

MAN UNKNOWN TO MAN NO. 2079

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, APRIL 14, 1889,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger does not intermeddle with his joy.”
Proverbs 14:10.*

YOU lift up your eyes and you behold the stars. Surely, it is no idle imagination that these heavenly lights are distant worlds, but they are entirely separated from the inhabitants of this globe. You may peer at them through the telescope as long as you will, but you cannot enter into the feelings and pursuits of the dwellers in those worlds. You know nothing of the nearest planet, nor even of the world's own satellite. Some look up and declare that they see a man in the moon. It is the fancy of the ignorant. Others gaze at it till they discover huge volcanoes. It is the belief of the astronomer. But do what you will, you cannot enter into conversation with the moon-dwellers. You cannot sympathize with their politics, nor share their domestic experiences.

There is a great gulf fixed and we who would pass to them cannot—neither can they pass to us who would come from thence. In a great measure, such is our relation to our fellow men. Men are microcosms, or little worlds—each man has his distinct sphere, wherein he dwells apart. We are so many worlds and no one world of man exactly overlaps another. You cannot completely know your fellow man. All that you know concerning your fellows—and there is much which we can know—yet leaves a great deal as unknown to us as the fixed stars.

There is a bitterness which each man feels alone, and a sweetness with which none can intermeddle. Every man is, in a measure, self-contained. His being is detached from other beings in certain matters. There are bonds which unite us to our fellow man, and there is a solidarity about the race. But for all that, each man is a distinct atom and item, and there are portions of his nature in which he does not touch his fellow man at all, but displays his own individuality and personality. Alone are we born, one by one. Alone do we die, one by one. Though we shall stand with the great multitude before the throne of God, yet that judgment will be of individuals and the sentence will be passed upon us one by one.

Heaven will be an enjoyment which the believer himself possesses, or hell a misery which the impenitent himself endures. No one can merge himself in another man, nor so blend himself with the mass as to cease to be an individual existence. For weal or woe we are each one launched on the ocean of life in his own vessel. “Every man shall bear his own burden.”

It is not surprising that we must be, in a measure, unknown to others since we do not even fully know ourselves. Mysteries exist within our own bosoms and abysses which we have never yet explored. Their own personal humanity is to many an utterly unknown land, and none know themselves so fully as they think. “Man, know thyself,” is a precept much more profound than it appears. If we do not know ourselves, how shall we know our fellows?

Besides, there are points of individuality in each man which render him distinct from every other. No two women, although they are born of the same parents, have been trained in the same home, and have lived together in close companionship, will be found to be precisely alike. No man could find his exact counterpart among all the millions of the race. In some point or points each man is inscrutable by his companions. Either from one peculiar element which is in him or from the peculiar proportions in which qualities are blended in his constitution, each man is a being after his own kind. How can we know beings so strangely different from each other?

Remember also, that men in their highest and deepest conditions are remarkably secretive. The extreme heights and depths lie in darkness. A man may openly show himself in his ordinary life and “wear his heart upon his sleeve for crows to peck at.” But when he reaches a especial grief, the deep waters are still. The keenest griefs cut a narrow but deep channel, and as they wear into the inmost soul they flow without noise. The grief that babbles is a shallow brook. Silent sorrow is profound. Great misery is dumb with silence—it opens not its mouth. It is precisely the same in the higher ranges of joy. When once we soar into the heavenlies we are alone.

As I rode along in the South of France, the driver, turning to me, exclaimed, “See, there are eagles!” “No,” I said, “not eagles, for eagles fly alone.” Seven or eight large birds together might be hawks, or falcons, or kites but not true eagles. A royal eagle soars alone into the blue—his mate may bear him company but he has no crew of comrades around him. The child of God, the true eagle of the skies, when he rises into the more divine ranges of his spiritual life is, and must be, alone. Like their Lord, all saints will have a winepress, which they must tread alone, even as they will have a Pisgah to which they will climb unattended. I marvel not that men hide those lives which God has hidden in Christ and that their fellows see not the part of them which lives upon the invisible.

