

SERVING THE LORD WITH GLADNESS



***Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!
Serve the Lord with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!***

Psalm 100:2

It must have been a dream. I was sitting on this bench in Detroit in Grand Circus Park. Apart from the sunshine and the birds, the place was deserted. A chap came along and sat down on a bench a few feet away and started reading his newspaper. Then a man came up from Woodward Avenue with a weary step. When he got to the bench where I was sitting he stopped and looked at me as if he were waiting for me to say something. *"What are you doing?"* I asked him. *"Serving God"* was his reply. *"Serving God is not easy, my friend"*, he continued. *"As a matter of fact, I'm very tired today. I've been out late every night this week helping people and going to fellowship. Still my heart is heavy for I know I'm not doing enough. Right now I'm trying to decide whether I should go to a meeting or make some hospital calls."* With that the weary servant of God trudged off toward Washington Boulevard.

From behind his newspaper the stranger on the next bench said,

"That man isn't serving God. He's serving a bad conscience."

A woman with a worried face came hurrying toward my bench. She too stopped and looked at me as if she were waiting for me to speak. *"What are you doing, Ma'am?"* I asked. *"Serving God"* she replied. *"And today I'm all confused. My neighbor wants me to go to a Bible Study. My mother-in-law expects me to come over and rub her back. I'm returning these slacks to Walmart because my husband says they're too expensive and the sisters in the fellowship where I go are down on me for missing two meetings in a row."* With that she turned and ran toward the bus stop.

My friend with the newspaper commented.

"She isn't serving God. She's serving other people's expectations."

"Praise the Lord, Brother!", said a well-dressed man with a Thompson Chain Reference Bible under his arm. *"As you can see, I'm serving God, hallelujah! It's really great to be in the King's business. It's fun being saved! Why don't you come to our evangelistic services tonight at 8.00. Praise God! And bring your friends. We have the fastest growing Sunday School in town. We walked away with all the prizes at the convention last year. Well, I'm on my way to testify at a Laymen's Luncheon. See you later, Praise the Lord!"*

"Religious ambition", muttered my friend with the newspaper.

Just then a woman came walking through the park holding her head in her hands. *"I've tried and tried to serve the Lord! But all I ever do is fail. I just don't seem to be making any progress in my walk. I don't see any fruit. My prayers are dry. I might as well give up."*

"She's been serving the Accuser for ten years", said the man with the newspaper.

A chap descended the steps of a nearby church, crossed Woodward Avenue and came walking through the park talking to himself. *"All these years I have served you. I never transgressed one of your commandments.*

Yet, you never gave me any joy. But when these sinners come into our church after wasting their lives in dissipation, you pour out on them your Holy Spirit! It isn't fair!"

With that my friend put down his newspaper and looked the man in the eye.

"All these years you have served whom?"

"Why God, of course", answered the church- man. *"I've been serving God."*

"No", said the man with the newspaper. ***"You haven't been serving God. You've been serving a distorted image of God tailored to your own liking. The picture of God you have in your mind isn't God at all."***

"What do you mean?" demanded the churchman in anger. But suddenly the man with the newspaper vanished before our eyes, newspaper and all.

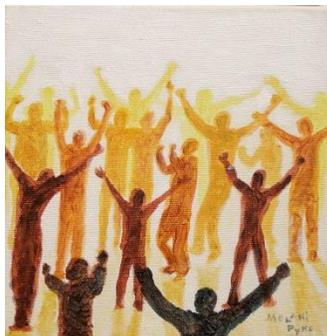
How many times we tell ourselves we're serving God when we're not serving God at all.

- We're serving a bad conscience.
- We're serving other people's expectations.
- We're serving religious ambition.
- We're serving the Accuser.
- We're serving a distortion of God in our own minds.

And the proof that we're not really serving God is that there is simply no gladness in it.

No joy. No liberty. No real communion with God himself.

***Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!
Serve the Lord with gladness!***



That gladness is only possible when it's the Lord Himself that you're serving.

When you're serving the Lord....

- you're not worried all the time that God is going to punish you,
- you're not thrown into a depression when you discover that people aren't satisfied with you,
- you're not a slave to the need for visible success,
- you're not obsessed by your failures,
- you're not forever afraid that God is being unfair to you.

You're free....



- free from that bad conscience,
- free from other people's expectations,
- free from the curse of religious ambition,
- free from the lies of the Accuser,
- free from the sick distortions of God that have corrupted your vision in the past.

Our Lord served the Father with gladness.

It was His meat and drink to do the Father's will. That's all that mattered.

