

# The Joy of the Christian

John 13, 14.

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## ***PART THIRD. EARLIER MINISTRY, CONTINUED.***

My desire is to present a few simple thoughts in connection with the joy of the Christian. There is nothing the heart of man looks for more than satisfaction. Rest is the first thing he seeks, and beyond that joy, which gives more sensible pleasure. The poor world seeks for both, but in vain. If we would build our house in the gate of Sodom we shall find satisfaction only for a moment. To say nothing of God taking away the things heaped up round about, they cause sorrow and no satisfaction; God meets the cravings of the heart of man perfectly and eternally as becomes Him as God, so that there is in Him what satisfies and what gives joy. I believe these two things are really one — satisfaction and joy. We often make a mistake, because we take human instead of divine thoughts. The Scriptures show that the soul of man can be satisfied with God alone. The soul was made for Him, and when it obtains *Him* there is peace and joy. A soul divinely filled is as full as it can hold.

I remember being struck, some thirty years ago, with God forcing me to seek after Himself. It was by the sense of sin in myself, and that I as a sinner was going down an inclined plane, as it were, to destruction. This was soon followed by peace. Amid all the things that were shown up, around, and within, I could say, "Well, I know this is the way of peace; and even if it be imagination, which the infidel thought of my heart would suggest, it is better to let the imagination no after *God* than anything else." I was more happy at least than I was when seeking the world. The experience of a Roman Catholic I met with yesterday was remarkable as to this. He was one who had been thoroughly sunk in the system. Four or five months since, a sister in the Lord gave him a Bible. There he learnt that there was a God, and a Christ at God's right hand. "I was ignorant as a beast before Him," were his words; but though without bread, money, or any of the common necessities of life, he had peace, and this brought him satisfaction. He had found Him for whom he was made, and there was light in that dwelling.

All this is a reality, no matter of feeling or imagination. It is a peace and satisfaction according to that which satisfies *God*, and brings *Him* rest. God now brings sinners to Christ, saying to them, "Here is the Son of my love; I have put Him at my right hand; and the biggest sinner that is in Him there may have perfect peace, perfect satisfaction, because I have perfect peace and satisfaction." The peace of the poor sinner is thus eternally formed upon what God finds His peace, and satisfaction, and joy in. It is thus divinely formed; for the foundation on which I rest is the same as that on which God rests, though He knows more about it of course than I do, just as the father of the poor prodigal knows far more of joy than he ever can, but it is on the same foundation. The presence of this peace and joy in our hearts comes from the Holy Ghost ("the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God"), and the soul, while shut, folded up, as to the *full understanding of all that is in God*, can understand peace on God's foundation.

Perfect joy in the Christian is associated with God. There are many things to rejoice in besides, and which are necessary to our being brought into it and sustained in it; *e.g.* mercy, forgiveness of sins through His blood, and God's righteousness to cover you. The joy to your mind may be "He has washed me," and in the consciousness of your spotted robe, you may delight in the thought that God has just put on you an unspotted robe. But there is something more than this. God rejoices in our being washed and clothed. And there is another thing connected with it. You sometimes rejoice in one part of the blessing and sometimes in another, according to your feelings of the need at the time. As the mother feeds her infant with the spoon, so God gives us to take little by little of what His mercy has done. But there is a time coming when we shall not want washing, clothing; but in the Father's house the sense of God's *electing love* in setting us amongst the children in eternal glory which will never end, is that which will fill the soul *eternally*, while still the power and the beauty of that blood and that righteousness will never be so brightly known as in heaven. Our redemption being accomplished, and ourselves brought into it and glorified, our joy will be in GOD HIMSELF. All thought about our need being done with, our joy is in association with God Himself, according to the riches of His grace made known to us in Christ Jesus. There are different characters of satisfaction and joy for the believer which may be viewed in four different aspects. First, as regards the saint here below in the present time; secondly, the Father's house; thirdly, what may intervene — "absent from the body, present with the Lord;" and fourthly, the time which succeeds the Father's house, although we can never be said to be out of it. All these characters of joy are in association with the God of all grace, of whom Christ said, "My Father and your Father, and my God and your God."