What is the practical use of these facts? We learn, I think first, that *we may not judge our brethren as though we understood them and were competent to give a verdict upon them*. Do not sit down, like Job’s friends, and condemn the innocent. They, seeing Job covered with sores, and hearing him speak in bitterness, and knowing that God had taken away from him his property and his children, rushed to the conclusion that he was a hypocrite, abhorred of God, and that his heart was proudly rebellious against JEHOVAH.

Never a more cruel judgment than that of men who are but half-informed upon the matter and see before them a great man in adversity, a good man in dire distress. Had it not been for Job’s prayers, they would not have escaped the anger of God, and yet they had dared to condemn the patient saint. Why do you sit down and write bitter things against your fellow man? Be not sure that you can accurately judge any of his actions. Seen upon its surface and by itself, his act may appear blameworthy, but the motive behind it, if known to you, might soften your censure or even win your praise.

Before the great Searcher of all hearts, things are not what they seem. As our law condemns no man before it hears him, so let us not hasten to give sentence, since we have not yet heard and in all probability never shall hear, all the ins and outs of his behavior. Well said our Lord, “Judge not, that you be not judged.”

Especially judge not the sons and daughters of sorrow. Allow no ungenerous suspicions of the afflicted, the poor, and the despondent. Do not hastily say they ought to be more brave and exhibit a greater faith. Ask not why are they so nervous and so absurdly fearful? Nay, in this you speak as one of the foolish women speaks. I beseech you, remember that you understand not your fellow man.

The next practical lesson is *if we desire to show sympathy to our brethren, let us not dream that this is an easy task*. It is not a simple matter to square two unknown quantities—yourself and your friend. It would take me long to learn to correspond with the inhabitants of the planet Mars—in all probability I should never achieve the task. I doubt not that there are many people so peculiar, both in their sorrows and in their joys, that I shall no more be able to commune with them in real sympathy than with the people of the aforesaid planet. Study the art of sympathy. It is easy enough for a captain of a steam vessel to lay his ship alongside the quay, but if I had the doing of it I would probably break down the wall of the dock and injure the vessel too.

It is not easy to lay your soul side by side with another man’s soul. It is as difficult to do as Elijah did, when he laid himself upon the dead child, putting his mouth upon the child’s mouth, and his hands upon the child’s hands, and his feet upon the child’s feet, and so, by God’s power, breathing life into the cold form. It is not easy to be effectively sympathetic—some cannot manifest tenderness even when they have a mind to do so.

I once knew a minister who had never suffered pain or illness in his life. I was unwell in his house and he most kindly tried to sympathize with me. He did it almost as wonderfully as an elephant picks up a pin. It was a marvel that he could attempt a thing so altogether out of his line.

Many of the trials which are experienced by Christians are sent as an education in the art of sympathy. Be thankful for that which enables you to be a minister of consolation to your fellow men, but feel that in this matter you are a learner yet, and will frequently meet with sorrows and with joys into which you cannot enter.

One other lesson, and that is the great one we want, all of us to learn. *We all need sympathy*, and as it is impossible that we should ever perfectly obtain it from our fellow men, *there remains but One who can give it to us*. There is One who can enter the closet where the skeleton is locked up. One who is in touch with our unmentionable grief. He weighs and measures that which is too heavy for us to bear. That blessed One! Oh, that we may each one have Him for our friend! Without Him we shall lack the great necessity of a happy life! A personal Savior is absolutely needful to each of us to meet our individual personality. Jesus alone can intermeddle with our joy and make it still more gladsome. He alone can understand our grief and remove its wormwood.

We must each one have Christ for himself. What is another man's Christ to me? What is the Christ who dies for all the world to anyone in that world until he takes a personal hold on Him? "He loved me and gave himself for me"—that is the point of rest. What joy to touch the nail print with your finger and to cry, "My Lord and my God"! This is the heart of the matter. The general doctrine of the Gospel has great power in it, but the sweetness lies in the particular application of it. What though the city be full of bread? If there is none upon your table, you will starve! What though the coffers of the bank should overflow with gold? Yet if you have nothing wherewith to purchase the necessaries of life, you will perish in your poverty!

