

THE SYMPATHY OF THE TWO WORLDS

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A SERMON
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AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.

“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents.”
Luke 15:10.

MAN’S heart is never big enough to hold either its joys or its sorrows. You never heard of a man whose heart was exactly full of sorrow, for no sooner is it full than it overflows. The first prompting of the soul is to tell its sorrow to another. The reason is that our heart is not large enough to hold our grief and we need to have another heart to receive a portion of it. It is even so with our joy, when the heart is full of joy, it always allows its joy to escape. It is like the fountain in the marketplace, whenever it is full, it runs away in streams and as soon as it ceases to overflow, you may be quite sure that it has ceased to be full. The only full heart is the overflowing heart.

You know this, beloved you have proved it to be true, for when your soul has been full of joy, you have first called together your own kindred and friends, and you have communicated to them the cause of your gladness. And when those vessels have been full even to the brim, you have been like the woman who borrowed empty vessels from her neighbors, for you have asked each of them to become partakers in your joy. And when the hearts of all your neighbors have been full, you have felt as if they were not large enough and the whole world has been called upon to join in your praise.

You bade the fathomless ocean drink in your joy. You spoke to the trees and bade them clap their hands, while the mountains and hills were invoked by you to break forth into singing. The very stars of heaven seemed to look down upon you, and you bade them sing for you, and all the world was full of music through the music that was in your heart.

And after all, what is man but the great musician of the world? The universe is a great organ with mighty pipes. Space, time, eternity are like the throats of this great organ and man, a little creature, puts his fingers on the keys and wakes the universe to thunders of harmony, stirring up the whole creation to mighty acclamations of praise. Don’t you know that man is God’s high priest in the universe? All things else are but the sacrifice. But he is the priest, carrying in his heart the fire and in his hand the wood and in his mouth the two-edged sword of dedication, with which he offers up all things to God.

But I have no doubt, beloved, the thought has sometimes struck us that our praise does not go far enough. We seem as if we dwelt in an isle cut off from the mainland. This world, like a fair planet, swims in a sea of ether un navigated by mortal ship. We have sometimes thought that surely our praise was confined to the shores of this poor narrow world, that it was impossible for us to pull the ropes which might ring the bells of heaven, that we could by no means whatever reach our hands so high as to sweep the celestial chords of angelic harps.

We have said to ourselves there is no connection between earth and heaven. A huge black wall divides us. A strait of unnavigable waters shuts us out. Our prayers cannot reach to heaven, neither can our praises affect the celestials. Let us learn from our text how mistaken we are. We are, after all, however much we seem to be shut out from heaven and from the great universe, but a province of God’s vast united empire and what is done on earth is known in heaven. What is sung on earth is sung in heaven. And there is a sense in which it is true that the tears of earth are wept again in paradise and the sorrows of mankind are felt again, even on the throne of the Most High.

My text tells us, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repents.” It seems as if it showed me a bridge by which I might cross over into eternity. It does, as it were, exhibit to

me certain magnetic wires which convey the intelligence of what is done here to spirits in another world. It teaches me that there is a real and wonderful connection between this lower world and that which is beyond the skies, where God dwells, in the land of the happy.

We shall talk about that subject a little this morning. My first head will be *the sympathy of the world above with the world below*. The second, *the judgment of the angels*—they rejoice over repenting sinners. We shall see what is their ground for doing so. The third will be *a lesson for the saints*—if the angels in heaven rejoice over repenting sinners, so should we.

I. In the first place, our text teaches us THE SYMPATHY OF THE TWO WORLDS.

Imagine not, O son of man, that you are cut off from heaven, for there is a ladder, the top of which does rest at the foot of the throne of the Almighty. The base of which is fixed in the lowest place of man's misery! Conceive not that there is a great gulf fixed between you and the *Father*, across which His mercy cannot come and over which your prayers and faith can never leap.

