

THE JOY OF SALVATION

“Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

Near the close of an unjust, two-year imprisonment in Caesarea, Paul was summoned to appear before Governor Festus, King Agrippa and Bernice, the big brass of the military, and principal men of the city to make his defense against the ridiculous charges the Jews from Jerusalem had brought against him. Paul had been forced to appeal to Caesar, rather than risk his life going back to Jerusalem for a retrial. At the end of his discourse before this distinguished audience, the apostle concentrated on King Agrippa:

For the king knoweth of these things, unto whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him; for this hath not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest (Acts 26:26, 27).

King Agrippa’s background was such that Paul knew he was a believer in the Old Testament prophets. He answered his own question by saying, “I know that thou believest.” Agrippa answered Paul, “With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian” (Acts 26:28). Paul then said to the entire assemblage, “I would to God, that whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds” (Acts 26:29). Obviously, he believed everyone should be a Christian. The reasons he thought so are given again and again in his recorded sermons and epistles.

Many people today do not understand what it means to be a Christian. But this is not something new because it has been so for centuries.

The concept that so many people have of a Christian is someone with a long face, a sad countenance, with the corners of his mouth always turned down, who never smiles, laughs, or ever experiences any pleasures in life. This is an erroneous idea! But it is one reason why many do not become a Christian. Through the years, this mistaken concept of a Christian has caused countless people to think that becoming a Christian brings an end once and for all to any joys he might otherwise have in life. Many of these ridiculous ideas originated during medieval times when so much ignorance and superstition abounded. Of course, some do not become Christians because of the difference in the Christian life and a life devoted to sinful pleasure.

In order to show how erroneous the “long face, sad countenance, never smile” concept of a Christian is, note what Paul commanded the Christians in Philippi: “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). *Christians are to “rejoice.”* This is an imperative! *Rejoicing is to be “in the Lord,”* not in outward circumstances. *It is to be done “always,”* in every circumstance. *The admonition is doubly emphasized, “Again I will say, rejoice.”* Paul’s life illustrates that this can be done. He was beaten, stoned, pursued, and imprisoned, yet through it all he rejoiced. His feet were held fast in the stocks of a Philippian prison, and his back was an aching mass of bloody stripes. But he rejoiced and sang hymns of praise to God. Even in the confines of a Roman prison he could say, “. . . the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; . . . therein

I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice (Philippians 1:12, 18).

I. A SPIRITUAL BASIS

The basis of a Christian's joy is in spiritual things, not in material things. Those who spend their time trying to find happiness in material things are doomed to disappointment because lasting happiness cannot be centered in them. True happiness is based on something more durable than the things of this physical world. However, there are many temporal blessings that Christians may enjoy without transgressing divine law because God has given them for the enjoyment and happiness of His children. God has not asked His children to give up that which will not hurt them if they keep them. For us to be truly happy in the sense in which the Lord intended for Christians to be, the basis for the happiness must be found in that which transcends this physical world.

The very essence of joy is discovered in living the Christ-centered life. To sacrifice and serve, spend and be spent in the service of our King is what true spiritual pleasure is all about. Service in God's kingdom produces happiness in much the same manner that a mine produces the highest and richest grades of ore. A mine must be explored and worked before its resources are enjoyed. This is also true in the life of a Christian. Jesus taught His disciples to abide in Him and bear fruit so that their "joy might be made full" (John 15:11). The path of loving service is the only path to lasting happiness, and the Lord promised, "Your joy no man taketh away from you" (John 16:22).

Christians can "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). It is worth much to be at peace with God. It is natural to look forward to the consummation of God's eternal purpose and the glory that will be conferred upon faithful saints at that time. Paul said,

For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself (Philippians 3:20, 21).

Such blessed hope is an "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast," according to Hebrews 6:19.

With their vision of eternal glory, Christians can even "rejoice in their tribulations," regardless of whether their afflictions come by disease or by the hands of ruthless men; they know that patient endurance of tribulation strengthens character and promotes stability in the faith (Romans 5:3).

II. A BEAUTIFUL REALIZATION

A Christian knows that all his sins have been completely washed away in the blood of the Lamb. Any Christian who takes a glance back into his past life will remember the sins he committed and the shame of them. But he is assured that when he surrendered to the Lord's call through the gospel, all his sins were blotted out of the Lord's book of remembrance.

When the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized into Christ by Philip, he arose from the watery grave knowing that the old man of sin had been crucified with Christ and buried. "He went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). When the Philippian jailor learned about Jesus and obeyed His will by submitting to baptism along with his household, he "rejoiced greatly, having believed in God" (Acts 16:34).

I have baptized people who came up out of the water shouting for joy. One eighty-four-year-old lady rose from the water of baptism and told the group of ladies around her, "I am so happy I just have to shout," and she did! I have baptized others who came up from the water heaving a great sigh of relief as if a tremendous burden had been lifted from their souls. And a burden had been lifted! They realized that they had been delivered from the kingdom of darkness and had been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13). Sinner friend, how much would it be worth to you to stand rejoicing in the knowledge that every sin in your life has been forgiven?

