

What A Gracious And Loving God Rules Us! (Zech 9:9-12)

* The years of being Christians have taught us that joy unites permanently with thankfulness where we experience our salvation in Christ Jesus, (Luk 17:15-17). It is natural to enjoy each saving act of Jesus in our lives. It is also natural for our hearts to feel the deep gratitude to the Savior after being saved from deadly accidents, or after the fulfillment of our heart's wishes. Therefore, having God in our lives, we are not only recipients of His mercy, but we wonder as well about a gracious and loving God we have in Heaven!

Experiencing our salvation in Christ, we conclude that joy and thankfulness in addition to our admiration walk together inseparably as cause and effect. Here we would like to illustrate this thought with a short story, in which the 'cause' will be followed by our reflection as the 'effect'. The following is a paraphrase of *It Happened on the Brooklyn Subway* - a story written just after World War II; the composer is a professional photographer, Paul Deutschman.

* It came about by chance that Paul started the conversation with a certain man in a crowded Brooklyn subway car. As soon as Paul noted that the man by his side read a newspaper in Hungarian, it prompted him to ask a question because he was a native Hungarian, I suppose. During a half-hour conversation, Paul learned that his companion was Bela Paskin from Hungarian city Debrecen, a recent immigrant. Bela said that he was a college student when German troops crossed into Hungary. By force, he was mobilized as an auxiliary worker and sent to the Ukraine. Sometime later, he was captured and imprisoned by the Russians. After the war, they let him to return to his country. He arrived to his home with a joyful anticipation; but there he didn't find a single person from his father's household. Some eyewitnesses certified that the Nazis took his relatives, including his young wife, and detained them in a concentration camp in Auschwitz, and not one of them returned. On hearing the tragic news, the aching heart of the man was totally broken. Grief and despair led Bela to set out on foot and leave his country. As luck would have it, he moved to the US in October 1947, just three months before his conversation with Paul.

* Meanwhile Bela was talking, said Paul, *I kept thinking that somehow his story seemed familiar to me.* Not long afterwards, Paul visited his friend's family, and there he heard another story from a young woman - also a recent immigrant from Hungary and a former resident of Debrecen. She and her relatives were captured by the Nazis and detained in a concentration camp. From there she was transferred to work in an ammunition factory. It was a great fortune for her because, if it had not happen, she would have died with her relatives in the gas chambers. At the end of the war, she was freed by the Americans, as were many other survivors, and brought to the US in 1946 as a displaced person. *Her story had moved me so much, said Paul, that I had written down her address and phone being interested to invite her to meet my family and thus relieve the terrible emptiness in her life.* From this we conclude, *what a gracious and loving God rules us!*

* Despite Paul's difficulty in seeing the both stories relative to one another, he asked Bela an important question: *Was your wife name Marya? Yes, he whispered. How did you know? I'll you, but first lets get off the train,* said Paul. Then he took Bela to a phone booth. While Paul dialed Marya's phone, the man stood beside Paul like a person who couldn't stop knocking his knees together. When Marya responded, it was exciting to know that her husband's name was Bela Paskin and that they lived together on such-and-such street. *Try to be calm, said Paul, something miraculous is about to happen to you. Here is your wife, take this phone and talk. At this moment we ask our listeners a rhetorical question, Isn't it true, how great is our God?*

* Bela took the receiver with shaking hands and was listening for a moment to his wife's voice. Suddenly he cried, *This is Bela! This is Bela!* and he began to mumble hysterically. After awhile Paul spoke to Marya again; no wonder, she also sounded hysterical. *Stay where you are. I am sending your husband to you. Well be there in a few minutes,* said Paul. In the beginning Paul wanted to accompany his new friend, because it seemed the man lost his physical strength on hearing the excessively joyful news and was not able to go alone. But then the thought came to Paul that the upcoming moment is a special one in which a stranger should not be involved. Lucky for them there was a taxicab close by. In a moment he gave the driver Marya's address, put Bela into cab, paid the fare, and said good-bye.