Oh, think not, son of man, that you dwell in a storm-girt island cut off from the continent of eternity. I beseech you, believe that there is a bridge across that chasm, a road along which feet may travel. This world is not separated, for all creation is but one body. And know you, O son of man, though you in this world do but dwell, as it were on the foot, yet from the feet even to the head, there are nerves and veins that unite the whole. The same great heart which beats in heaven beats on earth. The love of the *Eternal Father* which cheers the celestial, makes glad the terrestrial, too.

Rest assured that though the glory of the celestial is one and the glory of the terrestrial is another, yet are they but another in appearance, for, after all, they are the same. Oh listen, son of man, and you will soon learn that you are no stranger in a strange land, a homeless Joseph in the land of Egypt, shut out from his father and his children, who still remain in the happy paradise of Canaan.

No, your Father still loves you. There is a connection between you and Him. Strange that though leagues of distance lie between the finite creature and the infinite Creator, yet there are links that unite us both! When a tear is wept by you, think not your Father does not behold, for, "Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them who fear him." Your sigh is able to move the heart of JEHOVAH. Your whisper can incline His ear unto you. Your prayer can stay His hands. Your faith can move His arm.

Oh! think not that God sits on high in an eternal slumber, taking no account of you. "Shall a mother forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget you." Engraven upon the Father's hand your name remains and on His heart recorded there your person stands.

He thought of you before the worlds were made, before the channels of the sea were scooped, or the gigantic mountains lifted their heads in the white clouds, He thought of you. He thinks of you still. "I, the LORD, do keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro in every place, to show Himself strong on the behalf of all them who fear Him. You are not cut off from Him. You move in Him, and in Him you live and have your being. "He is a very present help in time of trouble."

Remember, again, O heir of immortality, that you are not only linked to the Godhead, but there is another one in heaven with whom you have a strange, yet near connection. In the center of the throne sits one who is your brother, allied to you by blood. *The Son of God*, eternal, equal with His Father, became in the fullness of time the Son of Mary, an infant of a span long. He was, yea, is, bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. Think not that you are cut off from the celestial world while He is there, for is He not your head and has He not Himself declared that you are a member of His body, of His flesh and of His bones? Oh, man, you are not separated from heaven while Jesus tells you,

*"I feel in My heart all your sighs and your groans,
For you are most near Me, My flesh and My bones,
In all your distresses, your Head feels the pain,*

They all are most needful, not one is in vain.”

Oh, poor, disconsolate mourner, Christ remembers you every hour. Your sighs are His sighs. Your groans are His groans. Your prayers are His prayers.

*“He in His measure feels afresh,
What every member bears.”*

Crucified He is when you are crucified. He dies when you die. You live in Him and He lives in you and because He lives shall you also live, you shall rise in Him and you shall sit together in the heavenly places with Him. Oh, never was a husband nearer to his wife, and never head nearer to the members, and never soul nearer to the body of this flesh than Christ is to you.

And while it is so, think not that heaven and earth are divided. They are but kindred worlds, two ships moored close to one another, and one short plank of death will enable you to step from one into the other. This ship, all black and coaly, having done the coasting trade, the dusty business of today, and being full of the blackness of sorrow, and that ship all golden with its painted pennon flying and its sails all spread, white as the down of the sea bird, fair as the angel’s wing. I tell you, man, the ship of heaven is moored side by side with the ship of earth, and rock though this ship may, and careen though she will on stormy winds and tempests, yet the invisible and golden ship of heaven sails by her side never sundered, never divided, always ready, in order that when the hour shall come, you may leap from the black, dark ship and step upon the golden deck of that thrice happy one in which you shall sail forever.

