

THE SECRETS OF CHRISTIAN JOY
THE SECRETS OF CHRISTIAN JOY (JOHN 20:20)

Tom Wallace, the well-known preacher, admits his favorite illustration about happiness comes from his own ministry. At the commencement of a Sunday morning service at the Bible Baptist Church in Elkton, Maryland, a stranger entered the church and seemed to be amazed at the large congregation.

Tom tells the story: "He came down the aisle and sat in the second row from the front. As the sermon proceeded he listened with the utmost attention, and was one of the first to respond to the invitation to trust Christ. His hand waved back and forth continually as if he were afraid it would not be seen. He stood stiff and erect when I asked if he would like to be saved; if he believed that Christ died for him. His eyes were gleaming when he responded: 'Yes, Sir, I want to do just that.' When he came into the baptistry, I gently lowered him into the water, and then lifted him to walk in newness of life. Suddenly, he began to clap his hands as he shouted 'Hot dog; hot dog; hot dog.' My people roared with laughter, but I reminded them the man was not accustomed to amens, praise the Lord, and hallelujahs. He was praising the Lord in the only vocabulary he knew."

Expressions of joy are the language of the soul; the greatest anomaly in the world is an unhappy Christian! Certain scriptures relate to this fact.

The Joy of Acceptance (Acts 8:38-39)

"And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing."

This was one of the earliest missionary triumphs of the Christian church. The final commission given by the Savior was: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Yet, even before the disciples could obey that command, the Lord was preparing the way for the dissemination of His message. A high-ranking official from Ethiopia,

143

who was either a convert to Judaism or a Jew of the dispersion, had been to a feast in Jerusalem. He was returning to his home in North Africa when a stranger approached his chariot. Philip had been preaching in Samaria, but the Holy Spirit commanded him to leave the evangelistic meetings. He said: "... Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet" (Acts 8:26-28).

Probably Philip was extremely surprised when he was told to leave Samaria, for his services in that area were the greatest since Pentecost. Luke wrote: "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto . . . Philip . . . hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:5-8). To most observers it was a mistake to leave the overwhelming possibilities among the Samaritan people. It would be interest-

THE SECRETS OF CHRISTIAN JOY

ing to know what Philip thought at that time.

The evangelist's subsequent meeting with the official from Ethiopia, and how that convert became the first missionary to North Africa is known throughout the world. Philip had reached a city in Samaria, but through the convert in the desert, he influenced a continent. Religion brought the man to Jerusalem, but Christ returned with him to Ethiopia.

It is significant that North Africa became one of the strongholds of the Christian faith during the second century. The eunuch, who only met the preacher once, returned to his home to evangelize his people. Although his spiritual advisor was suddenly removed, the convert "went on his way rejoicing." His friend explained the scriptures, and introduced him to fellowship with the Lord. All the money he controlled was nothing compared with the treasure within his soul.

144

The Joy of Assurance (Luke 10:17-20)

"And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them . . . Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

The disciples were ecstatic! They had just completed their first evangelistic tour, and the results exceeded their expectations. They had often watched and admired their Master but on those occasions Jesus assumed responsibility for everything that happened. They had no worries and very little care. This tour had been different; they were on their own! Whatever fears filled their souls were dispelled by the success of their mission. When they returned, they gave their glowing report and assured Jesus everything had been satisfactory. Even the evil spirits had been forced to obey their commands. Modern evangelists would have claimed the closing of hospitals, doctors with little to do, and police without prisoners! Throughout their itinerary the disciples experienced continuing victory, and they were elated.

"And Jesus said unto them . . . in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. . . . And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Luke 10:20-24).

It was thought-provoking that those ordinary, uneducated fishermen possessed treasure of incalculable worth. The combined wisdom of Solomon, wealth of David, and knowledge of the prophets could not provide the happiness which the disciples possessed. The writer to the Hebrews, referring to the saints of earlier times, said, "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:30-40).

