

SERVING THE LORD WITH GLADNESS

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A SERMON
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“Serve the LORD with gladness.”
Psalm 100:2

MUCH of the sweetness of music lies in the ear to which it is addressed. There are mysterious sweetnesses and unknown harmonies which lurk amid the notes, and are detected only by the ear attuned to melody. The most enchanting strain to one ear may be discord itself to another. The wise man tells us that as vinegar upon niter, so is he who sings songs to a sad heart. The song in itself may embody the soul of delight, and yet it may be misery itself to the ear which is not in tune therewith.

So is it with my text. It is a short, but inexpressibly sweet stanza. “Serve the LORD with gladness,” is a delightful sonnet to the spiritual mind, but to the ungodly, the careless, the unspiritual, it is flat and dull—the grinding of labor’s wheel—and far other than a verse from a cherub’s harp.

The very first word is “serve,” and the proud spirit of unregenerate man kicks at that at once. “Serve!” says the man, “why should I be a servant? I hate the yoke and I will not bow my neck.” The lawless spirit, fond of what it calls “free thought” and “free action,” hates the sound of the word “serve.”

“I will be my own master,” says the willful, wayward, soul of the man who knows not what is meant by obedience, and has never drunk into the deep joy of submission to the Lord. “Serve!” says he, “let those do so who are calves enough to bow their necks, but as for me, I know no government but my own ungovernable will.”

But to the soul that has been subdued, delivered from the bondage of its own self-dominion—the soul that is humble, teachable, weaned from the world, and changed into a little child, the thought of service has heaven in it. For such a heart remembers that in the New Jerusalem they serve God day and night, and it looks forward to perfect service as being its perfect rest. Renewed minds accept “Ich dien”—“I serve,” as their motto, and feel ennobled thereby.

The next word of our text, which we may well call the golden canticle of labor, is even more distasteful to the carnal mind. “Serve *the LORD*.” Men’s hearts are naturally atheistical, they will not endure the thought of God. The most of men are careless and indifferent to their heavenly King. They remember all things except the God who made them.

We find them willing to serve their country, to serve science, literature, art, trade, but as to serving God, they will have none of it. The spirit of this age is too much that of Pharaoh. “Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice?” To the philosophical mind it seems to involve an absurdity to serve a being whom you cannot see, whose voice you cannot hear, and whose existence is unfelt by the unspiritual, unawakened mind. Therefore the wise man turns upon his heel, and says that he will serve any other master sooner than serve the Lord.

The man who has once known, who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and been made to enter into the Lord’s covenant of mercy, and has seen under what obligations he is laid to the loving-kindness and tender mercy of JEHOVAH, to such a man the very thought of serving God is liberty. He delights to run in the way of God’s commandments, and the statutes of the Most High are to him sweeter than honey or the droppings of the honeycomb.

“Serve the LORD.” “Ah!” says the quickened spirit that has been made obedient by a work of grace within, “would God I could always serve Him, and never in thought, or word, or deed, rebel against His gracious will.” To serve God is to reign. He who obeys the King of kings is himself a king.

As for the next word of my text, which contains the rarest sweetness of it, “Serve the LORD *with gladness*,” this is a point to which the mere carnal mind never did attain, and never will. Any connection between religion and gladness seems to the most of men to be very remote indeed. Many people attend to their “religion,” as they call it, but it is downright slavery.

They go up to their place of worship because it is a terrible necessity of custom that respectable people should meet in certain fixed places on the Sabbath. But they are glad when the service is short—exceedingly glad if it could be made so short as to be omitted altogether. They look upon their religious exercises as a tax which they pay to God, or rather, as a tax which they pay to respectability, for living in a country where so many think it right to profess the Christian faith.

The worldly religionists’ service has no gladness in it. “Serve the LORD with gladness” seems to the carnal mind to be a perfect monstrosity. And yet, mark you, this is the test between the genuine and the hypocritical professor—by this one thing shall you know who it is who fears God, and who it is that does but offer Him the empty tribute of his lips.