But O man of God, there are other golden links besides this which bind the present to the future and time unto eternity. And what are time and eternity, after all, to the believer, but like the Siamese twins, never to be separated? This earth is heaven below, the next world is but a heaven above. It is the same house—this is the lower room and that the upper, but the same roof covers both and the same dew falls upon each. Remember, beloved, that *the spirits of the just made perfect* are never far from you and me if we are lovers of Jesus. All those who have passed the flood still have communion with us. Do we not sing,

*“The saints on earth and all the dead,
But one communion make;
All join in Christ, the living Head,
And of His grace partake”?*

We have but one Head for the church triumphant and for the church militant,

*“One army of the living God,
To His command we bow;
Part of the host have cross’d the flood,
And part are crossing now.”*

Does not the apostle tell us that the saints above are a cloud of witnesses? After he had mentioned Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Gideon, and Barak, and Jephthah, did he not say, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight”?

Lo, we are running in the plains and the glorified ones are looking down upon us. Your mother’s eyes follow you, young man. A father’s eyes are looking down upon you, young woman. The eyes of my godly grandmother, long since glorified, I doubt not, rest on me perpetually. No doubt, in heaven they often talk of us. I think they sometimes visit this poor earth—they never go out of heaven, it is true, for heaven is everywhere to them. This world is to them but just one corner of God’s heaven, one shady bower of paradise.

The saints of the living God, are, I doubt not, very near unto us, when we think them very far away. At any rate, they still remember us, still look for us, for this is ever upon their hearts—the truth that they without us cannot be made perfect. They cannot be a perfect church till all are gathered in and therefore do they long for our appearing.

But to come to our text a little more minutely. It assures us that *the angels* have communion with us. Bright spirits, first-born sons of God, do you think of me? Oh, cherubim, great and mighty, seraphim, burning, winged with lightning, do you think of us? Gigantic is your stature. Our poet tells us that the wand of an angel might make a mast for some tall admiral and doubtless he was right when he said so. Those angels of God are creatures mighty and strong, doing His commandments, hearkening to His word, and do they take notice of us?

Let the Scripture answer, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto those who shall be heirs of salvation?” “The angel of the LORD encamps round about them who fear him.” “For he shall give his angels charge over you; to keep you in all your ways; they shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” Yes, the brightest angels are but the serving men of the saints, they are our lackeys and our footmen. They wait upon us. They are the troops of our body guard. And we might, if our eyes were opened, see what Elisha saw, horses of fire and chariots of fire round about us, so that we should joyously say, “More are they who are with us than they who are against us.”

Our text tells us that the angels of God rejoice over repenting sinners. How is that? They are always as happy as they can be, how can they be any happier? The text does not say that they are any happier, but perhaps that they show their happiness more. A man may have a Sabbath every day, as he ought to have if he is a Christian, and yet on the first day of the week he will let his Sabbatism come out plainly, for then the world shall see that he does rest.

“A merry heart has a continual feast,” but then even the merry heart has some special days on which it feasts well. To the glorified every day is a Sabbath, but of some it can be said, “and that Sabbath was an high day.” There are days when the angels sing more loudly than usual. They are always harping well God’s praise, but sometimes the gathering hosts who have been flitting far through the universe come home to their center. And round the throne of God, standing in assembled ranks, marshaled not for battle but for music, on certain set and appointed days they chant the praises of the Son of God, “Who loved us and gave himself for us.”

And do you ask me when those days occur? I tell you, the birthday of every Christian is a sonnet day in heaven. There are Christmas days in paradise, where Christ’s high mass is kept and Christ is glorified, not because He was born in a manger, but because He is born in a broken heart. There are days—good days in heaven, days of sonnet, red letter days, of overflowing adoration, and these are days when the Shepherd brings home the lost sheep upon His shoulder, when the church has swept her house and found the lost piece of money, for then are these friends and neighbors called together and they rejoice with unspeakable joy and full of glory over one sinner that repents.

I have thus, I hope, shown you that there is a greater connection between earth and heaven than any of us dreamed. And now let none of us think, when we look upward to the blue sky, that we are far from heaven. It is a very little distance from us. When the day comes we shall go post-haste there, even without horses and chariots of fire. Balaam called it a land that is very far off. We know better—it is a land that is very near. Even now,

*“By faith we join our hands
With those that went before.
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
Upon the eternal shore.”*

All hail, bright spirits! I see you now. All hail, angels! All hail, you brethren redeemed! A few more hours, or days, or months and we shall join your happy throng. Till then your joyous fellowship, your

sweet compassion shall ever be our comfort and our consolation—and having weathered all storms of life, we shall at last anchor with you within the port of everlasting peace.

