

Night of Weeping

Why GOD's Children Suffer

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CHAPTER 11

THE SOLEMNIZING

LAUGHTER AND GAIETY belong to a fallen world. They are all too superficial to have place among the holy; and too hollow to be known among the truly happy. With the peace of GOD in our hearts we feel that we do not need them. They may do for childhood; they may do for the world; but not for us. They do not suit our feelings; they are not deep or solid enough to be in harmony with our new nature. They are not the utterances of a truly happy soul.

Yet we live in a gay world that rings everywhere with hollow laughter. Around us are the sights and sounds of mirth by which vain men are seeking to cheat away their ever-fretting uneasiness, to soothe their ruffled consciences, or to drown their bitter sorrows.

Oftentimes the saints seem to catch the tone of levity, making mirth with the most mirthful, jesting with the most foolish, singing, perhaps, the world's songs of vanity, speaking its idle words, walking in its vain paths as if its friendships and pleasures were not forbidden things.

Apart, however, from the contagion of the world's influence our tone is apt to fall low and our deportment to lose that solidity and seriousness which become the saints. Almost unconsciously and without knowing how, we get light and airy; we give way to the current of vain thoughts; we forget to set a guard upon our lips; we indulge in foolish talking and jesting in our meetings with each other. Our words are not "with grace, seasoned with no salt." We forget the admonition, **"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouths, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers."**

This propensity grows upon us. Seriousness becomes a thing reserved entirely for the closet or the sanctuary. We forget our character as saints, called out of darkness and **"delivered from this present evil world."** We lose sight of our heavenly parentage and divine adoption. Our whole habits of thought, feeling, speaking, and doing too much resemble the flippancies of a heedless, light-hearted world, whose maxim is, "let us eat, drink, and be merry."

Thus our spirituality decays. Heavenly mindedness is gone. We become of the earth, earthly. Our souls cleave to the dust, and we are content to grovel there. We become lean and barren, neither growing ourselves nor helping the growth of others. Our blossoms send forth no fragrance, our branches bear no fruit.

We grieve the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption. He cannot dwell with levity and mirth any more than amid profanity and crime. He retires from the

temple into which He had come and in which He would fain make His abode forever, driven out from it by the laughter and jesting with which we were making its consecrated walls to resound. How can He dwell in a temple which, from being a house of GOD and a house of prayer, we have turned into a place of merchandise, a hall of revelry, a haunt of mirth and song?

I do not mean, as I have said before, that the saint is ever to be gloomy. No. Gloom and melancholy are not our portion. "**The lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places.**"

They are not the inmates of a soul that has tasted the joy of pardon and is walking in light, as a happy child with a loving father. But true joy is a serious thing. Its fountains are deep. It is the waking up of the heart's deep springs.

Mirth and levity are not joy. They are too shallow to deserve the name. Like the sun-flash on a stagnant pool, they are a mere surface gleam of light. There is nothing in them of the calm radiance illuminating the ocean depths many a fathom down, as if the waters themselves were a mass of solid sunshine, and remaining amid the heaving of the billows, unbroken and unobscured. In coming to Him, who is the fountain of all gladness, the saint of GOD bids farewell to gloom. Tribulation he may have - nay, must have - but not gloom. That has left him forever since the day he knew the Saviour, and opened his ears to the joyful sound. Peace is now his heritage.

But still it is not levity that is his portion. It is joy. And this joy is not only far superior to this vain mirth, but it is utterly inconsistent with it. This levity is as much an enemy to real joy as it is to holiness and spirituality. Hence, it must be rooted up.

GOD cannot suffer it in His children. His desire is that they should set their affections on things above. This element of earthliness must be purged out. They must be made solemn and thoughtful. To this end He visits them with chastisement.

In a moment, perhaps, He smites them to the dust; or, by some slower but withering, crushing calamity, He slays and casts out that foolishness which had wrought itself into the very texture of their being.

His purpose is to make them thoughtful and solemn.

He lays on them accordingly something that will make them think. The blow prostrates them, and in a moment all levity is put to flight. They cannot laugh and jest now when their home is desolate and their heart is bleeding. They are withdrawn from intercourse with an airy, shadowy world and sent into the very inmost recesses of their spiritual being, or forward to the infinite eternity, whose vastness they had been but little alive to.