Now as to *present* joy, brethren in the Lord. Children of God, what is your joy at the present time? I believe John 14: 23 brings one element of joy very vividly before us: "If a man love me, he will keep my words." This is in connection with fruit bearing, as in John 15: 11. The reference is not here to our abiding, as shadowed over by the love of Christ. That is always true, even when also there is failure. Peter's love to Christ, and Christ's love to him, were very different. The Lord's love to Peter never altered, but Peter failed to abide in His love. When Peter thought of his love to Christ, all the fire went out, and his heart grew cold, and he soon began to swear that he did not know Him. But when he thought of Christ's love to him his heart warmed. There was always real joy flowing into the heart of Jesus every step of the way, because it was always in conscious association with His Father. Thus every step He put down firmly and steadfastly, as saying, "Well, now, this is a step in association with my Father." If I go and build a house in Sodom, I cannot have the assurance of association with God. God would say, "He has joined himself to idols," but He cannot give me up. God's association with Lot did not cease, but all the consciousness Lot had of it was, "his soul was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." Abraham was quite different, he had the joy of conscious association with God. Your present joy depends on your association with Christ, your conscious association with Him. Now, what was Christ's position with respect to this world? Pilate and Herod could shake hands if Christ is to be crucified. After Christ's death Satan is called not only the "prince," but the "god of this world," and the "friendship of the world is enmity with God." How then can I have joy in God if I am in association with the world?

John 13. There are three things to be noticed connected with the walk of Christ, and which He would have us to mark now that He is gone. First, Christ is associated with God, while morally displaying the character of God. Emptied Himself, He washes the feet of His disciples: "Ye are clean, but not all." Christ referred then to His cleansing blood.\* The saint needs constant cleansing, and in this the Lord gives fellowship with Himself. If you have been enabled to present the blood to the conscience of fellow-sinners, there is a link formed between you and them, and you must have a regard to their walk. The *Father's* name is on the *brethren*, and if their feet are defiled you must seek to

remove the defilement. This brings with it great renunciation of heart, and is one of the things by which we have association with the Lord Jesus. Secondly, there is another thing you will find connected with it. There was the flesh working in Peter, and if you care for your brethren in the way the Lord did, you must be prepared to find in them the same spirit as that of Peter. They will perhaps assume that you have no right to interfere between them and God. The flesh thus works in those who have the Spirit of God, but you cannot forbear, because the Father's name is upon them. All our experience in the world comes to this — "*tribulation*." "In the world ye shall have tribulation." You may have it divinely in fellowship with Christ, or you may have it in a human way; and then, going to feed with the swine, you must have discipline. The desire of the Christian must be to bear fruit, and it will not be that which puffs up. No! he will say, "If there is any fruit, it is the sap rising up from the root;" and the sweetest taste to his soul will be that he can say, "We love Him because He first loved us." Every one of us has something to do for Christ. Every one of the things we do the rest of this day we should be able to take up and do to Him, and do it heartily. If we cannot say, "He has given us a thing to do," we should pause. That matter which, however simple, is done unto Christ, will bring great joy to our hearts, because it will bring into association with Him in separation from the spirit of the world which rejected Him. We shall realize the result of keeping ourselves from the evil while in the scene of evil, and this is the position in which we properly are.

\*It may be doubted whether the reference is not rather to the washing with water (the Word) at the new birth. — ED.

Connected with sorrow there are two things to remark; first, the normal position of what Christ was here is just reversed with us, if we are finding, or seeking to find, our satisfaction in the world. If the bride finds herself setting up her tent where her Lord was murdered, the consciousness of it must bring sorrow. But, secondly, there is another, a deeper thing. The Spirit, who is the spring of joy, will be grieved if we walk contrary to God, and there can be no joy. The whole of our gospel is dated from heaven, the throne of God. It is the declaration of the estimated value by God the Father of what Christ did when He died, rose, and ascended. "We will come and make our abode with Him." What a shadowy, unreal, senseless thing the joy of a Christian must be to a man of the world! With the Christian, what he possesses is no dreary imagination, but a solid reality. Christ loves me as God loves Christ, and it was by the excellency of His power, commanding the light to shine out of darkness, that I know it. It is so large that it could never have entered the thought of man. It is divine, it is a reality. The world cannot see Him, and therefore they cannot receive Him; they take knowledge of what they can see and hear, but beyond that they have nothing. There are certain things about which I cannot talk to a man of the world. How should he understand the Father's house, who has not the Spirit of adoption, crying, "Abba, Father"?

"God hath shined into our hearts." It is a figure of speech, but it is a *reality* above all the realities of this age. In spite of the heart even of the Christian, which veers round and round like a weather-cock on a windy day, he finds God the same, and His shining into the heart makes joy. Suppose we see a little boat with a light in it going up against the current, and the strong rough current of a mighty river — the waters almost cover it — it seems to disappear, but it rises again, the light is unextinguished, and it continues on its way, the light cannot be put out, it is a reality, and there is some unseen power which keeps it burning. So there is the Holy Ghost in the Christian which the man of the world cannot understand. He dwells there.