We must have not a national religion but a personal religion. Not a share in the ecclesiastical privileges of a church, but the privilege—each one for himself—of becoming a child of God. We must personally open the door to our Lord, and He must enter into us and fill our entire nature with His divine indwelling. He must be formed in each one of us the hope of glory, or glory will never be ours. Be not deceived into joint-stock godliness—each man must come into individual relation with the living God in Christ Jesus.

Having already handled its general principle, we will now come close to our text in its two parts—*the heart knows a bitterness peculiar to itself*. And secondly, *the heart also knows a sweetness peculiar to itself*.

I. THE HEART KNOWS ITS OWN BITTERNESS.

This is true in a natural, common, and moral sense. I shall, as a rule, confine myself to the more spiritual application.

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness." *Concerning any man this is true*. The shoe pinches on every foot and that foot only knows where the pinch is felt by itself. Every shoulder bears its load and that load is its own. Envy no man. He who seems most happy may be more fit for pity than for envy. His heart knows its own bitterness. Do not intrude into the hidden sorrows of any—it is enough for one heart to know its bitterness. May be you will increase misery if you meddle with it. Leave that alone which you can not relieve. If you can, help, lend your attentive ear, but if you cannot help, keep your finger from the wound.

Yet in your very quietness feel inwardly a sense of brotherhood, for since this man's heart has its own bitterness and you have yours, it proves that you and he are of the same fallen family, and both citizens of that world which brings forth thorns and thistles to all the fallen race. You are evidently sprung of the same Adam, since in the sweat of your face you must eat bread. You cannot bear another man's burden so as to take the weight from his shoulder. If a man had to carry a hundredweight of material upon his back, you could take fifty-six pounds of it for him and he would have just so much the less to carry.

But it is not so with mental and spiritual loads. You may cheer the heart of the burden-bearer, but his trouble is still the same—there is no dividing his grief. When a heart is full of bitterness, you may sip the wormwood, but the cup will still be nauseous to him that drinks it. We cannot diminish the pain of another's wound even though we should be wounded ourselves. Rest certain that everywhere throughout this world every foot has its blister, every shoulder has its sore, every lot has its crook, every rose has its thorn.

Most solemnly this is true *concerning the godless man*. Of the irreligious man, the unbelieving man, it is surely true that, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." In the verse which precedes the text we read, "Fools make a mock at sin." Why do they so? It is to hide the uneasiness within their bosoms. Why does a man blaspheme? Why does he sneer at the truth? Why does he say evil things against the Christ of God? Why does he persecute godly people? Simply because these good things are a protest against his evil condition. He is disturbed by them and is vexed by an uneasy feeling within his heart. The boy going through the churchyard at night whistles to keep his courage up, and many of the braggart speeches of infidels are merely an attempt to conceal the unrest of heart which they would not like to confess.

They are not happy—they cannot be happy. Can a creature be happy at war with its Creator? Can the breaker of the law be happy when justice pursues his every step? They are ill at ease and we may truly say of each one of them, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." Be not afraid to approach them with the Gospel—they are more ready to receive it than we imagine. When they roar most loudly there is little of the lion about them except the skin. Fear them not. They need the Gospel even more than other people and their attempt to bully their own consciences proves that they are somewhat aware of their want. Approach them without fear and press them home with the Word of the Lord. For this is true of them, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness."

Next—how true this is *concerning an awakened man*! When conscience at last starts up from its dream, when the Holy Spirit begins to convict the man of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment—ah! then, beloved, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." I could not have told you, if you had bribed me to disclose the secret, the inward grief I felt when day and night God's hand was heavy upon me on account of sin. Before I found a Savior, the agony of my mind was at times indescribable, for I felt the pressure of the wrath of God justly incurred by my iniquity. That verse which precedes my text, which we read as, "Fools make a mock at sin," may be interpreted, "Fools mock at the sin offering." Or even "The sin offering is a mock to fools."

Not only does the fool mock at the sin offering but the sin offering becomes a vain thing to the fool. Religion refuses to yield comfort to godless men. When under deep conviction of sin I have known a sinner to seek the Lord with hunger of spirit, and for a while he has been left in his hunger. He has turned to Jesus for comfort and for a season he has thought that even Jesus repelled him. It is an awful time with the heart when it is obliged to confess, "I remembered God and was troubled."