II. But the angels are said to sing whenever a sinner repents. Let us see if there is any JUDGMENT IN THEIR SONG, or whether they make a mistake. Why do angels sing over penitent sinners?

In the first place, I think it is because they remember the days of creation. You know when God made this world and fixed the beams of the heavens in sockets of light, the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy. As they saw star after star flying abroad like sparks from the great anvil of Omnipotence, they began to sing and every time they saw a new creature made upon this little earth, they praised afresh.

When first they saw light, they clapped their hands and said, “Great is JEHOVAH, for He said, ‘Light be!’ and light was.” And when they saw sun and moon and stars, again they clapped their hands and they said, “He has made great lights; for his mercy endures forever. The sun to rule the day; for his mercy endures forever. The moon to rule the night; for his mercy endures forever.” And over everything He made, they chanted evermore that sweet song, “Creator, You are to be magnified, for Your mercy endures forever.”

Now, when they see a sinner returning, they see the creation over again, for repentance is a new creation. No man ever repents until God makes in him a new heart and a right spirit. I do not know that ever since the day when God made the world, with the exception of new hearts, the angels have seen God make anything else. He may, if He has so pleased, have made fresh worlds since that time. But perhaps the only instance of new creation they have ever seen since the first day is the creation of a new heart and a right spirit within the breast of a poor penitent sinner. Therefore do they sing because creation comes again.

I doubt not, too, that they sing because they behold God’s works afresh shining in excellence. When God first made the world, He said of it, “It is very good”—He could not say so now. There are many of you who God could not say that of. He would have to say the very reverse. He would have to say, “No, that is very bad, for the trail of the serpent has swept away your beauty, that moral excellence which once dwelt in manhood has passed away.”

But when the sweet influences of the Spirit bring men to repentance and faith again, God looks upon man and He says, “It is very good.” For what His Spirit makes is like Himself, good, and holy, and precious. And God smiles again over His twice-made creation and says once more, “It is very good.” Then the angels begin again and praise His name, whose works are always good and full of beauty.

But beloved, the angels sing over sinners who repent because they know what that poor sinner has escaped. You and I can never imagine all the depths of hell. Shut out from us by a black veil of darkness, we cannot tell the horrors of that dismal dungeon of lost souls. Happily, the wailings of the damned have never startled us, for a thousand tempests were but a maiden’s whisper, compared with one wail of a damned spirit.

It is not possible for us to see the tortures of those souls who eternally dwell within an anguish that knows no alleviation. These eyes would become sightless balls of darkness if they were permitted for an instant to look into that ghastly shrine of torment. Hell is horrible, for we may say of it, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the horrors which God has prepared for them who hate Him.

But the angels know better than you or I could guess. They know it not that they have felt it, but they remember that day when Satan and his angels rebelled against God. They remember the day when the third part of the stars of heaven revolted against their liege Lord. And they have not forgotten how the red right hand of JEHOVAH Jesus was wrapped in thunder. They do not forget that breach in the battlements of heaven when, down from the greatest heights to the lowest depths, Lucifer and his hosts were hurled. They have never forgotten how, with sound of trumpet, they pursued the flying foe down to the gulfs of black despair.

And as they neared that place where the great serpent is to be bound in chains, they remember how they saw Tophet, which was prepared of old, the pile whereof is fire and much wood and they recollect how, when they winged back their flight, every tongue was silent, although they might well have shouted the praise of Him who conquered Lucifer. But on them all there did sit a solemn awe of one who could smite a cherubim and cast him in hopeless bonds of everlasting despair. They knew what hell was, for they had looked within its jaws and seen their own brothers fast enclosed within them. And therefore, when they see a sinner saved, they rejoice because there is one less to be food for the never-dying worm, one more soul escaped out of the mouth of the lion.