There is another thing we cannot talk with the world, or with a worldly Christian, about; for they cannot understand what Paul meant when he said, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and be with Christ; which is far better." (Phil. 1: 23.) Staying in the world because there is

godly work to be done is a strange thing to them; and in their case, being "absent from the body," there is nothing but uncertainty, therefore "better to depart" is quite incomprehensible. Why cannot they understand it? Because the feelings are all blunted by being like Lot in Sodom. But to a Christian in communion with Christ, it is no dark uncertainty to be present with Him, to be where He is: it is no uncertainty that Christ is in heaven. There are two things that make the saint desire to depart; first, I go groaning on in this body of sin and death, and I shall drop that by-and-by. I have a wicked heart; you cannot trust me; you do not know but I might turn out like a Judas or a Peter, denying the Lord; you cannot depend on me. This a self-emptying thought — surely if this body of sin and death were laid at rest that would be gone. Second, there would be gain where I go. When Christ was here His moral glory was in the emptying of Himself every day: "I came not to do mine own will," but He emptieth not Himself thus now. Christ is filled with all blessing, with all power, and with the fulness of divine glory. He is not sustaining all the glory outwardly, as He will be in the kingdom; but were I called to leave the body tonight, I should be where all the fulness is shown to be His; where He is causing the fulness of His grace to flow forth for poor sinners. Is this a dark uncertainty? Do you say you know nothing about it? Do I know nothing about it? There is no veil upon the face of Christ to hide Him from us, but there are two veils alluded to in Scripture. There is a veil over the soul that walks carelessly; the one on His side is removed entirely, and on my side it will be removed for ever when the body is vacated.

Where are the bodies of Paul, Peter, John? They were logs and clogs to them; but, laid aside, they are all taken care of, watched over by God, until He shall put body and soul together again. Is Paul there in the dust? No, Paul is not there; Paul is present with the *Lord*. Why is so little said about that time — "present with the *Lord*"? For a very simple reason, Scripture never gives us anything which has nothing to do with men's responsibility. When absent from the body, responsibility will cease. The question is cut short there, shut up in the hand of our God and Father, and of Christ Jesus our Lord. This truth, that there is no light where there is no responsibility, cuts through a hundred difficulties; e.g. as to infants. Directly their understandings open we are responsible to instruct them in the Word, but we have no light expressly beyond that. Again, I believe that the whole power of understanding the joy of departing to be with the Lord is in *communion*. If in the presence of Christ you have got your heart warmed, there you will rejoice in prospect of being with Him for ever.

The third scene which awaits us is the Father's house. But suppose that it were revealed that the Lord Jesus would rise up from the Father's throne, and come for us today at 3.30, I am not so sure whether, if I might, I should not desire to depart to be with Him at 2.30. The more He puts me through, the more I shall know of Himself and His guardian care. Thus I do not see why we should shrink from falling asleep; for Christ has passed through it all, and it is now no valley of the shadow of death to the saint. Dropping the question of selfishness, and of work to be done, it was real joy to Paul to think of departing, because Christ was everything. God's people are in heaven; my brethren are there. I see heaven getting full of them. I should like to be one of them. If only my work were done, the sooner I can get away the better.

Some talk of disgrace in being called away; others say it is only a dark, shadowy uncertainty beyond; but these are most unscriptural thoughts, and the want of joy in the prospect of departing is only the result of want of communion. One thing that the saints who depart will have is *precedence in the resurrection*. Scripture always shows us God's way is to begin with the weakest first; as, for example, in the exhortations to wives, children, servants. When Christ rose, it was Peter to whom He sent, because he had most failed. So in the resurrection, those who come up first will be from the position of weakness. "The dead in Christ shall rise first." The position of hope now is different to that when Christ was in the wilderness in humiliation, then, He was looking forward to suffering, and

afterwards the glory. Now He is looking forward to the time when He shall bring us into the Father's house; there will be nothing then to soil or mar the purity or hinder completeness of the joy. Now He holds His power in abeyance, but when He rises up it will be to use divine power in putting down all that is adverse. It is the *Father's* house to which He will take us. It will be a scene of His own. The Church is His, and where He is, there she must also be. Have you a distinct thought in your minds about the Father's house in contrast with the glory? Nothing shows the peculiarity of our position more than this. The Father's house is not like created scenes, such as the new heavens and the new earth. The *Son's* heart must be there, the Son's mind there. We must have the unselfishness of the Son to have the joy of that house. It is a scene no longer needing watching on our part, nor the down-stooping of grace from God as now. It will be full, perfect *communion*. There will be the full inshining and outshining of God, and there the only-begotten Son will have His rich reward.