

THE CHRISTIAN'S HEAVINESS AND REJOICING

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A SERMON
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*“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be,
 ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.”*
1 Peter 1:6

THIS verse to a worldly man looks amazingly like a contradiction, and even to a Christian man, when he understands it best, it will still be a paradox. “Ye greatly rejoice,” and yet, “ye are in heaviness.” Is that possible? Can there be in the same heart great rejoicing and yet a temporary heaviness? Most assuredly.

This paradox has been known and felt by many of the Lord’s children and it is far from being the greatest paradox of the Christian life. Men who live within themselves, and mark their own feelings as Christians, will often stand and wonder at themselves. Of all riddles, the greatest riddle is a Christian man.

As to his pedigree, what a riddle he is! He is a child of the first Adam—“an heir of wrath, even as others.” He is a child of the second Adam—he was born free. There is therefore now no condemnation unto him. He is a riddle in his own existence. “As dying and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed.”

He is a riddle as to the component parts of his own spiritual frame. He finds that which makes him akin to the devil—depravity, corruption, binding him still to the earth, and causing him to cry out, “O wretched man that I am.” And yet he finds that he has within himself that which exalts him, not merely to the rank of an angel, but higher still—a something which raises him up together, and makes him “sit together with Christ Jesus in heavenly places.”

He finds that he has that within him which must ripen into heaven, and yet that about him which would inevitably ripen into hell, if grace did not forbid. What wonder, then, beloved, if the Christian man be a paradox himself, that his condition should be a paradox, too? Why marvel you, when you see a creature corrupt and yet purified, mortal and yet immortal, fallen but yet exalted far above principalities and powers—why marvel you, that you should find that creature also possessed of mingled experience, greatly rejoicing, and yet at the same time, “in heaviness through manifold temptations.”

I would have you this morning, look first of all at *the Christian’s heaviness*—He is “in heaviness through manifold temptations.” And then, in the next place, at *the Christian’s great rejoicing*.

I. In the first place, HIS HEAVINESS.

This is one of the most unfortunate texts in the Bible. I have heard it quoted ten thousand times for my own comfort, but I never understood it till a day or two ago. On referring to most of the commentaries in my possession, I cannot find that they have a right idea of the meaning of this text.

You will notice that your friends often say to you when ye are in trouble, “There is a needs be for this affliction.” There is a needs be, say they, “for all these trials and troubles that befall you.” That is a very correct and Scriptural sentiment, but that sentiment is not in the text at all. And yet, whenever this text is quoted in my hearing, this is what I am always told, or what I conceive I am always told to be the meaning—that the great temptations, the great trials which befall us, have a needs be for them.

But it does not say so here—it says something better—not only that there is a needs be for our temptations, but that there is a needs be for our heaviness under the temptation. Now, let me show you the difference.

There is a man of God, full of faith—strong. He is about to do his Master's work and he does it. God is with him and gives him great success. The enemy begins to slander him. All manner of evil is spoken against him falsely for Christ's name sake. You say there is a needs be for that, and you are quite correct—but look at the man.

How gallantly he behaves himself! He lifts his head above his accusers, and unmoved amidst them all, he stands like a rock in the midst of a roaring tempest, never moved from the firm basis on which it rests. The scene changes, and instead of calamity, perhaps he is called to endure absolute persecution, as in apostolic times.

We imagine the man driven out from house and home, separated from all his kindred, made to wander in the pathless snows of the mountains. And what a brave and mighty man he appears to be, when you see him enduring all this! His spirits never sink. "All this I can do," says he, "and I can greatly rejoice in it, for Christ's name's sake—for I can practice the text which says, 'Rejoice ye in that day and leap for joy.'" And you will tell that man there is a needs be for his persecution. He says, "Yes, I know it, and I fear not all I have to endure. I am not cowed by it."

At last imagine the man taken before the Inquisition and condemned to die. You still comfort him with the fact that there is a needs be that he shall die—that the blood of the martyrs must be the seed of the church—that the world can never be overcome by Christ's Gospel except through the sufferings and death of His followers—that Christ stooped to conquer and the church must do the same—that through death and blood must be the road to the church's victory.

And what a noble sight it is, to see that man going to the stake, and kissing it—looking upon his iron chains with as much esteem as if they had been chains of gold. Now tell him there is a needs be for all this and he will thank you for the promise. And you admire the man—you wonder at him.