There is yet a better reason. The angels know what the joys of heaven are and therefore they rejoice over one sinner that repents. We talk about pearly gates, and golden streets, and white robes, and harps of gold, and crowns of amaranth, and all that, but if an angel could speak to us of heaven, he would smile and say, "All these fine things are but child's talk and you are little children, and you cannot understand the greatness of eternal bliss, and therefore God has given you a child's horn book and an alphabet in which you may learn the first rough letters of what heaven is, but what it is you do not know.

"O mortal, your eyes have never yet beheld its splendors. Your ear has never yet been ravished with its melodies. Your heart has never been transported with its peerless joys." You may talk and think and guess and dream, but you can never measure the infinite heaven which God has provided for His children. And therefore it is, when the angels see a soul saved and a sinner repenting, they clap their hands, for they know that all those blessed mansions are theirs, since all those sweet places of everlasting happiness are the entail of every sinner that repents.

But I want you to read the text again, while I dwell upon another thought. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner *that repents*." Now, why do they not save their joy till that sinner dies and goes to heaven? Why do they rejoice over him when he repents? My Arminian friend, I think, ought to go to heaven to set them right upon this matter. According to his theory, it must be very wrong of them, because they rejoice prematurely.

According to the Arminian doctrine, a man may repent and yet he may be lost. He may have grace to repent and believe and yet he may fall from grace and be a castaway. Now, angels, don't be too quick. Perhaps you may have to repent of this one day, if the Arminian doctrine be true. I would advise you to save your song for greater joys. Why, angels, perhaps the men who you are singing over today, you will have to mourn over tomorrow. I am quite sure that Arminius never taught his doctrine in heaven. I do not know whether he is there, I hope he is, but he is no longer an Arminian, but if he ever taught his doctrine there, he would be put out.

The reason why angels rejoice is because they know that when a sinner repents, he is absolutely saved or else they would rejoice prematurely and would have good cause for retracting their merriment on some future occasion. But the angels know what Christ meant when He said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." And therefore they rejoice over repenting sinners, because they know they are saved.

There is yet one more fact I will mention, before I leave this point. It is said that the angels "rejoice over *one* sinner that repents." Now this evening it shall be my happy privilege to give the right hand of fellowship to no less than forty-eight sinners who have repented, and there will be great joy and rejoicing in our churches tonight, because these forty-eight have been immersed on a profession of their faith. But how loving are the angels to men, for they rejoice over *one* sinner that repents.

There she is, in that attic where the stars look between the tiles. There is a miserable bed in that room, with but one bit of covering and she lies there to die! Poor creature. Many a night she has walked the streets in the time of her merriment. But now, her joys are over, a foul disease, like a demon is devouring her heart! She is dying fast and no one cares for her soul! But there, in that chamber, she turns her face to the wall and she cries, "O You that saved Magdalene, save me. Lord I repent. Have mercy upon me, I beseech You." Did the bells ring in the street? Was the trumpet blown? Ah! no. Did men

rejoice? Was there a sound of thanksgiving in the midst of the great congregation? No. No one heard it, for she died unseen.

But stay! There was one standing at her bedside who noted well that tear—an angel who had come down from heaven to watch over this stray sheep and mark its return. And no sooner was her prayer uttered than he clapped his wings and there was seen flying up to the pearly gates a spirit like a star. The heavenly guards came crowding to the gate, crying, “What news, O son of fire?” He says, “’Tis done.” “And what is done?” they ask. “Why, she has repented.” “What! She who was once a chief of sinners? Has she turned to Christ?” “’Tis even so,” he says. And then they tell it through the streets and the bells of heaven ring marriage peals, for Magdalene was saved and she who had been the chief of sinners was turned unto the living God.

