

THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE JOYOUS LIFE

TEXT: **“That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves”** (John 17:13).

WE have here two simple ideas—Jesus Christ filled with joy; ourselves privileged to partake of that joy until we also are filled.

PLEASURE, HAPPINESS, JOYOUSNESS

It is not uncharitable to say that many people in this world are content if they may be merry; they seek nothing higher from life than pleasure. If they may put far from them the burden and sorrow and care of this world, and forget its grief in a passing jest, they are content. There is a place in life for pleasure, but pleasure is never the object of lives which are noble.

Better than this and the pursuit, I would fain believe, of a far great number, is happiness.

Happiness is an infinitely higher thing than pleasure, and the desire of God that His children should be happy is abundantly revealed in the Bible. The Beatitudes are instructions in the art of happiness.

But our text speaks of something which is better even than happiness, and that is joyousness.

Joyousness, in the scriptural sense of the word, might be defined as happiness overflowing. Happiness too full to be used up in mere personal satisfaction; happiness all alive and aglow. If happiness might be compared to a tranquil lake, embosomed in protecting hills, joyousness would be like the outflowing of a brimming river.

It may, then, help us just at the beginning, to fix in our minds these three things which stand over against sorrow or pain; pleasure, which exists for and ends upon self; happiness, a deeper, nobler thing, and joyousness, which is the overflow of happiness.

THE JOY OF JESUS CHEIST

First of all, Jesus speaks of His own joy.

Now, we do not habitually think of Jesus Christ as joyful. Long before His manifestation, the Prophet Isaiah had said of Him that He would be a **“man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”** And so it was. But observe: A man of sorrows, not a man of melancholy. We cannot think of Jesus Christ as moping through life; we cannot think of Him as turning fretfully toward His burden, as thinking of His wrongs—His throne denied Him, His people rejecting Him, His poverty and humiliation in a world which He had made.

Just once, in Gethsemane, He speaks of His sorrows: **“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.”** But habitually He speaks of His joyfulness. That, then, is the paradox of His life. **“A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”**; but bearing these sorrows, as it were, upon the deep floodtide of a mighty joy. And the joy was more than the sorrow.

Let us try to understand this paradox—an exultant and joyful man of sorrows.

Have you ever observed that the nearer Jesus came to the cross, the more He spoke of His joy?

You do not find that He testified of His joyfulness much in the earlier part of His ministry, and I believe not once in that which is called “the year of public favor,” Then the multitudes thronged Him, and it seemed as if the nation would really receive him as the long-expected Messiah. But as he went on, drawing ever nearer to Calvary, and as the burden of the shame and sorrow and sin of the world began to gather in awful darkness over Him, He speaks ever more and more of His joyfulness, and in His closing admonitions and instruction there is a constant reference to the deep joy which filled his being. Just when the tide of sorrow is rising highest, the joyfulness seems to rise above it and triumph over it.

THE PARADOX SOLVED

If we ponder that, and connect it with the prophet’s explanation of the sorrows of Jesus Christ, **“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows,”** I think we shall be on the very verge of solving the paradox.

In other words (and is it not very simple?), Jesus found His supreme joy in bearing the sorrows of others. He was not joyful in spite of having to bear the sorrow and burden of the world; He was joyful because He could bear it. It was the fountain head, the very source, of His joy.

I think we can conceive of that, if we are willing to separate ourselves for a moment from that shrinking which we all feel at the thought of pain and sorrow, and get upon the nobler side of our own souls.

- We can understand that such a being as Jesus would rejoice, with joy unspeakable, that He could do that thing.
- We can understand how, when looking down upon this world, with its sin and misery and want and woe, and mountainous iniquity, there would be ever in His heart the exultant joy at knowing that it was He who, in due time, should come down here and get underneath all that unspeakable guilt and bear it away from man through the cross.

