

Cheerful Christians!

“Be of Good Cheer; it is I; be not Afraid.”—Mark 6:50

WHILE it is enjoined upon the Lord's followers to be sober and earnest and moderate in all of life's affairs, it is a mistake to suppose that this means they must be morose, gloomy, or have a dejected appearance. Quite to the contrary. Everything in Scripture agrees with the facts as we know them, that those who are full of faith in the Lord and in his Word, and whose hearts are fully consecrated to his service, are cheerful, happy, even in the midst of unsatisfactory and even painful conditions. It is true also that their faces show this cheerfulness of their hearts. They have less of the worried and anxious look, are less fearful and foreboding. The calm of joy and peace resulting from their relationship to the Lord and their reception of his holy Spirit shows itself not only in their tone of voice but in the glance of the eye; and gradually, if this be the result of an acute conversion, the wrinkles and other marks of care will begin to fade, although they may not fully pass away.

There is a difference, however. We are not merely describing nominal Christians, but the very special class of Christians who know their Lord and are known of him, who have pledged themselves to walk in his footsteps in the narrow way, and who are seeking daily to lay aside every weight and every besetting sin that they may run with patience the race set before them. (Heb. 12:1). On the contrary, one may attend divine service in large Church buildings and scan the faces of those whom he meets, and find on them all the various marks that belong to sin and care and sorrow and pain and trouble. Indeed he is sure to find very few of the kind we have just described, whose possession of the peace of God which passeth all understanding ruling their hearts shows itself in their faces.

WHY SO MANY CAREWORN FACES?

The explanation is, first, that many who attend the nominal churches are not even believers in the Scriptural sense of the word, and still fewer are consecrated believers who are daily striving to know and to do the will of God more perfectly. The great mass of nominal Church attendants could best be described in the Lord's words to the Samaritan woman, “Ye believe ye know

not what; we know what we believe.” (John 4:22.) One of the most prominent ministers in Allegheny recently said to his congregation, “There are nearly eight hundred members of this Church and I would to God that two hundred of you knew what you believed.” The gentleman was giving undoubtedly a very liberal allowance. In our opinion, he would have come nearer the truth if he had said not one in ten of the members of the Church knew what they believed or why they believed it. And where is the fault? Is it wholly with the people who attend divine services? Have they absolutely no gift of hearing as respects spiritual things? Or is the difficulty in part with the preachers, who, instead of informing the public respecting the doctrines of Christ, are too busy talking about politics of the day, discussing rich men, socialism, etc., etc.?

An old adage is, “Like priest, like people,” and we believe it would be difficult to find many ministers who know what they believe and what authority from the Word of God they have for the belief. How can such people show in their faces what they do not have in their hearts? How can they trust their affairs, both present and future, in the hands of one of whom they have such little knowledge, and that knowledge chiefly error handed down from the dark ages?

Even those who are truly the children of the King, the fully consecrated, are so swamped by their close contact with the tares, so deprived of the fertilizing influences of the Truth, so choked with the tares, that they are, as the Scriptures explain, merely babes in Christ, lacking in knowledge, lacking in appreciation of the divine Word, lacking in the strength and courage and full assurance of faith and principle. It is to this class, the meek, the teachable, who are hungering after the Truth, that the Lord's message at this present time is specially sent, to cheer them, to comfort them, to uplift them, to develop them in the fruits and graces of the Spirit through the knowledge of the Word. It is this class that we here and everywhere specially address.

GOOD CHEER IN TROUBLE.

