

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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PICTURES OF HAPPINESS.

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## A Sermon

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“Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”—Psalm cxliv. 15.

SOMETIMES God's people are unhappy when they ought to be happy. God observes this. Therefore he tells them when they possess the materials of happiness, and gives them a description of the peace and prosperity of those who are truly happy men. Recollecting thus the choice mercies which surround them, and not attaching so much importance to the little trials of the day, they may become of God's mind, and feel themselves to be as happy as he declares they are. The pure in spirit are said by our Saviour to be blessed. They often think themselves to be cursed, and feel as if there were no blessing for them. But blessed they are, for Jesus knows whom he hath blessed. And God's people are sometimes in their own consciences unhappy, but a happy people they are, and to be congratulated on their condition notwithstanding. They have reasons for happiness; they have satisfactory grounds for happiness; they have springs of happiness; they have future prospects of happiness. If you are God's people, you cannot err in exercising faith about this thing. You are numbered with those who are the happiest people under heaven.

The text speaks not only of the persons, but also of the condition of God's people—a condition which I believe is to a great extent parallel to our own as a Christian church. It seems to me that

we have, according to the gospel standard of interpretation, all the privileges, all the blessednesses, which, in the verse preceding the text, David ascribes to this happy people. I shall ask you, therefore, to look at these things, that each particular may be an incentive to gratitude. He declares here:—

#### I. THE ELEMENTS OF HAPPINESS.

First, David accounts those to be a *happy people who are in a healthy and vigorous condition*. The sons have “as plants grown up in their youth, and the daughters as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.” It is a great blessing to a church to have in her midst fruitful, earnest young men, aye! and I will say that, whatever their age may be, it is no small measure of a church’s strength to have her sons about her, who, having grown up and become mature in knowledge, mental force, and spiritual vigour, bear fruit unto the glory of God.

There has been a tendency in the Christian church to decry instrumentality. But God always has worked by instruments. So far as we know, he always will. When Christ ascended up on high and led captivity captive, the gifts which he received for men were men, apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, and the like. It is no small riches to a church to have in her midst men, teachers qualified to teach, and seeking to save as well: to become evangelists, in this way and in any other way, thus aiming to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Ah! unhappy is that church where her sons are all slumbering, where they are all stereotyped in their beliefs, and in their several states never make any advance, feeling no throbs of sacred ambition, never caring to come to spiritual attainments, resting satisfied with the lowest possible eminence of grace, without any desire to advance to a high degree of love to God. Blessed is that church where her sons seek to grow up and to bear fruit unto God! And not less blessed to have in her midst sisters who are like those pillars we sometimes see in public buildings—beautifully fluted, carved, polished, the very adornment of the structure, placed at the corner, corner-stones that help to cement the entire structure and bind it together. It seems to be to be one of the peculiar gifts of the Christian sisterhood to be the means of holding the entire fabric of the Christian church in sacred love; and though in our belief they ought not to do this by public speech, yet by quiet conversation, active sympathy, and the patient endurance and holy tenacity of affection, they may help to keep the church well bolted together, well barred and banded, well cemented, so that the stones of the church shall not be detached the one from the other. Happy is the church that abounds in Christian matrons and younger women willing to be serviceable for Christ!

Do I remind you that this is our happy case, you may, perhaps, think little of it, and lightly esteem the cause for gratitude. But were you in some churches where there are not men nor women

enough to take the Sabbath school—and such churches I have visited—where there are none, positively none to assist the pastor, where the whole work must be confined to a one-man ministry because the rest of the members do not seem to be alive in the sacred service—if you were members of such churches, you would deplore their lamentable poverty both day and night. Has God made it otherwise with us, let us bless his name, and, while thanking him, acknowledge that we are happy to be in such a case.

