

A.B. Simpson:

"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Neh. viii:10.

There is no more pointed difference between Christianity and all other religions than the element of joyfulness.

The natural countenance of heathenism is gloomy, and often profoundly sad. The true expression of a consecrated face is radiance and gladness. True, this is not always realized as it ought to be, but when the Holy Spirit shines in the consecrated heart, the face will reflect its glory, and, like Stephen's, be often like the face of an angel. The reporter of a weekly paper once remarked as he described the services of one of our happy conventions, "one thing that characterized all the faces was their wondrous joyousness." Surely this ought to be ever true! Look at those two sisters, born of one mother, rocked in one cradle, educated in one school, yet parted now by a distance far greater than leagues can measure. The younger sister is rich, prosperous, admired by a wide circle of friends, loved by every member of her family, and indulged in every gratification that social position or ample wealth can procure. The other is poor; her life is a struggle with circumstances, her time is crowded with toil and care; her dearest friends often misunderstand her religious attitude, and rudely blame her for the very things which are the highest services and sacrifices of her love. And yet her face shines with a deep, transparent joy, compared with which the other is dull and tame. The daughter of wealth and prosperity has got so used to her surroundings that they are no more to her than the humble circumstances of the other are to her. External luxuries have palled her appetite long ago, and no deeper springs have opened in her empty heart. Look at her when circumstances change! She has no other resources. Bereavement and death find her without consolation, and when she loses earth she loses all she had, and the parting is the more terrible in proportion to the pleasure of the possession. But the other has an inner source of peace and happiness that external vicissitudes cannot affect. Her trials throw her more wholly upon that hidden source of joy, and when all else is overshadowed with darkness, you may often see her face, as it were the face of an angel, and when sobs and tears are heard on every side, around her dying couch, her voice is melodious with praise and her face is shining with the reflected glory of the everlasting day.

Why should it not be so? "God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all." The blessed God must be the source of blessedness. His Beloved Son, our Pattern and our Saviour, is the Prince of Peace, and the Royal Bridegroom, whom God "hath anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows," and surely His salvation should be a glad salvation; His touch should bring joy and sunshine, and they who follow Him should be true to His own ideal of that happy company who "shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." As we look over the earth we find that God has put beauty and gladness wherever He can. He has made us to be happy, and He has sent redemption to restore and consummate our joy, and so His great salvation is inseparably linked with a rejoicing spirit. True, it can stoop to sorrow; it will enter the saddest home and the darkest midnight, but it cannot dwell with gloom. It must banish sorrow as well as sin, and live in the light of joy.

And so we must give up trying to combine religion and melancholy, for Christ will have none but a happy people. Even old Judaism robed itself in bridal garments whenever it could and went forth with songs of rejoicing. Under the Mosaic law there was a constant succession of feasts, and the whole nation was required every little while to go on a great religious picnic to keep them from settling down into selfishness and melancholy. And in the closing festival of the sacred year they were required to spend an entire week in the most romantic and picturesque religious rejoicings, dwelling in rustic booths and uniting in festal services and sacred songs and ceremonies, which must have formed a grand and impressive spectacle of national rejoicing.

It was this Feast of Tabernacles that Nehemiah and the people were now observing, yet, like some of us, they had come with long faces, and thought it becoming to celebrate the occasion by a few appropriate tears, as they thought of the desolations of Zion which had just been removed and restored. But Nehemiah told them that it was no time for mourning, simply because it was a holy day, and holiness and tears did not go well together; that the sorrows were past, and therefore there was no cause for mourning any longer, but this was a day for gladness and praise, and the spirit of praise was necessary in order even to their own preparation and strength for the tasks in which they were engaged; "for the joy of the Lord," he declares, "is your strength."

This is true of us also, even in connection with the ordinary duties of daily life. How much one can do when the heart is light and free, and how long and heavy the easiest task when it is irksome! That mother can toil half the night, that father can sweat all the day, for the joy of knowing that it is for the child of his love. Listen to the words of the sailors as they heave their heavy loads into the hold of yonder vessel with their ringing chorus sometimes of two syllables; but if it is only Ho-Hay, they sing it and they sing it in unison, and the great packages seem like feathers in their hands. Look at the soldiers as they march over the long tramp of many miles! But the beat of the drum or the chorus of their battle songs lighten up all the toil of the way.

