

# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

*Editor*

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## *Editorial*

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT various names are used to describe those who belong to Christ. A very lovely title is that of “steward”. A steward is one to whom is committed some measure of responsibility.

Do we recognise the responsibility of stewardship with regard to our lives? Life itself is a gift of God. The Shorter Catechism is surely right when it asserts that, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever”. We need, then, to ask whether we are content just to drift along or if we are living with a higher purpose in view. The New Testament urges us not to live unto ourselves but unto Him who died for us and rose again.

Then there is the stewardship of our possessions. Strictly speaking, we should not speak of “our” money; it is only ours on trust, it really belongs to God. David, when dedicating the offerings for the building of the Temple, said, “All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

How are we using our time? For this too has to do with the thought of stewardship. Do we seek to get the best out of every day? We could not do better than pray the prayer of the Psalmist, “Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). The apostle Paul wrote with a sense of urgency, “Redeem the time, for the days are evil”.

Faithfulness is what the Lord looks for. The New Testament reminds us that “it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). We are furthermore exhorted to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

# “There was Great Joy in that City”

*Acts 8:8*

A Sermon by the Editor

TO COME STRAIGHT TO THE TEXT: this, of course, was at Samaria, and you remember that Philip went down and we read that he “preached Christ unto the people”. What better subject could any preacher have as that, to preach “the unsearchable riches of Christ”? And he preached with such power and the Holy Spirit applied the Word with remarkable power that there were far-reaching effects because we read that devils were cast out, the sick were healed, souls were saved and God was glorified and, says Luke — the writer of the Acts — “there was great joy in that city”. And is it to be wondered at? They had heard of God’s unspeakable Gift to men. They had heard that God “had visited and redeemed His people”, had raised up a mighty salvation for them, and in simple faith they took the Gift and they rejoiced in Peter’s words with “joy unspeakable and full of glory”. This joy was too deep for words. “And there was great joy in that city”.

The Gospel always brings joy. Our Lord Himself said that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”. You remember the words from the 89th Psalm: “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance and in thy name shall they rejoice all the day long.” The Gospel brings joy. Take up your New Testament, and that is evident from the very first page to the last. Let me remind you of just three references. Just after the day of Pentecost we read these words, that the believers “did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart”. There was a wonderful joy in those days. Turn on a little further in the Acts to days when persecution had been unleashed and Paul and Barnabas had been expelled from Antioch in Pisidia and this is what we read: “The disciples were filled with joy of the Holy Ghost.” In a sense every man’s hand was against them, but they still were filled with joy. When you get on to the First Letter to the Thessalonians we read that Paul said: “You received the Word of God in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost.”

These early believers found to their great and endless comfort that the “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering”, and it is interesting — and surely instructive — that joy comes next to love. It is given high priority in the fruits of the Spirit. “There was great joy in that city.” God would have His people rejoice. He has told them to do so. Did not our Lord say, “Rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven”? How comforting it is to know that “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost”.

**Now I want to share with you some thoughts about what the Bible has to say concerning joy.** I have not time to develop them, but just to lay them before you.

First of all, there is **joy in faith**. God's Word speaks of "joy and peace in believing". Now many want joy and peace before believing, but that is to invert the order and that is not God's method. If you want joy you must believe what the Scripture says. You remember how that is so beautifully illustrated in the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer. He cried out in sheer panic because he thought his prisoners had fled and because of the earthquake. He says, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?". And Paul says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved", and we read that he "rejoiced, believing in God with all his house". There is joy in faith, because faith links us to Christ and gives us a saving interest, and Christ is the Christian's joy and Christ Himself never changes. John Newton was a very colourful personality in his day. Prior to his conversion John Newton had tasted every earthly joy, but he found it to be a fleeting experience. How he wrote in that most loved and beautiful hymn:

"Glorious things of thee are spoken,  
Zion, city of our God;  
He, whose Word cannot be broken,  
Formed thee for His own abode."

and he goes on to say,

"Solid joys and lasting treasure  
None but Zion's children know."