- If people didn't appreciate Him ... it didn't ruin His day.
- If Satan accused Him of fraud ... He didn't try to defend Himself.
- If John the Baptist was disappointed in Him,
- If He appeared to all the world as a failure,
- If He had to hang on that Cross with nobody to comfort Him

He remained faithful.

Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross.



Hebrews 12:2

And that Cross is our doorway to true, free, glad service to God. No one can serve the Lord with gladness but by the power of that Cross. And no man or woman can continue to serve the Lord with gladness unless they remain continuously in the shadow of that Cross. i.e. CALVARY.

You serve the Lord with gladness when you serve the Lord under the shadow of His Cross.

The Cross is *your comfort, your peace, your rest in God.*

It's *your liberty* from yourself and from the fear of man.

The twin streams that flow from the wounded side of the Lamb are the fountainhead of all life. But let something come between you and the Cross, good as it may seem, and before long your service to God degenerates into bondage to something other than God.

- Whatever you're doing in the service of God, wherever you are, no matter how well or how badly things may seem to be going...

....-stay in the shadow of the Cross.



1. In the Shadow of the Cross you experience the clean-sing power of Jesus' blood.

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God!

Hebrews 9:14

You can't serve the Lord with gladness if your conscience is troubled.

When your conscience is troubled you're not serving God, you're serving your troubled conscience.

Don't make the mistake of thinking you can ease your conscience by working harder to do good. The harder you work the worse your conscience feels. The cure for a bad conscience - the only cure - is the blood of the Lamb. Bring your conscience to the Cross where your guilt before God was truly dealt with and truly removed; stay in constant touch with the Cross as you serve God---and you'll serve God with gladness.

2. In the shadow of the Cross you experience liberty through the death of self.

I don't have to struggle to stay alive if I'm already dead. And so I am. My life is hid with Christ in God.

I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Hence, I don't have to.....

- defend myself,
- vindicate myself,
- justify myself,
- or prove my point.

I'm dead - now Christ in me is free to serve the Father joyfully in this flesh.

The only good Christian is a dead one.

The only free Christian is a dead one.

And the only place, on this side of the grave, where my death and the liberty that flows from it becomes actual is at the Cross.

Far be it from me to glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

3. In the Shadow of the Cross the Spirit of Glory and of God comes to rest upon us.

Many people think that the resurrection Spirit of God only began working on the third day. The resurrection Spirit began working the instant Jesus died.

- Through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God.
- By the Spirit He tore through the veil of the Temple and entered the Holy of Holies with His blood.
- By the Spirit of God the earth shook and the tombs were opened when Jesus died.

The place where, to this day, we experience the resurrection power of Jesus is where the world would least expect it: at that place of death.

That I may know Him in the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings and be made like Him in His death.

And when you share His sufferings and death, then you share in that resurrection, you rise with Him.

Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ you are blessed, because the Spirit of Glory and of God rests upon you.

1 Peter 4:13

Behold a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.

Isaiah 32:1-4

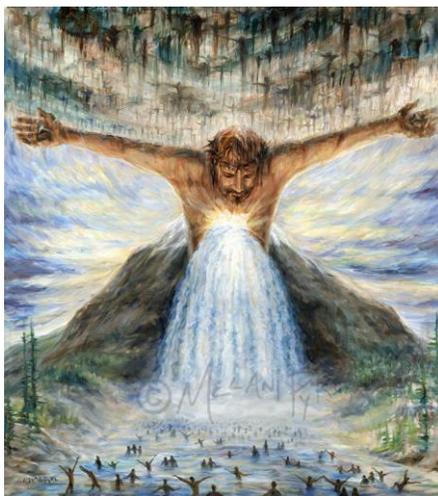
... a King shall reign in righteous

....that King is already reigning.

....His princes are coming together.

Their gathering place is "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land": Calvary.

The call to us is to come under that shadow, get under His yoke, by the power of the Cross to learn from Him to serve the Lord with gladness.



Prayer: Lord, bring us to the point where we can serve you with gladness. Where we are singing in your presence...serving with joy... free from serving from a bad conscience, other people's expectations, from religious ambition, from the accusations of the Accuser, and free from serving our own distorted views of you. Lord bring us to your Cross the only place we can find that freedom. Help us to stay in its shadow when we find things getting hard, challenging, discouraging. Keep us in its shadow where we find shade in a scorching land, where we find protection from the storms, where we are sheltered from the winds, where we find living water in a thirsty land, and where we learn from you how to serve with the gladness and joy you so richly deserve. Amen.

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WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN