

### 383 A Merry Heart

“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance ... he that is of a merry heart [hath] a continual feast ... A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” – three encouragements for us within the Book of Proverbs (15.13 / 15.15b / 17.22, KJV).

In a prayerful half-hour spent under the Holy Spirit with an open Bible and Concordance we learn much about merry hearts! For a start, our hearts can be made merry in a wrong kind of way by indulgent feasting, with food a-plenty and free-flowing wine. This was the case among the Philistines in Judges 16.21-25ff, after they had finally captured Samson by the wiles of Delilah (16.18) and had blinded him. Now it was their time for great sacrifices to Dagon along with a mighty feast. “And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport” (16.25).

We hear of Nabal, “churlish and evil in his doings”, who was blessed with a fine wife Abigail (I Samuel 25.3). After foolishly defying David, Nabal “held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal’s heart [was] merry within him, for he [was] very drunken”. When Abigail told him the next day that she had persuaded David to spare Nabal, his heart suddenly became not so merry after all – “his heart died within him”, and ten days later the Lord smote him (from 25.37-38).

Absalom ordered his servants to watch for “when Amnon’s heart is merry with wine” before slaying him (II Samuel 13.28), and in I Kings 21.7 Jezebel reassured Ahab - “arise, [and] eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” – how very kind of her! In Esther Chapter 1 we read concerning King Ahasuerus, that by the seventh day of a massive feast, and unsurprisingly, “the heart of the king was merry with wine” (v.10), which quickly led to great trouble.

In Luke 12.16ff the Lord tells us of the rich fool and his fancy plans for “greater barns”, who now allowed himself to “take thine ease, eat, drink [and] be merry”; but the next words he heard were, “[Thou] fool ...”. In Revelation 11 we read that after the deaths of “the two witnesses” (vv.3,7), the people “shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another” because those two prophets had “tormented them” with God’s testimony (vv.7a,10).

We learn from such examples that not all “merry hearts” are righteous hearts. A glance around the contemporary cultural scene of our day reinforces this truth, where the goal for many people seems to be to get seriously drunk whenever the opportunity arises. “Drink thy wine with a merry heart” (from Ecclesiastes 9.7 / Ruth 3.7) has its place, but of course that place needs to be understood and respected (egs., I Corinthians 6.12 & 10.23,31 / Ephesians 5.18 / Colossians 3.16-17 / I Timothy 3.3,8 & 5.23).

Thankfully we have scriptural examples of just that respect - the joyful feasting of the Lord’s people, in gratitude to the Lord and in praise of His holy name. After the dedication of the temple and the king’s wonderful prayer (II Chronicles Chapters 5-7), we read that after a 7-day feast and a solemn assembly, Solomon finally “sent the people away into their tents, glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people” (7.10). What a wholly different feel there is to this occasion, for it is centred on worship and thankfulness to Almighty God.

In Luke 15.11-32 the Lord tells us of that other merry occasion, lavishly laid on by a grateful father over the return of his wayward son. This lovely parable highlights the gracious love of God the Father in Christ for each one of us, as well as prompting us to ponder the conduct of the other son who “was angry and would not go in”.

Our hearts are also rightfully merry in our knowing that “... Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast ... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (from I Corinthians 5.7b-8), a feast-keeping in bread and wine, and in life and deed. In view of all our Christ-given blessings, no wonder that the Holy Spirit urges us through Paul to – “Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in every thing give thanks” (from I Thessalonians 5.16-18).

Yes indeed, “... he that is of a merry heart [hath] a continual feast” (Proverbs 15.15b). And praise God, we can now see that, through the Father’s mercies to us in Christ, these precious words in Proverbs also work the other way round. For each of us who are in Christ by faith has “a continual feast”, right now, moment by moment, and that in turn produces a very large number of merry Christian hearts!