How are those blessings to be ours? By simple faith and trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is joy in faith.

And then we find certainly there is **joy in hope**, because the apostle says in Romans 5:2: "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God." The Christian has a sure and certain hope. Hope is a scarce commodity today. It is in very short supply, and there is a sense of hopelessness in the country and the world. But the Christian has a sure hope. "We have good hope," says the apostle, "through grace." In the Epistle to the Hebrews it speaks of "Hope that is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast", and this hope is as bright as grace can make it and, furthermore, the Christian has a hope before him for the Scriptures speak of "that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ". But even now, to pick up Paul's words, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain". Someone has said that life for the Christian is "leaning on the arm of Christ". It is resting on His breast. Does not that remind us of the closing words of Psalm 16, "In thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"? There is joy in faith; there is joy in hope.

There is thirdly **joy in service**. Who can really measure the joy that Andrew had — the first Christian missionary — when he brought his own brother, Simon

Peter, to Christ. That must have been a tremendous thrill to him. I often think of old Bishop Taylor Smith. I read the story many years ago. He was brought to faith in Christ himself as a young man and he was instrumental in God's providence of helping someone along the road to find Christ, and Taylor Smith (he was not a bishop, of course, in those days) said, "He was so thrilled he could have died on the spot", and he used as a prayer the words of the Nunc Dimittis, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace . . . for mine eyes have seen thy salvation". He found joy in service. He went on to be a faithful minister of God and then in the First World War was made Chaplain General. He was a man greatly beloved and much used and he found tremendous joy in service. And is not that the testimony of every Christian worker, however humble our lot may be, whether it is just speaking to two or three in the Sunday School or doing some practical service for Christ? Surely there is joy in service. The Prayer Book has a lovely phrase, "Whose service is perfect freedom", and in that perfect freedom we find an abundance of joy.

Then I find, fourthly, there is **joy in trial**. This is what James says in his letter: "Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." If a Christian is much tempted, may we not conclude that he is thereby rich in faith or other graces, else the devil would have no trouble with him? Yes, there is a reason that the devil tempts us. You remember perhaps in olden days when piracy was the order of the day on the high seas. The pirates never attacked an empty vessel when it was leaving the country, they only attacked the vessels coming back to the country when they were well laden. Oh the devil only attacks well-laden believers; so, says James, "Count it all joy . . ." — we could translate it — "when ye fall into divers trials". Well if we **only did that** wouldn't it lift us up in the dark and gloomy day because when trials come we tend to be depressed and we tend to give way to our feelings? The Scripture says, "In everything give thanks" and "Count it all joy when trials and difficulties come". It is not easy, we fully admit, but it is scriptural nevertheless.

Then, fifthly, there is **joy in communion with God**. We may come boldly to Him and make all our requests known to Him. Just before the end our Lord said to His disciples, "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name. Ask that your joy may be full." What encouragements there are to prayer! The Bible is full of them. It is a wonderful encouragement to come boldly to the throne of grace. John Newton again in his well known hymn says:

"Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much."

Then, sixthly, there surely is **great joy in studying the Word of God**, the Bible. The Psalmist says, "I rejoice in thy word as one that findeth great spoil". What was the testimony of Jeremiah? "Thy words were found **and I did eat them**, and

thy word was unto me the rejoicing of my heart." Is it any wonder that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and heard the word as it fell from the lips of Him who was "fairer than the children of men"?

Yes, there is joy in communion with God, in praying, in reading His Word, in singing His praise. There is joy in praise, especially when we are enabled to sing a new song for mercies daily renewed. Yes, Christ would have His people share His joy with Him. "These things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." The joy that the Lord gives is a joy which abides, for the Saviour said, "And your joy no man taketh from you". All around us, everything with us, fades and ultimately dies, but this joy grows wider and deeper as it emerges into eternal joys in heaven. "There was great joy in that city."