Just as Jean Val-jean, in Victor Hugo's great story, was happy under the cart; it hurt him cruelly, but he lifted it away from the old man who was being crushed by it. So there was a joy in the very pain which it cost to do it—the joy of vicarious suffering; the joy of getting underneath all that was bearing down the heart of humanity, and lifting it forever away—this was the joy of the Lord.

You know how easily, after all, poor as this world is in nobleness, this truth finds illustration.

Surely, Winkelreid must have felt something of that joy when he gathered the spears of the enemy into his own bosom so that his comrades might break the hostile line and make way for liberty. There must have been in him an ineffable joy as he felt those spears crushing into his heart and his life going out. There was suffering, but it was a joyful thing so to die.

I think that pilot, who kept his burning boat against the shore until every passenger was safe, though his own hands burnt to a crisp as he held the wheel, must have had a joy greater than the pain. This is a very high kind of joy, but we may realize it after all, may we not?

I think that captain who stood upon the deck of the sinking ship and gave his place in the last boat to a poor stowaway, who had no kind of claim upon him, and saw him pass on into safety while he went down with the ship, drank deeply of this joy of vicarious suffering.

SOURCES OF THE SAVIOUR'S JOY

Then there was another source of the joy of the Lord. He rejoiced in the will of God. Will you consider that for a moment? What a joyful thing it is that we are not left alone in this world!

What a joyful thing to know that one is not the sport of circumstance and of accident; not orphaned amid all these destructive forces that move in upon us, as children of God here in the world; to know, in short, that over it all there is the resistless will of God. Things are not "happening" to the children of God. We are moving upon an appointed course, and the joys and sorrows of our lives are all appointed and portioned out, molding and shaping us for better things. The joy of doing and enduring the will of God, and of suffering that others might not suffer—here are the abiding sources of our Lord's joy.

In the Hebrews we are told of another source of joy which sustained our Lord in the supreme agony of the cross—"the joy that was set before him." The joy of the final consummation; the joy of anticipation when He should see the eternal results of His suffering; all this was present with Him helpfully in the hour of agony. That is what we need to see. Beyond question we do not live enough in the inspiration of the compensations and balancing of heaven.

THE LORD'S JOY, OUR JOY

Turn now for a moment to the other thought —the human side of it.

"That my joy might be fulfilled in them."

But how shall we have the joy of the Lord? Evidently there is here a call to the unselfish heights? If we are to share the joy of the Lord we must be willing to share that out of which His joy sprang. We must rejoice if we can bear away some sorrow from another heart, some burden from another life, even if it means sorrow and burden to us.

We must learn to rejoice as we never yet have learned to rejoice, in the salvation of the lost. We read that there is **“joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”**

We must stop regretting that “only ten were converted,” and, like the angels, rejoice over one sinner that repenteth.

Then we must turn our thoughts more toward the future, toward the heavenly rest, the heavenly activities and the eternal joys which are there. I repeat, it is a trumpet call. It costs something to have the joy of the Lord.

Salvation, with its joy, is a free gift, but the joy of the Lord is to be had only by entering into fellowship with the Lord in His life plan; to be, in the measure of our capacity, Christ’s in the world; to get with Him into the joy of suffering; into the joy of the great sweet will of God; into the expectation of the things to come.

It was a great thing for humanity when that strange being, Peter the Hermit, went through Europe preaching the Crusades. It was a call to those barons and knights to cease petty neighborhood wars; to come away from their pompous and empty way of life; from tilting in the castle yard, and feasting in the castle hall, to go forth to do an unselfish thing.

Is not the sorrow and pain of human life a call to a perpetual crusade, a call up out of the petty things in which our lives are frittered away, into sympathy and helpfulness? And is not the sin of the world a call to go out upon Christ’s own great enterprise of salvation into the uttermost parts of the earth? It seems to me there is something in this that ought to lay hold of the noble side of us, that ought to redeem us from the meanness of self-pleasing and to lift us up into a glad participation in our Lord’s sufferings and also in His unspeakable joy.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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