Next to that the Psalmist describes *plenty as a peculiar pleasure*. “That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store.” Bountiful provision of the gospel! The ministry is to have all things desirable for Christians, if they are to be made happy. Unhappy they who can seldom hear a sermon, or who, hearing it, might well have spared their ears the trouble of listening to the words. Thrice happy they who hear the pure truth of Jesus Christ, even though it be spoken in a rough manner, and in a style that has no enchantments for the soft lovers of rhetoric and elocution. If ever you are laid up a while upon a bed of sickness, you may heave a deep sigh for the privilege you scarcely know how fully to appreciate till you lose it, that you can go up to the house of God. I heard but the other day from one who has been unable to worship with us for months such words as these, “Oh! Ziona, Ziona, the loved of my heart, when shall the day return that I shall again rejoice with the multitude that keep holy day, and lift up my song with them, and bow my head in the midst of the great congregation?” By your regrets which you will feel when you are thus laid aside, value the privilege while you possess it—the privilege of having an open Bible expounded, and of being able to join with the whole company of the faithful in the worship of the most high God. If at any time the Word has been marrow and fatness to you, then think yourselves happy, yea, rejoice to-night, and give to God the gratitude of your souls.

Further, the Psalmist represents *multitude as being a cause of thankfulness*. “That our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets.” Sheep are always a favourite type of the servants of the Lord Jesus. I cannot, nor indeed need I, enter into the illustration, you yourselves understand it so well; but the peculiar blessing is when these sheep are multiplied by thousands and by ten thousands. Alas! for the church when she is satisfied with an increase of one or two during a year. Ah! miserable church that shall be content if the pool of baptism is never stirred by those that profess their faith in Jesus! if at the sacramental table there should be no fresh visitors at the feast of love. Ah! miserable state of religion in which the churches shall think this to be their fit and proper condition, and shall say they are comfortable while the world is perishing and none careth for souls. Oh! what a joy it is when every member of a church becomes fruitful in leading others to Christ. I know this is much the experience of my dear brothers and sisters in church

fellowship here. The greater number, I believe, are striving to be missionaries for Christ. I wish I could honestly hope that all were so doing. It is to the shame of those who are not doing so that they can sit side by side with earnest Christians and not be more earnest themselves. Yet I thank God and take courage, as I remember many of you who, by tears and prayers, and afterwards by earnest labours, some of them of the most self-acrificing kind, have gone forth to bring others to Jesus, so that from a handful of men we have multiplied and shall multiply yet as the dispensation of God's grace shall be continued to us.

Now, brethren, these may not seem to some selfish spirits any great things to rejoice in. But lovers of Christ, who have some of Christ's likeness in their hearts, will account it a matter for which to clap their hands and indulge in holy mirth when souls are converted. Is it not better to see a sinner saved than to see your purse full or your lands extending? Should it not give you greater joy that Christ is glorified, than that anything, however desirable, should transpire for your own carnal gratification? Let him reign if I perish. Let the crown sit well upon his head, if I be trodden like mire in the streets. Let him be King of kings and Lord of lords, even if his poor servant die forgotten and unknown.

The next blessing mentioned in the Psalm is *the happiness of God's people is their strength*: "That our oxen may be strong to labour." I think here, by oxen, there is mystically and spiritually intended all the workers of the church, but especially ministers of Christ. Paul expressly calls these the oxen—"Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." It is a blessed circumstance when those that essay to plough any part of God's field are qualified for the work. Whenever I see a man driving a horse with a load that is too much for it, I thank God it is not my task to have such work as that. A company of people attempting a work for which they are not qualified either by gifts or grace is an unhappy spectacle. If God makes men strong to labour so that their labour is their delight, and the service of God is a very recreation to them, it ought to be, and it must be, a cause of thanksgiving. Perhaps some of you have been refreshed of late. I know my Sunday School teachers can bear me witness. You have had such visitation from God that teaching in the Sunday School has become a greater joy to you than it ever was. There are, I know, others of you whose service to Christ is by no means misery. You go forth to the battle, not with dolorous sounds, but with music in your hearts, with a happy beaming of your eye, with the precision of saints, and with the attendant symbols of victory. Be thankful for this, for it is no small blessing when the labourers are strong for their work.

Then comes *the blessing of peace*: "That there be no breaking in, nor going out." No secession fomented by discord; no heresies invading the midst of the happy family and rending asunder hearts

that should be as one. If it should ever be your wretched lot to be a member of a church that has been distracted by schism and discord, you will confess that, perhaps of all things in Christian experience, there is nothing that humbles the soul more, nothing that wounds the heart more, and that does more mischief to the inner life, than personal jealousies and the party divisions they occasion. It is a blessing unspeakable when God keeps so many hearts in holy union. We so easily divide, our tastes naturally are so different, there are such varieties of circumstance and of temperament among us—some rich, some poor, some lively and cheerful, some gloomy and desponding—it is not likely that a company of men will all agree together year by year without some jarings; and where peace rules, and there are no breakings forth of the waters of strife, everyone ought devoutly to bow his head in a gratitude which he cannot express, and say, “Lord, with thee there is no breaking in nor going out.”

