



24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.
(John 17:24)

I believe that every reader of this devotion has fond memories of family gatherings around the fireplace on Christmas Eve, the Table at Thanksgiving, and perhaps the city park on July 4th. Remember the joy and security we felt as children surrounded by family members – mothers, fathers, sister, brothers, aunts, uncles, and, especially grandparents, who loved us? Even in our early youth, the thought may have crossed our minds that may have cast a thin, dark shadow over our joy: “Shall we all be together next year in full strength; or will someone special to our hearts be missing from the muster roll of the living?” We may seldom consider that a younger sibling or baby may vanish from our circle in the uncertain future, but tragically, it may happen. Such thoughts are normal and do not usually overrule the joy and happiness we share on special gatherings. However, the time will surely come when we must say a final earthly good bye to a dearly beloved friend or family member. How should we face that event?

In times past, when our father was called upon to serve our country in wartime, how sad was our parting! Or our mother was called away to care for a seriously ill relative - what emptiness pervaded our souls. But remember the glorious reunion that happened at their return. The joy at the return of the traveler well overcompensated for the misery and loss we felt at their leaving.

Consider for a moment the detailed planning and dedicated preparation that our families undertook for a Thanksgiving gathering around the dinner table! Our older relatives worked double time to prepare dainties to bring to our house. The younger helped to make the yard and grounds suitable for ‘company.’ Our parents, especially mother, sacrificed days of cooking, cleaning, stocking condiments and spices, and preparing the table and other furniture with fine linens. The father probably gathered up his accumulated reading matter, hid his work boots out of sight, cleaned the windows, and a thousand other errands directed by the matron of the house. A lot of thought, study, and preparation always precedes a family gathering.

We should consider if we make a similar effort to prepare for that future gathering of our loved ones beyond the Gates of Splendor? Do we store up in our Hearts (little temples of God) the beauties and mysteries of God's Word, for we shall need them at the Banks of Jordan Waters. Have we comprised our invitational list of relatives and friends who may not know the Way, the Truth and the Life? Have we scoured the heart chambers from mold and dirt that has been building up over many years? Have we acquired a proper adornment for the gathering such as an attire suitable for the Wedding Banquet of the Son of God? A White Robe of Righteousness alone, purchased for us at His expense, will only suffice. Perhaps we have given too much thought and planning to the trivial and non-essential of this life to the detriment of the greater concerns of eternal life with God.

Our gatherings on earth may be joyful; however, sorrow will always follow close on the heels of joy in our human condition. Death comes alike to all. But there are different kinds of death – namely, two! There is a physical death which comes to all alike. But for the believer, that death is not the real thing – it is rather a shadow of death and a sleep of restful bliss from which he will awaken to the brilliant Sunrise of Christ. But to the unbeliever, there is a second death which succeeds the Judgment. The second death is eternal and makes a total separation from God and all of our loved ones who are saved in the arms of our Lord. This is a spiritual death not experienced by the saved of God.

Our families on earth are very dear to us, but our greater family is the Family of God – the Church. It is to be a cherished hope that our earthly families share the love and security of that Family of God for it is our Ark of the Latter Days. All who remain without the Ark at the last trump shall suffer greater loss than human minds can imagine. Those who laughed at Noah and ridiculed his faith had no earthly idea what great ruin was about to burst forth upon them and all creation. As the waters rose, and the rains descended, they fought against the wild beast – lions, tigers, snakes, - for the higher branches of the trees. Do we desire such a fate for our own loved ones? I think not!

As the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, has written: "The bird of time has but a short way to fly and, Lo, the Bird is on the Wing." The time component is a factor with which we must deal here on earth for our days are numbered. But if we are in Christ (the Great I AM) we are in a timeless environment of eternity. Soon, the trumpet shall sound on a street corner near you, and we shall be called to attend the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Will we be ready? Will the wicks of our lamps be trimmed by careful and moral living; and will we have acquired the oil of the Holy Ghost for our fuel? What of those family members about us? Have we encouraged them to make proper preparation so as not to find the door of the Banquet shut and barred?

We have previously considered the many *I Am's* of Christ. But what of the *I Will's*?" "*Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.* (John 17:24) Our Lord Jesus Christ is our dearest Friend who cares for us far more than any brother. He loves us as His family; and He wants His family to be with Him where He is, or has ascended. This is a natural property of love – to desire its object to be in its presence. In fact, the Lord **WILLS** we join Him as a member of His Body – the Church. Those who are given to Christ are not those who came by their own power and resolve, but those whom the Father has placed in the Hands of His dearly beloved Son. Because our Lord loves us with a greater love exceeding every other that we can comprehend, we respond with our frail hearts with a lesser, but genuine love. We can only love Him because He **FIRST** loved us!

See how the Beloved Apostle, John, describes that love relationship between the Lord and His elect:

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. 8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. 13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. 15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. 19 We love him, because he first loved us. 20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? 21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. (1 John 4:7-21)

Are we pilgrims and sojourners upon the earth, or do we cherish the things of the world more than the assurance of a Heavenly Mansion? We all must depart this life. We cannot determine the time of our departure, but we may seek to determine the manner of it – either in faith, or in doubt and rebellion. The Lord wills that we and the Church dwell in His Presence in the eternity future. Isn't that the desire of every Bridegroom – that His Bride dwell wherever He dwells?

God loved His only Begotten Son in Eternity Past – before there was a world or a universe; a star, or a moon, or a vast expanse of space to accommodate those material bodies. Being in the Body of Christ qualifies us for that same eternal love. If we are in Christ, He loved us, too, before the Foundation of the World. Our present condition is transient and fading. We are in a temporary passage from birth to death. All is based upon time, but we do not have the time to learn to live righteously. So Christ came and paid our sin-debt that we may have the righteousness that defines the life of Christ “imputed” to us by means of Grace.

For our ultimate Family gathering, we need not labor and worry for Christ has made every provision. He has prepared the Table at the cost of His own Body and Blood. He has purchased a White Robe of Righteousness for us at the cost of His Life's Blood so that we may have a covering for our sins. Should we not introduce our children, our parents, our siblings and friends to this great Savior so that we may all celebrate beyond the bounds of mortality? So what will heaven be like? We do not know, but we know that wherever Christ is, there is joy and contentment. In the words of David: *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.* (Psalm 17:15)

When we ALL get to Heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!