

JOY and TRIALS IN PERSPECTIVE

By

Curtis Dickinson

Jesus made no secret about the fact that anyone who took Him and His teaching seriously would face severe trials and hard temptations. At the same time He said of these disciples, “Blessed are you...” and promised that their joy would be “made full.”

In the modern Christian message, the emphasis often is on joy and excitement, with very little said about the expectation of trials. But it doesn’t take long for one to find out that Jesus wasn’t kidding when He warned of tribulation.

The question is how to reconcile these two conditions. How can there be joy in the midst of grievous trials?

The answer can be found in the example of Jesus. In carrying out God’s purpose, He said, “I do always the things that are pleasing to my Heavenly Father” (John 8:29). When the disciples suggested that he eat, as it was past lunch time, He declined saying “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work (John 4:34). The deepest desire of Jesus was to please the Father, and fulfilling that desire is what gave Him joy, even if, at the same time, it brought trials.

It is this same desire, to be pleasing to our Father that is required of those who would follow Christ. Contrary to popular thinking becoming a Christian is more than “whispering a prayer” and asking Jesus to “come into your heart.” This is the promotion of “cheap grace,” a kind of discipleship of convenience. It has filled churches with people who have never known the pain of repentance, who vacillate between love of the Father and love of the world and have yet to deny themselves in order to follow Jesus.

This desire to please God must be supported by genuine faith, such as that found in 1 Peter, 1:6-7:

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Gold becomes precious when it is purified by fire, but faith is even more precious, and therefore must be proven in the fire of various trials. Peter says that in these trials our attitude is one of joy, even great joy. It is a two-fold joy.

1. It is joy in that it is ‘proof’ of our faith, proof in the sense of putting it to a test for the sake of purifying it, as gold is purified by fire. Faith that is “faith only” is of no value.

In fact, James writes that faith “without works is dead in itself.” (James 2:17) Paul writes that faith which accomplishes anything is a “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

Each trial calls forth faith, that attitude of mind and heart which depends upon God with confidence that He will enable one to endure the trial in faithfulness. By the exercise of faith in obedience, it is strengthened so that one is prepared for even greater trials. The more we live to please the Father, the more we are at odds with the world and the more severe the trials become, the more precious will be the faith that is growing. The trials are always present, and continue throughout life. Yet, the Lord gives us seasons of refreshing, and there is an undercurrent of peace and joy that the world cannot know, because it is a joy that is created by our harmony with our Father.

The person who refuses to endure the trials is also refusing the growth and joy of this harmony. So, when we follow Christ, we accept the pain of growth and change. The discipline He demands or gives is severe; but with it comes His love and strong help, and in the end immortally and great reward.

Contrary to what some think and preach, Christ does not offer a life of what the world calls happiness and success. His kind of happiness is unrecognizable to the world. It goes deeper, far below the surface, down below the pain and visible trauma, a happiness unseen and undefined. Nevertheless, it is the real joy and peace that enables one to live without anxiety and fear, and which fills one with a deep sense of thanksgiving and praise.

2. Joy is the natural result of accomplishing one’s purpose. In the case of a Christian, that purpose is to do the Father’s will, and this is often done in the midst of bitter trials.

With Jesus there was never a doubt that obedience to the Father would result in the ultimate good. It caused Him severe opposition, criticism, and death, but it pleased His Father, and that was what He desired more than all else.

Our age has been warped with Freudian psychology. We want every trial and temptation subjected to a psychological analysis before we decide what to do about it. We want to ask why trials come, how good can come from suffering, how much of it we should endure. What is needed is not the psychology to figure out our strengths and weaknesses and all the shades of personality in between. What is needed is for us to submit ourselves to God and to the doing of His will. If that is our desire, then joy will be produced in obedience, regardless of the price one has to pay. If pleasing God is not the highest priority, then the profession of Christ will be empty and each trial will only produce distress and sorrow.

Without a doubt the hardest trial for Jesus was to submit to the horrible death of crucifixion. Yet, it is recorded that He, “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame...” (Heb.12:2). Think of the apostles who were imprisoned for proclaiming the gospel, but were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name” (Acts 5:41).

The book of Revelation is used by some for no other purpose than to instill fear in the minds of believers. Much prophetic preaching dwells on the notion of a future tribulation (ignoring the murder of some 60 million people by Communists), the horrors of an antichrist ruler, etc. Certainly Revelation describes in figurative and symbolic terms the role of evil men and governments, but few seem to realize that it is one of the most joyful and “song-full” books in the Bible. John, the writer, keeps hearing song after song — always songs of praise, thanksgiving, and joy. (e.g. 4:11, 5:9-10, 12, 13, 14 7:10-12, 11:16-18, 12:10-12, 14:3, 15:3, 19:6-8) Note the song in Chapter 12, verses 10-12:

“Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony: and they loved not their life even unto death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you that dwell in them...”

Here is a picture of Christians constantly tempted by Satan and persecuted because of their faith, but who love Christ more than they love life. This is cause for rejoicing. “Therefore rejoice.”

Peter tells us that these trials are only “for a little while.” This is a wonderful contrast to the inheritance reserved for God’s people. The new creation will be forever.

What’s more, being faithful in the trials will “result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” After His resurrection from the dead Jesus was crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9), and obtained a place in the new creation for us, a place of glory and honor. Note that this is not to be realized at the time of death, but “at the revelation of Jesus Christ,” that is, when He comes again to raise all the dead and give life and immortality to the redeemed.

The secret of putting trials in proper perspective was well known by Job, when he said, “But He knows the way I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

What God intends to make of us is so magnificent! So glorious! It is worth everything — the pains, trials, tears — even our very lives. In fact, that’s just what it takes! Then He will make us more than we can imagine or dream we could ever be.

In fact, He has already started the process, and the most satisfying vocation is to participate in the progress of His work.

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries. Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute Curtis’ articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article for permission to be valid. Vol. XXXV, Number 10.
.....