The last mercy which David mentions is that of *satisfaction*—“that there be no complaining in our streets.” And can we not appropriate this when, instead of hearing the voice of murmuring on the right hand and on the left—murmuring against the preacher, murmuring against the officers, murmuring against one another; each one is encouraging his fellow to do the work of the Lord, and all are unanimous together in this sole regret, that we can’t love more, can’t work more, can’t glorify God more? Oh! this makes a happy church. It is evidence of a people near to God. Theirs is a happy case.

Now, brothers and sisters, these things may have in them little interest for strangers, but they will have, I trust, some force, though I put them thus hurriedly to you, for those who have been with us from the beginning, and whose history has proven how God has multiplied his blessings. Unworthy of the least of all his mercies we were, and the church was brought low by affliction and sorrow, till it seemed as though our name would be blotted out from his Israel, and Ichabod was written on our walls; but God turned his hand in mercy upon us. That is fifteen years ago, and by the space of these revolving years he has never ceased to bless. We have had no startling phenomena of revival, we have had no excitements such as have passed over different parts of the Christian world; but steadily, as though all had been regulated by an ever-progressing geometry, we have gone on to increase and to multiply, and have been led on from service to service in the name and strength of the Lord God. Not one particle of this is ascribable to human agency, only so far as God may have pleased to use it. The whole of it belongeth unto God. We then at least, whatever others may say, ought to keep in the same frame of mind in which we were last Monday evening when we gathered round that communion table, instant in prayer, constant in fellowship, continuing to be happy in blessing, and praising, and magnifying the Lord.

## II. THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.

The latter part of the text carries up to higher ground. Happiness, a practical outflow from the favour which God shows, is traced to its source, the God of all grace; and accounted for by the covenant relations into which he has entered. "Yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord." Now, beloved, our God is the Lord, our God is Jehovah. Let me refresh your memories with this truth in two or three of its aspects, that you may remember and act in the spirit suggested by them. Our God is the Lord.

*He has revealed himself to us in that character.* We knew him not. We said, "Who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?" When we heard of him in the preaching of his truth, it only reached our outward ear, we felt no power in our spirits till it pleased God to reveal himself to us. It was years ago with some of us, it was only a few months with others of you. Oh! I charge you, go back to that blessed day, when those blind eyes were opened, and when that dead heart began to feel the divine light. Oh! then it was you said, "He is my God." You did not come to him and ask him to be your God, but he who gave himself to you in the eternal covenant before the world was, in the fulness of time, gave himself to you by his effectual grace, making you willing to accept him and to kiss his silver sceptre. Yes, you have been changed from an enemy into a friend. Your back is no longer toward your God.

"But now subdued by sovereign grace,  
Your spirit longs for his embrace."

Now, bless him for that with all your heart to-night.

Moreover, he is your God because *you have been brought to acknowledge him as such.* Most of you have been baptized into the name, the one glorious name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and by that act you declared to all men that you would be dead to all the world besides, and alive only to Christ. You came forward years ago moved by earnest zeal, and you said, "Let others do as they will, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." This work of grace led you from believing with the heart to confess with the mouth. I trust that many a time since then, you have stood in the gap for God when his name has been dishonoured by the ungodly, that you have avowed it in your family and business that you are the Lord's servant. Whilst others have disregarded his law and his truth oppressed, my soul followeth hard after him unto shame and derision, and I will follow where my Saviour leads. Now, you are happy to be able to do this.

Happy is the people who acknowledge God to be the Lord. Be happy to-night, then, and show your happiness by praising the name of the Lord in your heart. The Lord has been your God since then, inasmuch as you have believed in him. In the day of trouble your soul has found peace by confiding in his goodness.