III. A HAPPY REALIZATION

A Christian has the happy relationship that has been established with God and His people. There is real happiness in the fellowship of God's family. Fellowship with God includes our daily communion with Him. The psalmist said, "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; in thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11). Fellowship

means sharing. When the saints share the greatest and most important activities in the world, it brings joy. In the congregation where I serve as preacher, a large group of wonderful Christian ladies love to work together for the Lord. While they work they often burst into spontaneous songs of praise and thanksgiving. Sometimes they talk in subdued tones because of their sorrow over the serious illness or death of a loved one in God's family. When the items they have made are given away, their joy is made full when they see the delight on the faces of those they helped.

In spite of their imperfections, Christians are the best people on earth. Sharing their work, worship, companionships, joys and sorrows produces a sense of joy and happiness that nothing else in the world can give.

IV. A SANCTIFIED LIFE

A Christian lives a pure, clean life. There is a separation from the fleshly lusts, evil desires, and wicked practices that characterized his life before obeying the gospel. The New Testament calls this sanctification.

A clear conscience is worth so much. We cannot be truly happy as long as our conscience pricks and probes and hurts us. By living clean, pure, chaste lives before our families and our neighbors, we can keep our consciences clean.

A faithful Christian has nothing to be ashamed of. He can walk down the street, look people straight in the eye, and feel no shame or embarrassment because of the guilt of sin. One Christian walked proudly down the street, acting as if he owned the world. A neighbor asked, "Why are you looking so happy this morning?" He answered, "Why shouldn't I be happy? My Father owns the whole universe, and I am one of His children." Any Christian will remember the joy he experienced when he obeyed the gospel and changed his life by God's grace and mercy. He can remember the first assembly with the saints, the first prayer, the first time to partake of the Lord's Supper. Neighbors are quick to notice the "newness of life" in a new convert to Christ.

V. A HOLY PURPOSE

A Christian has a sense of spiritual achievement. There is real happiness in helping someone in need. In fact, there is no greater joy than know-

ing that someone who needed to repent has been turned to the Lord and is now a faithful child of God. There is joy in teaching a Bible class and observing the students growing in faith. Parents who are Christians rejoice when they see their children trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Family relationships in the Lord provide some of the most enjoyable times in life.

I think it wise at this point to note again that such joy and happiness as we have described does not come to those who are not Christians. It is impossible to experience the kind of happiness Christians have until one becomes a Christian. Peter said, "Repent ye therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, so that there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

VI. A COMFORTING ASSURANCE

A Christian has the joy of assurance of salvation. The New Testament abundantly shows that one can know he is saved and a child of God. There is no reason to live in perpetual doubt about one's salvation and relationship to God. God's Word makes this explicit.

And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby we know that we are in him: he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

These things I have written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13).

The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him (Romans 8:16, 17).

The Holy Spirit bears witness to the world by means of His revelation of truth. Our spirit comprehends the Spirit's revelation through the gospel, and we render obedience to the conditions of salvation set forth in it. The Lord promised to save us upon our faith in Him, repentance from sin, a confession of our faith, and baptism for the remission of sins. Thus, there is a double witness to the fact that one is a child of God. But Christians not only have assurance that they are children of God, they also have assurance that they

are doing what is right by living according to the teachings of Jesus. In spite of the ever-changing standards of the world that causes so much confusion among young people as to what is right and permissible, Christians are assured that when they live in accord with the teachings of the New Testament they are always right. They have the assurance that their names are inscribed in the Lamb's book of life (Philippians 4:3).

CONCLUSION

Some twenty times in his letter to the Philippian church, Paul used the words *joy, rejoice, peace, content, and thanksgiving*. The very keynote of the epistle is this: "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, rejoice." Paul may well have remembered the words of the psalmist, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goes forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:5, 6).

To another group of Christians in another large city Paul said, "Rejoice always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). Someone has said concerning this verse, "This is a much neglected command." Too many people borrow tomorrow's troubles and

burden themselves with so many imaginary trials that they actually handicap themselves in trying to run the Christian race. The fewer the hindrances and the lighter the burdens, the easier it is to run the race. But those who burden themselves with apprehensive forebodings of impending evil are in no position to assist fellow Christians in bearing their burdens, because they have too many of their own!

Why should a Christian not rejoice "with joy unspeakable and full of glory"? He is a child of the One who owns the universe. His sins have been forgiven and he stands redeemed. All the spiritual blessings that are only found in Christ are his. He has the gift of the Holy Spirit. His fellowship is with the best people on the face of the earth. The Lord Jesus Christ is his King, High Priest, and Advocate. He has the promise of eternal life in heaven! No wonder Paul said,

. . . I overflow with joy in all our affliction
(2 Corinthians 7:4).

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

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