

Privilege

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The Christian life is a life of perpetual fellowship, unchanging joy, perfect righteousness, complete protection, assured victory, absolute guarantee, and personal relationship with God.

Scripture: Psalm 123:2

Topics: "Christian Life", "Fellowship With God"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches on the Psalms, emphasizing that blessedness is found in our relationship with God, not in circumstances. He highlights the Christian life as a journey of perpetual fellowship, unchanging joy, perfect righteousness, complete protection, assured victory, absolute guarantee, and personal relationship with God through the joyful sound of deliverance and worship.

Transcript

The first word of the Psalms, "Blessed," is in some respects the keynote of the whole book. It occurs nearly thirty times. But the interesting point about the Beatitudes of the Psalter is that they are nearly all concerned with our relation to God, and scarcely ever do circumstances enter into this blessedness. So, according to the Psalms, it is not what we have, or what we know, or what we can do, but what we are, that constitutes blessedness. One of those numerous passages is found in Psalm 89:15-18, and it shows that the Christian life is a life of privilege in power and blessing.

Let us remember, even though it needs constant repetition, that we are to know the things that are freely given to us of God; and as we look at this passage, we shall be able to see something at least of what the Bible means by the Christian life, that life which we are to meditate upon, to understand, and, by the mercy of God, to experience. I. The first thing is that it is a life of perpetual fellowship. "They walk, O Jehovah, in the light of Thy countenance." The countenance of God is a symbol of the Divine presence.

The word is literally "face"; and the face of God in Scripture always means His presence. Then it also means the Divine favour. "In the light of the king's countenance is life." The benediction that was pronounced upon Israel closed with, "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee." It is said of David in relation to Absalom that "the face of the king was not towards him as aforetime." Thus the idea of the Divine face or countenance is His presence and His favour. And, of course, it also implies Divine guidance.

There is a phrase in the Psalm about the servant looking to the eyes of the master (Ps. 123:2), that is, desiring to know what the master's will is; and here we have, "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." Walking implies progress, and walking in the light of the Divine countenance means guidance as we take our journey and make progress, through life. Walking is one of the illustrations used in the Bible to express spiritual progress. Almost every part of man's body is associated with spiritual things.

Sometimes we are to "look" and be saved; at other times we are to "hear" and our souls shall live; at another time we are to "take hold" of God's strength; at another we are to "taste and see." But most frequent of all is the word "walk". In the brief Epistle to the Ephesians it occurs seven times. We recall also the well-known text, 1 John 1:7, "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light." So this is the first feature of the new life, a life of perpetual fellowship, in the Divine presence, with the Divine favour, and under the Divine guidance.

At this point it will be well to ask ourselves, What do we know of this? Is this the experience of our life? For this is what the Bible intends. If the Christian life is not a life of perpetual fellowship, it is nothing at all. There are two men who are said to have walked with God: Enoch and Noah. Many people think that Enoch had a very delightful time of it, full of blessed contemplation. But we are told by St. Jude that he had a very severe experience in testifying against ungodliness; and, therefore, not even Enoch had altogether an easy and quiet life.

But whatever we may think about Enoch, Noah was a practical man of affairs, and for one hundred and twenty years he preached the Gospel of righteousness without getting a single convert, though all the while he was walking with God. This is the life intended for us, the life of perpetual fellowship. II. The Christian life is a life of unchanging joy. "In Thy name do they rejoice all the day." We must not forget, though it is often repeated in our ears, that there is a vast difference between joy and happiness.

Happiness depends upon what happens, upon circumstances, the "hap" of life. Joy is independent of circumstances, and is connected with our relationship to God. Happiness is very much like the surface of the sea, sometimes turbulent, at other times calm; joy is like the bed of the ocean, which is untouched by anything on the surface. Joy, referring to our relationship to God, is threefold. There is the joy of retrospect, as we look back at the past; there is the joy of aspect, as we look around on the present; there is the joy of prospect, as we look forward to the future.

There is the joy of memory, the joy of love, and the joy of hope. There is the joy of the peaceful conscience, the joy of the grateful heart, the joy of the teachable mind, the joy of the trustful soul, the joy of the adoring spirit, the joy of the obedient life, and the joy of the glowing hope. "In Thy name do they rejoice." That is where we get our joy - "In Thy name," in the revelation of God. The name of God is all that is known of Him. Wherever the word "name" occurs, it never means a mere title or epithet, but a character, the revealed character of God; and in proportion as we get to know this "name" and what it means in all its fullness, we shall have joy, which will thus depend, not upon ourselves, but upon God.

