

JOY THAT IS FULL

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

The note of joy runs like a thread throughout the fabric of the Bible. "Praise ye the Lord!" is on the lips of every saint from Abraham to John the Baptist. In the great cathedral of the Gospel narrative joy bells chime continually. In the book of Acts and the Epistles the notes of joy rise clearly, jubilantly and forcefully. From Matthew to Revelation the theme of triumphant Christianity may be affirmed in the exclamation, "O be joyful!"

Joy bells rang at the birth of our Lord. Christ was joyful. This fact does not accord with the popular conception of Christ. An immeasurable injury has been done to our Lord by painters and writers who have pictured Him as being sorrowful always. I have seen many paintings of Him in this and in other countries, but I have never looked upon one which showed His 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 the joy which was His. Even though the road which He trod was rugged and He was acquainted with grief, nevertheless, Christ 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 sustained. Paul spoke of those whom he had won to Christ as his joy.

In the view of a good many people today religion is a kind of necessary evil. It is like a fire escape, a way out of a difficulty. In the thought of many, it is something to be avoided as long as possible. Our Lord Himself was called "a man of sorrows," and such He was. He spent most of His earthly life among people who were troubled. Wherever He went, the sick, the halt, the lame, the blind and the deaf congregated. People came to Him for help, and He was the Helper of everyone. He was often found in the house of mourning, and seldom in the house of joy and feasting. But, it is also true that Christ was the happiest person who ever lived. While no one else ever fathomed such depths of sorrow and shame, nobody ever climbed to such heights of joy as He did.

It is rather surprising that Christ Jesus spoke of His joy in that particular dark season through which He was passing. At that time His 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 He would be betrayed, then 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. Knowing all of this, He had told 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." To be speaking of joy in that unutterable agony was a most extraordinary thing. Oh, this amazing, indestructible and victorious joy of Christ!

I. Joy That Is Full Is Purposed.

A striking purpose is expressed in these words, "These things have I spoke 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 clearly expressed purpose. He wants His people to be the possessors and the 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 better. Christ came to bring and impart joy.

Let us never forget that true joy is inseparable from Christ's teaching. He said that He had spoken these things in order that we might have joy. "These things" cover the whole of His teachings in the preceding verses of this chapter. In verse eleven our Lord passed from speaking in that wonderful metaphor of the vine and the branches to the plain and unfigurative language about the relationship of the disciples with Himself. Christ intends that His followers, through living according to His teaching, shall have the same kind of joy which He possessed.

II. Joy That Is Full Is Possible.

It was even possible for our Lord when He was shortly to go out into the most tragic experience through which He could pass.

1. In what Christ's joy did not consist.

(1) Material possessions.

Christ was extremely poor. When some approached Him with the thought of becoming His disciples, He cautioned them to count the cost, saying, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). He did not have a house in which to live or a couch on which to lay His head. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Coringhians 8:9). From our Lord we learn that joy does not lie in the acquisition of possessions.

(2) Physical enjoyment.

There is some satisfaction in having a comfortable place in which to live, wholesome food and such comforts as moderate means will provide. But our Lord did not have any of these. And yet, in spite of His privations and the discomforts to which He was exposed, our Lord was full of joy.

(3) Human approbation.

There were times when some people said, "He doeth all things well." There were times when they shouted, "Hosannah!" But the same people who praised Him cried, "Crucify Him! He is not fit to live."

2. In what Christ's joy did consist.

(1) A proper relationship to the Heavenly Father.

It was a relationship of love and fellowship which was never broken. We have a glimpse of this when in His boyhood 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." Repeatedly He spoke of His Father as one Who was always near to Him.

Christ came to do the will of His 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. He said, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). With delight in the actual doing of the will of God, Christ said, "His commandments are not grievous and in the keeping of them there is great reward." True Christian joy comes through self-surrender to God and submission to His blessed will. There can never be any true joy in your life until you have learned to say, "Thy will, O God, be done." You cannot be full of joy if you are out of harmony with God.

(2) A redemptive ministry for others.

With a sense of the imperativeness of such a ministry Christ announced, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

His earthly life was one continuous act of unselfish devotion to the welfare and happiness of others. Reflect on His mighty ministry to mankind; His giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, purity to the impure, and cleansing to the lepers. However, the highest joy which He had was in His redemptive work which He wrought out on the cross and thereby brought about the reconciliation of man to God. Nobody ever took greater delight in rendering real service to needy sinners than did Christ.

There is certainly a great joy in the relief of suffering, whether it be physical, mental or spiritual. There are Christians who do not realize how much they are losing by the selfishness which they permit to lurk in their hearts. If, instead of thinking so much about themselves and live for Christ and others, they would find themselves in an entirely new world. Next to the joy of fellowship with His Father, nay, inseparable from it,

was the joy of telling men who were bound in the fetters and miseries of sin where to find deliverance and the joy of showing weary hearts the way to rest.

The joy of relieving pain and suffering was deep and satisfying to Christ. Although His healing ministry was wonderful, His biggest joy was in His redemptive work through which people were reconciled to God. Christians today may have the incomparable joy of leading lost souls to Christ. Though many 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 impart 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 towards others, He floods our hearts with His own wonderful joy. Thus our joy is made full. Since we are not church members merely to enjoy Christian fellowship, to listen to inspiring singing or eloquent preaching, let us realize that there is no joy to be compared with that which issues from being co-laborers with Christ in the redemption of mankind from the bondage of sin.

Christ wants us to have joy, real joy. He wants our joy to be full. He wants this joy to overflow our souls. Henceforth let us be so closely and constantly united to Christ by obedient faith that His joy may remain in us and that our joy may be full! May our joy become sweeter, deeper, richer and fuller as we draw nearer that promised consummation when we shall see our blessed Lord face to face and become perfect in His likeness! We may rest assured that the joy which Christ would have us possess to the fullest is that of sonship in God's family, doing His will throughout our lives and being co-workers in bringing others into a saving knowledge of Him.