

A Duty to Joy

Happy Sabbath to all.

The name of tonight's study is "A Duty to Joy." At first glance, it may seem as if some sort of typing or grammatical mistake was made. Perhaps I meant to say, "A Joyful Duty," or "A Duty to Enjoy" (indicating something we are obligated to do, but should enjoy doing).

The title is correct as read, however. The Christian has a duty to joy; that is, a duty to be joyful. It is a part of our nature. It is a vital aspect of our character. It is, strange as it may seem at first reading, a requirement for salvation.

Earlier I was working on a new section of the *Answers from Heaven* Bible study series, and looking at some passages from the Scriptures relevant to the "goals" of the born-again life. One of the questions asked in this section is, "Does God give us instructions for a happy life on earth?"

I want to go over the verses that I referenced during the part of the study designed to answer that question, and then talk about it a little further.

The first of these is Psalm 144:15, which reads, "Happy is that people, that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people, whose God is Yahweh."

The "case" that the verse references is found in the verses that precede it, which speak about offspring growing up strong and healthy, garners and storehouses being full, and security from theft. In other words, the things being described here are fairly typical "earthly" matters, which are directly connected to a people who worship Yahweh as the Almighty.

It is plain from a great many verses that the servants of Yahweh have an everlasting Inheritance in which they may place their hope. They may certainly be joyful in this, and Paul speaks of the resurrection, for example, and tells those who have lost loved ones (that they may) "comfort one another with these words." (1Th 4:18)

So with regard to spiritual blessings, the Bible gives us no cause to question that there is a coming joy. But what about the present age? Well, with regard to external sources of joy, we have something of a "mixed multitude" of factors. We have the verse above, one of many that speaks of the prosperity of Yah's people. We have the history of Israel, which connects the physical well-being of the country and its people with the state of its faithfulness to the Creator. We are also taught to give thanks for what we possess, and to be content with our wages and position in life.

On the other hand, we are plainly told to expect persecution, and to expect to sacrifice for our spiritual integrity, in such passages as, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Yahshua shall suffer persecution." (1Tim 3:12) "Then said Yahshua unto His disciples, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.'" (Mat 16:24, 25)

The history of our faith is full of examples of those who, being in the minority that are intent on Biblical accuracy, suffered great loss – even of their lives at times – at the hands of a backsliding, spiritually declining, ecclesiastical authority.

Now, this is so far as it goes for external sources of happiness. If we were to base the state of our peace merely on external factors, however, we would be no better than any in the world, who are subject to the winds of emotion and opinion. If we claim to have the truth, and to be “as one” with the Creator and Savior of all the universe, surely we have a more constant bearing than this would indicate.

Peter addresses this idea by saying, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (1Pet 4:15, 16)

Now, we have had studies before that dealt with the idea behind this verse – that the Christian has a reason for thanksgiving and praise despite potentially troubling circumstances. And of course, we have discussed the following as a key verse describing the Sabbath rest principle: “Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” (Phil 4:11, 12)

But what we have not done, at least not to the extent that I believe it should be done, is to connect this clearly and powerfully with the testimony we are called to give to the world.

It is not sufficient to know “I must claim to be content in all things,” or to believe that “even if we suffer, we are to glorify the Father.” We have had it repeated many times before us, that our words and actions must reflect a faith that is “invincible,” that is, unstoppable and without weakness. But as Yahshua said to His disciples, “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (John 13:13-17)

It is good to call Yahshua “Lord,” and to understand His example, but we are only “happy” if we do the things that have been acted out before us... if we step into the faith that has been demonstrated in our sight, and deny the power of the world to affect the state of our joy.

This does not mean, of course, that we become insensitive; that is, that we become unable to sense and properly react to our surroundings. We are, after all, in a time of atonement, and a time of judgment. This must not be lost either in our discussion of joy, because the time to “celebrate” will be when the Bridegroom returns for His Bride. But this is a time during which, in the antitype, the Israelites were told to “afflict [their] souls.” (Lev 16:29) The word for “afflict” there means to cast down, to humble, to bow low, to be weakened. It is very much in line with what the CSDA Church understands of the purpose of New Moons; but it does not convey a sense of sorrow so much as solemnity, and so it is not really in conflict with the concepts of peace, joy or contentment.

Yahshua was described as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” (Isa 53:3) and we read of times in the Gospel books at which He reacted with amazement, with sadness, and with anger.

And yet, because He did always those things that pleased His Father, He was always in a state of peace. Similarly, those who know the Gospel message, and follow His example, experience the same rest, the same Sabbath, and testify of the same in their words and actions.