"In Thy name shall they rejoice all the day," i.e., under all circumstances. That is what St. Paul meant when he said, "Rejoice in the Lord always." He did not say, "Be happy in the Lord always." He knew very well it was impossible. We cannot be happy always. If we have anything troublesome in our circumstances, if we have any bodily pain, if we have any mental or social anxiety, we cannot possibly be happy. The Apostle Paul was not very happy when he called himself sorrowful, but he said, "Sorrowful yet

always rejoicing".

While we cannot be happy always, we can rejoice always, because we rejoice in the Lord always. Our joy is independent of happiness, of what happens; it is associated with God. This, too, is a need of the Christian life, one which ought to be considered again and again, the need of unchanging joy. If in our daily life we do not realize what this means, we are lacking in one of the essential features of Bible Christianity. III. The Christian life is a life of perfect righteousness.

"And in Thy righteousness are they exalted." What do we mean by righteousness? We might put it in this way, and say it means rightness, the state and condition of being right with God. In some respects righteousness is one of the greatest words in the Bible. We find it very frequently in that large section, Isaiah 40 to 46. But righteousness is the great message of the Apostle Paul. We sometimes think that the essence of the Gospel is the mercy of God, or the love of God. St.

Paul did not think so. He said, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ ... for therein is the righteousness of God revealed" (Rom. 1:16-17). It was because Paul felt that righteousness, even more than mercy, was necessary, that he emphasized it as the keynote of his Gospel, the truth of righteousness, the state of being right with God. The whole of the Epistle to the Romans is built up in a sevenfold way on this thought of righteousness: Righteousness Required, chapters 1 and 2; Righteousness Revealed, chapter 3; Righteousness Reckoned, chapter 4; Righteousness Received, chapter 5; Righteousness Realized, chapters 6-8; Righteousness Rejected, chapters 9-11; Righteousness Reproduced, chapters 12-16.

The entire teaching from beginning to end is righteousness, and this is the meaning of the Christian life - a life of perfect righteousness. "In Thy righteousness." That is the sphere and the atmosphere of true living. "In Thy righteousness." It means that we are to be surrounded by that righteousness, covered by it, protected by it. If that is not true of us now, then there will be no blessing until it is settled. "In Thy righteousness." Do we know what God's righteousness is?

We have no concern with His holiness until we have received His righteousness, for it is only when we possess this that holiness becomes possible. There are those who wish to know the best way of living the holy life. But perhaps they have never made sure of this question of righteousness. This is the primary necessity. "In Thy righteousness are they exalted." Exalted above our foes, exalted above our fears, exalted above our failures. What do we know of God's righteousness?

I was taking a walk some years ago with a beloved friend, a well-known clergyman, and as we passed a particular house he pointed to it, and said, "I never pass that house without calling to mind this incident. I was summoned to see a lady, an entire stranger to me, and, indeed, to this town, who was thought to be dying. I went in, and I very soon saw that she could not live long. After a few words of personal interest and sympathy I said to her, 'Now, it may not be God's will that you should recover: May I ask how you regard the future?'" Said my friend, "She opened her eyes wide, and fixed them on me, and said, 'Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is through faith of Jesus Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith.'" And my friend added, "That was all she said, and it was quite sufficient."

In the same way now, not for death, but for life, this is the secret, "Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is through faith of Jesus Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith." This is the thought here. "In Thy righteousness are they exalted." And day by day and hour by hour, if this is settled, we are able to sing, and able to mean what we say when we sing:

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress; 'Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head."

IV. The Christian life is a life of complete protection. "For Thou art the glory of their strength." Strength is one of the great needs of the Christian, and it is associated with righteousness. In more than one passage in Isaiah we find both: "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Strength follows righteousness here because it refers to the next great need of the Christian life, strength for daily living. There is an old Latin phrase which we might almost put into very literal English when we speak of the need of power to "resist," to "insist," and to "persist" - power for everything in the Christian life.

The secret of it is, "Thou art the glory of their strength." Not self, not circumstances, but God is our strength. "In the Lord have I strength." "Thou art the glory of their strength." His presence is salvation. Both in the Old Testament and in the New the word "glory" or "boast" is utilized for right and true and pure ideas and ideals. If there is one person who is more contemptible than another, it is a man or woman who boasts. Whenever we find a man boasting, we always feel that he is one of the most deplorable and contemptible specimens of humanity.

