THOUGHTS OF JANUARY, 2013

1. “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” is prayed daily all over the world. Question [without attempt to settle the matter]: Just how are things in heaven? Have things in heaven changed from time to time? Are all things in heaven perfect always and all persons in heaven righteous always? Have we considered what we are praying in that short sentence? It must be a good prayer because the Lord Jesus told His disciples to pray it. They did, and they passed it on for us.

Many Spirit-led, praying saints take on tough assignments. Their faith and righteousness produce prompt or eventual success. When Jesus gave the disciples that Disciples Prayer, did He give it for immediate or [very!] long range results? In that prayer, are we praying for something today, or for the future, or both? My question remains: “What is it in heaven that we are praying for on earth? Yes, it is for His kingdom to come and His will to be done, but how has/is/will that be acted out in view of our asking for a big dose of heaven’s reality?

Well, for one thing, it’s beautiful there, although it was the site of a tremendous civil war of unimaginable magnitude and unknown duration. And, it is peaceful there by all revealed descriptions, including when Satan shows up. During those appearances he seems to be subdued, even docile. In view of our present questioning, I’m confident that everything in heaven has been/is/will always be under God’s control. So, how different are things now between heaven such as we are given to know it and our earth as we experience it as members of the kingdom of heaven walking in the Spirit?

My thought here is that if heaven has had and perhaps is still having [because of Satan’s visits there] rebellion, lying, deception, planning of destructions, opposition to God, open unrighteousness and perhaps all manner of sin, why did/does the Lord want us to pray for more of those things to come to earth? He did not tell us to pray for the good things and leave out the [possible] bad things of heaven, did He?

Well, my contribution to our search for answers is that faith [God’s confidence in Himselves] and love [God’s attitude toward Himselves] reign in heaven despite the presence of [occasional?] imperfection. Such supreme confidence and love enables Him to tolerate all challenges and failures there in heaven and here on earth [having times for both mercy and justice]. That is life in His one kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven, and is available to all His people. Some Christians are enjoying it, others are growing into it, others are getting peeks at it and are processing whether to enter into that life now.

2. What makes a good listener? Here are some hints:

 1) Listen with your eyes on the speaker. That really shows one’s attention and personal interest in the person and his topic. It honors the speaker. Ex.: I had always been a poor listener, but when I began to lose my hearing I had to listen more closely and watch the speaker. That helped, and it made me a better listener in the eyes of the speaker.

 2) Ask questions that show you are attentive and interested. That encourages the speaker to go further, which puts him in debt to you conversationally. He will turn things toward you.

 3) Agree with the speaker. Surely that applies to topics in which you are totally in agreement, but it also applies to those in which you disagree. It is a loving art to be able to agree with someone who has just stated something with which you disagree. It may be, “Yes, I have seen some good articles lately that put forth that same thought.”

 4) Consider what the speaker has endured in coming to his conclusions. This doesn’t need to be spoken by you, but it will improve your attitude toward him, and it will show.

Then, there are some negatives to avoid:

 5) Don’t be preoccupied with something else going on in the room or in your life, like texting or watching out a window.

 6) Don’t come to conclusions before the speaker offers them. That takes much of the enjoyment out of the conversation, and we are often inaccurate.

 7) Don’t be listening while rehearsing your next insertion into the conversation. That’s very distracting to the both of you, and almost guarantees that your next insertion will be out of sync or off- topic when inserted. Stay with the flow, at the possible expense of not saying something you considered valuable or at least pertinent.

3. Was Jesus’ focus on the church [the called out people of God] or on the kingdom [the rule of God in the hearts of the saints and affairs over all people]? Right; He spoke little in regards to the church, but almost continually taught about the kingdom. So?

The message seems clear: Build the kingdom; be faithful in regards to the church. We are laborers in both, owners of neither. If we love Jesus, we will yield to His reign and we will tend to His bride – John 21:15-17.