It is easy enough to be of good cheer under favorable conditions, mental, moral and physical, and with happy

associations and surroundings. All who are truly the Lord's people, who have attained any measure of development in the knowledge of his plan, should be cheerful under such circumstances—especially when associating with fellow Christians, singing the divine praises and approaching the throne of grace as in the Church gatherings, so that the happy faces which we see at Church are not always a token of what we would see if we saw the same people in the everyday affairs of life. To illustrate our point: Not long since four of the brethren met with a nominal Church man, a stranger to them, to attend to a little job which proved very tantalizing and patience-wearing to them all for nearly three hours. As they parted the nominal Church member said, "Gentlemen, when I go home I am going to tell my wife that I met four men who, under very trying circumstances, did not swear." The gentleman did not understand the reason lying behind the perplexity and the fretting circumstances which kept the brethren serene.

PEACE IN THE HEART

We may be sure, however, from his own words, that their living epistles were not entirely lost in this case. The brethren, through a better knowledge of the Lord, the result of their better faith and fuller consecration, had what the Lord promised they should have, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, ruling in their hearts. The world and the nominal Church tell us that doctrine is of no particular consequence, that the important matter is honesty and proper living. But, on the contrary, we tell them that doctrine is all important. The man who has not the proper doctrine before his mind lacks the very power which God intended should work in him to will and to do the divine good pleasure. The man who has not taken the Lord's prescription is still sick, is still in pain, is still in trouble, and the anxious care and trouble show upon his face. The Lord has invited all the weary and the heavy laden to come to him and find rest, and when this course has been followed and the rest has come to the heart it is always sure to manifest itself on the features and in the conduct.

"BE NOT AFRAID: IT IS I."

Our text is a part of a little narrative: Jesus had been with his disciples on the farther shore of Lake Galilee; he remained behind but sent them away in the ship. A storm arose, the wind was contrary, they were tossed by the waves and made no progress; they were still in the midst of the sea and troubled. They had learned from previous experiences that while the Master was with them all would be safe, but now he was absent. We may be sure that he remained behind for this very purpose, that they might have the very experiences

which they encountered, that they might feel troubled by the tempest's tossings and the dangers undergone, and that he might teach them a lesson thereby, a lesson respecting his providential care. In the severity of their trouble they beheld Jesus walking toward them on the water. They were doubly affrighted, and supposed that they saw a hobgoblin, a phantom, in harmony with stories always told by the seafaring; they were in terror, not only by reason of the storm, but now by reason of their fears. Then Jesus spoke to them in the words of our text, "Be of good cheer: It is I; be not afraid." Cast away your fear, learn to look to me, to remember that having become my disciples I have supervision over all your affairs whether in storm or in calm; all things are subject to my supervision and shall be ordered for your best interests.

THE LESSON FOR US.

We may be sure, too, that this lesson was not taught the disciples merely on their own account, but, like all other of our Lord's teachings and parables and miracles, they foreshadowed things to come, and were really lessons, instructions, along spiritual lines. The lesson intended for the Lord's true followers is that in all the storms and trials and difficulties and perplexities of life they may remember that, having put their interests and affairs into the hands of the Lord Jesus, he is both able and willing to keep that which has been committed to his trust.

"When the storms of life are raging,
Tempests wild on sea and land,
I have found a place of refuge
In the shadow of God's hand.

"Enemies may strive to injure,
Satan all his arts employ;
God will turn what seems to harm me
Into everlasting joy."

It is not for the world, including the merely nominal Christian, to have this confidence in the Lord. It is better for them that they be undeceived. Not having committed their all to the Lord's care he has given them no assurance respecting his willingness to make all things work together for their welfare. Such promises belong only to the disciples of Christ, the followers of Jesus, the consecrated. It is better for the others that they should still stumble and realize their own weariness with their heavy load. All the more likely they will be inclined some day or other to see the difference between their own standing and that of the truly consecrated, and to come into a relationship with the Lord which will guarantee to them the easy yoke and light burden which the Lord promises to all who are his true followers.

PERFECT LOVE, NO FEAR.

