



REJOICING IN THE LORD

QUEST LESSON D-13

The Problem: What should be the habitual disposition of a follower of Jesus Christ? What attitude should he manifest in good times and bad times? Is the Christian's life any different from the life of the one who does not believe?

George Whitefield, the great eighteenth-century evangelist, suffered much in his work of soul-winning, but always he praised God for allowing Him to work for others and to be a sharer in the sufferings of Christ. On one occasion Whitefield was traveling from town to town on horseback with an assistant. In one town, they learned that a widow lady with a large family was about to be put out of her house because she could not afford to pay the rent. Whitefield did not have much money, but he almost emptied his purse to give the woman the five guineas she needed. His assistant later objected, pointing out that he could not afford such a generous gift. Whitefield reminded him that God brings cases of need to our attention so that we can relieve the need.

The two men set off on their horses for the next town. After a while, they heard a galloping horse coming behind them. It turned out to be a highway robber who held them at gunpoint and took every cent they had. Whitfield asked his friend if it wasn't better for the widow to have received his money than that highway robber.

As they proceeded along the road on their horses, again they heard a horse coming in their direction. It was the same robber who this time demanded that Whitfield give him his good coat in exchange for the tattered one he was wearing. Reluctantly Whitfield exchanged coats with the highwayman. But he was sad at having to do so because he liked that coat.

To the dismay of Whitfield and his companion, they soon heard the highwayman galloping back towards them for the third time. They said, "Not again," and, spurring their horses, galloped furiously into the next town. After they found shelter, Whitfield took off the robber's torn and tattered coat, and as he did so, putting his hand in one of the pockets he drew out a hundred guineas.

The Lord rewarded him for his faithfulness and gave him back his money with interest.

The Bible teaches that, if we rejoice in the Lord despite our trials and difficulties, He will take very good care of us. We are told that suffering, calamity, heartache, and temptation which the Lord allows to come upon us are for our best good and that we have divine protection in every stormy experience of life.

The secret of a radiant Christian life is to live above the gloomy clouds of disappointment and sorrow, rejoicing in the privilege of being servants of Christ and trusting implicitly in His control over all the affairs of our existence.

Objectives

First, we shall note that Christians are representatives of Christ.

Second, Christians are to be positive, happy people.

Third, our privilege is to copy the life of Jesus.

Fourth, we are to love and respect others, despite their faults.

Fifth, there will be ultimate joy in the Kingdom of Glory in the relatively near future.

I. Christians Are Representatives Of Christ

When we have committed our lives to Christ, we have entered into fellowship with the divine that makes us representatives of the Lord in whatever situation we find ourselves. Everything we do or say now should depict to others what Jesus is like, and what it means to be His disciple.

The Word

1. What special commission are we given as ambassadors for Christ? John 17:18; 2 Corinthians 5:18.
2. How is the world to know that we belong to Christ? John 17:21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:10.
3. Since they don't read the Bible, how are non-believers to read Christ's message to them? 2 Corinthians 3:2-3.

Explanation: Jesus has sent us into the world as ambassadors of reconciliation. He wants us to be the instruments in God's hands of reconciling sinners to Him and of diffusing blessing and joy wherever we go. The world is to know that we are Christians because of the unity of love that exists in our churches. And we are to show the same love to those who do not believe as we do. The only Bible many people will ever read is the Epistle of Christ displayed to the world through the way we speak and act. If we are constantly gloomy and depressed, they will gain the impression that our faith is not worth having. If we are cheerful, gentle, and kind, they will conclude that the Christian life is one of peace, happiness, and joy. The teachings of the Bible that we believe will be sought after by others if they are convinced that these teachings have made us better people. Our lives are to be the best possible advertisement for the truth of Christianity.

Relevance: What impression do you give of the Lord Jesus Christ? Are people likely to get the feeling that your God is a hard taskmaster, or are they drawn to Him as they see your buoyant, loving disposition?

II. Christians Are To Be Positive, Happy People

If we have enjoyed the new-birth experience and, so, have the Holy Spirit reigning in our hearts, we have all of the necessary grace to be positive, happy people. The vicissitudes of life will not get us down if we allow the Lord to control and direct us. In prosperity and adversity, we will remain peacefully surrendered to the Lord, because we have an undergirding faith as a rock foundation that cannot be shaken.