4. The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt and eventually into the Promised Land so He could fulfill His [not their] purposes and promises in them. His plan was to give them victory and peace, not relaxation and retirement. They were not free to create their own lives and nation, because He had their lives and nation all planned for His purposes. They were not freed from Egyptian slavery in order to develop personal slavery. All was to show forth His glory, even their clothing, hair care, title to property, method of taxation, days to celebrate certain of His events, etc. All was centered around their God.

So also with us. We, too, have a superior God and superior principles to live by.

5. Mark Twain noticed something that many others have noticed and a host of studies have proven, that Jews are smart, smart enough as a group to be candidates for the brightest people on earth. He wrote: “[The Jews] are peculiarly and conspicuously the world’s intellectual aristocracy … [Jewish] contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are … way out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world … and has done it with his hands tied behind him.”

Jews, more than any other minority, ethnic, or cultural group have been 1/5 of Nobel Prize recipients. They make up 0.2 percent of the world population but 54% of the world chess champions, 27% of the Nobel physics laureates, and 31% of the medicine laureates. In the U. S., Jews make up 2% of the population, but 21% of Ivy League student bodies, 26% of the Kennedy Center honorees, 37% of the Academy Award-winning directors, and 51% of the Pulitzer Prize winners for nonfiction.

Simply on the basis of IQ, Jews have a higher average than their closest rivals – Northeast Asians, by 8 points, and 40% higher than the global average IQ. Yet, something is happening in our day; we are in the midst of a collapse of Jewish academic achievement. Obviously, two questions can be asked: why have the Jews been so smart, and why is it being lost? Why were they so special in the first place and why is their source now becoming dormant?

Some offered answers: 1) God put it in their genes. 2) They were the first people who mandated literacy for every child and lifelong study of every adult. 3) Their central educational and lifestyle book was the Talmud – their Bible and associated writings on religious law and life. 4) Thus, the central feature of their life and faith was God’s word. 5) They loved learning and passed it on to their children.

When the leaders of South Korea noticed Jewish exceptionalism, they mandated study of the Talmud in all public schools. Almost every South Korean home has a Korean language version. They believe that if they teach their children the Talmud they will also become geniuses.

I doubt that reading the Talmud will change their genes, but it may create an orderly life and a climate of respect for scholarship. The oriental mind may return to a preference for the accumulation of wisdom over material possessions.

Which brings us back to the collapse of Jewish academic achievement. It may be that the distinctly Jewish culture is being assimilated into American and other Western cultures. The traditions that insured Jewish intellectual excellence and made them blessings to the world are being abandoned. That is similar to but not identical to their assimilation into other religions. One wonders if basics of Jewish culture can be maintained when individuals encounter Jesus Messiah, or do the various Gentile cultures, even with each having a variable influence of Christianity, necessarily undermine Jewish culture?

6. Tearing down [anything/anyone] ordinarily requires a different person than one who builds up. Jehovah called Jeremiah to do both – Jer. 1:10. Jeremiah’s commission was “To pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” Jeremiah was to be developed into a powerful, steadfast, but highly flexible man of God. God’s work in Jeremiah’s soul was remarkable, and to this day [and onward into eternity] Jeremiah has been thankful.

What is God’s tool for tearing down? It’s His word. What is God’s tool for building up? Right again. It’s His word. The Truth, delivered by any of its saintly purveyors, will accomplish God’s results.

A late congressman from Texas used to say the same thing differently: “Any jackass can kick a barn down, but it takes a pretty good carpenter to build one.” Yes, godly thoughts can be somewhat rephrased, but sometimes things come through thick skulls one way better than another.

7. Proverb 13:23(a) makes a very usable point. “Abundant food is in the fallow ground of the poor.” That which lies just beyond arms reach can be grasped by planning, work, diligence and the like. Otherwise, it will not only be lost but may never be recognized as potential. A little work develops a little result. Hard work develops more of the same. Diligence and planning develops even more. So much of life’s success is lying at the door, ready to be recognized and “purchased.”

8. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, Paul is re-laying the foundation of Jesus Christ for those Christians. He said they were still on the spiritual milk that he had started them on, and that they were immature and carnal. I began to desire a clear distinction between spiritual milk and meat, for my soul’s sake and for my Bible students. Wouldn’t you say that the Lord’s first teachings to His disciples would have a high probability of being milk, and that His later teachings to them would probably be meat? So I began to read His sermon on the mount in Matthew. This is a selected list for our present purpose:

 1) 5:10-12 – Knowing that we are blessed when we are persecuted for righteousness sake, and growing into the spontaneity of it.

 2) 5:20 – We need to be more righteous than are our religious leaders.

 3) 5:22 – Cussin’ is a thing of the past.

 4) 5:23-24 – We are responsible for restoring broken relationships when we find out about them.

 5) 5:27-28 – Take charge of our wandering eyes.

 6) 5:39-42 – Don’t fight back against evil or potential mischief, but overcome it with generosity.

 7) 5:44 – In short, love your enemies.

 8) 6:2-4 – Deliberately conceal your generosity, especially in regards to money and temporal goods.

 9) 6:7 – Don’t use repetitious prayers.

 10) 6:19-21 – Do not store up earthly treasures for ourselves. [Ouch!] My only semi-defense here is that my earthly treasures are not only for myself, but for family and for whomever the Lord directs.

 11) 6:25-34 – Several things have been instrumental in reducing my worriness: His personal display of Himself to me personally, and His acts of faithfulness to me personally.

I am considering those samples to be milk for babes, which the disciples certainly were. If so, then what were His meaty teachings to them? Without references, how about die to oneself daily, teach the entire world to do the things I taught you, don’t protect yourself from verbal or physical assault, seek to humbly serve and not to be a leader [while you lead], and expect your words to often divide families and peoples [instead of healing them]?

We can add more milk-type things from John the Baptist’s teachings to those who were wanting to become obedient to Jehovah: Share your coats if you have two, be honest, be content with your wages, don’t steal and don’t lie.

My Thought is that an occasional review of our own diets would be helpful for spiritual health.

9. What happens to salt when for a long time it has not been used? Jesus told us it loses its savor [becomes tasteless, inept], is useless [good for nothing, including its vital purpose], discarded [set aside, dismissed] and trampled [scorned and treated contemptibly] by others [the churched and the unchurched] – Matt. 5:13.

Considering that verse, answer for yourself: 1) “Do I have spiritual gifts?” If the answer is “yes,” what are your gifts? To whom do they belong? “The Lord” is not an acceptable answer here, because all belongs to Him. Answer: “My gifts belong to the church. I bear them in my body and soul but they belong to the church [the “common good”]” – 1 Cor. 12:7. Perhaps in a more loose manner, it could be said that my gifts belong to society at large, for the more grand common good. In any case, my gifts belong to others, not to me.

How does that work out? It means that I bear gifts from God, sent from Him through me to others. I am to be useful, most especially in certain ways, to others. I am to perfect my delivery system and to deliver God’s gifts on time and without damage. For this Thought, the emphasis is that my gifts are to be delivered.

But what if not delivered? Re-read paragraph 1 of this Thought.

I write – books and letters and THOUGHTS. All are without charge. Such was also true of my medical gifts. They were without charge if my patients could not or would not pay for them.

The Lord gives us nothing for nonuse. The message is, “Use it or lose it.” The gifts of God are not recalled, but they can lose their savor.

10. Are we to love the church? Yes and No. Jesus told us to love Him with all that we are and have, and to love our neighbor as ourself. We are to love our wives [laying down our lives for them] as Christ loved the church [and laid down His life for her], but where are we told to love the church?

 Perhaps this Thought is a bit weak, but I think we should be careful about loving the church [a special group of our neighbors] as we love Christ. Why? Because the church is not a substitute for Jesus, who is the head of the church. The church is the present human corporate expression of Christ – but the church is not Christ. The church is the body of Christ, but not Christ. Without the Head, the church is dead. With the Head, but without yielding to His headship, the church is religious.

We should love the Creator, who gave us all of creation to care for. We should be thankful for all of creation, while being watchful that we do not begin to worship creation – Rom. 1:25. We should be thankful for the church, while being watchful that we do not begin to worship the church. That means keeping our eyes on the Lord while we properly serve others. Our neighbor, the church, and all of creation are served and loved properly as we love the Lord with everything we are and have, and love our neighbor as ourself.