We have been looking at this idea for the past couple of weeks, that the “end,” the last step, of receiving blessings from Yahweh is to declare them openly, to make them a part of our testimony, and to use these blessings not only for our own benefit, but also as a way of reaching out to others to draw them near.

Yahweh has indeed given His people instructions regarding a joyful life on earth, and it may be summed up in this way: Have a clear, spiritually educated conscience, and testify of this before the world.

This is not a “doctrinal” statement, although doctrines serve to educate the conscience.

We read, “Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.” (Rom 14:22) This verse is specifically addressing the issue of meats sacrificed to idols, although it has been misused by some groups and applied to the “clean vs. unclean meat” issue. The principle behind it, however, is beyond controversy – we must not be in violation of our own consciences. I included the phrase “spiritually educated” in my summation above, and brought up the idea of the place of doctrine, because the Bible also speaks about consciences that may become corrupted, or have simply never learned the truth, and are therefore unable to properly distinguish between right and wrong. (Titus 1:15, 1Tim 4:2) The people of Yahweh are described, by contrast, as “Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” (1Tim 3:9)

Paul expresses almost the entire idea above in a single verse, saying, “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.” (2Cor 1:12)

The Scriptures tell us in the very first book that at the end of the original creation, all things were “very good.” At some point after this, sin entered the earthly experience, and from that time to this, humanity and the universe on a broad scale have had to endure great suffering. Despite this, we know that Yahweh has not abandoned His creation, and instead, has showered the earth with His particular attentions, even to the extent of sending His own Son to offer Himself as a sacrifice, because He has never turned away from His original conception, that all things should be “very good.” It is worth an infinite price to our Father to restore things to that perfect state.

Mankind, being intelligent creations, are made in the image of Yahweh, and have the opportunity to participate in this perfection of state even before it is fully made manifest. This is because we may come into harmony with the plans and intentions of our Father, and by faith see things as they were and shortly will be.

This coming “into harmony” means accepting the power of Yahweh to call things into being by His own authority, and having Him declare us “just” by that same authority. By trusting in His power, and resting in His promises, we do indeed make our consciences pure, because we hold before us a vision of our Father’s will, and stand in agreement, in covenant, with that vision.

In beholding that vision, of humanity restored, of the universe purified, we come to see that the things of this world provide only temporary pleasures. The enemy desires to fix our attention on these things, to

the exclusion of the heavenly expectation, but they do nothing to purify the character or cleanse the conscience. Yet these are the very attributes that lead to a joyful testimony, and so we may see that a joyful countenance, just like faithful works, are the natural result of the proper faith, which leads to the Sabbath-blessed conscience.

I once mentioned a verse in a Bible study a few years ago with a group of non-Adventists, and it caused a little bit of controversy. It was this one: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” (Rev 21:8)

One individual present asked why the “fearful” were listed along with the murderers, whoremongers and liars, because surely people suffering from depression or some similar issue were not open sinners as these others were. My reply, which he did not receive very well (if I recall) was that these conditions themselves are not the “problem.” The problem, for which that each of those is a symptom, is a lack of faith, and it is faith that makes it possible to please Yahweh, faith that fulfills His promises to us, and faith that makes possible all the saving blessings with which He has provided us.

It is faith that leads to the life that cleanses the conscience and gives a pure testimony, and of course that faith will cast out fearfulness, all sin, and even sorrow, leaving nothing but the fruit of the Spirit, the first aspects of which are listed as love, joy and peace. (Gal 5:22)

There were two more passages listed in answering the question, “Does God give us instructions for a happy life on earth?”

They are these:

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” (1Tim 1:5)

And, “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Yah, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.” (Psalm 89:15, 16)

The people of Yahweh are described as having a pure heart, a good conscience, an unfeigned faith. We are told that they rejoice “all the day” in His righteousness and in His name. These are not just idealized images, they are testimonies of what faith is, and what it does. The Faith of Yahshua provides a solemnity as we approach the end of all earthly things... but at the same time, this humbling of the soul, the casting-down of the “self” does not give anyone cause for worry, or agitation, or sorrow.

In this world we are described as the lights, the salt, and the stars. These things are bright, or flavorful... associated with life, and happiness, and hope. If we accept the Gospel of Christ, then we must also accept all the descriptions of us that have come down through the ages by inspired pens and testimonies. They are all a part of that one faith. We must understand that we are these things, because we have committed to a vision of the creation that is, as was originally intended, “very good,” We work to facilitate the restoration of all things to this perfect state, and we do so by bearing about not only the sacrifice of the cross, but also the joy of a conscience made pure by the Blood of the Lamb, and a life made peaceful by

its harmony with the law and will of our Heavenly Father, who is light, and love, and our everlasting Comfort.