

Radiant Christianity

by Ralph I. Tilley

It was in one of our weekly prayer gatherings a few years ago that a dear brother, who has since gone to be with the Lord, raised a question which still lingers with me. He asked, "Where has the joy gone?" Of course, all who were present knew what he had reference to.

A few weeks ago I was visiting in a home which had been graciously opened to me as a young teenage boy. Following the death of my mother, these dear folk regularly had me over for Sunday dinners, for which I will always be grateful. Having been members of my home church, they had known my mother well. As the three of us sat in the living room reminiscing that morning, Murnal said to me, "Ralph, I've never known anyone who manifested more joy than did your mother."

Joyless Christianity is an oxymoron. And yet, let's face it: there are far too many of our pulpits and pews populated with cloudy Christians instead of joyful, radiant Christians. It takes more than a membership course, a confirmation class, water baptism and a Christian heritage to produce vibrant, joy-filled Christians. What made New Testament Christianity so attractive to the pagan culture of the day, as well as appealing to the ritualistic but empty-hearted Jew, was the heavenly dynamic of Holy Spirit joy radiating from Christocentric believers. Men and women who had experienced the converting power of the crucified and risen Lord were living lives in the very fullness of the Holy Spirit.

None of us can afford to be smug. Joyless Christianity plays no favorites; it is blind to denominational distinctions. It stalks the church like a plague. Services are attended, sermons are preached, prayers are prayed, hymns are sung - but has anyone observed any evidence of Spirit-generated radiance and joy? Where is Christ in all of this?

Jesus our Lord was radiant with joy. The Father said of Him, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy" (Hebrews 1:9). Jesus said of John the Baptist, "He was a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35, KJV). He shone externally because he burned with joy internally. When the church's first martyr stood before his accusers, those in attendance "saw that his face was like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15).

Many years ago I was given a book by a dear sister in the Lord entitled "I Met a Man With A Shining Face". It is the story of how Dr. Harry E. Jessop came to experience the Holy Spirit in a deeper way following a personal encounter with a radiant Christian. He relates:

I met a man with a shining face - and I mean shining. It was a face having upon it the glow of heaven and the glory of God. . . . Let there be no mistake about it, my language is not mystical; I am not thinking about the face of Moses as described in the Scriptures. . . . The face was the face of a man; a man of my own generation; a young man, probably not more than ten years my senior.

The most convincing and compelling advertisements any church can have to attract hungry-hearted seekers into its fellowship - are glowing, joyous, radiant Christians. Furthermore, these devoted, sanctified disciples will have a convicting impact upon the lukewarm and backsliding.

In writing about radiant joy in the Holy Spirit, we're not referring to cheap showy religiosity, nor of a pompous, shallow, superficial gaiety. The joy of the Holy Spirit is Spirit-produced, not manufactured; it is a fruit of the Spirit, not a work of the flesh; it comes from above.

How can we be joyful, radiant Christians? What price must we pay? Let me suggest three pointers.

To be a joyful, radiant Christian one **must have an insatiable appetite for God**. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6). One thing which characterizes radiant Christians is continuous discontent with their level of growth in God. They want to know Jesus Christ more intimately, they desire to grow in grace more fully, they want to be used by God more effectively. It is always a cry for "More, more, more." Their constant prayer is reflected in the words of Thomas Chisholm:

I have one deep, supreme desire,
That I may be like Jesus.
To this I fervently aspire,
That I may be like Jesus.
I want my heart his throne to be,
So that a watching world may see
His likeness shining forth in me.
I want to be like Jesus.

Secondly, To be a joyful, radiant Christian **one must hate sin and love righteousness**. As we saw earlier, Jesus was exalted to the very throne of His Father because of His abhorrence of evil and His attachment to the standard of holiness: "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy" (Hebrews 1:9).

Joy must inevitably depart when sin enters. Where sin is confessed and forsaken, joy returns. Following his confession of sin, King David rightly prayed, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Psalm 51:12).

It is here that so many Christians are losing their way. They lament the absence of joy, they decry their feebleness and lukewarmness. But they're unwilling to pay the price for joy-filled living: confession of sin. It doesn't have to be the sin of adultery, thievery, or drunkenness. What about the refined sins of malicious gossip, slander, greed, grumbling and unkindness? These sins will as surely sap the believer of joy as any other.

Finally, to be a joyful, radiant Christian one **must consistently listen to the voice of the Bridegroom**. John the Baptist enjoyed this relationship with Jesus Christ: "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete" (John 3:29).

We listen to the voice of our Bridegroom with the Word of God open before us in the place of prayer. Prayer is not primarily talking to God; prayer is God's speaking to me. Child of God, have you allowed the strange voices of this world to muffle the voice of your heavenly Bridegroom? Are you more familiar with the voices of men and women in this world than the voice of the Good Shepherd? Has your joy leaked out? Are you filled with anxiety, fear, dread, boredom, heaviness? Your Bridegroom would invite you into His holy chambers to be alone with Him - just the two of you. Stay there, get still, get quiet, open the Word, don't be in a hurry. And don't leave until you hear His voice and know that sweet communion has been restored. Then you can leave the place of prayer with complete joy. Practice this and you will be a joyful, radiant Christian.

It has been 20 years ago now since I was exposed to the writings of the late Catherine Marshall. The first book I read was entitled "Friends With God"; it consists of stories and prayers of the Marshall Family. In that volume is a legend which will serve to illustrate quite well what happens when we pay the price to live a radiant life. Here's the story:

The story goes . . .

In the Far West there is an Indian village. Rising out of the desert and towering over the village is a high mountain. Only the very strong can climb it, so all the boys of the village were eager to try.

One day the chief said, "Now, boys, today you may try to climb the mountain. Each of you go as far as you can. When you are too tired to go on, come back. But I want each of you to bring me a twig from the place where you turned back."

Very soon a fat boy came puffing back. In his hand he held out to the chief a cactus leaf. The chief smiled. "My boy, you did not even reach the foot of the mountain. Cactus is a desert flower.

Later a second boy returned. He carried a twig of sagebrush. "Well," said the chief, "at least you reached the foot of the mountain."

The next boy to come back had in his hand a cotton twig. "Good," said the chief. "You climbed as far as the springs."

Another boy came back with some buckthorn. "You, my boy, were really climbing. You were up to the first rock slide.

An hour afterward, one boy came back with a branch of pine. To him the chief said, "Good! You made three-quarters of the climb."

The sun was low in the sky when the last boy returned. His hands were empty, **but his face was shining**. He said, "Father, there were no trees where I was. I saw no twigs, but I saw a shining sea."

Now the old chief's face glowed too. "I knew it! When I looked at your face, I knew it. . . You have been to the top. You needed no twig to tell me. It is written in your eyes. You alone, my boy, have seen the glory and peace of the mountain.

And so it will be with you and me. When we climb to the "top" of the mountain, we will return with the joy of the Lord in our hearts and the radiance of God on our countenances. In the words of the Psalmist, "**Those who look to him are radiant**" (Psalm 34:5).

"You needed no twig to tell me. It is written in your eyes. You alone, my boy, have seen the glory and peace of the mountain." Many consider they have God's best; few find it in fact, for it is higher yet than every path trammelled by mere men. Only those diligently faithful souls who give their all can find it. TP

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