

A CHRISTIAN'S JOY

Philippians 3:1-3, 7-16, 20, 21; 4:1-13

LESSON 406

Junior Course

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

A Happy Christian

The Apostle Paul was a happy Christian because he had had a change of heart. God had given him some marvellous revelations that made him happy, but He had also warned Paul that he would suffer for the Gospel. And he surely had! Paul had been beaten; he had been shipwrecked; false brethren had betrayed him; he had been hungry and cold and in prison for the Gospel's sake. Yet he could say, "Rejoice in the Lord." The Philippians, to whom he was writing on this occasion, no doubt remembered how he and Silas had sung when they were in prison, their backs bleeding, on their first visit to Philippi. Paul did not ask anyone else to do things that he himself did not do. He had proved that God would help him through every trying time of life, and reward him for his faithfulness.

Paul's greatest ambition was to go to Heaven to be with Jesus. He said he had suffered all those things for the hope of the resurrection. He knew that if someone would kill him he would be in Heaven immediately. He had watched Stephen being stoned, and had seen the glory on his face as his life was departing. He had heard Stephen say, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). Paul had an intense desire to see the same thing. and he was willing to pay any price to see it. The very thought of seeing Jesus thrilled him. That was why he was always happy. No one could take that hope from him.

If we are born again we are children of God, and His heirs. We are joint-heirs with Christ to all the glories of Heaven. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us, a more glorious place than we can imagine. Paul said that if we suffer here with Christ we shall be glorified together with Him.

Warnings

Paul was very careful to live so that he would be worthy to enjoy Heaven with Jesus, and he warned the Philippians to live so that they too could enjoy eternal life. He told them to beware of dogs - a name he gave to wicked people - and evil workers, and those of the concision. Those of the "concision" were very religious Jews who did not follow Jesus and were trying to turn the Christians from following Jesus. They were preaching that people must keep the forms and ceremonies of the Law in order to be saved.

The Jews insisted that they were the descendants of Abraham, therefore they were the only ones who would go to Heaven. When Paul said, "We are the circumcision." he meant that we who are born again and obeying the commandments of God, are the real children of Abraham. Abraham believed in Jesus and his faith saved him; so we who come to Jesus in repentance and believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God who died for us, are the true children of Abraham. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

Not Saved by, Works

When he said, "We have no confidence in the flesh," he meant that the fact that his parents were Jews, and that he had carefully kept the forms and ceremonies of the Law did not give him a ticket to Heaven. Paul said that he had as much right as anyone to claim membership in the family of God through his birth into a Jewish family and his zeal in the Jews' religion, but he could see that none of that would make him worthy of Heaven. He said: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ... and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:7, 8). Only through Jesus could he (or anyone else) be saved.

There are people today who feel that if they go to church on Sunday morning, and never do anyone any harm. they will go to Heaven. Others think that if they go to church on Saturday and refrain from eating meat, they will go to Heaven. Some stand on street corners selling books and think they can earn their way into Heaven in that way. Even devoting one's life to helping the sick and poor in the medical fields will not save the soul.

**"What can wash away my sin? ...
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the Blood of Jesus."**

Paul had given up all his reputation as a Jew in order to walk with Jesus and to obey His teachings. There is only one way to be saved: "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Old things must pass away - the sinful nature must be purged - and all things become new in our lives if we are to be ready to go to Heaven.

After all the things Paul had already given up, he felt there was still more for him to do. There was still a chance that he might miss eternal life if he did not walk carefully. He was putting forth much effort and he could say, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

Citizens of Heaven

"For our conversation is in heaven," could also read, "Our citizenship is in Heaven." When we are born again and heirs with Christ, we are citizens of Heaven, and are supposed to live in this world as representatives of our "Homeland." Can people tell that you are a Christian by the way you live?

One time when Jesus had sent out some of the disciples to preach, they returned very joyful because even the evil spirits had been subject to them. Jesus answered: "Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). To have our name written in Heaven is the most important thing in our life. And even if it has been written there, we must be watchful that we keep it there. If, after we have once been saved, we commit sin again, our name will be blotted out of God's Book. He said: "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Exodus 32:33). When our name is written in Heaven, we enjoy talking about heavenly things. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

The Lord's Coming

The glorious hope of the Christian is to go up in the Rapture of the Church. It could happen at any moment, so it is important that we be ready continually. "Let your moderation be known unto all men." Let people see that you are living for Jesus, for the Lord is at hand. Live every moment as though Jesus might appear now.

Our Burden-Bearer

"Be careful for nothing." Cast all your cares on the Lord and let Him solve your problems, because He cares for you. Let Him provide for your needs and do not worry about what you may need in the future. Jesus said: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Matthew 6:25). It is more important to have salvation in our soul than to have food and clothing. Our salvation is our life. But in addition to that, the Lord knows what we need and has promised to provide it, if we will trust in Him. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:26). Did you notice that Jesus said that we are "much better" than the birds which He takes care of?

How to Pray

The Apostle Paul gave some good advice about how to pray. He said: "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). When you start to pray remember some of the things God has already done for you. As you begin to thank Him for those things, joy will fill your heart. If you cannot think of something good God has done, for you, think about the Home in Heaven He has gone to prepare for you and that it will be possible for you to go to be with Jesus. Rejoice in that God has said "whosoever will" may come. That includes us all. Thank God for the beautiful sunshine, for the flowers and trees that brighten the landscape, for the rain that waters God's vegetation. There are ever so many things for which to thank God. The more we appreciate what God has given, the more faith we will have to receive His blessed gifts. We will get the feeling that God is truly our loving Father who is watching over us, and wants to do good for His children.

Contentment

Paul was not concerned with how much of this world's goods he possessed or what honour men gave him. He said: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11). If he had plenty, it was all right. He thanked God for it. He would not become proud when people spoke well of him, nor glory in the abundance that might be his. But if he had little, he did not complain. "Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith" (Proverbs 15:16). When everything was gone and he had barely enough to eat, he could still rejoice. It was not that he had a naturally happy disposition, but God had made the change in His heart which made him able to say: "Rejoice evermore. In every thing give thanks" (I Thessalonians 5:16, 18). And he did not expect anyone to do something which he himself did not do. He had become a "partaker" of the messages he preached.

The reason Paul could preach such marvellous sermons, give much needed advice to the many churches, and be a support and comfort to the Christians from his day on to our day, was that he trusted the Lord implicitly. He said: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

QUESTIONS

- 1 What was Paul's greatest ambition?
- 2 Give some reasons why Paul was a happy Christian.
- 3 Who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham?
- 4 What claims did Paul have on Heaven, according to the Jews' religion?
- 5 How important did Paul consider them after he was saved?
- 6 Who are citizens of Heaven?
- 7 What will erase our name from God's Book after it has been written there?
- 8 Who takes care of the birds? How do we compare with the birds?
- 9 How are we to pray?
- 10 What did the Apostle Paul say about contentment?