4. What special blessing is given to believers in Christ? John 14:27; 16:33.
5. What is the result of love and service for Christ? John 15:9-11; 16:24.
6. Why should the believer in Christ not be consumed by anxiety? Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7.
7. What part does praise have in the life of the Christian? Psalm 35:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

Explanation: Jesus promises us peace! He does not suggest that there will be no tribulation, but peace in the heart remains for the believer despite the trials. Jesus says that He wants us to have the fullness of joy. That is not mere emotion or ecstasy, or the excitement of living high and fast. It is the abiding inner contentment of one who is right with God. He knows that his sins are forgiven, he is conscious that Christ is living through his life (Galatians 2:20), and the ups and downs of human existence do not disturb his calm assurance that the Lord is on His side. Family, friends, and professional associates may turn against him, but in his heart, there is peace and joy because Christ reigns and sin is kept away.

Jesus instructed us not to have anxious thoughts about the material things of life; what we are to eat and wear, and how we are to survive financially. He has undertaken to supply all our needs, as long as we are surrendered to Him and doing the work that He has assigned to us.

Thus, it is that the Christian's life is to be filled with praise. His inner and outer existence is controlled by divine power. When blessings are provided, the believer praises the Lord for them. When hard times strike him, he knows that the Lord has allowed them for a purpose, and he trusts that there will be divine overruling providence to bring good out of what the devil and his subjects plan to be destructive.

Relevance: You can have unshakable faith in the supreme power of Christ to manage all the affairs of your life. Such faith results in a temperament controlled by the Holy Spirit, and a habitual attitude of confidence, peace, and joy.

III. Copy Jesus

Jesus was not crushed by the tragic circumstances of His life. His reliance upon His Father gave Him strength to meet life's challenges, cheerfulness in the midst of trial, and special grace to meet the needs of others.

The Word

8. What does following Christ's example do for us? Matthew 11:28-30.
9. In what spirit did Jesus endure the burdens laid upon Him? Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 2:21.
10. To what extent were people attracted to Jesus and His message? Matthew 14:19-21; 5:1-2.
11. What evidence is there that children were attracted to Jesus and He to them? Mark 10:13-16.

Explanation: When we learn of Jesus and take His yoke upon us, we become meek and lowly in heart as He is. Then we have the rest of the soul because we do not feel that we have to prove ourselves to anyone. Because He accepts us with infinite love, we have the inner assurance that all is well. Insecurities are replaced by quiet confidence.

Jesus bore His lot in life "for the joy that was set before him" (Hebrews 12:2). The cross of shame, and the rejection by those whom He came to save, all was endured with patient submission because by faith He was looking beyond to the eternal result of His sacrifice. When we believe the message of Jesus Christ, we have hope for the future. We do not cherish some phantom idea of great wealth, or fame, or worldly acclaim. Our sights are set on the better land that our Lord is reserving for us. As Jesus believed in the joys of the hereafter, so may we. And His peace and contentment may be ours.

Jesus' personality was not dull or depressed. The very fact that thousands of people would listen all day to His teaching indicates that He had a magnetic personality. He must have spoken with great cheerfulness and pleasantness. Children came to Him and allowed Him to hold them in His arms. That itself proves that He was a bright, attractive personality. Being Christian does not make us sad, repressed, introverted people. If we follow Jesus' example, we will glow with a holy joy that will attract others to us.

Relevance: There is no character on this earth as worthy of our emulation as Jesus. No other has been free from sin as He was; no other has lived with such unselfish caring for the needs of others; no other has given so much to relieve human suffering and elevate humanity to the level of divine nobility. We can never equal Jesus in character but, by His grace, we can copy Him.

IV. Love And Respect Others, Despite Their Faults

The tendency of humanity is to criticize and condemn others when they are found to fall short of our set standards. When we find someone living in sin, we are moved to be very judgmental. Weak sinners are sometimes discouraged and destroyed by otherwise good Christian people who shun them, look down upon them, or say harsh things about them. Jesus hated sin but loved sinners.

The Word

12. What attitudes towards others should be manifested by the followers of Jesus? 1 Peter 3:8-9; 1 John 4:7, 20-21.
13. How should we react if mistreated by others? 1 Peter 3:12-18; Matthew 5:10-12.
14. When we observe faults in others, how should we treat them? Galatians 6:1-3.
15. If a fellow Christian wrongs us, what are we to do? Matthew 18:15-17.
16. If you are a Christian believer and your spouse is not, how should you act? 1 Corinthians 7:10-16.

Explanation: Christian love and courtesy are to characterize all our relationships with people. If we are discriminated against because of our faith, we are to "rejoice, and be exceedingly glad" (Matthew 5:12). It is not that Christian believers are impervious to slights and insults. They are very sensitive people, perhaps somewhat more so than most people. But love for Christ and love for the sinner who is persecuting them leads them to manifest patience under duress and forgiveness in the face of injustice.

