

CHAPTER IX

JOY AND PRAISE

"Let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them: let them also that love Thy Name be joyful in Thee."—Psalm v. 11.

THE genealogy and history of praise are contained in six well-known words. They are all associated etymologically and when placed in order they tell their own story. The six words are: "price," "appraise," "appreciate," "prize," "precious," "praise." Praise may therefore be defined as the expression of appreciation. Praising is the result of prizing. We can easily see from this that the praise of God is the expression of our appreciation of God. We prize Him, therefore we praise Him. He is precious, and is therefore to be praised. This appreciation of God refers both to what He is and what He gives, for Scripture uses praise in connection with both ideas. The true spirit of praise will thus be the true expression of our appreciation. In so far as God is real and realised in our life we shall find Him precious, and the result will be praise.

But the question at once arises, What is the true spirit of praise? How may we know that this is ours? There is at least one sure test and

certain proof: the possession by us of the spirit of joy. When we know what the joy of the Lord is, when we understand what it is to rejoice in the Lord, we shall have the guarantee of the true spirit of praise. This, then, is our subject, the relation of joy to praise; and we shall consider it under the guidance of four propositions.

THE NATURE OF JOY IS A CALL TO PRAISE

What is joy? Joy is a condition of soul, an attitude of soul, an emotion of soul, which is the direct result of our being right with God. It is due to our accepting, maintaining, and realising a right position before God. It cannot be too strongly emphasised or too constantly remembered that joy is the immediate and necessary outcome of a heart that is right and a life that is straight with God.

This joy, arising from a right relation to God, concerns the whole of our life—past, present, and future. In regard to the past it is the joy of recollection, arising out of what God has been to us; in regard to the present it is the joy of realisation, arising out of what God is to us; in regard to the future, it is the joy of anticipation, arising out of what God will be to us. Thus we have the joy of retrospect, aspect, and prospect, and all is concerned with God's relation to us and ours to God.

Joy is therefore to be clearly distinguished from happiness, though the two words are often used interchangeably and the two things are confused far too frequently. Happiness, as we can see from the word, depends on what *happens*, i. e., on circumstances, and it varies accordingly. Joy is really independent of circumstances, and should be unvarying. St. Paul could not have been "happy" when he spoke of himself as "sorrowful," but he could nevertheless say, "Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Happiness is like the surface of the sea; to-day calm, to-morrow turbulent. Joy is like the bed of the ocean, ever the same. Happiness depends on what we *have*; joy depends on what we *are*. Happiness is excited by the possession or expectation of good things as distinct from evil; joy is excited by the possession or expectation of God, apart from good or evil.

It can readily be seen, then, that since joy is what it is, it is the direct source of praise. If we prize God we shall have joy in God, and having joy we shall express it in praise. The nature of joy is a call to praise.

THE EXPERIENCE OF JOY WILL BE THE SUBSTANCE
OF PRAISE

There are many ways in which joy comes to us. The avenues of joy are manifold. Limiting

ourselves to the verse which heads our chapter, we notice three channels of joy.

There is the joy that is born of *faith*. "Let all those that trust in Thee rejoice." Trust links us to God and leads to joy. There is the joy of conversion, "the joy of salvation." "We joy in God, through whom we have received the atonement." "Joy and peace in believing." This was the joy of the Philippian jailor who "rejoiced believing in God." This is the joy of condemnation cancelled, of guilt removed, of righteousness imputed, of acceptance bestowed.

And the joy of faith is the joy, not only of the commencement, but also of the course and continuance of the Christian life. It is the joy of consecration, for our whole life is a life of faith. Faith unites us to God, and enables us to abide in God; faith rests on God's faithfulness, depends on His wisdom, appropriates His fulness, and realises Him as our all in all.

There is the joy that comes from *assurance*. "Let them ever shout for joy because Thou defendest them." This is the joy that depends not on our faith, but on God's faithfulness; not on our trust, but on His trustworthiness. This is the spirit that can count it all joy when we fall into divers trials—the spirit that glories in tribulation, that rejoices because our names are written in Heaven. This is the joy that comes from

the confident and blessed assurance that God is our shield, our strength, and salvation.

There is the joy that arises out of *love*. "Let them also that love Thy Name be joyful in Thee." This is the joy that comes from fellowship. "God's Name" means God's character, God's nature as revealed in His Word, and to "love His Name" is to have fellowship with Him in and through His great purpose and provision of grace in Christ. To love His Name we must know His Name, and at the same time in order to know we must love, and the result of this fellowship will be joy in God.