Have you ever looked to the cross and even there beheld darkness and not light? Have you ever heard a voice saying, "You have done despite to the precious blood and it avails you no more"? That voice is a LYING voice—but all the same—when it pierces the ear of conscience it brings on an indescribable agony and then with emphasis, "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." Have any of you to whom I now speak at last come to your senses? And do you wish to escape from the wrath of God but cannot? Do you feel like a poor worm upon the ground, surrounded by a ring of fire which you cannot overleap? I am grieved for you, my brother, but yet I am thankful that by such self-despair men are brought at last to trust in Jesus, cut off from sin by a terrible discovery of its evil, cut off from self by utter despair, and driven to cast themselves on the merit of the Savior. Fly to Jesus and you shall be saved. But till you do, your heart will be filled with a bitterness beyond expression.

Our text is certainly true *concerning the backslider*—"The heart knoweth its own bitterness." The Proverbs appear at first sight to be thrown together without connection, but it is not so—when you come to close reading you will discover that they are threaded pearls and that they are in proper position with

regard to each other. In the fourteenth verse we read, “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.” So, whenever a backslider goes away from God and plunges into sin, you may not dare to think that he is happy. In his case, “The heart knoweth its own bitterness.”

One of the most intense bitteresses that is ever experienced out of hell is that of one who is awakened to see his heinous criminality after having known the truth and enjoyed meetings for prayer, and having been accustomed to speak about his own conversion, and to labor for the salvation of others, having known rapt fellowship with God, and having stood to the front in holy effort, after all, he has turned aside to filthiness and dishonored the sacred name by which he was called. To dive from communion with God into gross sin! Ah, it were better for him that he had never been born! Even in the present anguish of his heart he will often feel himself set up as a target for the arrows of the Almighty till they seem to drink his blood.

When the gracious Lord grants him repentance and he comes back, as I am persuaded he will, he will return with weeping and with supplication, and eat again of the paschal lamb with abundance of bitter herbs. Alas! even when he is restored and grace has cleansed the stain, his old wounds will be sadly apt to bleed afresh. As men that break a bone in their youth will find strange pains in bad weather visiting the limb, so do old men feel the sins of their youth in their bones. Some go softly all their days, because of one grievous fall. Many a sigh and many a tear will start unawares because of former transgressions. Even the restored and pardoned heart knows its own bitterness.

Concerning *the tried believer*, this is very true. The afflicted is one whose heart knows its own bitterness. Brethren, many of the excellent of the earth are constitutionally sorrowful. Certain of our friends are always happy, not so much as the result of grace as the effect of nature. Some can bear a very much larger amount of pain than others without being depressed in spirit—this is a great boon. Many plants flourish best in the sunshine, but others love the shade. I have seen a fern which grows best in drip and gloom. God has made each one for its place.

Some of the most beautiful flowers in the garden of the Lord grow under the shade of the tree of life. Bid all those who are timorous and sad to lift up their hearts and rejoice in God—but oh, do not condemn them while you encourage them! Cheer them, but do not censure them. The Lord knows that there may, in each case, be something about the body, something about the mind, or something about the condition which makes it far less evil in these persons to be desponding than it might be in our cases—“The heart knoweth its own bitterness.”

Possibly there may be present among us servants of God who are wading through rivers of trouble. We do not know, dear friends, in the heyday of our joy how closely we may be sitting to “a woman of a sorrowful spirit,” or “a man that has seen affliction.” We little know the burdens which are bowing our neighbors’ backs. Patience gives them smiling faces, but pain wrings their hearts. Great losses and great crosses fall to the lot of great saints. Sickness is often a means of grace—those who have much grace may be called to endure much disease.

There is a bitterness which some of you can scarcely understand—it is the loss of beloved children—especially the loss of an only child. Call to mind that word of Holy Scripture—“They shall be in bitterness, as one that is in bitterness for his only son.” Evidently this is singled out as the keenest trial. The widow of Nain was feeling this grief and this led our divine Master to bid the bearers stand still while He made the dead young man sit upright on the bier, and then delivered him to his mother. Bereavement of our loved ones is a heavy trial.