The followers of Jesus were not always sure where they would sleep at night, and there were occasions when their fu-

145

ture appeared bleak. They had left their homes, and no longer had a regular income. Yet God knew them by name; He watched their progress, and had given orders their names were to be indelibly inscribed in His book of life. Christ had promised nothing in time or eternity would pluck them from the Father's hand (John 10:28-29). That was a cause for continuing thanksgiving.

THE SECRETS OF CHRISTIAN JOY

The Joy of Assembling (Acts 11:22-24)

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem; and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch, Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord."

The church was growing daily; the testimony of the preachers was irresistible, and wherever the persecuted brethren went, people were formed into assemblies. Revival was spreading through the land, and it was to be expected the apostles in Jerusalem would become aware of the current events. Denominations were unknown; the converts were united in fellowship with Christ, and each belonged to the others.

The apostles were delighted with the news, and they sent Barnabas to investigate and encourage the preachers in the provinces. He accepted the assignment, and eventually arrived in Antioch. The people's efforts to win lost souls were outstanding, and their dedication was easily discerned. The visitor from Jerusalem was stirred and his appreciation was evident. "He was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord."

Palestine was well known for its religious and political arguments, and it was thrilling for Barnabas to see how strangers, through faith in Christ, were becoming children of God. Furthermore, it was obvious these people enjoyed church fellowship; they worshiped harmoniously together, singing psalms and hymns. When the need arose, they gave money that other Christians might overcome financial problems. The power of the love of Christ was astonishing, for converts continued to

146

help each other. Many years later when Paul was aware of similar circumstances, he wrote to the Corinthian church to describe what had happened in the churches of Macedonia. "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (2 Cor. 8:2).

A Christian who knows nothing of fellowship with others becomes a religious hermit. A man or woman who refuses contact with other people becomes a recluse deprived of the joy of winning souls for Christ. The early Christians valued fellowship with other believers and consequently, the writer to the Hebrews said: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is (Heb. 10:24-25). The Christian church is the home of the believer, a man without a home can easily become a hobo!

The Joy of Adoration (John 20:19-20)

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord."

Webster's dictionary defines adoration as "the homage paid to one in high esteem, profound reverence, great love and respect; to love greatly." It would be very difficult to describe the emotions of the disciples when they saw the risen Lord. Their night of frustration and anguish had been long and bitter, their greatest hopes remained unfulfilled; all for which they had hoped

THE SECRETS OF CHRISTIAN JOY

and worked had ended in failure. Then came the resurrection when the astonished disciples saw with awe and wonder the face of their Lord.

They had considered the teaching of the Sadducees who believed death was terminal. The reappearance of Jesus proved they were mistaken. Christ was the greatest of all teachers, for He had announced correctly what would happen. He predicted His death, burial and resurrection, and had accomplished that

147

which was promised. His appearance assured them He would always be accessible, and gave new meaning to His promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

The closed door of the room in which they sat indicated terror had gripped their souls; they feared the possibility of capture and punishment. Yet, when they saw the wound-prints in the Savior's outstretched hands, their fear vanished. Perhaps they did not fully comprehend what had happened, but the fact that He was standing before them was all they needed. They worshiped Him, and joy began to change their outlook. There was no need to anticipate heaven; it had arrived! They enjoyed preaching the gospel and sharing companionship, but previous experiences became insignificant when they sat at His feet. Later when they met on the beach, it mattered not whether He preached or performed miracles, it was sufficient to see and worship Him. Jesus was "the altogether lovely one."

The Greek word "chairō" is used in all these references, and indicates that joy is a chief characteristic of the Christian life. Dr. Thayer states the word means "to rejoice exceedingly." It is not difficult to appreciate the stranger's thrilling exclamation when the joy of the Lord flooded his soul. Perhaps even the angels laughed when the man shouted: "Hot dog; hot dog, hot dog." There might be a veiled connection between the aforementioned scriptures and the statement in Luke 19:37-40. "And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." Oswald J. Smith was correct when he wrote:

There is joy, joy, joy in serving Jesus
Joy that throbs within my heart.
Every moment, every hour,
As I draw upon His power,
There is joy, joy, joy that never will depart.

148□

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.