

REJOICING IN CHRIST

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

"By the help of the Lord always keep up the glad spirit; yes, I will repeat it, keep up the glad spirit" (C. B. Williams).

Paul's writings contain numerous exhortations of various sorts to Christian people. He exhorts them to be patient, to be courageous, and to be kind to one another. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to stress the important duty of rejoicing in Christ.

In his letter to the Philippians Paul spoke of joy, alluded to his own sources of joy, and frequently urged his brethren to rejoice in the Lord. Paul was very earnest in his own rejoicing, was quite anxious that his brethren in Christ should rejoice, too, and was certain that they had ample reason for rejoicing. Observe the stress upon rejoicing in Christ as Paul comes back with renewed emphasis to the keynote of the Epistle, which is joy, and says, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice." This urgent reiteration of what he had said in the opening of the third chapter is not vain repetition, or the repeating of a catch-phrase, but it is a needed accentuation of a vital truth in Christian experience, and indicates something of the importance of Christian joy.

The Greek word "chairete," which is here translated "rejoice," expresses the pre-dominate mood of the Epistle, and one which was wonderfully characteristic of Paul's closing years. When he wrote this Epistle of joy, Paul was a prisoner in Rome, and was facing trial before a man who was bloodthirsty. It was almost a certainty that his trial would result in his being condemned to be beheaded. And yet his letter did not have any shadow in it. All the way through it there is exultation. Even though Paul knew that his life was in danger, still he rejoiced in the Lord, because he was confident that, whether he lived or died, Christ would be glorified.

Paul was even thankful that he was in jail, because his being shut up in prison helped to propagate the gospel. In jail Paul always had one man to whom he could talk about the Saviour, and that was the soldier who was chained to him and could not get away. He talked with such effectiveness that many of those soldiers received Christ as their Saviour. The jail and the chain that seemed to make it impossible for Paul to preach the gospel really gave him the best opportunity to preach it effectually.

It is really doubtful if Paul could have achieved more than he did for Christ in Rome if he had been free to go and come as he pleased and to preach to great crowds instead of a congregation of one person only. Even if his imprisonment had prevented any possibility of witnessing for Christ this remarkable man would have found some other reason for being grateful and joyous. Paul did not find the cause for his rejoicing in circumstances. His faith in Christ and reliance upon Him lifted him above circumstances and enabled him to rejoice in the Lord. Paul exulted that he was allowed to do something for Christ. Instead of simply being resigned to suffering for Christ, his heart leaped with joy that he had the privilege of doing so.

There could not be a more striking or sad contrast than there is between the joyous gratitude and rapturous devotion of the old-time Christians who, so far as this world is concerned, had so little to make them happy, and the feeble devotion and lukewarm zeal of professing Christians in these days, who have so much to make them happy. The reason for this difference is not far to seek. Many today are troubled who ought to be joyful, and it is because they do not really believe the things that

they profess to believe, whereas Christians of former generations believed them with all their heart and soul.

Doubtless most of us like to meet and associate with cheerful people. We find it a tonic to be in the company of happy spirits. There is nothing attractive about a gloomy, pessimistic personality. We do not care for the company of one who always looks on the dark side of things, and, if there be no dark side, manages somehow to make one. For a religion to be attractive it must be cheerful. A long-faced religion will not appeal to those who are already familiar with sorrow and grief. Nothing so discredits the Christian faith as gloom or moroseness. The world will never be drawn to a Christianity that does not make people happy. This is one reason why some professing Christians are such poor advertisements of Christianity. If you would be a true follower of Christ, you must demonstrate to the world the real spirit of Christian joy.

Paul could not rejoice in himself, in his circumstances, in his attainments, or in his fame, but he could and did rejoice in his fellowship with the Lord Jesus and His service.

We cannot always rejoice in ourselves. Taking one day with another, there are very few of us who can find occasion for rejoicing in ourselves and in our accomplishments. Our lives have been beset by many troubles and our records have been marked with numerous failures.