The Scriptures declare that perfect love casteth out fear, and this is the Christian's secret of a happy day. Having learned of the grace of God in Christ in the redemption, having accepted this grace and realized his sins forgiven, he is at peace with God, and having consecrated his justified heart to the Lord and to the service of the Truth he has made progress. Eating the Lord's Word, growing strong in the Lord and the power of his might, he has come to know more and more of the Lord's true character, that God is love; and as he has learned to love in return, in the same proportion has the love cast out the fear. Not only does perfect love for God cast out fear of him, but it also casts out the fear of all troubles and danger, both real and fancied. When we know of God's goodness, when we know also of his promises for our protection and care, when we have his assurance that all things shall work together for good, we have indeed the true basis for fearlessness, for confidence, for hope, for joy and peace and blessing.

Such Christians, instructed by the Word of the Lord and full of love for him and confidence in his love in return, are able to look to the Lord in all the storms and trials and difficulties of life, and to hear his voice in all the trying circumstances, saying, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." They have learned not to question why the storms and trials of life are permitted; they have learned that they are all for the development of faith and patience and the various graces of the Lord's Spirit in us, and hence when trials come they know it is all for the best and a blessing from the Lord, as we read, "No chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness." (Heb. 12:11.) And so, after having had experiences and disciplines in this life, those who are the Lord's true people, who have made progress in the knowledge of him and who have had experience in the school of Christ, learning these necessary lessons, instead of beginning to mourn when the trials and storms and clouds of trouble gather, by faith will be able to hear the Master's voice, by faith will be able to discern that it is the great Teacher who has given them another lesson, and their hearts being fully submissive and anxious to learn, they rejoice therein.

The Apostle points out to us that the Christian's course should always be one of rejoicing. His own experience is an example of what he meant. He did not mean that the Christian should expect to be exempt from trials and difficulties, which properly enough would be a ground for sorrow and sadness and trouble; he did mean, being rightly informed respecting the object of these lessons and experiences, the Lord's faithful ones would rejoice in them as evidences that they were

still in the school of Christ, still in preparation for the Kingdom.

O, what comfort it gives to our hearts when trials arise! Sometimes from the actual difficulties of life with which we are surrounded, with the waves of trouble that nearly swamped the boat of the disciples—sometimes in our experiences as little congregations of the Lord's people, and sometimes in our personal or family experiences, how comforting to think that the Lord is near, that nothing could harm us except by his permission, that not even a hair of our heads could fall without our Father's notice. No wonder that with such assurances our faces and hearts may always be calm in the midst of storm; no wonder if the hobgoblins of fear, which often cause the world more distress than its actual difficulties, are as nothing to us. Why should we fear? Greater is he that is on our part than all that could be against us. Whatever may be the trials or difficulties of the pathway, the end is sure to justify every pain, every sorrow, every disappointment—we have the Lord's Word for it.

Why should we sorrow as those who have no hope? We have a hope that is, as the Apostle explains, "an anchor to our souls, sure and steadfast, within the veil." God's love, as manifested in the redemption, as testified by our Lord Jesus and by the holy Spirit speaking through the apostles, gives us all the assurance that we could ask that his love is not ephemeral, not transitory, but abiding. The fact that he followed up the redemption by the adoption, and now we are by his grace heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord if so be that we suffer with him, gives us assurance respecting the divine purpose, and hinders us from being overwhelmed by the waves of present trouble and distress and protects us from the fears common to the remainder of mankind.

"AND AGAIN I SAY, REJOICE."

Having seen the ground of our proper rejoicing, having found that it is the result of heart-relationship to the Lord and instruction from his Word, let us have a few words of testimony from the apostles respecting this matter—showing what manner of persons we ought to be, not only in all holy conversation and godliness, but also in enjoying the divine blessings ourselves while telling the good tidings to others.