When you have felt the weight of sin, you have got rid of that weight by coming to the pardoning God. Oh! the mere professors do not know what it is to take God as he really is. They take him to be, what shall I say? to be anything but their Almighty Sovereign. They take the Lord to be their lackey, to help them in some greivous hour when they can't help themselves—to be their make-weight, on an emergency just to supply a few of their deficiencies. They pick and choose his commands. They will be fruitful enough in duties that bring them honour, but they are barren enough in any duties that are sacred, that only belong to God and their own soul. As to outward ceremonies, they can indulge abundantly, but to spiritual religion they are utter strangers. They have never taken God to be altogether their God. Why, that means something more than Master, more than Father, more than King. Oh! dost thou know what it means? Is he all in all to thee? That is what Godhead is, all in all. Dost thou take him to be all in all to thee, henceforth and for ever? Happy are the people that can say that in very truth. It may cause them loss, it may often make their course run contrary to flesh and blood; but if they own God to be their Lord, so as to give him entire obedience as his grace enables them, they are pronounced happy by the highest authority, and happy they shall be, come what may.

We have taken God to be our God, not merely to trust in him, but, to go further, *to enjoy him*. Have you not had sweet enjoyment with your God, beloved, when he has brought you to feel that all things around you might be shadows, but that God was true? Have you never so realised God in your little chamber that you did forget there was a world of sin and sorrow, and care, and only did remember him? Have you never felt as you have come down from that mount of fellowship, that when the atheist said there was no God, you could laugh him to scorn, for your spirit had seen him face to face, and your soul had come into contact with the soul of the infinite God, and you had as truly communed with him as ever man communed with his fellow, or ever heart had fellowship with heart. Yes, oh! seek this yet again. Yea, let it be your element to live in the enjoyment of communion with God, for those are the happy people who, to the highest degree by inward fellowship, take God to be their God.

And then, over and above that, having enjoyed something of the Lord, we have *taken the Lord to be our God that we may serve him*, It has been our delight, when we have had opportunities, to try and spread abroad the theme of his great and glorious name. You have chosen to give him of his substance; I trust you have not held back any of the talent which your Master has entrusted to you. In proportion as any man or woman here answers to the description we have been reviewing, in that proportion shall they be truly happy. If thou hast but partly trusted and partly communed, and partly served, thy happiness may well be shallow. But if

thou hast trusted with thy whole heart, leaning thine own entire weight upon the Lord, and if thou hast loved with all the power of thy passion, and communed day by day in closest fellowship with him, if thou hast served him with thy whole heart, and soul, and strength, then happy art thou. God declares thee such, and in the highest degree thou certainly shalt be such, world without end.

The believer who thus has taken God to be his God is happy, because he has a portion with which he never can grow discontented. Men outgrow their books. Students come to look on the volumes they once valued as being worn-out things. Men outgrow their friends; those that were their superiors once they can outstrip. Men outgrow their substance and their wealth. The comfort they once had in these things they find no longer. The most pleasant pleasures of the world are the first to expire as men advance; especially as they grow old that which once contented them becomes vanity of vanities in their account. But no man outgrows his God. No soul ever runs at such a rate that he passes beyond the powers that God has given him. No, beloved; but the more our capacities are enlarged and our desires expanded, the more perfectly satisfied are we with the Lord our God. He that hath this portion has one that can never be taken away from him. The world did not give it, and the world cannot steal it. The devil has tried full often to take away from us our God, but he shall never do that. Time may rob us of our health, the world may rob us of our wealth, sickness may deprive us of a thousand comforts, but there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our inheritance cannot be alienated; it is where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal!

Hence the Lord's people are a happy people, because they have a portion they can die with; they have a pleasure that can make their dying pillow soft, and riches they can take with them through the last rim river—can pass its floods without losing a single farthing of their heritage—nay, can pass the flood and land upon the other shore to enter more fully into the bliss which God has prepared for them that love him.

I wish we were all such happy people; I wish we were all of us happy to the fullest degree. If you are not, you may be: if you are not, if you trust in Christ, you shall be; if you come empty-handed and simple, and take Christ to be your Saviour. He never did reject one yet, and never shall. He will accept you to-night, and put you in the same happy case as others of his people. I know there are some here that are hard to comfort, but the Master, I trust, will do it yet, for he looseth the prisoners and delights to find out the hard cases and to deal with them. If there is a dungeon door that no key can open, he delights to come with the mighty hammer of his Word and dash the door in pieces and give the spirit liberty. May he do that to-night, and we will sing together then of his pardoning power. Amen!