We know what Uriah Heep means, not only in the pages of Dickens, but everywhere else, the man who is always "very 'umble". Caroline Fry has a fine definition of humility: "Unconscious self-forgetfulness." The self-forgetfulness that is conscious is, of course, the most acute, intense and subtle form of pride; and yet here and in the New Testament this very word "boast" in the original, although rendered often "glory," is taken over and transformed, and we are enabled to boast in a great number of things.

"God forbid that I should boast, save in the Cross." "We boast in tribulation." "We boast in hope of the glory of God." "And not only so, we boast in God." We can glory as much as we like so long as we glory in Him and not in ourselves. And in this connection let us emphasize the word "complete," because it is intended to mean what it says. At all times, under all circumstances, God's grace is sufficient for us. "Behold, I give you power ... over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

V. The Christian life is a life of assured victory. "And in Thy favour our horn shall be exalted." The "horn" in the Old Testament is the symbol of conquest, of victory. Wherever the word occurs it is associated with complete victory. When it says here, "In Thy favour our horn shall be exalted," of course it means that in union and communion with God there is assured victory, as well as complete protection. It may be questioned whether we have ever sounded the depth, or rather scaled the height, of St.

Paul's word, where, in Romans 8, he speaks of us as "more than conquerors." One of the French versions is, "les vainqueurs et au dela" - "conquerors, and beyond that." Yes, but what is the "beyond that"? It is "super-conquerors"; not merely the bare victory, not merely that which just manages to get home, but that which gives us a perfect and abundant conquest over the enemy. A Christian man, in his humility, once said on his deathbed that he would be thankful if he just crept into heaven on his hands and knees.

We fully appreciate the spirit in which he said those words; and yet God does not expect us, or desire us, or intend us to creep into heaven on our hands and knees, for has He not spoken of the "abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom"? And this is the thought here, "conquerors and more than that," super-conquerors; victory and more than victory assured in the favour of God. VI. The Christian life is a life of absolute guarantee. The Authorized Version says, "For the Lord is our defense; and the Holy One of Israel is our King."

That is perfectly true, but it is the truth of verse seventeen, and therefore it is best to read with the Revised Version, "Our shield belongeth unto Jehovah, and our King to the Holy One of Israel." Who is our Shield? The Messiah. Who is our King? The Messiah. Who is Jehovah? The Holy One of Israel. Therefore it says that Christ, our Messiah, our Shield, our King, belongs to God. That is the meaning of St. Paul's words, "Christ is God's." This introduces us to one of the profoundest and yet one of the simplest truths of the Bible, the covenant between the Father and the Son on our behalf.

If we read very carefully Hebrews 8, we shall see that the New Covenant is not between God and us; it is between the Father and the Son. Again and again there is this wonderful thought of a solemn covenant and agreement between God and Christ. We must, of course, use human language to express it, but the idea is of a definite covenant on our behalf. It was this, no doubt, that the Psalmist regarded as the culminating point of the believer's life. "Our Shield belongeth unto Jehovah, and our King to the Holy One of Israel."

So St. Paul is not only able to say what I have just quoted, but he says, "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." That also is the meaning of such a passage as John 10:28-29, "I give unto My sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." It is well known that philosophy and evolution, and indeed the general trend of modern thought, have during the past fifty years emphasized the human side of things.

Perhaps that was the necessary and inevitable rebound from an overemphasis of the Divine side fifty years before. Be that as it may, we must never forget that there is a Divine side as well as a human side. Never let us overlook the fact that God keeps us, and this is prior to our keeping ourselves. An Irish boy was once asked whether he did not sometimes feel afraid. He replied, "I often trimble on the rock, but the rock never trimbles under me." "I hold," says the motto; but there is another side to it - "and I am held."

It is a great thing to hold God by faith; it is a much greater thing for God to hold us with a grasp that never tires. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isa. 41:10). "Let me no more my comfort draw From my frail hold of Thee; In this alone rejoice with awe, Thy mighty grasp of me." This idea of the covenant has almost entirely fallen out of modern theology and modern writing, and we must get back to it as the bedrock of everything.