Trials awaken us to a sense of our self-pleasing ways and our indifference to the condition of the world we live in, not only as being a world of sin, but thoroughly, and all over, a world of misery. They bring us into contact with solid certainties and that produces thoughtfulness. They make us "**acquainted with grief**" and that drives off all levity. Sorrow and levity keep no companionship.

It is through tears that truth is best seen. When looked at through this medium, objects assume their right proportions and take their proper level.

Shadows then evaporate. Realities compass us about, and these make us solemn. Shadows only make us light and vain. They never stir the depths of our being, but merely flit around its surface.

Thus GOD solemnizes His saints, and brings them in this respect into closer sympathy with the mind of CHRIST. All was solemnity with Him. There was no levity ever found in Him.

Everything about Him was serene, yet everything was solemn. And the nearer we are brought to resemble Him, the more will this calm, happy solemnity possess us. We shall live not only wakeful but solemn lives.

Our whole deportment will speak the depth of the serenity that dwells within. Our looks and tones will all be solemn, and will of themselves testify for GOD and condemn the world. We shall be men awake and alive, men zealous and in earnest; men who have no relish for levity, because it is incompatible with the deep peace which is their better portion, and who feel that they have no time for it, because eternity is so near.

Yes, a near eternity rebukes and banishes frivolity. Even apart from positive trial this is its tendency. It is the eternal lifetime that makes the lifetime of earth such a solemn thing. Sever the living here from the living hereafter, and man's longest time on earth is little more in importance than the flutter of a leaf, his death no more than the falling of a blossom. But fasten on the infinite and the eternal to our present existence, and everything in life becomes mighty, momentous, solemn. The briefest moment that comes and goes is the meeting place of two eternities. Traversing this narrow pass, with rocks on either side of infinite ascent and lost in impenetrable midnight, how can we fail to be solemnized unless our eyes be closed or our reason gone!

The pang that shoots through our frame and makes each fiber quiver would be quite endurable were it but for a moment, were it to die and be buried with us in the same tomb, were there no capacity of eternal anguish in our nature, or no eternity in which that capacity must develop itself.

The sting of a moment is a trifle, but the eternal stinging of the undying worm is terrific beyond all utterance. In like manner the thrill of fresh joy which makes the whole man throb with delight would scarce be worth the having or the losing were it only like the lightning, flashing out in its brightness and then quenched for ever. But a nature gifted with faculties for infinite enjoyment, and with a whole eternity in which these joyous buds shall expand themselves, turns all our life into a deep and awful reality.

A flower that folds up its leaves and withers down at sunset may be carelessly trodden underfoot; but a star that shall roll around forever in its orbit, either effulgent in beauty or dark in the gloom of its own chaos, is an object of wonder and awe.

Such is the life of man! Not the life of one man or some men, but of every man.

By itself it may seem a plaything, a mere insect's life; but in connection with the everlasting

future, it becomes awfully real and solemn in its aspect. We may be noble and famed upon the earth, or we may be poor, unlettered, hard-toiling men, still our life is a vast reality. It is no mere shadow, or rainbow, or vision of the night, but an unconceivable reality in all its parts, great or small.

Such especially is the life of the saint! He not only knows that there is an eternity, but he has seen and felt it. Each hour he is looking out upon it like a traveler looking over a dark and infinite precipice which flanks the road on which he is passing along. He not only knows that there is such a thing as forgiveness and eternal life, but he has found them, he has tasted them; his eyes have been opened, and he has now come into the very midst of realities. They compass him about on every side. And especially as he "**looks for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing**" of the Lord, he feels what a solemn life he is called upon to lead, and levity and mirth as ill become him as they would have done the High Priest, when standing within the veil under the immediate vision of the glory.

Even without the positive infliction of chastisement there is enough to solemnize a saint in what he sees and knows of things as they are. A dying world, a groaning creation, a curse-laden earth, a divided, bleeding church, an absent bridegroom - these are at all times enough to subdue and soften a believer's frame. And thus he walks through earth like Paul after he had been in the third heaven - an inhabitant of another star - one who has his conversation in heaven-who is too happy ever to be gloomy, but too happy also ever to be light or vain.

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