We cannot always rejoice in our circumstances. We are not to rejoice simply because we have enjoyed good health, or prospered in business, or been happy in our family relationships. While we ought to be grateful for all these blessings, yet they are not the source or cause of Christian joy. Nor are we to rejoice because of the position of trust or influence which we have. Nevertheless, we should be thankful for the opportunities for doing good which have been afforded us. Christians should rejoice under all circumstances, no matter what trials they have to bear or what sacrifices they are called upon to make, for these things are only part of the divine plan in accordance with which all things work together for good to God's people.

We cannot always rejoice in other people. We have had joyous experiences with some people, but with others our associations have not been joyful.

We are not invited or exhorted to "rejoice in the Lord," but we are commanded to do so. As certainly as we are commanded to believe on Christ, we are commanded to rejoice in Him. As believers in Christ we are obligated to rejoice in Him. Regardless of whether circumstances are pleasing or painful, dark or bright, we can and should "Praise the Lord!"

In this regard Paul set us a wonderful example. He rejoiced in the Lord in spite of flogging. Even though he and Silas were beaten within an inch of their lives at Philippi, "they sang praises unto God." Paul rejoiced in the Lord in spite of fetters. While penning the words of our text he was chained to a soldier. Paul rejoiced in the Lord in spite of friendlessness, for he told Timothy, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me" (II Timothy 4:16). Nevertheless, Christ gave Paul perpetual joy. Failure to "rejoice in the Lord" injure themselves, cripple their influences, and grieve the Lord.

Rejoicing in Christ is the duty and exalted privilege of every Christian. Every follower of Christ should cultivate the fine art of rejoicing in Him. Rejoicing in Christ adds to our strength, enables us to bear a more honorable testimony to those who do not know Christ as personal Saviour, and bears a forceful testimony to all as to the blessedness of being a child of God through Christ.

We can rejoice in Christ if we are living close to Him. Our Lord is always the same. He never changes. His power never changes. His grace is always the same. It is good to know that we can rejoice in Him, in Whom He is, and in what He is, in what He has done, in what He is doing, and in what He will yet do.

If we avail ourselves of the supplies of grace that are in Christ Jesus, even in the dullest and darkest days, when everything seems to be going wrong, we will be able to "rejoice in the Lord." Abiding joy is possible only because of one's relationship to Christ.

A certain poor mother had one son. She had been left with this boy when he was but an infant, and she had brought him up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. She died, leaving the boy without care, without a guardian, and without means. But before she left him she said, "Now remember, I have committed you to God, and He will look after you. No matter what comes, learn to say this, 'It all comes from above.' Nothing can come to you but by divine permission. You are His child; you are trusting Him, and although mother will not be with you any more, your Heavenly Father will be looking after you, and nothing can come to you that does not come from above." No matter what happened to him, he would always say, "O well, as mother said, it comes from above."

One day he was going along the street when a piece of slate fell off a building and struck him, knocking him down. A crowd gathered. His head was bleeding profusely, and he was in a semi-conscious state. As they leaned over him, they heard him say, "O well, it comes from above." The crowd laughed, notwithstanding the seriousness of it. But passing by there was a man who saw the crowd and he stopped. Seeing the little fellow, he inquired about him, and took charge of the case before the police arrived, and accompanied him to the hospital. He watched him daily until the little boy got well. Meanwhile the boy had found his way into the Christian man's heart. That man had had one son and death had taken him away. When he made inquiries he found that this boy had no encumbrances at all; no one to look after him. So he took him, with his own consent, adopted him, and made him his legal heir. He took him from the hospital to a mansion. In due time the boy became a rich man. The tile off the housetop had really come from above, after all.

So if our faith be in Christ, and in His overruling providence and in His abounding grace, we shall be able to say: "All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God."

Rejoicing in Christ kills the desire for sinful pleasures, enables the believer to endure persecution, and enhances the charm and influence of the Christian life. Rejoicing in Christ makes us more active and useful in His service. We are encouraged to rejoice in Him for our sake, for the sake of others, and for the sake of Christ. Rejoice in Christ in all circumstances and at all times. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).