

RADIANT RELIGION

"Be of good cheer." Matthew 9:2. Matthew 14:27. John 16:33. Acts 23:11.

God wants His children to be happy. It is not His fault if they are unhappy. Some seem to think that God is happy because they are miserable, but He is not glad because any are sad. He wants His children to be cheerful, to keep heart under all circumstances, to rejoice in Him always, and to be glad in the prospects that await them. Christians are not the creatures of circumstances, but they are the conquerors of circumstances.

Cheerfulness is a characteristic of Christianity. From the scriptures we learn that cheerfulness is possible under all circumstances of life. It becomes ours when we fix our minds, not upon the discouraging, but upon the encouraging things of life. We never lessen trouble by continually thinking about it. After all, life's blessings outweigh its troubles and sorrows. If you will weigh all your discouragements, and then weigh all your encouragements, you will find there are many reasons for being cheerful.

Cheerfulness is both pleasing and profitable. It tunes the soul for the praises of God. It increases the volume of our happiness. It loudly welcomes our Master. It opens a avenues of usefulness for us among our fellow men. It makes us light-bearers amid the melancholy darkness and gloom which abound in the world. There is nothing like cheerfulness to dispel the gloom hanging over many lives. By living the cheerful life, and by uttering the cheerful message, each of us can help to warm the sorrow-chilled hearts of many. "Be of good cheer" is one of the favorite watch words of Jesus. On five occasions our Lord bade people to "be of good cheer." These occasions illustrate:-

I. The Cheer of Pardon.

"Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." Matthew 9:2.

Jesus had just returned from a marvelous mission of miracle working. He was preaching to a crowd of eager listeners when suddenly there was let down through the roof of the house a man bed ridden from a stroke of paralysis. This paralytic was brought to Jesus by four friends who were exceedingly anxious that he might be healed. Being delighted with the boldness and strength of the faith which was thus displayed, Jesus immediately bestowed upon the poor man a far greater blessing than the one which he sought, namely, instant, complete, and permanent pardon. The Saviour flung hope and cheer into the man's heart by giving him what he needed -- forgiveness of sin or cleansing from the past. The consciousness of the remission of sin through God's pardoning love is the source of true happiness. The forgiveness of sins is God's greatest gift to man. See in the faith of the paralytic and the faith of the men who brought him, Jesus healed his soul and then proved himself to be the Divine Physician by raising the paralytic from his bed. So the man who came in with his back on the bed went out with the bed on his back.

On another occasion Jesus was on his way to raise from the dead the daughter of a ruler. A woman, whose disease had baffled the physicians for twelve years, and who was gradually growing worse through their treatment, followed him. She thought that the power of Jesus resided in his garments. She was of the opinion that if she could only touch his garments. She was of the opinion that if she could only touch his clothes she would be healed apart from his knowledge or effort. She said, "If I may but touch His garment I shall be whole." In spite of her ignorance she came with such a faith that she got what she desired. Knowing her thoughts, Jesus turned and said, "Daughter, be of good cheer; thy faith hath made thee whole." Matthew 9:22. Jesus not only healed her body, but He saved her soul.

Salvation is a word with great content. We have been saved from the penalty of our sins by His death on the cross. We are saved from the power of sin by His indwelling Holy Spirit. We shall be saved from the presence of sin when He comes for us or when we enter into Glory. Our Saviour from past guilt, from present trial, and from future dread commands us "to be of good cheer".

II. The Cheer of Peace.

"Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Matthew 14:27.

Having fed the 5,000 men, besides the women and children, Jesus commanded his disciples to get into a boat and go across the sea. Obedient to their Master's command the disciples took ship and put forth upon the calm sea. Jesus dispersed the people and retired into the solitude of the mountains to pray.

As night came on, the wind arose and lashed the waters into foam-crested waves. The ship was tossed about like a cork. Although the disciples were seasoned seamen they could not make any progress against the wind. Even though the night was dark, Jesus was watching them from the mountain-side. He heard the roaring of the wind. He saw the raging of the waves and witnessed the resolute efforts of his disciples. For hours He permitted them to be tried, then He left the mountain-side and walked out on the waters of the troubled sea. Through the darkness and the mist Peter saw his Lord but he mistook Him for a ghost. When the whole crew saw Him walking upon the sea, they were startled at His appearance and cried out for fear. Then Jesus stilled their terror and filled their hearts with joyous hope by exclaiming, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid."

What is the special message for us in this note of good cheer? It is that Jesus is willing and able to take care of every emergency that he creates. Every emergency that occurs in the line of obedience to his command will be taken care of by Him. His disciples did not go to sea of their own accord. Jesus told them to go; therefore, it was a certainty that he would take care of them. Their joy was to spring from the fact of his presence with them. The presence of Christ is the source of all peace and happiness.

III. The Cheer of Power.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33.

These are some of the closing words of our Saviour in his farewell discourse to his sorrowing disciples when they were within an hour of Gethsemane and a day of Calvary. Although they had never fully understood Him and His mission to earth, the disciples listened attentively to Him, and were drawn closely to Him. His words touched the deepest cords of their hearts and fanned the glowing embers of their affections into a great fire of divine love which kindled the ages with a new enthusiasm.

This verse comes to us with the heartening cheer of a glorious conqueror. Three things are noticeable in this conqueror's cheer:

1. There is tranquility.

"That in me, ye might have peace."

Are we in Christ? If so, then we know what peace and tranquility really are.

2. There is tribulation.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation."

Although we shall encounter tribulation as long as we are in the world, its effects depend upon our hiding-place. If we are in Him, a thousand storms may break against us but they will never injure us.

3. There is triumph.

"But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

The world, with all its evil forces, is a defeated foe.

If ever there was a time when the disciples would have appeared to be justified in questioning the words of the Master it was surely when he uttered the words of this text. With the immediate closing in upon every side, with Judas having gone forth to complete his infamous bargain, and with the little company of eleven faithful disciples crushed with the announcement of his approaching departure, it must have sounded absurd for Him to exclaim "I have overcome the world." It certainly looked as though the world had overcome Him, but after nineteen centuries we discover that His outlook was true. He overcame the world with an unconquerable faith in God, a persistent service along the line of God's revealed love, and a sacrificial love for the world.

IV. The Cheer of Protection.

"The Lord stood by him, and said, be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also in Rome." Acts 23:11.

If ever Paul needed Christ's message of good cheer surely it was at that time he was in Jerusalem making his masterly defense before the Sanhedrins. The opposition received was almost unbearable. At one point Paul forgot himself and called the high priest "a whited wall", but afterwards in humility he apologized. Then there arose discension among the Pharisees and the Sadducees because of Paul's position. To save him from being mauled to death, the chief captain took Paul into the castle for the night. There he lay not knowing what awaited him on the morrow. Then the Blessed Master came and stood at his side and encouraged him by saying, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also in Rome." Paul had wanted to go to Rome, but he had not known how he could possibly get there. Paul had considered it to be the highest honor and the greatest happiness of his life to work for the Saviour. Now, to be told that he should still work for him was a cause of unspeakable pleasure and renewed strength. Jesus told him that the result of faithfulness was more work. What a comfort to know that we are immortal until our work is done!

Paul caught the spirit of the Master. The message of cheer which he received that night in the castle encouraged and greatly influenced him. He went forth to Rome. On the way his ship was wrecked, but he said to those with him, "Sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." May God make us like Paul. This world needs men and women who are unruffled by the storms of life and who can send out to struggling souls battling with the dark waves the inspiring message --"BE OF GOOD CHEER!"