

“REJOICE EVERMORE” 1 Thess. 5:17

(Discourse by F. H. Robison at Columbus, June 29, 1914 Convention Report, page 108.)

Joy is the most vivid sensation of the soul; the habitual temper and the inalienable right of the heart in harmony with God. It is various in its moods; *cheerful* under stress or anguish; *pleased* by lesser and more ordinary favors; I at relief from want and pain; and *joyful* at the gratifying things of greatest moment. The gladness of the angelic hosts was voiced in song when they “shouted aloud for joy.” (Job 38:7) The Christian message opens with the declaration of “Good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10), while part of man’s blessing for the time to come is in that joy which “cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5), and finally, they “shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.” Isa. 35:10.

But now such blessing is wanting. Power to rejoice, like all other powers, has suffered loss since sin has come and disturbed the delicate magnetic pole of human feelings, causing them to be untrue.

But while the world is not now in gladdening circumstances, the Church of the called out ones may have such blessing. Concerning our Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church, we read in Psalms 45:7 that He was anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows, and that a part of the office to which He was anointed was “to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa. 61:3).

The ideal Christian is not an embodiment of unimpassioned propriety. His life is rich in varied emotions, and is marked by trials severe and joys sublime. Grief and gladness alternate in his experiences like lights and shadows upon a landscape. Though sorrowful, he is always rejoicing. Seeing by prophetic vision the sufferings which the anointed Christian would endure throughout this Gospel Age, and knowing the discouraging influences which would be brought to bear against him by the world, the flesh and the devil, the apostle seeks to counteract these influences by words of cheer. Hence our text, an admonition.

On examining the matter, we find that there are several realms in which our joy as Christians may be exercised. These are all different from such delights as the worldly may know. Their pleasure arises chiefly from things which they are able to accomplish, oftentimes to the disadvantage of others. Our joy arises principally from things which God himself has done on our behalf, and are traceable to our relations with Him.

"Rejoice in the Lord"

First comes the exhortation to “rejoice in the Lord” (Phil. 4:4). This statement must be carefully read, or we will be making something out of it which is not there. The statement is not that we rejoice in our environment or rejoice in our feelings at all times, but it is a joy which finds its fountain head in the Lord Himself. Since we have come to know the Lord Jehovah, He inspires us with gladness because of the beauty of His character, and of the harmony with which all of those cardinal principles work together. We see how His love is so great as to prompt His wisdom to devise a scheme whereby His justice can remain inviolate and His power at the same time perform the liberation of those who were justly condemned.

“We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:11). God’s character of love is shown for the world most vividly, in the person and in the doings of His beloved Son, and the joy which is inspired by Him was mentioned by the apostle particularly (1 Pet. 1:8), “whom having not seen, we love, in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” The salvation that God provides us becomes another source of gladness. As the Psalmist says, “My soul shall be joyful in the Lord; it shall rejoice in His salvation.” Psa. 35:9.

God has so arranged it that joy in Him is now only for the humble of heart. The world in general know Him not for the god of this world has blinded their minds. “My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad” (Psa. 34:2). As we realize our former condemned state and the fact that forgiveness has been vouchsafed through Jesus Christ, such feeling of pardon brings gladness, and gladness breaks forth in song (Psa. 63:5). “My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips.” This joy which we have in the Lord is not dependent upon outward circumstances or environment; hence, no change in such surroundings could in any wise alter that joy. Our rapture is inspired by the fact that God is good instead of evil, and since with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, there is no possibility of losing that joy as long as we are in relationship with Him. As it was prophetically spoken of our Lord Jesus, “I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth. My flesh, also, shall rest in hopes” (Psa. 16:9). That our rejoicing in the Lord is inspired by the very nature of His being, and not merely by His beneficences, is shown by the prophecy which expresses implicit trust in Him. “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; 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.” Hab. 3:17, 18.

“Every human tie may perish,
Friend to friend unfaithful prove,
Mothers cease their own to cherish,
Heaven and earth at last remove;

But no changes can attend Jehovah's love."