Ah! but there is another class of persons that get no such honor as this. There is another sort of Christians for whom this promise really was intended, who do not get the comfort of it. I do admire the man I have pictured to you—may God long preserve such men in the midst of the church. I would stimulate every one to imitate him. Seek for great faith and great love to your Master that you may be able to endure, being "stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."

But remember, that this text has not in it comfort for such persons—there are other texts for them. This text has been perverted for such a use as that. This is meant for another and a feebler grade of Christians, who are often overlooked and sometimes despised.

I was lying upon my couch during this last week and my spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for—but a very slight thing will move me to tears just now—and a kind friend was telling me of some poor old soul living near, who was suffering very great pain, and yet she was full of joy and rejoicing.

I was so distressed by the hearing of that story, and felt so ashamed of myself, that I did not know what to do. I wonder why I should be in such a state as this—while this poor woman, who had a terrible cancer and was in the most frightful agony, could nevertheless, "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

And in a moment this text flashed upon my mind, with its real meaning. I am sure it is its real meaning. Read it over and over again, and you will see I am not wrong. "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness." It does not say, "Though now for a season you are suffering pain, though now for a season you are poor—but you are 'in heaviness.' Your spirits are taken away from you. You are made to weep. You cannot bear your pain. You are brought to the very dust of death and wish that you might die. Your faith itself seems as if it would fail you."

That is the thing for which there is a needs be. That is what my text declares, that there is an absolute needs be that sometimes the Christian should not endure his sufferings with a gallant and a joyous heart. There is a needs be that sometimes his spirits should sink within him, and that he should become even as a little child smitten beneath the hand of God.

Ah! beloved, we sometimes talk about the rod, but it is one thing to see the rod and it is another thing to feel it. And many a time have we said within ourselves, "If I did not feel so low spirited as I now do, I should not mind this affliction." And what is that but saying, "If I did not *feel* the rod, I should not mind it?"

It is just how you feel, that is, after all, the pith and marrow of your affliction. It is that breaking down of the spirit, that pulling down of the strong man, that is the very fester of the soreness of God's scourging—"the blueness of the wound, whereby the soul is made better."

I think this one idea has been enough to be food for me many a day. And there may be some child of God here to whom it may bring some slight portion of comfort. We will yet again dwell upon it. "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations."

And here let me for a moment or two try to explain why it is that there is an absolute needs be, not merely for temptations and troubles, but likewise for our being in heaviness under them.

In the first place, if we were not in heaviness during our troubles we should not be like our covenant Head—Christ Jesus. It is a rule of the kingdom that all the members must be like the Head. They are to be like the Head in that day when He shall appear. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." But we must be like the Head also in His humiliation or else we cannot be like Him is in His glory.

Now, you will observe that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ very often passed through much of trouble, without any heaviness. When He said, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head," I observe no heaviness. I do not think He sighed over that.

And when athirst He sat upon the well, and said, "Give me to drink," there was no heaviness in all His thirst. I believe that through the first years of His ministry, although He might have suffered some heaviness, He usually passed over His troubles like a ship floating over the waves of the sea. But you will remember that at last the waves of swelling grief came into the vessel.

At last the Savior Himself, though full of patience, was obliged to say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." And one of the evangelists tells us that the Savior "began to be very heavy." What means that, but that His spirits began to sink? There is a more terrible meaning yet, which I cannot enter into this morning.

But still I may say that the surface meaning of it is that all His spirits sank within Him. He had no longer His usual courage, and though He had strength to say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done"—still the weakness did prevail, when He said, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me." The Savior passed through the brook, but He "drank of the brook by the way."

And we who pass through the brook of suffering must drink of it too. He had to bear the burden, not with His shoulders omnipotent, but with shoulders that were bending to the earth beneath a load. And you and I must not always expect a giant faith that can remove mountains—sometimes even to us the grasshopper must be a burden, that we may in all things be like unto our Head.

Yet again—if the Christian did not sometimes suffer heaviness, he would begin to grow too proud and think too much of himself, and become too great in his own esteem. Those of us who are of elastic spirit, and who in our health are full of everything that can make life happy, are too apt to forget the Most High God.

