4-2-1967

It's Great to be a Christian

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Recommended Citation
Chalk, John Allen, "It's Great to be a Christian" (1967). Herald of Truth Documents. 32.
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"It's Great To Be A Christian"

Number 792
TRANSCRIPT OF THE
Herald of Truth
...... radio programs
“It’s Great To Be A Christian”

H e sat down by me at a church service recently, an intelligent-looking young man in his twenties with all the outward marks of success. His voice broke the silence of my contemplation in the last minutes before the formal worship began. Almost as if he were speaking to himself and yet, directing his words toward me, he said, “It’s great to be a Christian.” Frankly, I hadn’t expected that from him. As I turned to examine this unusual man I saw a smile that said even more than his startling words. Then the flush of my own half-believing reaction began to rush into my own soul. In my immediate expectation of finding some kind of pseudo-spiritual freak sitting next to me, I had failed to positively respond to his simple but profound assessment of life with Christ.

The worship became a real experience. The congregation’s singing took on freshness. Our corporate prayers said something. And the sermon that day underscored what my friend in the next seat had said. Somehow that day became a mountain peak in my spiritual life. I left the service, after meeting my new acquaintance and sensing more fully his faith, saying to myself, “It’s great to be a Christian!”

Not long after that experience I heard another man talking about Christians. He said, “I have considered becoming a Christian, but whenever I get together with a group of devout Christians they look so tired that I lose interest.” His observation reminds me of a well-known British chaplain of World War I who wrote a poem that begins with these words, “Our padre were a solemn bloke/ We called ’im dismal Jim.” Have you seen only this caricature of Christian life? Jesus was not a gloomy person. We really gain an insight into His character and impact on others when in the Gospels we see children flock around Him. No other religious figure of history enjoyed the love and response of children that our Lord did. He enjoyed living, and others could tell it.

No witness to Christianity’s unique approach to life can give a more valid testimony than the Roman prison-keeper whose conversion is described in Acts 16. When the earthquake opened the doors of his jail allowing the escape of his prisoners, Luke tells us that “the jailor, being roused out of sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped” (Acts 16:17). Two of his prisoners were the gospel preachers, Paul and Silas. Paul, seeing what was about to happen, called to the distraught man, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here” (Acts 16:28). This was the beginning of the jailor’s surrender in penitent faith and baptism to Jesus Christ (Acts 16:30-33). Remembering his very recent attempt to kill himself and then watching him come to new faith in Christ, and observing his obedience in baptism, we are somewhat prepared for the radically different attitude at verse thirty-four, “And he brought them into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God” (Acts 16:34). The prison-keeper at Philippi says to you today, “It’s great to be a Christian.”

The jailor’s example is only one of many such cases presented in the New Testament. Everywhere one turns observing the reactions of those becoming Christians, a unanimous voice shouts the same joyous conviction, “It’s great to be a Christian.” The very first converts to Christ at Jerusalem are shown by the author of Acts to be full of “gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46, 47). When the little town of Samaria heard the gospel of Christ, “there was much joy in that city” (Acts 8:8). An important governmental figure from Ethiopia, following his baptism, “went
on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). This was the universal reaction of all our first-century brothers and sisters in Christ.

Such a state or condition of life is no accident. Even the Old Testament recognizes, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:5, 6). Definite circumstances are here mentioned. To sow in tears is to labor according to a plan, to work with a purpose, and to have such a reason for living that even sorrow and tragedy do not destroy one. This imagery ultimately flowers in Jesus’ great parable of the sower which teaches that the Word of God, the seed of the kingdom, when received in the fertile soil of obedient hearts produces the Christian life, makes one a citizen of God’s kingdom, with joy or happiness as the resulting condition or state of life.

If happiness were left to the fates or the changing currents of misdirected life, then one would have no means of combating misfortune. The apostle Peter, however, says that the Christian can know joy in the midst of “grief” and “manifold trials.” “Your faith,” he continues, “can be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ,” if you love and believe the unseen One. “Yet believing,” he also says, “ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:6-9). The Christian is not enslaved by the changing currents of a meaningless life. Adversity, trouble, suffering, and loss refine and purify his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joy or happiness is a direct result of God’s indwelling presence, or in Paul’s words, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,” and other such attitudes (Galatians 5:22, 23).

This conviction, “It’s great to be a Christian”, is the assured possession of the Christian. The angel who announced our Savior’s birth said, “I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10, 11). At the conclusion of His earthly life Jesus encouraged His followers, “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Jesus makes this promise today to you and me, as we give ourselves to God.

