

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

JOY IN HEAVEN OVER THE REPENTING SINNER.

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"Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth:" Luke xv. 10.

Whilst some of the Old and New Testament allusions to angels are only as gleams of light amid clouds and darkness, there may be obtained, through the medium of not a few of them, precious and profitable views of angelic thought and feeling—of the exalted intelligence, the holiness to the Lord, the ardent interest in "the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh," and the "good will towards men," pervading the mighty joys of those morning stars of creation, the angels of God. "When the foundations of the earth were laid the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." When Jesus was born in Bethlehem an angel joyfully conveyed the glad tidings to the shepherds on the plain. To the women, whom love to the Saviour was drawing near to the sepulchre, an angel joyfully said, "Come see the place where the Lord lay." And after the "great multitude which no man could number" shall stand before the "throne and before the Lamb," the angels (according to the inspired representation of the apostle John) will joyfully sympathize with the praises of the redeemed, will say "Amen" to their praise, and associate therewith praises of their own. But when Jesus said "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," he had in view an object more grand and sublime, one of far greater moment than merely to convey the cheering truth that angels rejoice over the furtherance of the highest interests of man.

We do not read there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. We believe that to be true, but not the truth specially taught by this passage of scripture. There is joy in the presence (more literally before the face) of those angels of God who humbly and adoringly veil their faces with their wings before "the excellent glory." The joy of which we here read is clearly the joy of Jehovah in the presence of the holy angels. That such is the meaning of this great statement is abundantly confirmed by the context. The great truth it contains is a precious gem surrounded by beautiful parabolic representations, and every one of those parables tend to help us to enter more and more fully into the spirit of our text.

In the parable of the lost sheep the owner of the sheep is represented as rejoicing in the presence of his friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." In the parable of the piece of silver the woman to whom it belonged is represented as rejoicing in the presence of her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost." In the parable of the prodigal son the father is represented as rejoicing in the presence of his servants, saying, "Let us eat and rejoice: for this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found." "Likewise," the joy over one sinner that repenteth is the joy of "the Father of Spirits" in the presence of his "holy angels," a joy so abounding as distinctly to meet their spiritual recognitions and touch their spirit in their communings with their God, a joy with which they are invited to sympathize, and in which, according to the capabilities of their nature, a loving Father wishes them to share.

Our subject, then, is this:—*The joy of "the Father of Spirits" over one sinner that repenteth.*

Let us consider the occasion of that divine joy—and the joy itself.

1. *Its occasion.*—Repentance—a great change—a change of mind—a change in the state and moral relations of an immortal soul—and that it causes such joy in the infinite mind, tells more forcibly than any language could express that it must be an event of transcendent moment. How differently the same event is sometimes viewed by different beings and from different worlds? On that ever-memorable morning, the dawn of a better day to the nations, when a babe lay in a stable at Bethlehem, what a contrast of feelings on earth and in heaven. People who had been staying all night at the crowded inn, probably talked in the morning about the stable and the babe that lay in the manger, and did so in a tone very dif-

ferent from that of the angel who addressed the shepherds on the plain; some of them, perhaps, speaking with inconsiderate levity, others with a touch of humanity and tenderness, but all of them utterly destitute of the idea that an event had just occurred on which the eye of prophecy had been fixed for ages, on which the eye of "the Father of mercies" had been fixed "from everlasting"—an event, the influence of which was to spread through all subsequent time, and its results to include blessedness and glory to an innumerable multitude for ever and ever!

So, as to that great event in the history of a soul—repentance unto life—on earth it often attracts but little and sometimes scarcely any attention, but over it there is joy in the presence of the angels of God.

Could we adequately estimate the value of a soul—could we realize adequate ideas of the appalling possibilities to immortal minds in a future state—could imagination scale the heights of heavenly glory, then, but not till then, could we adequately estimate the value and importance of repentance unto life. What then is repentance unto life? The answer to this question in the Assembly's catechism is worthy of regard: it is "a saving grace whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience." It has to do with the understanding, the heart, the will, and "the executive faculty" of the soul. It includes, thought, feeling, choice, and the carrying out of all these states of soul, in actually returning to the Lord: and all this is vividly illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son.

He is represented as becoming conscious of a change of thought and feeling, and of a new resolve; as *thinking* of his own folly and degradation, want and worthlessness, of his father's character, home and resources: as *feeling*—thoroughly humbled, sensible of destitution and demerit, desiring to be done with prodigality, and anxiously concerned to occupy any place, however humble, in his father's house; as *resolving*—to confess his faults, to acknowledge his utter unworthiness, to cast himself on his father's love and compassion—and as acting out all these states of mind by arising and going to his father. Such is the representation given by a great Teacher of the elementary qualities of true repentance.

II. *The joy itself.* It is the joy of "the Father of Spirits;" and dim and limited as are our views, yet may we be enabled, in the light of Scripture, to recognize qualities, characteristics, elements of that divine joy, of which, with reverence, we may venture to speak.

