

THE SECRET OF JOY

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 15:11.

It is surprising that Christ Jesus spoke of His joy in the dark season through which He was passing. The circumstances were most oppressive. Antagonisms were blazing with fiercest enmity. Hatreds had deepened into the black passions of the midnight. The deep shadow of the cross was hanging like a pall over everything. In a few hours Christ would be transfixed and bleeding upon a cruel cross, dying in what seemed to be shameful failure. Soon He would be plunged into a sea of suffering the like of which never engulfed another. He Himself knew all this. He had foretold His little group of closer friends about it. Yet, as He turned His face toward Gethsemane, and knowingly entered the darkness of that supreme sorrow, He spoke of His "joy." He had already spoken to them of peace, courage and comfort, and these themes were most timely, but to be speaking of joy in the face of that unutterable agony was a most extraordinary thing. Oh, this amazing, absolutely indestructible and all-victorious joy of Christ!

The note of joy runs like a scarlet thread throughout the fabric of the New Testament. Christ was joyful. This fact does not accord with the popular conception of Christ. I have seen many paintings of Him in this and other countries, but I have never looked upon one which showed a countenance lighted with joy. Yet, it is evident from His own frequently repeated testimony that there was in His heart a deep and abiding joy. He spoke with deep emotion of that joy which was His. Even though the road which He trod upon earth was rugged and He was acquainted with grief, nevertheless, He was joyful.

(First century Christians were a joyous company. Think of Paul and Silas in prison at Philippi, fastened in the stocks and their backs cut and bleeding, yet joyfully singing hymns of praise. Think of it! At the midnight hour the prisoners heard the two Christians singing as their joy overflowed. All through the New Testament this note of joy is jubilant and sustained. Paul spoke of those whom he had won to Christ as his joy.)

A striking purpose is expressed in our text. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." The joy of Christ within us is a challenging thought. Yet, this is His clear-spoken purpose. Our Lord intends that His people shall be possessors and exhibitors of joy. A miserable Christianity is a contradiction in terms. Many believe that Christianity and joy are incompatible, that where the one is present the other is absent. A religion which wears grave-clothes begs to be buried, and the sooner the funeral the better. Christ came to give joy.)

(I. Joy Is Intended.

Our Lord intends for us to have joy, but it is important that we realize that true joy is inseparable from Christ's teaching. He said that He had spoken "These things" that we might have joy. What then did He mean by "These things"? The "These things" covers the whole of His teaching in the ten preceding verses of this chapter (Until the eleventh verse our Lord had been speaking by metaphor, that wonderful metaphor of the vine and the branches, but now at verse eleven He passed to plain, unfigurative speaking concerning the relation of His disciples with Himself. Thus we see that our Lord intended that we should have joy and that our possession of joy is inseparably linked with His teaching about the vine.

What then are the central truths expressed in that metaphor of the vine and the branches?

1. Union with Christ.

It is a vital union with Christ by faith, which makes us one with Him spiritually that His own life is communicated to us. Our true joy, then, is the issue of our union with Christ. Apart from this union with Him, the joy of which our text speaks can never be ours.

2. Abiding in Christ.

There must be constancy of union so that there may be an uninterrupted flow of life from the vine to the branch. This is where many believers fall short and miss the blessing. There cannot be abounding without abiding.)

(Christ intends that His disciples, by living according to His teaching, should have the same kind of joy as He Himself had.

II. Joy Is Imparted.

From our text it is perfectly clear that through an abiding union with Christ the believer will have the joy of our Lord communicated directly to him by the Holy Spirit. Our Lord wants us to understand that, if we live according to these things which He has taught us, we shall have a joy like His own because our joy will spring from the same sources as His own.)

(Just as He was one with the Father in a vital spiritual union and in a fellowship maintained by obedience to the Father's will, we are to be one with Himself in a vital spiritual union, as set forth in the figure of the vine and the branches, and in a fellowship maintained by a loving obedience to His commands.)

