

Robert Murray M'Cheyne:

When the Lord of glory left his Father's bosom, and came into this world, we are sure it was for a purpose suited to his divine nature. Christ came to make men glad. It was said of him, 'The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD hath appointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek' (Isaiah 61:1). Ah! sure, he must be a good Saviour that was to bind up broken hearts, and to make all men glad. Therefore, when he came, he said, 'That your joy might be full' (John 16:24). And you see in the verse before our text, his first words to his disciples — were, 'Peace be unto you.'

But the devil wants you to believe that we want to take away your mirth and joy. He is a liar, and he was a liar from the beginning. Jesus came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them; so do we. We come to break your false joy, to awaken you from your dream, before you be dashed into the burning lake. Ah! we come to give you fulness of joy that cannot wither, joy that cannot die.

True, believers have sorrow; they have a poor, frail body, and they may have false friends. They may have ungodly children; they have temptations and persecutions. The world knows nothing of these sorrows. But they have a joy that the world cannot give or take away. They have a joy to balance all their sorrows; they have 'joy unspeakable and full of glory' (1 Peter 1:8). It is a joy that will never die. It will be brighter and brighter throughout an endless eternity.

But let us consider what it was that made the disciples glad: first, what it was not, and then what it was.

What it was not.

It was not riches. They were all poor fishermen; none of them had nets of their own. Like their Lord, they were poor. A scribe said, 'Lord, I will follow thee, whithersoever thou goest.' Jesus said, 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head' (Matthew 8:19-20). When Jesus rose again, he did not give his disciples riches. Paul said he was poor; yet he possessed all things (2 Corinthians 6:10). Ah! it is not joy that riches give. You may have a little money in the bank, but it may be taken away. The bank may fail, and you lose it. Ah! riches will not profit you in the day of wrath. You remember the rich man mentioned in Luke 16. Ah! what did his riches do for him in the fire of hell? He could not get a drop of water to cool his tongue.

It was not friends that made the disciples glad. Ah! some of you may have a family - an undivided family; or you may have friends in the world - you may have bosom companions, or lovers; but ah! these will not give you joy. The disciples did not care for friends - that did not give them joy. Notice, the doors where they were assembled were shut for fear of the Jews. The world that hated and crucified their Master, hated them. They were like sheep in the midst of wolves; yet they were glad - their joy was not of earth. Ah, no! creature joys will soon be taken away.

Their joy did not proceed from their own righteousness. Some have all their joy from looking at themselves. Ah! that is a joy of earth - a joy that will prove false whenever the trumpet sounds; a joy that will all be dashed whenever the cry is made, 'Behold the bridegroom cometh' (Matthew 25:6). Ah! is this your joy? Do you have all your joy from your looking at your own filthy polluted hearts? The disciples did not do this. Ah, no! What would they have seen there? They had once known the Lord; but they had all forsaken him in his sufferings, one of them had denied him; they were cast down, they did not know what to do; but they were glad when they saw the Lord. Ah! many of you are going to hell. Look at yourselves, and if your way be the right way, then has Christ suffered and died in vain.

The disciples' joy did not flow from a sight of Christ with the bodily eyes. Ah! some of you think, 'Oh if I had been there, I would have been glad'; but it was not seeing him with the bodily eye that made them glad - for two reasons: First of all, because many saw him, and only wagged the head, and spat upon him. Ah! they could look upon his nailed hands, and pierced bleeding side, and only mock. And every one in this assembly shall see him, for 'every eye shall see him' (Revelation 1:7); and many shall wail because of him. It will be the beginning of eternal damnation to some of you. Second reason: it was not by seeing Christ with the bodily eye, for many have felt the same joy that the disciples did who never saw Christ with the bodily eye.

The disciples' joy did not proceed from seeing their Master again. The joy they had flowed from looking at his hands and side. It was not that he had risen and come to be with them again - it was seeing his hands and side - 'And when he had so said he showed them his hands and his side; then were the disciples glad when they saw

the Lord.'