"God is love;" and gratification of that immeasurable love must be an all-pervasive element of the great joy. But there are additional views of that joy of great moment to anxious enquirers. When a soul becomes deeply sensible of its sinfulness, alarmed by an awakened conscience, and filled with concern to find a sure basis of hope, the tumult of its thoughts and feelings will not be permanently calmed until enabled to look confidingly to God in Christ, a just God and a Saviour who, whilst delighting in mercy, is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

To doubting souls we earnestly submit the following considerations:—

1st. The thought of the justice of God should be alarming, not to those who wish to draw nigh, only to those who continue "to obey unrighteousness." The righteous Lord loveth righteousness—loveth all that is right. As God commandeth all men everywhere to repent it must be right to repent. Loving all that is right, God loves that state of soul; and, as a righteous God, rejoiceth over one sinner that repenteth.

2nd. The thought of the holiness of God should not discourage any sinner on earth who wishes not only to be pardoned but to be cleansed from sin. "The holy one of Israel is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity," saying, O do not that abominable thing that I hate."

Whilst the sinfulness of those who permanently "refuse to return" becomes deeper and deeper, darker and darker, to be perpetuated beyond earth and time, the sinner that repents and turns to the Lord is not only pardoned and accepted in the beloved, but from that date is in such spiritual relations to God in Christ as to become "*sanctified through the truth*," and the complete removal, the utter termination of all the sinfulness of that soul, being, at the same time, a distinct diminution in the great empire of the King of kings, of the abominable thing that he hates, it seems clear that not only from loving interest in the one individual

soul but also from regard to the lessening of the collective amount of moral evil in the universe, the Father of Spirits, as a holy God, rejoiceth over one sinner that repenteth. But the greatness of that joy "who can comprehend?" It is the gratification, not only of the love, but of the whole moral character of the great and ever blessed God.

As the darkness of night passes away before the rays of the rising sun, so should doubts, fears, and unbelief pass away from the spirit of sinners, even the chief, as the all-gracious and all-glorious truth dawn on their souls, that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God—the joy of the "holy" and "righteous" Father of Spirits—over one sinner that repenteth.

FATHER, TAKE MY HAND.

The way is dark, my Father! Cloud on cloud
Is gathering thickly o'er my head, and loud
The thunder roars above me. See, I stand
Like one bewildered! Father, take my hand.

The way is long, my Father! and my soul
Longs for the rest and quiet of the goal;
While yet I journey through this weary land
Keep me from wandering. Father, take my hand.

The path is rough, my Father! Many a thorn
Has pierced me, and my feet, all torn
And bleeding, mark the way. Yet Thy command
Bids me press forward. Father, take my hand.

The cross is heavy, Father! I have borne
It long and still do bear it. Let my worn
And fleeting spirit rise to that blest land
Where crowns are given. Father, take my hand.

THE "CANNOT BUT" IN ELOQUENCE.

So many series of Lectures on Preaching have been delivered and published, and so much has been said about individual methods and characteristics, that there is some danger lest our young men should grow to be the imitators of others, and forget that in a large degree eloquence is independent of all peculiarities and lies behind personality, using that precisely as it uses other things in its eagerness to attain its end. . . . The great thing to be remembered by all who would become efficient either in the pulpit or on the platform is, that nothing can be well said which does not compel itself to be said. The irrepressible is always eloquent, and there is nothing eloquent which is not also irrepressible. This is the case in the kindred arts of music, poetry, and painting. The really effective music is that which, so to say, sings itself. When a youth came to Mozart and asked him how he should begin to compose, the great man advised him to wait. "But," replied the youth, "you composed much earlier." "So I did," was the answer, "but then I asked nobody about it." Equally the true poem is that which the poet cannot help producing. It is in him, and insists on making expression for itself. The thoughts breathe, and therefore the words burn. In the same way the finest pictures take hold of the artist, and will not leave him until he has given them permanence upon his canvas. Those which he paints simply because he must paint something, are commonly inferior productions; but the creations which possess him, and which he can get rid of only by giving them shape and form, are such as thrill the beholder with delight. Now the same rule holds with eloquence. It cannot be made to order, and hence always when the speaker is trying to rise to some occasion, or to say something which he conceives will be appropriate, he fails. Inspiration comes only with the "cannot but." When the man feels that he "cannot but" speak, his utterance "cannot but" be powerful. When it comes to be with him as it was with the prophet when he says, "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay;" or when he feels, like Paul, that necessity is laid upon him, yea, woe is unto him if he preach not the gospel, then his sermons will be eloquent in spite of all the eccentricities by which he may be characterized, and even in spite of his lack of what the world calls polish. We do not undervalue culture indeed, but culture without this inner fire is nothing better than the polish on the cold marble, because it lacks the life. And even where that fire exists, there needs to be great caution lest in attending to the culture the fire should be overaid and extinguished, for everything that turns the speaker's mind from his great absorbing aim, and fixes it upon himself, does by so much abstract its power from his speech. Mr. Gough once told us