I must add here that your spiritual children can also make you feel a bitterness of the most intense order. This sorrow I know better than most men. Ah me! I bow in the dust when I think of those over whom I watched carefully and lovingly, who have turned against the cause I love as my own life. I thought that they would always preach to the glory of our Lord, but they have denied the faith, or sided with those who pervert the Gospel of Christ.

There may be sharper troubles, but I deeply pity those who have to endure them. In proportion as we have loved, we mourn over Judas when he lifts up his heel against us, and Demas, who quits us for the present evil world. Cutting to the very marrow of the bone is the cruel spirit which, in its infatuation with evil, forgets not only the ties of gratitude, but even of common decency. Truly, days have passed over me in which the plowmen made deep their furrows, but I forbear—"The heart knoweth its own bitterness."

You see, then, that in the whole range of human society each heart knows its own bitterness. And I want to say this to you—*the singularity of sorrow is a dream of the sufferer*. You sit alone and keep silent and you say in your heart, "I am the man that has seen affliction." But a host of others have seen affliction as well as yourself. Come down from your elevation of especial woe. Indulge no longer the egotism of despair. You are but one pilgrim along the well trod Via Dolorosa. The stairway of grief is never without its passengers and at their head is He whose name is, "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Next, let me say, *know your sorrow well*. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." It is always well when it does know it. If you can write down your grief in black and white, and describe it to yourself, the half of it will evaporate. A large proportion of our despondency is mythical—it is a kind of smoke or mist, which will disappear as the light falls on it. "Why are you cast down, O my soul? Why are you disquieted in me?" If you are wise, you will press home those two "whys," till you say to yourself, "There is no reason for being disquieted: hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him!"

Above all, remember that *the cure for bitterness of heart is to take it to your Lord at once*. Remember this word—"In all their affliction he was afflicted." No drop of gall was too bitter for His mouth—He tasted death itself. There is no corner in your heart so dark but Christ has been in as dark a room as that. All the thorns that pierce your feet once pierced His head. Go to Him with the full vessel of your woe. "You people, pour out your hearts before im: God is a refuge for us." Then shall you sing for joy of heart.

Enough, perhaps too much, upon that part of the text.

II. I wish I had an hour in which to speak upon the second part of our subject. THE HEART KNOWS A SWEETNESS WHICH IS ALL ITS OWN. I will go into one or two of the forms of this sweetness.

You have tasted, many of you, *the joy of pardoned sin*. Do you remember when you were, for the first time, sure that God, for Christ's sake, had forgiven you? Could you tell anybody the joy you then felt? If you had tried to explain it, you would have been compelled to use your legs to dance with, your hands to clap with, your eyes for tears of joy, and your countenance for beams of delight, as well as your tongue for speech. You would have had to speak by signs and gestures, as well as by words. In proportion as you were burdened before, you felt the bliss of rest. In proportion as the iron had entered into your soul before, the joy came leaping into your heart.

You felt as if you wanted every pore of your skin to become a mouth for song to praise the redeeming Christ. Truly a stranger intermeddles not with such joy. Only the pardoned know the joy of pardon. I dare say when you were first saved, others said that you were off your head. In the family it was suspected that poor John was not himself at all, he was so different from what he used to be. Oh yes, the joy of pardoned sin is one with which a stranger cannot intermeddle.

Some time after your pardon you knew *the bliss of vanquished evil*. To be forgiven was not enough. You longed to be free from the dominion of sin. I do not know what your peculiar sin may have been, but after a struggle, you overcame it, and you felt that the very desire for that sin was dead—you loathed it now as much as you loved it before. What a joy that was to you! It was like the triumph of Israel when they had come out of Egypt, and Egypt itself had been overthrown at the Red Sea. The depths had covered them, there was not one of them left. The mighty waters swept away Pharaoh and his captains.

Do you recollect when the habit of drunkenness went down into the sea? Do you remember when another vile propensity sank as lead in the mighty waters? Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the shore.

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel, saying, "Sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously." No Arabian in the wilderness could have entered into the joy of Miriam that day. No Edomite in the rock city could have joined in the ecstasy of the tribes who had newly come up dry-shod from the depths of the sea. Joy over a conquered evil is a joy worth worlds, and no stranger can deprive us of it.

