

In the name of Jesus, the Light of Life, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The new year is young, but the river of time is not slowing up! We want to holler, “*Stop! Slow the current! Let me get my feet back on the ground, clear my head, and dry my eyes, so that I can see where I am going!*” . . . But nothing doing, for the river of time has **no ears to hear** our plea! Time moves right along, and we are carried along with it.

Yet we do have the comfort and confidence of knowing **where time is taking us**. We have the sure word of our Brother, Jesus. For as time moved Him steadily toward the cross, He said to His disciples: *In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*” (Jn. 14:2ff.) Dear Friends in Christ, like God’s O.T. people Israel, referred to by Isaiah, we too are

MOVING ON TO A PLACE PREPARED.

I.

The newly freed nation of Israel stood at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The problems which faced them in the wilderness journey ahead seemed impossible to overcome. For although they were moving to a place prepared for them, they wondered: *How shall we know which path to follow?* What kind of problems, hardships, and enemies lay ahead? In answer to their concerns and ours, the Lord says: ***Behold Him Who keeps you in the Way.***”

The Lord promises to send “**an Angel**” To keep His people “**in the Way.**” There’s something very special and wonderful about this Angel, for the Lord says: “**My Name is in Him.**”

This is the “**Angel of the LORD**” Who appeared to Abraham (*Gen. 18;3, 22:11*). Abraham called Him, “*My Lord.*” Jacob wrestled with this Angel all night, and said: “***I have seen God face to face. . . .***” (*Gen. 32:30*) When this Angel appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he said: “*I AM the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*” (*Ex. 3:2ff.*)

We need to behold **how** the **Angel of the LORD** went in front of Israel: ***Manna*** fell from heaven; ***Quail*** flew into the wilderness camps so that the people might have meat to eat; ***water*** was brought forth from rock; ***The Angel of the Lord*** was a living wall around Israel to protect them from their enemies and keep them safely on the Way to the Promised Land!

So also **we** are to *behold* how He goes before **US**. This “Angel of the LORD” is the eternal Son of God, Who was **epiphanized** or **appeared** in and through the body of the Lord Jesus (*1Tim. 3:16*). Jesus Christ is the Angel of God’s presence – “**of God’s face,**” the very **image** of God’s person (*Heb. 1:3*).

God sent His Son in love to bless us. “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself*” (*2 Cor. 5:19*). Jesus has already gone before us into death for our sins! He has conquered death so that we need not fear death in any form! Christ arose from the dead and ascended His Father and our Father, that He might be with us to KEEP us in *The Way to the Promised Land of heaven!*

Which way is that? ***The Way He has chosen for us.*** In Acts 14, Paul calls it the way “*of much tribulation,*” by which “*we must enter the kingdom of heaven.*” But Psalm one tells us that it is “*the way of the righteous*” – the way which “*the Lord knows!*” (*Ps. 1:6*)

We may wish for ourselves and others that the Lord would make life’s problems, decisions, temptations, and sufferings much easier for us. But our God has not called any of us to be kept as hothouse plants, shielded from frost and wild, winter winds!

Why does our God often expose His believing children to more suffering and greater trials than the children of this world? Why? So that it may be proved that ***Jesus lives in us and the Spirit of God works in us as we triumph in all things!***

This is exactly what Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Corinth when he said: *“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also might be revealed in our body.”* (2Cor. 4:8 ff.)

It’s a matter of **focus** in our lives, isn’t it? If in time of tough decisions, trouble, loss, or pain, we focus on fleshly fears, doubts, and sadness, how can we *reveal the life of Jesus which is in us by faith?* Instead, we may be torn away from the way of life which our Savior has won for us! But **to behold Jesus “Who KEEPS” us in that Way**, assures us that we are moving on to the heavenly place He has prepared for us.

II.

Now, as we are **beholding Him**, we also have this warning in our text: ***“BEWARE of Him, His saving voice obey!”*** The Way by which Jesus will bring us to our place in heaven is the way of FAITH in Him. But our faith is a fragile thing, like our nation’s highway system that must be constantly repaired and improved. *Our faith must be constantly fed and strengthened.* So, we are told in Revelation chapter 12, that Church of Christ is kept safely by the spiritual nourishment God provides in the Word of Christ (Rev. 12:6, 14)

Therefore we are warned as Israel was warned: *“Beware of Him, obey His voice, do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My Name is in Him.”* (V. 21) This Angel had the right to forgive because he acted **for** God and in the **name** of God. In Mark chapter 2 Jesus says: *“The Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins.”* (Mark 2:10) Our life and death are in the hands of Christ. The Father caused it to be so when He made His Son, *“The Way, the Truth, and the Life.”* (Jn. 14:6)

Everything the Father does He does in connection with Christ and because of Christ. If we **despise** the voice of the Son when He speaks to us in His Word, we despise the Father Who has “put His name” in His Son. If we **despise** the grace offered to us in the Gospel of Christ by **refusing** to repent of our sins, **refusing** to make use of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, **“He will not pardon our transgressions.”** For then we have rejected the grace of God and God Himself!

Disobedience will **“provoke”** the Angel Who wants to lead us to salvation. Listen to Isaiah as he tells how Israel **provoked** the Angel of God’s presence: *“In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them.”* (Is. 63:9-10)

When Israel took up weapons against God by their unbelief and rebellion, He who had been their father and protector, **fought against them.** Their willful rebellion and refusal to believe God’s prophets led to their captivity in Babylon in 606 A.D., as well as the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 A.D..

This has always been the source of decay in the lives of churches and individuals. When grace and forgiveness is no longer appreciated, outward, work-righteous obedience may still remain, **but willing, joyful service of God does not, and real faith itself is lost!**

By the power of the Gospel alone we draw new strength to crucify the lusts of our flesh and to bring forth the *“fruits of the Spirit,”* which are *“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,*

goodness, faith, meekness, and moderation.” (Gal. 5:22-23) Only by the promises of Christ’s Word are we moved to **pray** each day for the forgiveness of our sins and cleansing from all unrighteousness! By Christ’s Word **alone** are we kept from the teachings and practices of men which threaten to draw us from the Way that leads to eternal life!

In this new year each of us is **moving on** to the heavenly place **prepared for us**. God the Father has sent His dear Son ahead of us *to keep us in the Way*. May we be given grace to **move on** each day with confidence and courage, keeping the eyes of our faith on Him alone, responding to the voice of His Word with faith’s obedience. ***O LORD, You have prepared heaven for us. So prepare us for heaven. Amen.***