Lest we should be satisfied with ourselves, and forget that all our own springs must be in Him, the Lord sometimes seems to sap the springs of life, to drain the heart of all its spirits, and to leave us without soul or strength for mirth, so that the noise of tabret and of viol would be unto us as but the funeral dirge, without joy or gladness. Then it is that we discover what we are made of, and out of the depths we cry unto God, humbled by our adversities.

Another reason for this discipline is, I think, that in heaviness we often learn lessons that we never could attain elsewhere. Do you know that God has beauties for every part of the world, and He has beauties for every place of experience? There are views to be seen from the tops of the Alps that you can never see elsewhere.

Ay, but there are beauties to be seen in the depths of the dell that you could never see on the tops of the mountains. There are glories to be seen on Pisgah, wondrous sights to be beheld when by faith we stand on Tabor. But there are also beauties to be seen in our Gethesmanes, and some marvelously sweet flowers are to be culled by the edge of the dens of the leopards.

Men will never become great in divinity until they become great in suffering. "Ah!" said Luther, "affliction is the best book in my library." And let me add, the best leaf in the book of affliction is that blackest of all the leaves, the leaf called heaviness, when the spirit sinks within us, and we cannot endure as we could wish.

And yet again—this heaviness is of essential use to a Christian if he would do good to others. Ah! there are a great many Christian people that I was going to say I should like to see afflicted—but I will not say so much as that. I should like to see them heavy in spirit. If it were the Lord's will that they should be bowed down greatly, I would not express a word of regret, for a little more sympathy would do them good. A little more power to sympathize would be a precious boon to them, and even if it were purchased by a short journey through a burning, fiery furnace, they might not rue the day afterwards in which they had been called to pass through the flame.

There are none so tender as those who have been skinned themselves. Those who have been in the chamber of affliction know how to comfort those who are there. Do not believe that any man will become a physician unless he walks the hospitals. And I am sure that no one will become a divine, or become a comforter, unless he lies in the hospital as well as walks through it, and has to suffer himself.

God cannot make ministers—and I speak with reverence of His Holy name—He cannot make a Barnabas except in the fire. It is there, and there alone, that He can make His sons of consolation. He may make His sons of thunder anywhere, but His sons of consolation He must make in the fire, and there alone.

Who shall speak to those whose hearts are broken, who shall bind up their wounds, but those whose hearts have been broken also, and whose wounds have long run with the sore of grief? "If need be," then, "ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations."

I think I have said enough about this heaviness, except that I must add it is but for a season. A little time, a few hours, a few days, a few months at most, it shall all have passed away. And then comes the "eternal weight of glory, wherein ye greatly rejoice."

II. And now to the second part of the text. Here we have something far more joyous and comfortable than the first. "WHEREIN YE GREATLY REJOICE."

And can a Christian greatly rejoice while he is in heaviness? Yes, most assuredly he can. Mariners tell us that there are some parts of the sea where there is a strong current upon the surface going one way, but that down in the depths there is a strong current running the other way. Two seas do not meet and interfere with one another—but one stream of water on the surface is running in one direction and another below in an opposite direction.

Now, the Christian is like that. On the surface there is a stream of heaviness rolling with dark waves. But down in the depths there is a strong undercurrent of great rejoicing that is always flowing there. Do you ask me what is the cause of this great rejoicing? The apostle tells us, "*Wherein ye greatly rejoice.*" What does he mean? You must refer to his own writings and then you will see.

He is writing "to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus" and so forth. The first thing that he says to them is that they are, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God"—"wherein we greatly rejoice." Ah! even when the Christian is most "in heaviness through manifold temptations," what a mercy it is that he can know that he is still the elect of God!

Any man who is assured that God has "chosen him from before the foundation of the world" may well say, "Wherein we greatly rejoice." Let me be lying upon a bed of sickness and just revel in that one thought. Before God made the heavens and the earth, and laid the pillars of the firmament in their golden sockets—He set His love upon me. Upon the breast of the great High Priest He wrote my name, and in His everlasting book it stands, never to be erased—"elect according to the foreknowledge of God."

Why, this may make a man's soul leap within him and all the heaviness that the infirmities of the flesh may lay upon him shall be but as nothing—this tremendous current of his overflowing joy shall sweep away the mill-dam of his grief. Bursting and leaping over every obstacle, it shall flood all his sorrows till they are drowned and covered up, and shall not be mentioned any more forever.