This threefold experience of joy will naturally and inevitably be the substance of our praise. The feeling of joy will lead to the fact of praise, experience will lead to expression, and joy to praise.

**THE DEEPENING OF JOY SHOULD BE THE GROWTH OF
PRAISE**

The Christian life is intended to be a life of progress, a life of perpetual movement on an upward path. This progress is indicated in the verse before us.

There is a clearly marked growth in the nature and effect of joy. Three times, as we have seen, joy is mentioned in the text, and not only is there a difference in the experience of joy, but

there is also a difference in the expression of joy. The first gives us joy as a separate act ("re-joice"); the second shows joy as a constant habit ("ever shout for joy"); the third reveals joy as a settled character ("be joyful"). Act, habit, character—this is the true order of the Christian life. "Sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." These words have their practical application to the Christian life. Our acts of joy should become habits, and our habits go to form our Christian character; and we may be sure that if our life is not settling into habits and forming character, there is a great weakness, a grave want somewhere.

This deepening joy is seen by a further consideration of the verse. The joy of trust emphasises the human act; the joy of assurance makes prominent the Divine gifts; but the joy of love is a joy in God Himself rather than in His grace or gifts.

This threefold progress of the Christian life is to be found in other parts of the Word of God. St. John writes (1 John ii. 12-14): "Little children"; "Young men"; "Fathers." "I write unto you, little children . . ." This answers to the joy of trust. "I write unto you, young men . . ." This is the joy of assurance. "I write unto you, fathers . . ." This is the joy of love.

Look also at St. John xxi.: "Feed My lambs"; "Shepherd My sheep"; "Feed my *growing* sheep." (See Westcott *in loc.*) Consider also St. Paul at Miletus, in Acts xx. In three verses he gives us the true progress. At first he refers to the "Gospel of the Grace of God"; then to "preaching the kingdom of God"; and, lastly, to "declaring the whole counsel of God." We have the same growth in the babe of 1 Cor. iii., the instructed believer of Rom. viii., and the mature Christian of Eph. i-iv.

We must therefore emphasise the need of progress in joy; and then as our joy deepens our praise will grow in reality, sincerity, and glory. The deepening of joy must be the growth of praise.

THE DEGREE OF JOY MUST BE THE MEASURE OF
PRAISE

There is a great law of proportion in the Kingdom of God. It is suggested in many parts of the Word of God, but very simply and significantly by the use of the prepositions in Hebrew and Greek which we render by "according to." If we read Psalm cxix., with its iteration of "according to"; if we study the Epistle to the Ephesians, with its frequent and profound emphasis on "according to." we shall see that Divine grace is accord-

ing to Divine love, so human life should be according to Divine grace. Human joy, therefore, should be "according to" Divine grace, and our praise should be "according to" our joy.

Now in the Word of God there are various epithets associated with joy which tell us what God is ready to bestow and what we ought to be ready to receive. We have the "much joy" of Acts viii., the "great joy" of John xv., the "fulness of joy" of Ps. xvi., the "joy unspeakable" of 1 Pet. i., and the "everlasting joy" of Isa. xxxv.

And as our joy increases, our praise should increase. The measure of the one must be the measure of the other, the ratio exact and the proportion perfect. The degree of joy is the measure of praise.

This, then, is the relation of joy and praise. The nature of joy is a call to praise; the experience of joy is the subject of praise; the deepening of joy is the growth of praise; and the degree of joy is the measure of praise. From all this we infer two practical truths for our daily life.

Joy is a very *simple* test of life.

It is perhaps the simplest barometer of our spiritual state. This is so because it means our asking but one question, "What is God to me *now*?" In proportion as God is appreciated and prized

will there be joy, but if there be no joy, it really means that there is no appreciation of God. No appreciation, no joy; some appreciation, some joy; much appreciation, much joy; growing appreciation, growing joy; abiding appreciation, abiding joy.

Joy is a very satisfying test of life.

We cannot possibly test our own holiness; others alone can do that. We cannot possibly gauge our own humility; we cannot possibly register our own growth in grace. This all means looking within, which is a fatal mistake for any believer. But when I ask myself, "What is God to me *now*?" I am at once occupied with Him rather than with myself, and in that occupation we find our perfect satisfaction. In His light "we see light," light on ourselves and our life; and joy in God, because it is the index of our appreciation of God, will be the surest test of our spiritual life and power.

We have, therefore, only to let God be real, to live close to Him, to let Him be first, submitting to His righteousness, relying on His faithfulness, abiding in His presence, drawing from His fulness and surrendering to His lordship, in order to live a life of ever-growing joy, a life of ever-deepening praise, and a life of ever-increasing glory to God.