There was a woman in Scotland on her deathbed, waiting for the end, after forty years of Christian life and service. She was deeply taught of God. Her friends felt they could say pretty much what they liked to her; so one of them remarked, "Well, you have been a Christian forty years; suppose the Lord were to let you go?" "Ah," she said, "He would lose more than I should." She meant that He would lose His character. God has pledged Himself in covenant with Christ on behalf of His people.

If you read the great, the real Lord's Prayer, not the disciples' prayer which we call the Lord's Prayer, but the Lord's Prayer in John 17, you will find a reference to the covenant between God and Christ on behalf of those who were given to the Son by the Father, and concerning whom, with one exception, the Lord said, "I have lost none." This is what I mean by the absolute guarantee. It will be worthwhile if we can get down to this basis and realize, apart from all our feelings and circumstances and problems and doubts and needs, I am the Lord; I change not."

"The foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." VII. The Christian life is a life of personal relationship. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound." The "joyful sound" had reference to two things in the Jewish religion. It was associated, first of all, with the trumpet on the day of Jubilee. Every fifty years the trumpet of Jubilee sounded, and that meant deliverance.

And this, translated into the New Testament, means the Gospel. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound," the sound of deliverance, the note of the Gospel. St. Paul says of the people of Thessalonica, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord." They had received it, and they were sounding out that trumpet of Jubilee, of deliverance. Here again we are at the beginning of things. Do we know this? Do we know the "joyful Sound" of deliverance? Do we know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour?

Has He come to us with His Jubilee of deliverance, deliverance from the guilt of sin, deliverance from the penalty of sin, deliverance from the bondage of sin, and deliverance hereafter from the very presence of sin? Deliverance is the great thought of the "joyful sound." But it means more than this. Trumpets were used oftener than every fifty years; they were employed from time to time to summon people to worship. If we look at the Book of Numbers, we find reference to the silver trumpets the priests used on special occasions.

According to some authorities, we might render the passage, "Blessed is the people that know the festal shout," i.e., the shout associated with worship. After deliverance comes worship. After the altar outside comes the tabernacle inside, and so the "joyful sound" first means salvation and then worship. It is for us to face this question: Is this a personal experience? Do we know the "joyful sound"? Do we know what deliverance means? Do we know what worship means? Do we know what it is to have this opportunity of spiritual worship with our Father in heaven?

If so, Blessed is the people." So we come back to the note with which we started: "Blessed". It has been well pointed out that festivals of gladness are based on religious facts. It is worthwhile remembering that Rationalism has never been successful in originating anything glad or joyful. It would be interesting for our missionary brethren and sisters to tell us how many hymn books they have found in connection with heathen religions. Heathenism knows nothing about hymn books, or joy, or gladness.

Joy is the essential of belief, and so we may put it almost in the words of a modern writer, "Where there is faith, there is gladness." "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound." The greatest day of joy in the present age is that which is at once a holiday and a holy day, the birthday of Jesus Christ. "I bring you good tidings of great joy." I heard once of a clergyman who looked on the dark side of things. I do not quite wonder at it, because he had spent a noble life as a missionary, and had got a severe touch of liver.

His people used to say that this good man never gave them anything bright or joyful. All his sermons were associated with gloom, until one Christmas Day he announced as his text, "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy." The people said, "Now we are going to have a change!" But the main substance of the sermon was a description of the blackness of the time when Jesus Christ was born. That was all he could do! "Blessed is the people that know the festal shout" - that joy which is the keynote of all Christian life.

So let each one ask himself this: Do I know it? Some know it by hearsay; others have read of it in the Bible; but the word "know" in the Old Testament and the New always means personal experience. "Blessed is the people that know." Perhaps someone says, "I do not know." Well, there is only one reason why we do not, there is only one reason why we cannot know. We find it in Psalm 90:8: "Thou hast set our

iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance."

It is because there is some sin between God's face and ours that prevents us from knowing the joyful sound. And so we have need to sing, and to pray: "Oh! may no earth-born cloud arise To hide Thee from Thy servant's eyes." If there is any sin unconfessed and unforgiven, this and this only is the explanation why we do not know the "joyful sound". But if we are willing to have that sin removed and blotted out, so that in the King's countenance there will be life and favour, from this time forward we shall know the "joyful sound," and know it increasingly in our experience.

It means this, that now and all through life there will be the test, there will be the trust, and there will be the taste. We shall test these things, and God will welcome us in fellowship with Himself. We shall trust Him, and in that trust will come the removal of all the clouds and all the difficulties. And then, all through life there will be the taste. "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/privilege/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net