

THE JOY OF HAVING CHRIST WITH US.

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"They have sent me to this prison to feast with my King. The bridegroom hath run away with my heart; I am drowned over head and ears in His love. We children of the bride-chamber have cause to leap for joy, for we have gotten the bridegroom's love-ring, and the marriage supper is drawing nigh. O time run fast! O sun hasten on the banquet! I wonder what the marriage supper of the Lamb will be in God's dining palace of glory, since a kiss of Christ in this poor wilderness is so comforting."

In such rapturous expressions as these did the devout Samuel Rutherford pour forth his soul during his imprisonment for Christ's sake in Aberdeen. They seem extravagant even to Christians, who seldom realize what the Master meant when He said "Can the children of the bridegroom *mourn* as long as the bridegroom is with them?," No illustration that he could use would set forth more fully the privilege and the duty of His people to rejoice evermore as long as they have Him abiding in their hearts. It was the custom in Palestine for the par-nymphs or companions of the bridegroom to spend the whole week of the wedding in such unbroken festivities that they were excused from devotions in the Temple, and from all ordinary labor.

Such was to be the joy of every believer; and such may ours be if we will give Christ Jesus His right place in our hearts and in our lives. The fault is ours entirely that our lives are not more glad-some: there ought to be vastly more of sunshine and serenity, and sweetness in the lives of all who are possessors of the greatest treasure of the universe. The sin smitten care-laden world needs the example and the inspiration of a joyous religion in order to attract it to Jesus. We owe it to ourselves, we owe it to Him to wear a sunnier face, and even amid heavy trials to beam forth brightness, as the waves of the ocean phosphoresce with sparkles of light at midnight.

What do we think of a newly married couple whose faces wear an illconcealed frown or cast of sadness when in each other's company? We pronounce it an ill-matched match. There is no love between them. Must not a sharp-eyed world conclude that there is no depth and reality of love for Christ in our hearts when we go worrying, and groaning, and meaning on our road to heaven? If we

will persist in living on mere externals, and at the mercy of outward circumstances, we cannot expect to be happy. But if we make Christ actual and real, if we walk in constant fellowship with Him, we may defy all the powers of darkness to disturb our joys.

Only think what Christ may be to us, and what He promises when He says "Lo, I am with you *always*." This means heart-fellowship. It is not *where* we are, but *what* we are that determines our happiness. The joy of wedlock does not depend on a fine house or a splendid equipage, but on the perfect union of two pure hearts. Such never tire of each other; the oil of love prevents all friction. My beloved is mine and I am his, that is enough. Paul in spite of poverty, and toil, and bonds, and persecutions, marched along his up-hill road shouting "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?" Strip him, whip him, lock him up in the dungeon and yet that joy no man could take from him. He had his Saviour always with him. The honeymoon of his nuptials with Christ never came to an end. Why should ours? It need not if we are true to our vows and do not lust after adulterous alliances with sin. Our blessed Master will give us just as much of His close, loving fellowship as we ask for, and the measure of Christ is the true measure of both happiness and power.

There is a wonderful exaltation and transformation of character produced by the intimate society of a noble, gifted and stimulating friend. This has saved many a boy in college. There has been the making of many a man; he was gravitating downward until a brave, godly woman got hold of his heart and lifted him up with her to a higher plane of life. If such be the lifting power of a human associate, O what limit shall we set to Christ's power to elevate, and enrich, and ennoble our characters? Jesus seems to say to us, Keep fast hold on Me, and I will carry you up, up into a purer atmosphere, up from grovelling thoughts, up into a higher view of life, up into the peace of God that passes the understanding of the slaves of this world. While He is with us we cannot go astray. We do not lust after unclean enjoyments while He is ever before us, any more than a true husband wanders after wantons, while a pure wife fills his eye and heart. The only real conqueror of sin is an ever-present, ever loved, and ever followed Saviour. It is not Christianity that keeps us, it is Christ.

Then too if we enjoy His favor what matters it how many shall praise us, or