Our Lord, when telling the disciples of the disappointments they would have in respect to the crucifixion and the blasting of their hopes, declared that later on they would have the reverse of this, rejoicing. He said, "I will see you again [I will reveal myself to you] and your hearts shall rejoice." (John 16:22.) So we, like the disciples, rejoice not merely that our Lord died as our

Redeemer but that he rose again from the dead, and that not only is he to reveal himself in the end of the age at his second advent shortly, blessing all the families of the world, but that all through the Gospel age he has been spiritually present with his disciples to bless, refresh, comfort and strengthen us.

The Apostle tells us another cause for rejoicing which we have, assuring us that we not only have been justified by God's favor but have been granted also an entrance into still higher favor, in which we now stand, "Rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God." (Rom. 5:2.) We have good cause for rejoicing in the hope of coming glory, not only because it means blessing to ourselves and intimacy with our Lord, but because also it means our participation with the great Messiah in extending divine blessings to the world of mankind. Again we read the Apostle's testimony even in the midst of trials and difficulties, even in the midst of suffering for righteousness' sake, for the Truth's sake, even while enduring hardness as a good soldier. He says, "I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."—Phil. 1:18.

The Apostle gave us a good illustration of this spirit, one which should be helpful to all of us: We remember that when he and Silas were in prison at Philippi, their backs bleeding from the wounds received from the scourging and wet also with the salt, as was the custom in order to make the suffering more intense, so full were their hearts of faith in the Lord and the realization that they were suffering for Christ's sake, suffering for righteousness' sake, that the blessing of the Lord was with them and eventually would compensate them for their sorrow and trouble, that they were able through their abundant faith to so rejoice as to sing praises to God in prison. The Apostle continues, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 3:1), as though he would tell us that the grand climacteric of Christian experience is this ability to rejoice in all the affairs of

life as they come to us, rejoice that we can see Jesus and hear his voice, saying, "It is I: be not afraid," and appreciate the fact that all of life's experiences are under divine supervision and will work out for us a blessing. It was this same spirit of faith and confidence in our Lord Jesus that enabled him to say in his most trying moment, "The cup that the Father hath poured for me, shall I not drink it?"—John 18:11.

The Apostle James, writing along the line of rejoicing, says, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice that he is exalted, but the rich that he is made low." (Jas. 1:9, 10.) This is the same thought which the Apostle Paul enunciates: our experiences, whatever they may be, should be recognized as under divine supervision, protection and guidance, and therefore a matter of rejoicing to us, however disappointing our experiences may sometimes be as viewed from the earthly or fleshly standpoint. The Apostle Peter has a word in the same connection. He says, addressing the heirs of the incorruptible inheritance, "Ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while if need be ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:6, 7.) Here is the thought: we rejoice greatly in our manifold temptations because we realize that these are evidences of our acceptance with the Lord, and that he is dealing with us as sons, and that he is polishing us as jewels for the Kingdom.

Those who can rejoice with joy unspeakable, even in the midst of temptations and trials and difficulties, surely belong to the class whom the Lord addresses in our text, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." It is because they have heard this voice and have come into harmony with the speaker that they find cause for rejoicing under all circumstances and conditions.

TRUTH SEEKING.

Think not, O seeker after truth
 Thy path with roses strewn will be;
 That friends shall, smiling, grasp thy hand
 And cheer thee by their sympathy.
 That souls as eager as thine own
 With joy shall hail truth thou mayest find
 And bid long cherished error flee
 And loose the chains of creed that bind.
 Nay, nerve thy soul to meet rebuffs,
 To lonely plod thy weary way,
 To bear the scorn and bitter sneers
 And all that tries man's constancy.

Truth is a bird of beauty rare
 That ne'er hath been by mortal caught
 And though it sings a noble song,
 But few can hear its heavenly note.
 A dreamer may, amid the throng,
 Above the clamor, faintly hear
 A few sweet notes that thrill his soul
 And fill with melody his ear.
 And, pausing, may bid others pause
 And listen to the wondrous song.
 But, ah, the din of earth is great,
 And all unheeding is the throng.

Alexander Walker in *Philadelphia Record*

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