Rejoice in the Truth

Our joy is still further inspired by God's message, and by its gladness. The one who is inspired with love "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6). The truth gives him appreciation, a kind of pleasure which cannot be duplicated any place in the world. "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." Psa. 89:15.

In a parable our Lord showed the zeal and delight with which the called and chosen class accept the truth and its requirements. A certain man for *joy* went and sold all that he had in order to obtain the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:44). Again the Master tells us that one object of instructing the disciples was that they might have thus a more reasonable and intelligent basis for joy. "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Once again, our Master said: "Your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:20-22). He was speaking of the happiness which they would experience when they would learn that He had arisen from the dead. No man has been able to remove this knowledge from the true believer, and thus to rob him of his joy; for if Christ be not raised, our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins, and we are of all men the most miserable.

Our pleasure in the truth leads us to be happified at a knowledge of its publication. As the apostle expressed it in Phil. 1:18, "We rejoice that Christ is preached." We are glad because we know how good God is, and that His message, if received, will make others happy. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Rejoice in Providence

The third mainspring of our joy we find in the Divine Providence on our behalf. We are made glad at God's dealings with us because they show the Divine interest in our welfare, and we are made glad again at God's dealings with others. The Psalmist said, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad" (Psa. 126:3). God defends us by His Providences from vital harm to the new man, and though the outward man is made to perish, the inward is renewed and refreshed by these same experiences. "Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice; let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them." The captive daughters of Zion were requested by their wardens to sing some of their noble songs, but they replied, "How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?" But when they had been delivered from Babylon and returned to the ancient landmarks so prominently identified with God's Providences for them, we read that "Many wept, many shouted aloud for joy" (Ezra 3:2). How much more joy should be in the hearts of those who have been delivered from a still more enthralling bondage of

Babylon the great, and have been led to see and to trust in the promises once delivered to the saints.

“When all thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I’m lost
In wonder, love and praise.”

The disciples during our Lord’s ministry were glad that even the demons were subject to their power, and were obliged to obey their behests to cease troubling certain poor afflicted humans. He told them, however, they would have still greater cause for joy than that. “But rather rejoice that your names have been written in Heaven” (Luke 10:20). To be so honored as to have the prospect of joint heirship with Christ and participation in all the glories which attach to an exaltation like that which our Lord Jesus has undergone, ought to fill us with continuous rejoicing. Again the Apostle James (Jas. 1:9) says, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.” Exalted not in his own estimation, nor necessarily in the view of others, but exalted in fact—lifted from the miry clay and placed with his feet upon the solid rock, Christ Jesus. No more than this has been done for the wealthy brother or for him whose worldly advantages have been greater.

Lastly, we have cause, under Divine Providence, for rejoicing in the joy of others. One of the essential things of the Christian’s life is true sympathy. “Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” Rom. 12:15.

Rejoice in Virtue

Another field where joy springs up, though small, must not be overlooked. Someone has said that “Virtue is its own reward.” One of the rewards of virtue, even at the present time, is joy. “To the counselors of peace is joy” (Prov. 12:20). Those whose influence makes for peace have a satisfying consciousness of knowing that they are thus standing for Him who is the Prince of Peace, and whether they succeed or not, the reward of such virtuous influence is theirs. They are happy to know that they have done their best and have not added to the strife. Again, “It is a joy to the just to do judgment” (Prov. 21:15). Our judging opportunities now are limited principally to ourselves. But even here we take pleasure in copying our lives and sentiments with the standard set forth in God’s Word, and though the needed correction is not joyous to the flesh, but grievous, the new man takes a genuine delight in correcting every fault over which he can gain the mastery. If he allows personal pride to hinder him the work of self judgment, he will be robbing himself of that pure enjoyment at knowing himself engaged in a righteous task. It requires meekness to delight in finding one’s own faults, that they may be corrected, and the fruits of the holy Spirit substituted therefor. Thus, “The meek shall increase their joy in the Lord.” Isa. 29:19.