Happiness always arises within the context of service. The happy person is the man, woman, boy or girl whose life has meaning because of a continual fulfilling of God’s plan in that life. “Make a joyful noise unto Jehovah, all ye lands. Serve Jehovah with gladness: come before his presence with singing,” we read in the Psalms (Psalm 100:1, 2). What this really says is that “It’s great to be a Christian”!

I want to give you at least six reasons for this conviction. These “reasons” are deeply personal as well as Biblical. They actually constitute my faith and conviction. I hope that you have already sensed my thrill, joy, meaning, and deeply serious commitment within my life as a Christian.

“It’s great to be a Christian” because of the God who cares for me and shares my burden. From creation through Calvary God continually poured out His love (John 3:16). From Calvary, that most profound expression of divine love, to this present moment God’s love is the spiritual man’s greatest strength. He is “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth do change” (Psalm 46:1, 2). The Christian enjoys special privileges as God’s son. Our apostolic blessing is “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). We plead with confused men and women, “Joy, real joy, is found only in the Lord.” In the same passage we also read, “In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6, 7). “But my situation is too bad, my life too mixed-up, my heart too black, my life too confused,” you say. Paul said, and Christians throughout the ages have known the truth of “in nothing be anxious . . .” (Philippians 4:6).

“It’s great to be a Christian” because of my High Priest and His personal acquaintance with me. According to the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews He is “a great high priest . . . Jesus the Son of God” (Hebrews 4:14). He has been “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” and tempted in every possible manner “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Such a High Priest encourages us. “Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). What other invitation do you need? What more drastic act could He perform than death by crucifixion? What greater hope could He inspire than that of the resurrection? With all of my heart I say to you this day, whatever your needs and whatever your worries, with Jesus as your Savior and High Priest, you can “draw near with boldness” and can “find grace to help in time of need.”

“It’s great to be a Christian” because of God’s ministry to me through His Spirit. This ministry as described in God’s Word becomes operative in my life when I hear and accept the Biblical revelation of God in Christ. Out of the faith that repents and causes me to surrender in baptism comes, in Peter’s words, “the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). My continuing obedience to God’s Word allows His gift of the Spirit to find expression in my love, joy, peace, and other Christ-like ways of living and thinking (Galatians 5:22). God expressed His great love in Christ, His onlybegotten Son, as we learn in His Word (John 3:16). When we surrender and remain in submission to that revelation, the Bible, Paul assures us that “the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us” (Romans 5:5).

“It’s great to be a Christian” because of the purpose and meaning of such a life. One thing about the Master’s life towers above all else — His sense of purpose. His Father’s plan for the world was the “meat” or food by which He existed (John 4:34). He continually urged His followers to “lift up” their eyes in recognition of God’s great redemption of mankind. “We must work the works of him that sent me,” He told the apostles (John 9:4). And He prayed to God, the Father, “I have glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do” (John 17:4). So you build a financial empire. So you plan a city. So you attain intellectual heights. So you unravel the mystery of life and understand all living organisms. The question, as one high level radio network official said to me not long ago, that still must be answered is “What for?” Christianity gives my life a reason as well as a hope for its continuation, now and forever.

“It’s great to be a Christian” because of the people, my friends and brothers, with whom I associate. “No man is an island,” a great English preacher once said. The community of man is a fundamental fact of human existence. The Christian becomes a part of a redeemed society, the church, committed to spreading the joy of that redemption to the whole world. When your business associates get hack away at your influence, when your personal companions ignore your convictions, when the struggle of a loveless society destroys your personhood, remember the fellowship of God’s people, the association of Christians who know “how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1).
"It's great to be a Christian" because of the peace and love Christ will bring to your family. Jesus desires permanent membership in your family. Wherever Jesus lives, there one finds peace with God, love for man, service to others. Selfishness, hate, lack of warmth and compassion, and infidelity, are never present in the home Jesus rules. How close to you and your family can He be? Let Jesus Himself answer, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:50).

The Christ who saves is revealed to us through the inspired records of the New Testament (John 20:30, 31). Here the testimony of those who knew Him personally, and then under God's guidance gave us a permanent record of His life and work, produces our faith in Jesus as the Christ (Romans 10:13-17). Such faith creates within us the conviction that life without Christ is emptiness, sin, and hell. But to live with Christ is to renounce self in the all-important act of repentance (Luke 13:3; Matthew 16:24). At this point the wishes of Jesus control and motivate us to baptismal union with Him and with His body, the Church (Galatians 3:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Paul says that we are "raised" out of baptism into a "newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4). In other places in the New Testament the Christian or newly baptized individual is described as "the new man" (Ephesians 4:22-24). We then begin to experience daily spiritual growth into greater understanding and appreciation of the truth that, "It's great to be a Christian."

John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program. He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series. A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 16. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full-time working with the Herald of Truth. He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.

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