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The Joy of Belief.

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"Believing we rejoice." Confidence is joy. Faith brings gladness. Trust is always a source of happiness.

The religion of Christ banishes gloom. It is a religion for the sorrowful, but not a sorrowful religion.

The conventional saint of mediæval legend, with pale countenance, wasted form, sour features and melancholy visage, is not the New Testament ideal. We are not more pleasing to God when we eat bitter aloes than when we eat honey; when we drink colocyinth, than when we sip nectar. A foggy day is not more heavenly than one of sunshine, nor is a funeral march diviner music than a waltz.

God Himself is called the Happy God, and godliness reproduces this beatific attractiveness. God means that His people should be happy, and has commanded us to rejoice, so that we ought to ask God to forgive us for being sad as when we break any other commandment.

"With joy unspeakable," continues the apostle. Christian joy is a deep and silent thing. And that is the reason it is so often mistaken for its opposite. Because it is calm and grave the world thinks it severe. But "the gods approve the depths and not the tumult of the soul."

Happiness is a shallow, superficial word. It signifies what happens, what comes to us by hap or chance, what falls to our lot from without. It has reference to circumstances; depends largely on material welfare. But "joy" is a nobler word—a deep, serene, and quiet thing—a "calm rapture" as Jonathan Edwards called it. There is nothing boisterous, tumultuous, hilarious about it. It does not express itself in laughter, nor sing comic songs. It is "joy unspeakable." Not a thing to be talked about. Its expression would never be likened to the "crackling of thorns under a pot."

Happiness and merriment are emotions determined by temperament, by circumstance; joy and blessedness depend on a soul which is in harmony with God, is satisfied with God, finds all its needs supplied in God.

The delights on the surface can be spoken, and utter themselves in laughter, but joy lies too deep for smiles. The great river moves silently to the sea with equable flow; the shallow brook chatters among the pebbles.

True Christian joy is "glorified," says Peter, has the glory of Heaven shining upon it, filling, enflaming, transfiguring it; saving it from triviality and cheapness, exchanging the flimsy, fluttering wings of the butterfly for the strong, calm, mighty plumes of an angel. Christian joy is not jollity, the exuberance of animal spirits on which temperament and trouble put a damper. Even men not sanguine or buoyant in natural disposition may have the "joy of the Lord." The gospel has power to make us rise superior to temperament and appropriate alien virtues. If it does not, it is difficult to see what good it does for us.

And similarly with depressing circumstances. Christianity has come on purpose to make us independent of them, to enable us to say: "Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herds in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

The Bible finds no contradiction in saying: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." "We rejoice, though now for a season we are in heaviness." Our Lord was a "man of sorrows," but amid the shadows of the cross He could speak about His "joy," and pray that it might be in His disciples. "He rejoiced in spirit."

Suffering men have often been the most joyful. Men in prison have known of liberty. Those on beds of anguish have sung most loudly the hymns of triumph.

Richard Baxter, who was a life-long sufferer, with an incurable disease, and lived with one foot in the grave, as he said; who was persecuted for his religion and was condemned to prison for five years for preaching five sermons, declared amid his paroxysms of suffering: "I have pain, but I have peace," and wrote—not the book—"Is Life Worth Living?" but another, called "The Saints' Everlasting Rest," which borders on inspiration, and is a foretaste of heaven.

Such are the contradictions of Christian experience, such the privilege of holy living. People who have had the least of the world have often had most of satisfaction. Martyrs, as a class, have been the most cheerful of men. To them thumbstrews have been finger rings and manacles bracelets. Like the salamander, they have flourished in fire, danced on burning coals, and frolicked in a furnace.

There is life under the snow. Greek fire burns in water. And it is possible to be beset with cares and troubles, to live in the hardest of "hard times," and yet have a pure fountain of joy divine welling up in the soul, sweet amid the bitter waters.

In the first letter Paul ever wrote, that to the Thessalonians, he said: "Rejoice evermore." And then, at the last, after he had been flogged five times in the market-place and three times in court, had been shipwrecked three times, and been in prison so many times that he doesn't count them at all; after being pelted with stones by vagabonds, till he was thought to be dead; hungry, cold, naked, robbed; hunted by murderers with only a wicker basket between him and death; betrayed by friends whom he had trusted; everywhere surrounded by dangers and difficulties, and saved at last by being clothed with pitch, and used as a candle to light the streets of Rome, by having his head chopped off—this is the man who at the close of life, with an iron chain clanking on his wrist as he wrote, could say with a repetition and explosiveness that sound like the salute of boom cannon, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."