The more of the holy Spirit we have, the greater will be our rejoicing for we “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:7). Joy comes second in a list of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22) The apostle had a keen delight in the consciousness that his personal influence had been employed in the most sanctifying of all labors, the spreading of God’s gracious message. “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward” (2 Cor. 1:12).

Rejoice in Tribulation

Strange as it may seem, the New Testament Scriptures closely identify the tribulations of the church with joy. That there is a close connection between these seemingly paradoxical points is shown by the Master in John 16:19-24. He knew that they were about to be engulfed by the greatest tribulation of their lives. He was to be taken from them and made to endure such ignominy and shame as to cast reproach upon them for years to come. He told them, however, that their sorrow should be turned to joy like a woman who is delivered of her child. We could hardly say that in the abstract suffering is a necessary prerequisite to joy, else were the holy angels precluded from that blessing, but we can say that for the church in embryo a degree of pain seems necessary to call their attention to the possibilities of real joy. This is everywhere the thought held forth by the New Testament Scriptures. The Apostle James (James 1:2) tells us: “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,” knowing that the trying influence thus brought to bear against your faith will call into service and even call into existence, qualities hitherto unknown. The Apostle Peter also says (1 Pet. 4:12, 13), “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” Here again, is emphasized the intimacy existing for the Lord’s people between tribulation of a certain class, and is one of their sources of joy. Analyzing it we find it to be about as follows: The world is dominated by the spirit of selfishness and “lieth in the wicked one.” His spirit inspires or directs in a greater or less degree the actions and the thoughts of the inhabitants of the earth. The tide moves in that direction and when the Lord’s people by virtue of faith in the message which God has given them, recognize the iniquity of the course in which they are and turn round to go in the opposite direction, they but naturally incur the studied or unstudied opposition of the world—those who have small appreciation of God’s will and are making no efforts in that direction. If the Lord’s people were to lack experiences of this sort, it would be one good indication that they were either standing still or that they were drifting with the tide; their lives would not be such as to attract the attention in any manner of the religious worldly class. As long, however, as tribulation arises from this source, it is a fair indication of itself, that the individual is making progress against the preferences of the world and against its ideals.

Our Master spoke of the same thing when He said, “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and shall persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.” Matt. 5:12.

The earliest disciples of the Lord, we are told “took joyfully the spoiling of their goods” (Heb. 10:34). The spoiling of their goods would not call forth their admiration for the spoilers nor would they have thought it proper to have destroyed their own belongings merely to make a demonstration. It was not to be in the limelight that they were seeking: their joy sprang not from the destruction of property itself, but for the fact that persecution was an evidence to them that they were walking not with the world but were following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Concerning two of the Apostles, we read that they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name’s sake (Acts 5:41). The same Apostle who had formerly told the Lord they were willing to drink of His cup were now happy because an opportunity was granted them under trying and unfavorable circumstances to prove the truth of their statements.

Those sayings which are usually referred to as the beatitudes all contained a kernel of this same thought. The word “Blessed” in that connection really contains both thoughts of *blest* and *happy*. So we read, “Blessed are ye when men shall hate you and when they shall separate you from their company and shall reproach you and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man’s sake. *Rejoice, ye, in that day, and leap for joy: for behold your reward is great in Heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets*” (Luke 6:22, 23). Truly it is a source of genuine joy to be found anywhere in the wake of those noble men of God who suffered of old. We must not, however, in this, think that our joy will make the suffering the less intense. The only mitigating influence is merely such as comes from a knowledge that it is an honor to suffer for Christ’s sake and a further knowledge that in most cases, at least, those who are perpetrating persecution are not aware of their own spirit.

