

REJOICING IN THE LORD

"Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." Philippians 4:1-4.

Paul addressed the Philippians in terms of endearment. He declared that they, his beloved brethren, were in his heart and mind, and that his separation from them caused him pain and distress. He referred to them as his "joy and crown." Their kindness to him had already brought cheer, and their presence with him in glory will be his crown of glory and eternal satisfaction. If any of the members had grown tired and inactive, when they heard these words of endearment they must have been inspired with new life and must have prayed for such a Christian brother and devoted friend.

After calling the Philippian Christians his "joy and crown," Paul exhorted them to steadfastness in the Lord. He urged them to resist the pressure of worldly forces. He was concerned that they not retreat from their foes or compromise with the enemies of the cross. As he had stood unwaveringly for God in every situation, so he wanted them to stand. Paul made it clear to them that the only power for steadfastness was "in the Lord." Apart from the Lord, people are forced to yield ground in almost every onslaught of the enemy. This exhortation to stand fast in the Lord is just as timely for us today as it was for the Philippians. As to faith and loyalty, our position is that of standing immovable. As to growth and service, the Christian's posture is never that of standing still, but always that of moving forward.

At the time of Paul's writing an incipient dissension was brewing in the church at Philippi. A disagreement had arisen between two prominent women in the membership of the church. These women of standing and influence had helped in the work, but they had also hindered it. They were commended, and they were blamed. The cause of their difference and dissension is unknown. Evidently their disagreement was not over doctrine or practice, but they just had difficulty in clicking with each other socially. It was not a matter of any importance. The occasion for their difficulty was too small for mentioning. Each of the women had a following, so a schism was being caused in the church because each of these women of distinction insisted on her point of view. Knowing that the remedy for this threatened disunity was very simple, Paul besought these two women to "be of the same mind in the Lord."

Paul asked an unnamed friend and true yokefellow to help these women to solve their differences. Epaphroditus may have been the trusted friend whom Paul asked to serve as an arbiter and peacemaker. Evidently the person whom he urged to help the women reconcile their differences was a man of rare discretion. While the task assigned him was very delicate, it was also honorable. Paul requested Clement to assist his unnamed friend in this ministry of reconciliation. Then Paul asked his fellow-workers, whose names he did not call but which were in the book of life, to help these two women to renounce their bickerings and jealousies and get right with the Lord. Since they had labored at his side in the work of the Lord, they were worth the combined efforts of all to get them to have unity of mind and purpose. He was anxious for them to resolve their differences before their usefulness was impaired more and greater injury was done to the cause of Christ.

Even though he had said it before, Paul repeated the injunction, "Rejoice in the Lord always." The Greek word "chairete," which is here translated "rejoice," expresses the predominate mood of this epistle, and one which was wonderfully characteristic of Paul's closing years. When he wrote this epistle of joy, he was a prisoner who did not know but that tomorrow he might be a martyr. Paul could not rejoice in himself, in his circumstances or in his fame, but he could and did rejoice in his fellowship with the Lord and in His service.

Doubtless most of us like to associate with cheerful people. We find it to be 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. It is well to remember that melancholy may be a fault as well as a misfortune.

It is the duty of every Christian to "rejoice in the Lord." Every follower of Christ should cultivate the fine art of rejoicing in the Lord. Christians should rejoice under all circumstances, no matter what trials they have to bear or what sacrifices they have 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. Christians are commanded to "rejoice in the Lord always." Of course, that includes all the calamities, afflictions, trials and bereavements which fall upon the world in general and upon themselves in particular. Circumstances may be bright or dark, the stock market may be up or down, health may be good or bad, and friends may be many or few, but Christians can still "rejoice in the Lord." In this regard Paul set us a wonderful example. He rejoiced in the Lord in spite of flogging. Even though Paul 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 forsook me" (II Timothy 4:16). Nevertheless, Christ gave Paul perpetual joy. Failure to "rejoice in the Lord" is both unwise and sinful. Those who fail to "rejoice in the Lord" injure themselves, cripple their influence and grieve the Lord.

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 other people. We have had joyous experiences with some people, but with others our associations have not been joyful. Neither can we always rejoice in our circumstances.

When we get away from ourselves, other people and our circumstances, and live close to the Lord, we can rejoice in Him. Our Lord is always the same. He never changes. His power never changes. His grace is always the same. Even though we cannot always rejoice in ourselves, in others and in our circumstances, it is good to know that we can "rejoice in the Lord." Rejoice in Him, in Who He is, 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 the Lord kills the desire for sinful pleasures, enables the believer to endure persecution and enhances the charm and influence of the Christian life. Christians should be filled with the joy that comes from the Lord because they thereby become walking advertisements of Christianity and living witnesses for Christ. Rejoicing in the Lord makes us more active and useful in the Lord's service. The joy of the Christian is not in himself, in his experiences or in his achievements, but "in the Lord." It is good to remember that peace and joy are not dependent upon material resources. Neither are they banished by the curtailment or withdrawal of material possessions. To "rejoice in the Lord always" is both the privilege and the duty of every Christian. Who is so genuine a Christian as he who has learned what Kingsley called "the sacred duty of being happy"? We are encouraged to "rejoice in the Lord" for our sakes, for the sake of others and for the sake of Christ. Rejoice in the Lord in all situations and at all times.