

The Grave Digger's Boards

"All these curses will come, pursue, and overtake you until you are destroyed, since you did not obey the Lord your God and keep the commands and statutes He gave you. These curses will be a sign and a wonder against you and your descendants forever. Because you didn't serve the Lord your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though [you had] an abundance of everything." – Deuteronomy 28:45-47 HCSB

There once was a poor Christian named Abish, who lived in grinding poverty. But he never complained. Instead, he remained satisfied with whatever little he had. He responded to everything – suffering included – by saying "Everything that God does is for good." His face radiated joy at all times; he was happy, cheerful and exuded the joy of life.

In that same town lived a rich man called Getzel. He held an atheistic view of material things and as a result, had become depressed and gloomy. In spite of his great wealth, he often imagined the Death Angel was striding after him with a sword and was consumed by an irrational paranoia of death. His paranoia became focused on Abish, who possessed not a kopeck to his name, but walked around radiating joy as though he had won the lottery. Getzel decided to do something about it.

Everyone admired Abish and his righteous attitude, but a rich man is still a rich man and they depended on him for their livelihood. So although they despised Getzel, they obeyed his command to not render Abish any aid.

Abish needed some boards in order to repair his small hovel but no one would sell him any. His hut was nearly unlivable but no one would take him into their homes either. "What do I care!" Abish whispered to himself. "Everything that God does is for good. Happiness is the foundation of divine service. After all, all the curses pronounced in Deuteronomy come as punishment 'because you do not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart. If I have nothing in this life, still I have the Master and a future in heaven!'"

Paltiel, the local cemetery's grave digger, was determined to help Abish. He did not fear the rich man for he knew that regardless of one's station in life, everyone ends up in the gravedigger's hands at some point. Back then, people used boards as grave markers. Thus, Paltiel had a great supply of boards that had already been marked "Here lies..." with a blank space for the person's name. He gave Abish the boards he needed and soon Abish's house was repaired with grave markers.

When Getzel heard that Abish's house had been repaired, he raged in anger and ran to see who had helped him. As he came to Abish's house he saw all over it, "Here lies..." and his irrational fear overcame him. He quickly begged forgiveness of Abish who gladly forgave him and taught him the Christian Way.

Happiness may come from wealth and good circumstances, but true joy comes from a right relationship with God.