Rejoice in Hope

But whatever joys to the Christian may arise from local causes, the essential element of his present happiness lies in hope. Hope constitutes the color to the Christian’s life. It is made up of two elements: expectation and desire. The glorious promises which are in God’s Word respecting His own future blessings and also that of the world inspire Him with confidence because He is acquainted with the integrity of the one making the promises. But since these promises of life and blessing are not fulfilled at the present time but necessarily look forward to the future, hence, he must still *expect* a fulfillment. Then, too, since these promises refer to far better things than he has ever known or experienced, he cannot help from desiring them. That, therefore, which he actively expects and truly longs for, begets in him joy. Hope anticipates our future joy. It will be seen that this joy is not brought into being by environment or fortunate circumstances,

and hence it cannot be removed by change of such surroundings. The promises which originally inspired our joy are still the same, they remain unaltered in God's Word. If they once filled our minds and hearts with joyful prospects, they should logically be able to do so again. Indeed, hope, with its accompanying joy, constitutes the principal spur to a constant devotion to God at the present time. If we could imagine hope being removed from the Christian's life, what incentive would he have for sacrificing? None whatever. Sacrifice is not a normal state of being and without some abnormal circumstances to feed and support it, such a course would be illogical. If throughout all the ages of the future there were no prospect of relief from pain, we would be in very truth, the fools the world takes us to be.

But everywhere the Scriptures abound in promises of final relief. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psa. 126:5). While there is a natural organic reaction tending from suffering to rapture, still that is evidently not intended to be expressed in this text. It does not say that those who sow *tears* shall reap joy, but those who are engaged in the Lord's work, sowing the truth, His message, under sorrowing circumstances and with pain to themselves shall eventually have their reward in joy. Our Lord held this same thought before His people (Matt. 25:21) in the parable of the talents, that those who are faithful in the small things now committed to them would be accounted worthy of a participation in still greater honors. "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The Lord himself has suffered the ignominy and the shame of His earthly ministry and was at the end of His course exalted to that joy which was set before him.

Again the Apostle identifies hope with our joy when he says, "And the God of Hope fill you will all joy and peace in blessing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the holy Spirit." (Rom. 15:13). This hope does not feed itself. It is inspired by and sustained by the active agency of the holy Spirit in the mind and heart of God's consecrated followers. The world and its spirit tends to dampen and to discourage our hope. Again, the very essence of our Christian life is bound up in the hope that is set before us in the gospel mentioned by the Apostle in Rom. 5:12, where he says, "that we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God," of Divine glory, of participating in the joys and privileges of the Divine Nature. "Rejoice in Hope," (Rom. 12:12), is one of the general admonitions given to us by the Apostle. Elsewhere he explains that this hope is worked out in us by the train of experiences set in motion by tribulation. "We glory also in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope: and hope maketh not ashamed, for the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by His Spirit which is given unto us." Again we are assured that we shall be made partakers of Christ if we "Hold fast the rejoicing of hope steadfast unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). Also, "Thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance" (Acts 2:28).

The joy arising from our hope is not exclusively a hope of our own blessing. We are glad, too, that all the world of mankind is to be blest, that instead of the dark night of sin

and death which now prevails, the glorious light of the Millennial morning shall finally usher in the Son of Righteousness with healing in His wings, and instead of darkness, the people shall learn of the knowledge of the glory of God which shall fill the whole earth. Concerning the desert we have the statement, “It shall rejoice even with joy and singing” (Isa. 35:2). Then again, “The Lord shall comfort Zion; He shall comfort all her waste places; and will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.” Isa. 51:3.

How, then, can we cultivate and increase our joy as the Lord’s people? (1) By a continuous contemplation of our causes for joy, some of which we have named above. (2) By taking heed to the admonition of our Lord: “Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24). If our joy is lean and scant, we have only ourselves to blame. Here is our Master’s word for it that we may ask and receive things which are necessary and best for us, and that thus our joy may be full. If we realize our need of joy, let us ask Him to give what is best. For our God “shall supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). His riches in glory are abundant: He will, therefore, abundantly supply our needs, but not unless we ask Him. That which is not worth asking for in the shape of Divine blessing and joy, is scarcely worth having.

Our joy sometimes is in constant jeopardy of being obliterated by observing merely the things that are seen and which are passing. In the measure that our hearts are set and fixed on things which are not seen, the eternal things of God, in that same measure will our joy be full and rich.

But whatever joy we have now, it is but a foretaste and an earnest of the joy that we may have when perfect. “In Thy presence is fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (Psa. 16:11). “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with *exceeding* joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.”