“Wherein we greatly rejoice.” Come you, Christian! you are depressed and cast down. Think for a moment—you are chosen of God and precious. Let the bell of election ring in your ears—that ancient Sabbath bell of the covenant. And let your name be heard in its notes and say, I beseech you, “Does not this make ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations”?

Again—you will see another reason. The apostle says that we are “elect through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ”—“wherein we greatly rejoice.” Is the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ girt about my loins, to be my beauty and my glorious dress. And is the blood of Jesus sprinkled upon me, to take away all my guilt and all my sin—and shall I not in this greatly rejoice?

What shall there be in all the depressions of spirits that can possibly come upon me that shall make me break my harp—even though I should for a moment hang it upon the willows? Do I not expect that yet again my songs shall mount to heaven. And even now through the thick darkness do not the sparks of my joy appear, when I remember that I have still upon me the blood of Jesus, and still about me the glorious righteousness of the Messiah?

But the great and cheering comfort of the apostle is, that we are elect unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for us. And here, brethren, is the grand comfort of the Christian. When the child of God is sorely stricken and much depressed, the sweet hope that living or dying, there is an inheritance incorruptible, reserved in heaven for him, may indeed make him greatly rejoice.

He is drawing near the gates of death and his spirit is in heaviness, for he has to leave behind all his family and all that life holds dear. Besides, his sickness brings upon him naturally a depression of spirit. But you sit by his bedside and you begin to talk to him of the

*“Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood,
Arrayed in living green.”*

You tell him of Canaan on the other side the Jordan—of the land that flows with milk and honey—of the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and of all the glories which God has prepared for them that love Him. And you see his dull leaden eye light up with seraphic brightness, he shakes off his heaviness, and he begins to sing,

*“On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye,
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.”*

This makes him greatly rejoice. And if to that you add that possibly before he has passed the gates of death his Master may appear—if you tell him that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming in the clouds of heaven, and though we have not seen Him, yet believing in Him we rejoice with unspeakable joy and full of glory, expecting the second advent—if he has grace to believe in that sublime doctrine, he will be ready to clap his hands upon his bed of weariness and cry, “Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Come quickly!”

And in drawing to a close, I may notice there is one more doctrine that will always cheer a Christian, and I think that this perhaps is the one chiefly intended here in the text. Look at the end of the fourth verse—“Reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

This perhaps will be one of the greatest cordials to a Christian in heaviness—that he is not kept by his own power, but by the power of God, and that he is not left in his own keeping, but he is kept by the Most High.

Ah! what should you and I do in the day when darkness gathers round our faith if we had to keep ourselves! I can never understand what an Arminian does, when he gets into sickness, sorrow, and affliction—from what well he draws his comfort I know not. But I know from whence I draw mine. It is this—“When flesh and heart faileth, God is the strength of my life, and my portion for ever.” “I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

But take away that doctrine of the Savior's keeping His people and where is my hope? What is there in the Gospel worth my preaching or worth your receiving? I know that He has said, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of *my* hand.”

What, Lord, but suppose they should grow faint—that they should begin to murmur in their affliction. Shall they not perish then? No, they shall never perish. But suppose the pain should grow so hot that their faith should fail—shall they not perish then? No—“They shall not perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

But suppose their sense should seem to wander and some should try to pervert them from the faith—shall they not be perverted? No—“They shall never perish.” But suppose in some hour of their extremity hell and the world and their own fears should all beset them, and they should have no power to stand—no power whatever to resist the fierce onslaughts of the enemy—shall they not perish then? No—they are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

Ah! this is the doctrine, the cheering assurance, “wherein we greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations.”

One word before I send you away. There are some of you here to whom this precious passage has not a word to say. Our heaviness, O worldling, “our heaviness is but for a season.” Your heaviness is to come. And it shall be an heaviness intolerable, because hopelessly everlasting. Our temptations, though they be manifold, are but light afflictions and are but for a moment, and they “work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

But your joys that you now have are evanescent as a bubble, and they are passing away, and they are working out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of misery. I beseech you, look at this matter. Search and see whether all be right with your spirits—whether it be well for you to venture into an eternal state as you are.

And may God give you grace, that you may feel your need of a Savior, that you may seek Christ, lay hold upon Him, and so may come into a gracious state, wherein you shall greatly rejoice, even though for a season, if needs be, you should be in heaviness through manifold temptations!

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