Beloved, since then you have known *the joy of perfect reconciliation with God*. When the prodigal laid his head in his father's bosom and his father's kiss was warm on his cheek, he could not have told how happy he felt. He was as a child which nestles down in its mother's bosom. Or as a lamb which has been lost amidst the brake, and has been found by the shepherd and carried home. What a joy to be "reconciled to God by the death of his Son"! I was once His enemy and now I am His friend. He loves me. With an everlasting love He loves me. I will not attempt to describe the joy this confidence creates, because I should break down in the endeavor. The only way for anybody to understand the bliss of reconciliation is to be reconciled himself.

I have told you, I think, the story of the boy at the mission house to whom the missionary gave a piece of white sugar. He had never seen it before and when he reached home, he told his father about this sweet stuff. His father said, "Is it like so-and-so?" The boy could not answer his father's questions and so he ran down the street to the teacher, and said, "Teacher, please give me a lump of the white stuff for my father. He wants to know how sweet it is and I cannot tell him. He must eat it for himself." Reconciliation to God has a sweetness in it which he only knows who enjoys it.

One of the most intense joys I have ever known is *the joy of accepted service*. The best picture I can show you of what that joy must be is Abraham. You have thought of Abraham going up to Mount Moriah with his son, Isaac, bearing the fire, and the knife, and the wood. What a heavy heart the patriarch carried up that hill! You have sympathized with him. Will you try to realize his feeling when he comes down from the mount? Isaac is alive, God has revealed Himself, Abraham is accepted. The man of God has been proved and he has not been found wanting. What joy he feels to think that he has not withheld his son, his only son, from God! He has fulfilled to the utmost the divine command, painful as it was. There is no self-righteousness about the old man, but what an intense satisfaction in feeling God has blessed him now with a sevenfold blessing, because when brought to the test, he did not withhold his only son!

Now, if you have served God and you have felt the witness of the Spirit within you—that God has accepted you—your joy is such as nobody can damp or diminish. You will not say much about it, for other people would say, "He is proud of what he has done." But for all that, you know what you know, and are not to be beaten out of the rest which comes of that knowledge.

Another great joy is that of *answered prayer*. When the Lord has heard our petitions and given us the desire of our hearts, what joy fills our souls! Perhaps it is a personal prayer, like that of Hannah. She sat in the sanctuary, a woman of a sorrowful spirit and the Lord granted her desire—and in due time she came thither a glad mother. Samuel was the reward of the travail of her prayer as well as the travail of her flesh. "For this child I prayed," said she. With what eyes she looked at him! There is never such a child as that which comes by the way of prayer. She added, "Therefore he shall be the LORD's as long as he liveth." This is a joy which a stranger cannot touch at all.

It must also have been a stern joy which filled Elijah when he stood at the altar after the priests of Baal and their clatter had all failed. When he stood up and said, "Let it be known, O LORD, that I have done all these things at your word." When the live lightning leaped from heaven and the sacrifice went up in sheets of flame, then I do not wonder that Elijah girded up his loins and ran, old man as he was, before the chariot of Ahab. For God had heard him and he was great that day. A wonderful exhilaration lifted him out of himself and he could do anything in the joy of his heart, because of his answered prayer. A stranger to prayer cannot know the joy of its success. He who knows what it is to wrestle, will understand what it is to prevail. None can praise God like the man who has prevailed in prayer.

Further, dear brethren, there is a very extraordinary joy about *usefulness*. This is a joy which, thank God, I do know, but unless you know it, I cannot communicate its sweetness to you. It was but a poor child, or a humble servant girl, or a working man in his fustian jacket. But as he took my hand and looked into my face, he said, "God Almighty bless you! You brought me to the Savior."

I get registered letters containing money for the Lord's work, but the letters which are most precious are those which tell of conversions from great sin to the Lord Jesus through the printed sermons. These are my golden wages. If I say much about this, someone will charge me with blowing my own trumpet, but truly this sacred bliss is one which the successful worker has all to himself and a stranger intermeddles not therewith.