What it was that made the disciples glad.

It was the sense they had got that his work was finished. When they saw his hands and his side, they saw his work was all completed. They saw the holy Lamb standing before them - he who had been so lately pierced - with the mark of the spear still in his side. They saw the meaning of that passage in Isaiah 53:5: 'But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed.' When Peter looked upon him, he understood those words he afterwards wrote down - 'Who his own self, bare our sins in his own body on the tree' (1 Peter 2:24). They saw that all the wrath due to them was poured out on Jesus; their debt was paid to the uttermost farthing, and no wonder, then, they were glad. Christ had finished the work the Father had given him to do. That prophecy in Daniel was fulfilled: 'The Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself' (9:26); 'To finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness' (9:24). Ah, brethren! it was this that made the disciples glad; they saw that all they ought to suffer was suffered for them: 'They entered into peace.' 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.' They were to be sad no more. Ah! do not many of you look to yourselves? You do not belong to Christ. You are only glad when you look to your own righteousness. But the disciples were glad when they saw Jesus as the Lord their righteousness. It was then, and only then, that they were glad. Oh when will you be glad? When will you have true joy? O sinner! look to Jesus. It is only when we see that he has suffered all, and done all we had to do, that we are glad - that our joy will be full.

The disciples were glad, for they saw Jesus was their living Head. 'Because I live, ye shall live also' (John 14:19). 'In the world ye shall have tribulation; but, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). The disciples were no doubt sad - they felt a load of guilt; but now they would rejoice, for they had got a sight of him as an ever-living Saviour. Now, Peter would know how to get his proud heart subdued. Jesus was living - and he would reign till all his enemies were put under his feet. Ah! beloved! if we had a sight of a crucified, living, reigning Jesus, we would get all our enemies subdued. Oh look, sinner! Look, all of you! Oh! then you will have true joy. For my own part, I never knew what joy was till I felt that Jesus had died for me - that he lived for me and reigned for me. The world can give you a little joy; but here is fulness of joy. 'We which have believed do enter into rest' (Hebrews 4:3).

I would now apply this.

You may learn from this if you are disciples. What does your joy flow from? Does it flow from riches, from friends? The disciples' joy proceeded from a spiritual sight of the Lord Jesus. When are your happiest moments? Are they when the world prospers with you? When friends are kind, when friends and lovers come around you? Is your joy gone when they are taken away? Ah! then, you are a disciple of the devil! 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.' Examine again. Does it flow from your own righteousness? Does it flow from your knowledge of the Bible? From your many prayers? Does it flow from self? Then it is not a disciple's joy. 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.'

I would exhort all present to seek a sight of Jesus. Oh seek this joy! A joy that will not pass away. Friends will be taken away, riches may flee away; but this joy will never pass away. Oh seek a spiritual discovery of the excellency of Christ's person and work! Oh it is a sweet joy! It is that that will be with you in death. The Author of it says, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee' (Hebrews 13:5). O let not the world keep you from looking to Jesus! It is eternal life - life eternal.

To you that are seeking Christ night and day. Oh how glad you will be when you find the Lord! Look away from all to Jesus. Oh look to him as a crucified and risen Saviour! Oh get a sight of his beauty and his love! O dear anxious soul! seek to have joy by looking at the finished work of the Lord Jesus.

To you that once had this joy, but have backslidden and lost it. Ah! you must look again to Jesus. The disciples had it once, but they had lost it; but Jesus came to them: 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.' Ah! we must have a spiritual discovery of his complete work, and his living power. O seek a true joy - a full joy!

Here learn all of you the folly of self-righteousness. Suppose the disciples had looked to themselves, what would they have seen? One had denied, all of them had forsaken him in his sufferings; but the disciples looked only to Jesus: 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.' Look, then, to Jesus, and you will have true peace, true joy, fulness of joy - joy that the world cannot give nor take away. You that are Christ's rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice.

May God bless his own Word. Amen.