It was in another place. A poor neglected little boy in ragged clothing had run about the streets for many a day. Tutored in crime, he was paving his path to the gallows. But one morning he passed by a humble room, where some men and women were sitting together teaching poor ragged children. He stepped in there, a wild Bedouin of the streets. They talked to him, they told him about a soul and about an eternity—things he had never heard before. They spoke of Jesus and of good tidings of great joy to this poor friendless lad. He went another Sabbath. And another. His wild habits hanging about him, for he could not get rid of them.

At last it happened that his teacher said to him one day, “Jesus Christ receives sinners.” That little boy ran, but not home, for it was but a mockery to call it so—where a drunken father and a lascivious mother kept a hellish riot together. He ran and under some dry arch, or in some wild unfrequented corner, he bent his little knees and there he cried, that poor creature in his rags, “Lord save me, or I perish.” And the little Arab was on his knees, the little thief was saved! He said,

“Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly.”

And up from that old arch, from that forsaken hovel, there flew a spirit, glad to bear the news to heaven, that another heir of glory was born to God. I might picture many such scenes, but will each of you try to picture your own?

You remember the occasion when the Lord met with you. Ah! little did you think what a commotion there was in heaven. If the Queen had ordered out all her soldiers, the angels of heaven would not have stopped to notice them. If all the princes of earth had marched in pageantry through the streets, with all their robes, and jewelry, and crowns, and all their regalia, their chariots, and their horsemen—if the pomps of ancient monarchs had risen from the tomb—if all the might of Babylon and Tyre and Greece had been concentrated into one great parade, yet not an angel would have stopped in his course to smile at those poor tawdry things. But over you, the vilest of the vile, the poorest of the poor, the most obscure and unknown—over you angelic wings were hovering and concerning you it was said on earth and sung in heaven, “Hallelujah, for a child is born to God today.”

III. And now, I must conclude with this LESSON TO THE SAINTS.

I think, beloved, it will not be hard for you to learn. The angels of heaven rejoice over sinners that repent. Saints of God, will not you and I do the same? I do not think the church rejoices enough. We all grumble enough and groan enough, but very few of us rejoice enough. When we take a large number into the church, it is spoken of as a great mercy. But is the greatness of that mercy appreciated?

I will tell you who they are who can most appreciate the conversion of sinners. They are those who are just converted themselves, or those who have been great sinners themselves. Those who have been saved themselves from bondage, when they see others coming who have so lately worn the chains, are so glad that they can well take the tabret, and the harp, and the pipe, and the psaltery, and praise God that there are other prisoners who have been emancipated by grace.

But there are others who can do this better still, and they are the parents and relations of those who are saved. You have thanked God many times when you have seen a sinner saved. But Mother, did not

you thank Him most when you saw your own son converted? Oh! those holy tears. They are not tears, they are God's diamonds, the tears of a mother's joy, when her son confesses his faith in Jesus. Oh! that glad countenance of the wife, when she sees her husband, long bestial and drunken, at last made into a man and a Christian! Oh, that look of joy which a young Christian gives when he sees his father converted, who had long oppressed and persecuted him.

I was preaching this week for a young minister and being anxious to know his character, I spoke of him with apparent coolness to an estimable lady of his congregation. In a very few moments, she began to warm in his favor. She said, "You must not say anything against him, sir. If you do, it is because you do not know him." "Oh!" I said, "I knew him long before you did. He is not much, is he?" "Well," she said, "I must speak well of him, for he has been a blessing to my servants and family."

I went out into the street and saw some men and women standing about. So I said to them, "I must take your minister away." "If you do," they said, "we will follow you all over the world if you take away a man who has done so much good to our souls." After collecting the testimony of fifteen or sixteen witnesses, I said, "If the man gets such witnesses as these, let him go on. The Lord has opened his mouth and the devil will never be able to shut it." These are the witnesses we want—men who can sing with the angels because their own households are converted to God.

I hope it may be so with all of you. And if any of you are yourselves brought to Christ today, for He is willing to receive you, you will go out of this place singing and the angels will sing with you. There shall be joy in earth and joy in heaven, on earth peace and glory to God in the highest. The Lord bless you one and all, for Jesus' sake.

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