When we see others doing wrong, we are not to sit in judgment on them, but to follow Paul's counsel: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). The aim of the true follower of Jesus is to save His brother or sister who is going astray. This is not to be done in any self-righteous spirit but with deep concern for the deliverance of the afflicted person. Sin is a sickness of the soul, and we must be very tender and merciful if we would work with the Spirit to heal and save.

Jesus' counsel in Matthew 18 indicates that, when we are wronged, we are not to criticize and malign the offender but to go to him or her in private and talk it over. If he will not put things right, we are to take some witnesses. If he still refuses to listen, we are to take the problem to the church, assuming that it is a matter of sufficient importance to warrant such a drastic action. In other words, Jesus encourages us to do all we can to be reconciled to fellow believers who are acting unfairly towards us.

A Christian is to remain with an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10-16), unless the unbeliever wishes to leave. There is no suggestion here that the unbelief of the spouse is a sufficient excuse for divorce and remarriage. In fact, Paul indicates that if a person has to leave a spouse for some reason, he should remain unmarried or otherwise be reconciled to the spouse (verse 11). The only grounds for divorce and remarriage recognized by Jesus are overt sexual immorality on the part of one's marital partner (See Matthew 5:31-32).

Relevance: It is not possible to rejoice in the Lord as a Christian disciple while hating or mistreating another human being. Love for Christ implies love for others for whom He gave His life.

V. Joy In The Kingdom

There are two kingdoms referred to in the New Testament. One is the kingdom of grace into which we are all inducted when we accept Christ. We become sons and daughters of God and members of His family on earth. The other is the kingdom of glory that is established at the second coming of Jesus. To belong to the kingdom of grace now assures us of a part in the kingdom of glory. Our joy now becomes perfected and unlimited when Jesus comes to receive His people.

The Word

17. Of what kingdom is the Christian a citizen right now? Colossians 1:13-14; Luke 17:21.
18. Of what kingdom will we be citizens after the second coming of Jesus? Matthew 25:34-40.
19. What kind of place will Christ's eternal kingdom be? Revelation 7:14-17; 21:1-7.

Explanation: It is thrilling to be delivered from the power of evil and made a part of Christ's kingdom today. The believer has the gift of eternal life now (John 3:36; 1 John 5:11-13), in the sense that He belongs to Christ and Christ lives in his heart by the Holy Spirit. In this sense "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Jesus did not imply that this is the only kingdom we have to look forward to. Luke 17 proceeds to describe the second coming of Jesus. Whether we live or die before then, we are assured of eternal life at that time. It is at that time that Jesus takes His believing people to be with Him in heaven (John 14:1-3). And the kingdom is given to them because they have allowed the Holy Spirit to live in their hearts. What a place of peace and rejoicing the heavenly kingdom will be! There is no more sorrow, sickness, death, violence, or impurity for people to contend with. They are given perfect bodies and minds, and freedom from all physical, emotional, and spiritual ailments. They meet Jesus face to face and receive His commendation for the works He did through them. Heaven is a place of perfection where no sin or temptation will mar the untrammelled peace of the people of God.

Relevance: Rejoicing in the Lord always now is but the beginning of habitual rejoicing in the kingdom of heaven. Within our hearts now, Christ provides that experience that qualifies us to live with Him for eternity. Heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21) provide an eternity of growth and advancement for the people of God in every noble enterprise. There is never any boredom, dissatisfaction, or lack of personal fulfillment. The infinite God, who so willingly gave His Son to die for our sins, will share with us the infinite knowledge that he possesses. There can be no more wonderful reward for God's people than He is preparing for us. Let us rejoice now because of what Christ has already accomplished for us and in us! And let us rejoice always at the exciting prospect of being citizens of His eternal kingdom!

Will you allow Jesus to come into your life at this time so that these thrilling blessings can be yours?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. It is not possible for Christians to be like Christ in character.
 - b. Christ in life drives away the sadness and depression.
 - c. Rebuke and rejection are to be the portion of people who choose to sin.
 - d. Eternal life begins now for the rejoicing believer.
2. Discuss: Throughout history, innocent Christian believers have been put in prison and martyred for their faith. How could such people rejoice in the Lord? How could people like John Huss, who was burnt at the stake in 1415, in the time prior to death give praise to God for what was happening to them and what they suspected was about to happen?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, Chapter 13.