The joy of our faith is not to be considered one of the luxuries of the Christian life, but the very staple of it. It is bread, not cake. It is the flower and fruit of religion and all is worthless till it comes to that. Hence the Bible enjoins it and puts it among the commandments. It is a plain and positive duty to cultivate this grace, and to have it; and not to go on forever asking for it and not having it. We ought not to rest satisfied with a religion that does not make us bright and cheerful and happy.

We are not pilgrims on a tedious journey to a distant paradise, but have one all along the way. God gives a heaven to go to heaven in, and feeds us with crumbs that fall from the Master's table, which are a part of the eternal banquet. God wants His people to abound in gladness and to go to Mount Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

And that, too, not for our own delectation only, but as a condition of service as well. "The joy of the Lord is your strength" here. It has a practical power which puts vigor into our work. Gladness is the life of any pursuit. We do well what we enjoy doing. Dull duty is apt to be valueless. A sad heart soon tires. We work best when we sing at it. We are weak unless we are glad.

Joyfulness of spirit is the most precious gift for those who desire to lessen the sorrows and sadnesses of the world. David wanted the joy of salvation restored unto him in order that he then might be equipped to teach transgressors God's ways, and that sinners might be converted unto Him. It is the joy of our faith which commands it to others.

Men are still bent on the pursuit of happiness and asking: "Who will show us any good?" And it is the happy Christian who can furnish a satisfactory answer. The joy of our lives will do more to commend our faith to others than all verbal declarations; but if we go mourning all

our days, lugubrious, solemn, sad, men may well ask of us as of old: "Where now is thy God?"

Scriptural Conditions of Successful Prayer.

BY REV. C. W. TOWNSEND.

We believe in prayer. And we believe in it in the old fashioned way—in "real answers to actual requests;" not merely in its *reflex influence*, of which philosophers (so called) speak. They seem to regard prayer as boys do the *runaway knocks* which they give at the doors of houses—just as a matter for their own entertainment. We, however, remember the words, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; KNOCK AND IT SHALL BE OPENED UNTO YOU; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; AND TO HIM THAT KNOCKETH IT SHALL BE OPENED" (Matt. vii. 7, 8).

If those philosophers who talk so disdainfully of prayer were drowning, would they cry for help in order to obtain the *reflex influence* of their own cries? Nay; at such a time they would want aid from without. Christians do not pray for the sake of hearing the echo of their own voices, but they speak knowing that there is a blessed Being who hears, understands, and will respond. Now we believe in prayer thus *because we believe in the Bible*.

In His Word God is spoken of as the God "that hearest prayer." In that Book we are bidden to pray, and also encouraged so to do. There are many promises made to those who pray, and numerous examples are given of prayers offered and answered. The noblest characters in Scriptural biography were mighty in prayer. Time would fail us to tell of Abraham, Jacob, Elijah, David, Paul, and many more who wrestled with God and prevailed.

Above all others, there stands out before us as our pattern the dear Master.

"The Mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervour of His Prayer."

But we have an additional reason for our belief in prayer, and that is the one arising from our OWN EXPERIENCE. Our faith in prayer is not theoretical, but experimental. We trust each of our readers can say, "I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because He hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live" (Ps. cxvi. 1, 2). And yet, though we have this confidence in the reality of prayer, are we not conscious that our petitions are sometimes unanswered? Our prayers do not always speed well. Often we fail to obtain that for which we ask. Why is this? Is the cause of this failure not given by the apostle James? "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss" (Jas. iv. 3.)

If we would prosper at the throne of grace, we must observe the rules laid down in the Word for our guidance. We will now point out the chief Scriptural conditions of successful prayer.

1. *There are certain preliminary and foundation conditions.* These are indispensable and unalterable.

1. *The possession of Spiritual Life.*—True prayer is essentially a spiritual exercise; and therefore, before we can pray aright—certainly before we can offer intercessory prayer—we must be alive unto God. "The Lord is far from the wicked; but He heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. xv. 29.)

2. *Abiding in Christ.*—"If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John xv. 7). The man who lives near the fountain-head need never be thirsty. Those who abide in Christ are "at the secret source of every precious thing."

3. *Obedience to Christ's Commands.*—"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (John iii. 22).