You Sunday school teachers and other workers know what I mean. Pray that you may have more of it! This makes us eat bread in secret—meat which the world knows not of. Blessed be the name of the Lord who gives us this choice delight! As a shepherd rejoices when he brings back the sheep that was lost, so does the winner of souls rejoice with a joy that he cannot communicate to others when he is the means of saving a soul from death and covering a multitude of sins.

There is a joy in the heart, with which no stranger intermeddles, of another kind, namely, *peace in the time of trouble*. A painful operation is needful and the patient hears the sad news without a murmur. I remember the picture of "the sleep of Argyle," who is to be executed in the morning, and he is found fast wrapt in sweet slumber when the jailer enters the cell.

Remember the martyr who had to be burned early in the morning, but needed to be shaken to awake him? Fancy being shaken in the morning with, "Get up and be burned"! How blessed to leave all with the Lord and bear His will with gladsome readiness! To be calm in the presence of pain, bereavement, slander, ridicule! This is delightful. The Lord breathes into His people His own peace. Many saints have their highest joy in their deepest trial—the Son of God is most with them in the burning fiery furnace.

They are not disturbed in prospect of the worst of evils—their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. God gives them a divine serenity, so that they can say, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation." The worldling cannot understand this! The saint is neither careless nor callous. He has both sense and sensitiveness, and yet he lives apart from burdensome care and throws aside the fret which otherwise would eat into his heart.

The deeper the waters, the higher our ark mounts towards heaven. The darker the night, the more we prize our lamp. We have learned to sing in the dark with the thorn at our breast. This peace is a blessing with which no stranger intermeddles—this world cannot give it and the world to come will not remove it. Nothing can disturb, much less destroy, the peace which Jesus gave us as His last legacy. It passes all understanding.

One other joy I must not overlook—it is the highest of all, and that is *the joy of communion with God*. About this I hardly dare to speak. If you have ever read Rutherford's Letters, I will very much judge you by how you judge them. If you know nothing at all about communion with God you will say, "The man is fanatical, carried away with rhapsodies. He almost utters blasphemy at times in his daring language." But if you have trod the crests of the mountains of fellowship, and have bathed your forehead in the eternal sunlight—you will know that he does not exaggerate, but that he even falls short of the indescribable bliss of fellowship with God!

Yes, we even now behold the Invisible and enjoy the Infinite. We pass the boundary which separates us from Immanuel's land and enter into the ivory palaces wherein our Lord does make us glad. When the gales blow from the right quarter, they waft us odors from the beds of spices in the heavenly land and then our abode is, indeed, the hill Beulah. Do you know what this means? If you do not, I could not tell you, for I should seem as one that talks in a dream. Yet, whether you know it or not, some of us find heaven begun below. If you have ever tasted fellowship with God, then there is a joy, as you know, with which no stranger intermeddles.

Beloved, if it be so, be much in the enjoyment of these delights! There is a secret parlor in the house of manhood, into which none can go but yourself and your Lord. Be sure that you enter there! Lock yourself in. I wish I might do so and never come out again. Why should you always be moping down in the cellar? If you have a good house, why do you grope in the basement among the coals and the rats? If there is a room in the house that has a fine view, make it your sitting room. I remember at Newcastle a person said, when letting a house, “You can from the upper window see Durham Cathedral on a Sunday.” “Why on a Sunday? Cannot you see it on a Monday?” “No, because then the smoke of the furnaces darkens the air.”

There is a room in my heart from which I can see heaven at choice Sabbath times, when I can get alone with my God and forget the cares both of the church and of the world. A glimpse of heaven is a rare joy. Why should we not have it often? Come out of the cellar! Come upstairs! Come to the highest place upon the housetop and look toward the New Jerusalem.

*“Why should the children of a king
Go mourning all their days?”*

May the Comforter come and cheer us this morning with that joy which a stranger cannot know!

If you have never known these joys, I pray you seek them for yourself—each man, each woman of you. Remember, you must come to God alone, by the exercise of personal faith and personal repentance. For neither in your sorrow, nor in your joy, can another man exactly fit with you. Therefore, come alone to the Lord Jesus and come at once. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 14

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—797, 786, 775

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.