11. The world has been placed into Satan’s hands – but Satan is restricted in his actions. He is limited in what he can do in regards to intensity of temptation [which the Lord regulates individual per individual] and action [there being a hedge around every believer]. We can step outside that hedge, but an at least moderately righteous saint gains protection from it. Read Job chapters 1 and 2; Luke 4:5; and 1 John 5:19.

Then there is the big exception to the world being in Satan’s hands – the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom has a different head, the Lord Jesus. This kingdom is a prearranged set-aside from the kingdom of Satan. We are no longer subject to Satan, but we are still subject to his attacks. We are a special people, which make us special targets for Satan’s barbs – as was Jesus. But we have new power and authority, which makes life different and difficult for Satan. We are his trouble. Expect him to complain and become frantic as his time nears. He may cut our time shorter if it fits the Lord’s plan for us, but his time is shortening, also. Some delicious scripture are Daniel 2:44; Matthew 24; and Hebrews 12:28.

12. What are we doing about our divisions of all sorts? The Lord said that a divided house cannot stand. Lots of people know that truth without reading it in the Bible, it being so obvious. Part of the action for healing division is that we go to those who have something against us and try to reconcile. That is occasionally effective, in my experience. The possible reason for only occasional effectiveness may be a lack of genuine humility.

13. “Civilization means, above all, an unwillingness to inflict unnecessary pain. Within the ambit of that definition, those of us who heedlessly accept the commands of authority cannot yet claim to be civilized men.” – Harold J. Laski

Harold Laski [1893-1950] was an English atheist-communist who necessarily repudiated his Judaism. He was adroit in proclaiming freedom and justice on the one hand while slyly stating that violence was necessary to bring them about.

When you read the above quote, did you question who was to determine the amount of “necessary” and “unnecessary” pain? For some, the usual response of those who agree with him, the answer is, “I’m o. k. with it if I make the decision.”

14. Adolph Hitler knew and used psychology, particularly on the “primitive simplicity” of the masses. He said, compared to little lies, “… in the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility.” He knew that little lies had less chance of being believed than big lies.

At first glance, that does not sound true. But Hitler reasoned that all tell small lies, but are ashamed to tell large-scale falsehoods. So, … “It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously.” So, he told whoppers and was believed by those who could and wanted to be deceived.

Do you give the same attention to people/information/things you dislike, as you do those you like? Keep your eyes open because, as is written about the sheep being invited to the wolf’s house for dinner:

 An invitation to dinner

 To some is delight

 But, beware conflicts of interest

 Because they just might

 Lead to betrayal and gourmet’s remorse

 When the guest finds out

 That he’s the main course.

15. The construction of Herod’s Temple was a major undertaking. It was considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world, taking the Jews 70 years to complete. When Jesus and His disciples were looking at it from the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24, it had been under construction for 50 years. It took 20 more years to finish the elegance of the whole Temple complex.

Yes, you have probably done some calculations that show it lasted only about one year before being completely destroyed by the Roan forces of Titus and Vespasian in 70 A.D.

In regards to present preparations for the next Temple, the newly-refounded Sanhedrin has called for the preparation of a prefabricated Temple that could be quickly assembled on the Mount.

Saints and non-saints, everything is moving quickly. Satan is busily “treading water” and the Lord is on schedule.

16. “No one has made progress in the school of Christ who does not joyfully await the day of death and the final resurrection.” John Calvin

There is no need to fear death. We may not prefer certain ways of dying, as did Jesus in the Garden on the night before His arrest, but not death itself. I don’t abide continually in the “joyful” part, as J. C. said, but at times of deeper reflection my soul is peaceful about dying some day and has a certain amount of eagerness and expectation. Nancy has a peaceful, patient and yet eager attitude about her dying that at times bothers me, meaning that, because of her love for Him, the Lord may take her before her time. ☺

From what I see in the Bible and from those who have died and been resuscitated, it’s the greatest experience of our entire earth-life process.

Hasta!