Quaint old John Bunyan puts it happily when he tells us how he wrote the Pilgrim's Progress in his old Bedford dungeon. "So I was had home to prison," he goes on to say, "and I sat me down and wrote and wrote, because joy did make me write." The old dungeon with its stunted rays of light, its clumsy table, its wooden stool, its pallet of straw, was heaven to him because the joy of the pilgrim and the pilgrim's home and the pilgrim's story were bursting in his happy heart. Oh, how we need this joy amid the plod and the drudgery of the one hundred and forty-four hours of every week, in the factory, in the shop, over the counter, in the kitchen, at the desk, on the street, on the farm, and we may add, in what are often the harder places of public life, and the weary monotony of publicity, and the great heartless noisy world! But, thank God! circumstances will make little difference where the everlasting springs are bursting from the deep well of His joy in the heart.

The joy of the Lord is our strength for life's burdens,
And gives to each duty a heavenly zest;
It will set to sweet music the task of the toiler;
And soften the couch of the laborer's rest.

David has beautifully expressed this blending of common life with heavenly gladness in one of the Psalms, where he says, "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." Statutes are just precepts of daily duty, and David enjoyed them by setting them to music and translating them to ceaseless praise. This, in a word, is the meaning of the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm. It is all about duty, and yet it is the most exquisitely constructed in the Hebrew Psalter. As it has been well said, it is duty set to music.

This is the way to make duty easy and acceptable to God. I have known a servant girl whose life was intolerable, and whose mistress was regarded as a petty tyrant, become so happy in the same home and with the same woman after she received the baptism of the Holy Spirit that she would not have exchanged her place for any other, and her mistress actually came to her to ask what had happened, and became an earnest inquirer through her beautiful transformation.

Beloved, let us take the joy of the Lord into the dark places and the hard places and the low places, and the dusty, grimy streets and lanes of life! Let us plant the flowers around the little cottage as well as the great mansion! Let us have the song of the birds along the wayside, and even in the night, as well as in the gilded cage of the drawing-room and in the broad sunshine of the day! Let us rejoice in the light evermore and go through the pathways of common life so filled with the Spirit that like men intoxicated with the wine of heaven, we shall be heard "speaking to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord," and then it shall be true, "Whatsoever we do in word or deed," we shall "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks unto God by Him."

The joy of the Lord is our strength for the trials of life. There are two ways of bearing a trial; the one is the spirit of stoical endurance, and the other through the counteracting forces of a holy and victorious joy. It was thus that Christ endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him, and then He could despise the shame and not even allow the smell of fire to remain upon His garments. We read in the first chapter of Colossians the prayer of the apostle for a company of saints who had already reached such a measure of holiness that they were made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; but there was something higher and better for them, namely, that they should be "strengthened according to His glorious power unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." "Patience" to endure the trials that come from the hand of God, and "longsuffering" to endure those which come from men, and both to be endured with real joyfulness. In fact, there is nothing to endure when the heart is full of joy. It lifts us wholly above the trial, and we do not realize that we are being afflicted or wronged. The blessedness of true self-sacrifice is in being so filled with God that we will not have any sacrifice. What luxury of grace it is thus to be lifted above all that could even try the heart! The rocks are not taken from the bottom of the stream, but the blessed tides rise so high that the ships sail far above them in the current of God's great joy. And so the apostle explains his self-sacrifices for the Philippians, "Though I be offered on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all."

The Hebrew Christians were congratulated that they had been enabled to take "joyfully the spoiling of their goods." This is not a very common experience. Some good women lose their sanctification over a set of smashed dishes by a careless servant, or the spilling of coffee over the new tablecloth or dress, or the spots on the little dresses of heedless children; and some men get very angry over the mistakes or failures of employees or servants that injure their business or lose large sums of money.

Sir Isaac Newton once lost all the calculations of twenty-five years by the burning of a lot of papers through the carelessness of a little dog, and the world remembers him with more admiration than for all his discoveries because he simply answered, "Poor thing! You little know the mischief you have done."

The joy of the Lord always counts on something better than we lose, and remembers that there is one above who is the great Recompenser and Restorer, and will give a thousand times more by-and-by for one victory of patience and love than all the world is worth to-day.

Yes, the joy of the Lord is our strength for life's trials,
And lifts the crushed heart above sorrow and care,
Like the nightingale's song, it can sing in the darkness,
And rejoice when the fig tree is withered and bare.