This is not just an isolated text. Take Paul's great word in the Letter to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord and again I say Rejoice." It is an interesting thing that the Letter to the Philippians was written from prison, and yet the keynote is joy. I have on my bookshelf a very lovely exposition on Philippians by the late Canon Guy King and he entitled it, *The Joy Way*, because it is so filled with joy. Paul's outlook was anything but bright and yet his epistle is saturated with Christian gladness. He is a man in feeble health, with failing eyesight, lonely and almost friendless, and yet his heart sings for joy and he says to the Christians, "Rejoice in the Lord and again I say Rejoice". Paul is an example of a man finding the joy of the Lord his strength. But when he said "Rejoice in the Lord always" he did not mean that Christians should always be smiling or laughing or singing. Paul knew what it was to weep. Why, he speaks of some of whom he said, "I tell you weeping, they are the enemies of the cross of Christ". Paul could weep. He was often moved to tears. I have seen men who would be described as manly in tears. Here is the apostle Paul who could be moved to tears and yet at the same time always he rejoiced. In the midst of all sorts of trials we can find something to rejoice in, in the Lord. You remember how the prophecy of Habbakuk concludes with these wonderful words: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

The *Pilgrim's Progress* was also written in prison and yet you know it is filled with joy, the music of heaven is heard page after page in that lovely book and if you are familiar with it, at the sight of the cross Christian's burden fell off and we read, "He was glad and lightsome and said with a merry heart, 'He has given me rest by His sorrows and life by His death'." And again you remember how Christian rejoiced when he escaped from Doubting Castle: "And when he got home all the bells in the city rang again for joy." And so in that wonderful book, "Christian goes on through cloud and sunshine until at last he enters the gates of the Lord". Bunyan taught a living Christ who was able to save to the uttermost and who gave help in every time of need.

Yes, joy runs through the Bible, as I have been trying to show you, like a vein of gold, and joy, in like manner, ought to run through the life of the Christian.

Spiritual joy is continuous. It is not conditioned by changing moods. Spiritual delights are not dried up when we pass through seasons of material drought. Oh, but often our faith is weak and we are depressed and we become heavy at heart. We therefore need to believe more simply, to trust more firmly, and to cleave more completely, to Christ.

So, let me ask, what is the chief source of your joy? Is it to be found in Christ or is it to be found in the world? Well, you know the things of the world just do not last. We are all getting older and things leave us or we leave them and things of the world often cause disappointment. Seek to have a firm foundation. "Solid joys," again says John Newton, "and lasting treasure, none but Zion's children know."

But if we are believers we ought to have this deep joy. It is something within that will be shown on our countenances in the lives that we live. Bishop Ryle says: "Gloomy Christians are like the spies who went into Canaan, they bring an evil report of the land." Let us commend our faith and let this joy be evident. It is different from the world's idea of happiness because happiness is something that happens, joy is something deeper and lasting, and they found it, you see, in Samaria. In the early days of the Christian Church, "there was great joy in that city".

May there be great joy in your heart, the joy that comes from knowing Christ as a personal Friend, as a loving Saviour, as a constant Companion through life's weary days. There can be joy and a peace that the world knows nothing about. "There was great joy in that city." May that be your experience now and in the days to come. Amen.

M.H.

## For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

### TELL THE TRUTH

**WHAT A HURTFUL THING** it is to discover that someone has told you a lie. It destroys your trust in that person and can cause a rift in your relationship. What an uncomfortable and dangerous thing it is to tell a lie to someone — perhaps to cover up something we have done wrong — perhaps exaggerating our achievements so that our friend will be impressed — or even just remaining silent when we should be owning up to some misdemeanour. Our conscience tells us that is wrong — because God tells us that is wrong. In His **Word He** makes it very plain that He requires us to be truthful.