

## Serving The Lord With Joy And Gladness

'Let the righteous shout for joy and be glad who favour My righteous cause. Yes, let them say continually, "God be magnified Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant!" My tongue will talk about Your righteousness and about Your praise all day long' (Psalm 35:27 & 28).

The Hebrew word for a servant of the Lord is 'obdi' and the plural word for servants is, 'obdim'. Obdi suggests a commitment to toil for the Lord. In the Scriptures, a committed servant of the Lord is sometimes called a 'bond' servant but that does not mean a person in bondage in the same way an ancient slave would have been but a person who has willingly bound themselves to the Lord and who willingly serves the Lord. Many modern Christians find the words, 'bond servant' unappealing because they misunderstand its meaning. They do not want to be slaves but neither does the Lord want His people to be slaves, that is why He released them from slavery. What the Lord does want are willing partners to work with Him to carry out His divine Will on earth. 'Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Luke 11:2). Many respected Bible characters, men and women are referred to as servants of the Lord or bondservants. The entire nation of Israel was declared to be servants of God. "To Me, the children of Israel are servants. They are My servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt. I AM Yahweh your God" (Leviticus 25:55).

Moses said, "Listen Israel, what does Yahweh your God require of you but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of Yahweh and His statutes, which I command you this day for your good? Behold, to Yahweh your God belongs heaven and the heaven of heavens and the earth with all that is therein. Yahweh delighted in your forefathers to love them, and He chose their descendents after them, that is you, above all peoples on earth as at this day. Therefore, circumcise the foreskin of your heart and be no more stiff-necked (stubborn) for Yahweh your God is God of all gods and Lord of lords, the great God, the Mighty, the Awesome, Who does not regard (favour certain) persons nor takes any reward" (Deuteronomy 10:12 to 17).

The Lord led the Children of Israel away from Egyptian slavery, He gave them a land filled with abundance, He helped them prosper in every way possible, He fought wars for them and wrought many miracles while establishing His nation of people whom He chose to bring His Word and His oracles to the world (Acts 7:38; Romans 3:2) and to bring forth the world's Messiah, Who is the living image of God Himself (Colossians 1:15). God gave them a choice to choose obedience and blessings or to choose disobedience and curses (Deuteronomy 30:19). Sadly, some Children of Israel chose disobedience which brought them all down into the realm of curses. 'They forgot God their Saviour Who had done great things in Egypt' (Psalm 106:21). Many stopped serving the Lord and turned to worshipping idols, which infuriated the Lord and as a result the Lord said, "All these curses will come on you, will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed because you did not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you and they will be on you for a sign, for a wonder on your descendents forever. Because you did not serve Yahweh your God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart after I gave you the abundance of all things, therefore you will serve your enemies whom Yahweh will send against you, in hunger and in thirst, in nakedness and in want of all things, and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you" (Deuteronomy 28:45 to 48).

This sounds very harsh until we understand why. To put this into perspective and to see it from a human point of view we can liken the work of the Lord to an earthly scenario. Imagine a father going into a raging bushfire to rescue his beloved son from the scorching heat and flames. That is what God has done for us. He has reached down to humanity to pull us all out of a fiery furnace (Matthew 13:50), the lake of fire that burns forever (Revelation 20:14). The Lord was our Redeemer before Jesus came. 'As for me, I know my Redeemer lives. In the end, He will stand upon the earth. After my skin is destroyed (dead and buried) then in my flesh (new immortal body) I will see God Whom I, even I, will see beside me. My eyes will see Him and not as a stranger' (Job 19:25 to 27). God has done great things for us and we must be glad for it but imagine if the son who had been pulled from the raging bushfire then turned on his father, disobeyed him, lied about him, slandered him and became horribly immoral, what would any father do but punish the son? That applies to all humanity, not just the Children of Israel. Most Gentiles are sinful, some are downright evil, others are utterly wicked and those people will face severe judgement from God on Judgement Day. Wicked people are not fit to live in the Kingdom of God so only people who have repented of their sin, shunned evil and turned from their wicked ways will be going to heaven. Unbelief in itself is sin. 'Those who overcome (difficulties) I will give them good things. I will be their God and they will be My sons and daughters. But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars, their part is in the Lake (of Fire) that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death' (Revelation 21:7 & 8). This truth is why Jesus came – to save our souls from the terrible eternity revealed in these verses.

God does not want anyone to have a fawning attitude or to serve Him out of a sense of duty, He wants people to feel genuine gratitude and thankfulness for the fact we have been saved from a terrible eternity and in our gratitude, we are to serve the Lord to the best of our ability, with appreciation, joy and gladness. Serving God does not bring salvation. Salvation can only come by faith and by accepting Jesus as our Saviour with the intent of walking with Him for the rest of our lives. After we have given our lives over to God, He then expects us to serve Him and our service to Him brings heavenly rewards that we will be given after the resurrection and judgement of the righteous. 'From now on, there is stored up for me the Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge will give to me on Judgement Day, and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved His appearing' (2 Timothy 4:8). We are to be servants to one another, help each other and love our neighbours. Jesus said, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). A servant has praiseworthy attitude towards others. The highest praise God can give us is to be called a faithful servant. "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things so I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21 & 23).

To receive our eternal rewards, God is looking for people who serve Him with thankful hearts, with gladness, joy and a willing mind. We might be able to fool people with a happy façade but God is not fooled. He knows our hearts and our thoughts. God wants us to be joyful in spite of trouble. 'Shout for joy to the Lord all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before His presence with singing. Know the Lord is God. It is He Who has created us and we are His. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and bless His name for the Lord is good. His loving kindness endures forever and His faithfulness to all generations' (Psalm 100:1 to 5). God is our Creator. He made us and He knows us. He is our Shepherd so He knows our needs. We need to enter into our time of prayer with thanksgiving and into His presence with praise. Blessing His holy name is blessing His holy character.

God listens to our conversations and understands our attitude towards Him. The following verses are a delightful reminder of what blessings the faithful righteous will enjoy after Judgment Day. 'Those who feared the Lord spoke one with another and the Lord listened and He heard. A book of memory was written before Him for those who feared Him and who honoured His name. "They will be Mine," says God of Heavenly Armies, "My Own possession in the Day that I make and I will spare them as a Father spares His own son who serves Him. You (the faithful) will return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not serve Him ... For behold, the Day comes, it burns as a furnace and all the proud and all who work wickedness will be stubble and the Day that comes will burn them up and it will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name will the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings. You will go out and leap like calves in the stall. You will tread down the wicked and they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the Day that I make," says the Lord of Heavenly Armies' (Malachi 3:16 to 18 then 4:1 to 3).

Amen and God bless you.

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