The joy of the Lord is our strength for temptation. "Count it all joy," James says, "when ye fall into divers temptations." One reason for this is because it is the best way to meet them. The devil always gets the best of a melancholy soul. Despondency will always bring surrender. Satan is so little used to joy in his own home that a happy face always scares him away. Amalek got hold of the hindmost of Israel's camp, the discouraged ones who were dragging behind and fretting about the hot weather and the hard road they had to travel. Such people always find the way harder before they get through. The fiery serpents, which were the devil's scouts, stung the murmuring multitudes, and it was an upward look to the brazen serpent that healed them. Jehoshaphat's armies marched to battle and victory with shouts of faith and songs of praise, and so still the joy of the Lord is the best equipment for the great conflict. But the apostle also means, no doubt, that temptation is no cause for despondency, but rather a great opportunity of spiritual progress. It is the proving of our armor and an evident token that the devil sees something in us worth trying to steal, and we may be very sure where the army of the enemy is encamped there the army of the Lord is also near. "The trying of our faith worketh patience, and let patience have her perfect work." Let us go through all the discipline and learn all that it has to teach us, and "when we are tried we shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love Him."

Let us then go forth into the conflicts which await us without a fear or cloud, and when we cannot feel the joy, but "are in heaviness through manifold temptations," let us "count it all joy," and say, "I will rejoice in the Lord, and I will be joyful in my God."

The joy of the Lord is our strength for temptation,
And counts it the testing of patience and grace;
It marches to battle with shouts of salvation,
And rides o'er its foes in the chariots of praise.

The joy of the Lord is our strength for the body. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." This is the divine prescription for a weak body. And so on the other hand, despondency and depression of spirits are the cause of nervousness, head-ache, heart-break, and low physical vitality. A word of cheer and an impulse of hope and gladness will often break the power of disease.

I remember a dying man whom I visited in the earliest years of my ministry, who was given up by his physicians and pronounced in a dying condition, so that they gave up the case and expected his death during the night. But as I visited him, as I supposed, for the last time, and tenderly led him to the Saviour, and as he accepted the gospel and became filled with the peace of God and the joy of salvation, there came upon him such a baptism of glory and such an inspiration of the very rapture of heaven, that he kept us for hours beside his bed as he shouted and sung, what we all believed to be the beginning of the songs of heaven, and we bade him farewell long after midnight, fully expecting that our next meeting would be above. But so mighty was the uplift in that soul that his body, unconsciously to himself, threw off the power of disease, and the next morning he was convalescent, to the amazement of his physicians, and in a few days entirely well. I knew nothing, at that time, of Divine Healing, but simply witnessed with astonishment and delight, the Divine joy to heal disease. Many a time since have I seen the healing and the gladness of Jesus come together to the soul and body, and the night of weeping turned into a morning of joy. Many a time have I seen the darkly-clouded and diseased brain lighted up with the joy of the Lord, and saved from insanity by a baptism of holy gladness.

It is true there is a deeper cause and a diviner power than the mere natural influence of joy. Incurable disease can only yield to the actual touch of Divine omnipotence, but joy is the channel through which the healing waters flow, and the overflow of the life of Christ in both soul and body. If you would live above your physical conditions, if you would renew your strength continually and "mount up on wings as eagles, and run and not be weary, and walk and not faint," if you would carry in your veins the exhilaration and zest of unwearied youth and freshness, if you would know, even here, in all its fullness, the foretaste of the resurrection life in your body, if you would be armed against the devil's shafts of infirmity and pain, and throw off his arrows upon your body as the heated iron repels the water which will not lie upon it, then, beloved, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice."

To return to our figure—the humblest housewife knows that water cannot rest upon a red-hot stove-cover, but leaps and dances over it in consternation, and flies off in explosions of helpless effervescence. So the devil will try in vain to pour cold water upon your life and work, and even your frame, if you keep ever in the white heat of heavenly joy.

The joy of the Lord is our strength for service and testimony. It makes all our work easy and delightful. It gives a perpetual spring in the hardest fields of Christian service. It goes with the city missionary and the all-night worker in the dives and slums, and takes away the natural shrinking from the degraded and unclean, the horror of filth and vermin, the fear of violent and wicked men and all the repulsiveness and hideousness of the surrounding scenes; and it makes the work, that naturally would be revolting, a perfect fascination, and enables the consecrated heart to say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify of the gospel of the grace of God."

Not only does it give a constraining motive to our service, but it also gives it a divine effectiveness and power. It illuminates the face with the light of heaven, and melts the heart with accents of tenderness and love. It gives our words a weight and winning power which men cannot gainsay. They know that we possess a secret to which they are strangers, and our gladness awakens their longing to share our joy. A shining face and radiant spirit are worth a ton of logic, rhetoric and elocution. A poor, crippled saint, standing up in a meeting and telling what God hath done for her soul, with a face divinely beautiful in all its homeliness, will bring more souls to Christ than the eloquence of a dozen college graduates without the joy of the Lord.

A scholarly minister once gave a course of lectures on the "Evidences of Christianity," for the special purpose of convincing and converting a wealthy and influential sceptic in his congregation. The gentleman attended his lectures and was converted, and a few days after the minister ventured to ask him which of the lectures it was that impressed him decisively. "The lectures!" answered the gentleman, "my dear sir, I don't even remember the subjects of your lectures, and I cannot say that they had any decisive influence upon my mind. I was converted by the testimony of a dear old colored woman who attended those services, and who, as she hobbled up the steps close to me, with her glad face, as bright as heaven, used to say, 'My blessed Jesus! my blessed Jesus!' and turning to me would ask, 'Do you love my blessed Jesus?' and that, sir, was my evidence of Christianity."

Bless the Lord! we can all shine like that, "burning," as well as "shining" lights, and setting hearts aglow with the contagion of our joy. The world is looking for happiness, and if it find the secret in a genuine form, will try to get it. Charles Finney tells us how the good deacons used to ask him in prayer-meeting, when he attended it in his ungodly days, if he did not want them to pray for him. "No," he said, "I should be very sorry to have you pray for me. For, in the first place, if I were converted through your prayers I should be as miserable as you are; and in the next place, I do not believe that your prayers would have any power to bring about my conversion, and I suspect that you yourselves would be a good deal surprised if they had, for you have been praying in the same melancholy way ever since I came to this town, for a revival, and I can see by your tones and your faces that you have no idea that it is ever coming. When I am converted I want a religion that will make me happy, and a God who will do what I ask Him."

Beloved, the Lord save us from religious melancholia, and send us out to work for Him with shining faces, victorious accents and hearts overflowing with contagious joy. Then, like Stephen, we will be able to look into the faces of our enemies and confound them by our very countenances, and force the world to "take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus."

"Let the joy of the Lord be the strength of our service,
As it speaks in our faces and accents of love,
As it wins the sad world to the fullness of Jesus,
And draws hungry hearts His salvation to prove."

II. The secret of this joy.

It springs from the assurance of salvation. It is the joy of salvation. Its happy song is,

"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine,
Oh, what a rapture of glory Divine!
Heir of salvation, purchased of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long."

If you would know it you must accept His promise with full assurance of faith, and rest upon His word without a wavering or a doubt.

It is the joy of the Holy Ghost. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy." It is not indigenous to earthly soil; it is a plant of heavenly birth. It belongs to the kingdom of God, which is "righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." To know it we must receive the baptism of the Pentecostal Spirit in full surrender and simple faith. It is the characteristic of all who receive this baptism that they know the joy of the Lord, and until we do receive this eternal fountain in our heart, all our attempts at joy are but surface wells; they are waters often defiled and their bottom often dry. This is the great Artesian stream, the "well of water" Jesus gives "springing up unto everlasting life."

It is the joy of faith. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." There is indeed a deep delight when God has answered prayer, and the joy of fulfillment and possession overflows with thankfulness, but there is a more thrilling joy when the heart first commits itself to His naked promise, and standing on His simple word in the face of natural improbability, or even seeming impossibility, declares, "though the fig-tree shall not blossom nor fruit be in the vines, yet will I rejoice in the Lord and joy in the God of my salvation." If you are doubting God you need not wonder that your joy is intermittent. The witness of the Spirit always follows the act of trust. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee," but it is just as true, "Surely, if ye will not believe, ye shall not be established."

The joy of the Lord is sustained by His word and nourished by His "exceeding great and precious promises." "I rejoice in Thy Word," exclaims the Psalmist, "as one that findeth great spoil." Oh, the rich delight of beholding in the light of the Holy Spirit, the heavenly landscape of truth open before the spiritual vision, like some land of promise shining in the glory of the sunlight, the whole Bible seeming like the vision Moses saw from Pisgah's top! We have found great spoil, and it is all our own. "We have received the Spirit that we may know the things that are freely given us of God," and we can truly say like the same Psalmist again, "Thy testimonies are the joy and rejoicing of my heart." How sweet the voice in which the Spirit speaks the promises to the sorrowing heart and makes this precious word a living voice from our Beloved!