(What then were the constituent elements of Christ's joy?

1. He had joy in His relation to His Father.

It was a relation of love and fellowship which were never broken. We have a glimpse of this love and fellowship in His boyhood, when He said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" We have proof of it in the voice from heaven at His baptism, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." Christ carried with Him everywhere and always the consciousness of God His Father. Again and again, in the hearing of His disciples, He spoke of His Father as one Who was always near to Him.

Christ came to do the will of the righteous and loving Father. He said, "I came not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

Christ knew the joy of perfect obedience to the Father's will. Obedience to that will always results in the sweetest of joys, whether it be in the life of Christ or in the life of one of His followers. Christ said, "I do always the things that please the Father.") He experienced the joy of intimate fellowship with God. This resulted, of course, from obedience to the Father's will. This fellowship was a fruitage of obedience. His walk with God was so intimate. True Christian joy comes through self-surrender to God and submission to His blessed will. There can never be any true joy in a man's life until he has learned to say, "Thy will, O God, be done."

(2. He had joy in His relation to men.

Christ's life was one continuous act of unselfish devotion to the welfare and happiness of others. How closely He identified Himself with the joys and sorrows of the people around Him! Quite often it was said of Him when He beheld a case of woe that He was moved with compassion. Christ came, lived, wrought, suffered, died, arose and lived again for others. However, the highest joy which He had was

not in the healing of the sick, the cleansing of the lepers or the giving of sight to the blind, though His ministry in these realms was wonderful, but His highest joy was in His redemptive work which brought about the reconciliation of man with God.

There is certainly a great joy in the relief of suffering, whether it be spiritual, mental or physical.) There are Christian people who little know how much they lose by the selfishness that is allowed to lurk in their hearts. If, instead of thinking so much about themselves, their wants, their rights, and the respect other people ought to pay them, they would only forget themselves and live for others, they would find that they were in a new world. Next to the joy of fellowship with His Father, nay, inseparable from it, was the joy of telling men bound in the fetters and miseries of sin where to find deliverance and the joy of showing weary hearts the way to rest.

(Though many people do not believe it, the secret of joy is in putting God first, others second and self last. Most people think that joy comes by the reverse order, self first, others second and God last.) It is this mistake which lies behind the worship of wealth, the passion for power and the pursuit of pleasure. Our Lord will never communicate His joy to a heart living for selfish ends or being at variance with the will of God. As we walk in glad obedience to His will and in unselfish love toward others, He floods our hearts with His own wonderful joy. Thus our joy is made full.

3. He had joy in the assurance of ultimate success. Christ was often grieved, but never discouraged. Before Him always was a vision of the spread of His kingdom into various parts of the world. He kept His eye constantly upon the time when His gospel would be preached throughout the whole world. That glorious prospect should challenge us to prayer, quicken our efforts, stimulate our liberality and fill our hearts with joy. Oh, the joy of confidence in the final success of His great redeeming purpose!

There is a vast difference between the pleasure of a worldly pleasure-seeker and the joy of a faithful Christian.) In the former it is outward, while in the latter it is inward. The Christian has an inward joy which is independent of external circumstances. With the former it is fitful because the things upon which it is dependent are changeable. With the latter the joy is constant. While the man of the world is seeking pleasure, the Christian is already possessing joy. Pleasure is merely human, but the Christian's joy partakes of the divine. The man of the world is self-seeking, but the true Christian is self-sacrificing. True joy comes by giving, rather than by getting. Pleasure fails to survive life's crises, but the joy of the Christian is unfailing. The pleasure of the man of the world is constantly decreasing, whereas the joy of the Christian is constantly increasing, becoming sweeter, deeper, richer and fuller as he draws nearer that promised consummation when he will see his blessed Lord face to face and become perfect in His likeness.

(Christ wants us to have joy. He wants our joy to be full. He wants this full joy to remain in our souls. May we from this time be so closely and constantly united to Him by obedient faith that His joy may remain in us and that our joy may be full!)