* We cannot understand Bela and Marya's joy if we ourselves have never gone through suffering the loss of a beloved one. But we are certain that their joy was exceptional, and it was the most exceptional joy in the life of both; but neither Bela nor Marya could tell much about that because their feelings were beyond words to express. Later Marya said, *I cannot remember details; only this I know, that I was happy for the first time in many years ...* At this moment we can conclude that, as soon as the excessive joy had ended, Bela and Marya started their life together as never before living happily always and getting all good things.

* After hearing this story we've had the impression that something important was missing. Isn't it true that the romantic story may have never happened if there would be no man such as Paul Deutschman. Paul didn't tell us whether or not he received a *Thank You Card*, but we believe that Bela and Marya found the way to express their thankfulness to the benevolent Paul. They might write like this, *Dear Paul, we thank you very much for your participations in our reunion that produced the unspeakable joy of receiving each other as one who received life after death. We greatly thank you for your attentiveness, carefulness, and kindness to us. Dear Paul, we love you from all our hearts;* that might be their final remark and ours as well, *How gracious and loving is our God!*

* At this moment we wish to focus your attention on the stories from the Scripture. The OT lesson of the day (Zech 9:9-12) which begins with an introduction to the excessively joyful news addressed to the prisoners - hopeless and afflicted, (v.11). The news came from the mouth of the Lord and it would not be delayed or called off.

It is interesting that the landscape of history was marked with Jesus' triumphant entering into Jerusalem that echoes back to Zechariah's prophecy in all details. *See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, ...* (v.9). The picture of Jesus riding on a donkey, rather than a horse, conveys to us a joyful meaning. It means that the Messiah came not to destroy people's lives, though we all deserve it, but to forgive our sins and grant us salvation. Next, the message is getting more joyful when it has been verified with many evidences of the King's gentleness and kindness throughout all the days of our life in Christ. When the Holy Spirit brought us to Jesus, we were in a frightened condition at the nearness of physical death, and we were burdened with many detestable things. Thanks to God through Jesus Christ who took our illnesses and bore our diseases, (Isa 53:5; Mat 8:17) so that we have rest (Mat 11:28) from the burden of sins and their consequences. God's words spoken through Zachariah are fulfilled in us as well if we believe in Christ Jesus and participate in the New Covenant which was sealed by his precious blood. For it is written, *By the blood of Your covenant I have freed Your prisoners out of the pit in which is no water,* (v.11). On top all these things, the Almighty God gives us the privilege to be His worshipers so that in the ages to come Jesus will show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness to the members of his royal family, (Eph 2:7).

* As we reread the great blessings from the Zachariah passage contextually, we note that there is no one expression of thankfulness to our gracious Lord similar to the story from Paul Deutschman. It is true, with Zechariah, we've not still expressed our gratefulness in response to the salvation of our souls; but it doesn't mean that our hearts were not untouched. For instance, when Zachariah prophecy was about to come (Mat 21), Jesus went on his way to Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. At that moment many people came out to meet him. They spread their cloaks under the feet of the King of Zion; by this expression they showed their deep thankfulness to the King Jesus. Those worshipers *rejoiced and praised God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen* (Luk 19:38).

* With respect to our listeners, they might also wish to express their exceptional joy to Jesus as the people from Paul Deutschman and Zachariah's stories did. Despite the fact that we don't yet have a chance to spread our cloaks under Jesus' feet, we still might follow Bela and Marya in writing a *Thank You Card* to Jesus. In this case, we can do it individually. As for me, I cannot write or say much because my feelings are far beyond words to being expressed. Only this I can ... some days ago I was lost, but now I am found. It makes me excessively happy, and it causes my heart to write unending "Thank You" to my Savior Jesus Christ.

Beloved, let us be thankful after all, for He is the gracious and loving God.

Amen.