Dear friends, do you know the joy that lies hidden in these neglected pages, the honey that you might drink from this garden of the Lord, these blossoms of truth and promise? Oh, take your Bibles as the living love-letters of His heart to you, and ask Him to speak it to you in joy and faith and spiritual illumination, as the sweet manna of your spirit's life and the honey out of the Rock of Ages!

It is the joy of prayer. Its element is the closet, and its source the Mercy-seat. No prayerless life can be a happy one. "They that wait upon the Lord shall mount up on wings as eagles." "Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

"This is the place where Jesus sheds
The oil of gladness on our heads;
The place than all besides more sweet,
It is the blood-bought Mercy-seat."

It is the joy of meekness and love. "For the meek shall increase their joy in the Lord," and the loving spirit ever finds that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Selfishness is misery, love is life and joy. The gentle, lowly, chastened spirit shall find all the flowers in bloom and the waters flowing in the valleys of humility. The unselfish heart shall never fail to prove the promise true, "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, the Lord shall satisfy thy soul in drought, and thou shalt be like a watered garden and a spring of water whose waters fail not."

Beloved, do you know the gladness which comes from yielding to the will of God, or bearing patiently the wrong, from being silent under the word of reproach, from returning good for evil, from the word that comforts the sorrowing heart, from the cup of cold water to another given, from the sacrifice of your own indulgence that the saving may be given to Him? Oh, then it is that all the bells of joy are heard softly ringing, and the Master whispers to the hearts that tremble with its gladness, "ye did it unto me."

It is the joy of service and especially of winning souls. All true work is a natural delight, but work for God in the true spirit and in the power of the Holy Ghost, is the very partnership of His joy, whose meat and drink it was to do the will of Him that sent Him and to finish His work. If you would have a life lifted above a thousand temptations and petty cares be busy for your Master, and let each moment see

"Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wanderer sought and won,
Something for thee."

We cannot convey the Living Water to another heart without being watered ourselves on the way. There is no

joy more exquisite than the joy of leading a soul to Christ. It is like the mother's strange, instinctive rapture over her newborn babe. The other day a precious friend passed through the gates a few moments after her babe was born, but in the hour of her agony her very first word was, "How is my babe?" It was the first thrill of that strange delight which is the very touch of the love which the Holy Ghost will give us for the souls He permits us to win for Christ. It is, indeed, a spiritual, motherhood, and it has all the joy and all the pain of a mother's love.

Beloved, do you know the ecstasy of feeling the new life of an immortal spirit sweeping through your very veins, as, kneeling by the side of one just born to die no more, you place it, as a newborn babe in the bosom of your Saviour? You may know this joy, and every Christian ought to know it a hundred-fold. It is the joy of angels, setting all the harps of heaven ringing, and surely it were strange if it were not the higher joy of ransomed saints.

It is the joy of the faithful servant. There is a sense even here, in which as often as we are true to God and faithful to the call of duty and opportunity, His Spirit gives us a present reward and a baptism of joy, and whispers to the faithful heart, "Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

It is the joy of hope. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God." It is the reflected light of the coming Sunrise and the Millennial Day. Except the death and resurrection of Jesus and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, there is nothing that sheds within the heart a diviner gladness, and on the brow a holier light, than the blessed hope of the Lord's Coming. It is, indeed, "a light in the dark place," the very Morning Star that presages the Rising Sun. Then let us in this blessed hope "lift up our heads, for our redemption draweth nigh."

And finally, it is the joy of Christ Himself within us. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." This is the deepest secret of spiritual joy; it is the indwelling Christ Himself rejoicing in the heart as He rejoiced on earth even in the darkest hour of His life, and as now, in heaven, He realizes the fulfillment of His own Messianic words in the sixteenth psalm: "Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul among the dead, nor suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence there is fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." In the fullness of joy He is reigning now, and its tides are swelling and rising to the same level in every heart in which He dwells.

Walking along the ocean beach hundreds of feet from the shore you may dig a little hole in the dry sand, and it will fill with water. Underneath the sand the waters flow and fill the pool to the level of their source. And so the life that is hid with Christ in God is in constant contact with the fountain of life, and though the world may not always see the overflow, yet the heart's depths are ever filling, and we only need to make room, and lo! the empty void, whether great or small, is full to the measure of the fullness of God. This, beloved, is why we beseech you to receive the indwelling Christ. He is the source of the River of the Water of Life that flows from the Throne of God and the Lamb, and those whose hearts are His temple can sing, no matter how the tempests rage and the fig-tree withers,

"God is the Treasure of my soul,
The source of lasting joy;
A joy which time cannot impair,
Nor death itself destroy."