There is an old legend, that when the Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon, she posed him with many difficulties, and among the rest, placed before him a vase of artificial flowers, which were so skillfully made that for a while Solomon could not tell which of the two bouquets of flowers were the handiwork of man, until he bade them open the window wide, and watched to see to which the bees would fly. No bees or flies would lodge upon the artificial, but only upon the genuine ones, for there alone they discerned the mystic sweetness which dwells in the secret aroma of the living bloom.

Even so, observe the worldling’s religion. It is beautifully constructed, well put together, it is everything to the eye that could be expected—but no winged delights ever alight thereon, no joyous thoughts find honey there. As for the true believer in Jesus, he serves his God because he loves to serve Him. He assembles with the great congregation because it is his delight to worship the Most High.

To him it is the greatest of all earthly joys, and the antepast of joys celestial to serve the Lord with hand, and heart, and strength, and to spend and be spent for His glory. May God’s grace bring us to know that the text does not mock us, but that it is a thing which is practicable—practicable to every believer—that we can serve God with gladness, ay, emphatically *with gladness*—with an overflowing pleasure unknown elsewhere.

I ask you, before we go further, to let this be a point of judgment with every hearer as to whether his soul finds joy in his religion or not. Let each man inquire whether that which he professes to possess ever causes him delight? With all our cares and sorrows, we who have believed have learned to rejoice in the name of our God. But the base-born professor dreads the majesty of heaven, and feels no flames of childlike love within his bosom. Like slaves, they fear the whip, and they know not the force of constraining love which rules within the hearts of adopted and heaven-born sons of God.

In our text, gladsome service is commended and commanded. We shall first notice *its secret springs*. Then we will endeavor to track *its manifest streams*. Then a word or two about *its difficulties*. Some other suggestions about *its excellence*. And then the conclusion. Briefly on each point.

I. The gladsome service of God has ITS SECRET SPRINGS.

These are too many for me to mention them all, but the following may serve as a sample. One main cause why the believer serves God with gladness is that *he is free from the bondage of the law*. When the believer serves the Lord, it is with no idea whatever of obtaining eternal life thereby. He does not go up to public worship, he does not respect the commandments of the Lord’s house, because he thinks that thereby he shall escape from hell or obtain heaven. Far from this.

He knows that he is saved. He understands that through faith in the Lord Jesus he has been delivered once for all from the penalty of all his sins—they are all forgiven. He is not afraid of the consequences of them—they are blotted out forever. As for heaven, he knows that eternal life is his portion, as the gift of sovereign grace—he is secure in that.

He is one with Jesus. Nothing can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus his Lord, and full well he knows that where Christ is, there shall Christ's servants be, reigning with Him forever.

Hence the heir of heaven serves his Lord simply out of *gratitude*. He has no salvation to gain, no heaven to lose. All things are his by a covenant "ordered in all things and sure." And now, out of love to the God who chose him, and who gave so great a price for his redemption, he desires to lay himself out entirely to his Master's service.

O you who are seeking salvation by the works of the law, what a miserable life yours must be! Why, you are haunted with the miserable foreboding that unless you do this and that, you will forfeit the good will of God, and perish! And you hope that if you diligently persevere in obedience, you may *perhaps* obtain eternal life, though, alas! none of you dare to pretend that you have attained it.

You toil and toil and toil, but you never get that which you toil after, and you never will, for, "By the works of the law there shall no flesh living be justified." However holy or obedient you may be, good works are not the way of salvation. And as you cannot get to London except by taking the road to London, although you may walk ever so earnestly in the wrong direction, so though you be ever so good and honest and excellent, you shall never attain to heaven by these things, for this is not the door of life.

"Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." And since you who go about to lay another foundation set yourselves in opposition to God, you may build, but your building shall fall to the ground. You may weave, but your garments shall turn to cobwebs. You may toil and labor as in the fire, but you shall never obtain comfort by your own doings.

O miserable slaves, your life is spent in bondage. You shall never be fit to die, and now you know not what it is to live. For living, you dread to die, and dying, you tremble to meet your Judge. Nothing can cover a naked soul but the righteousness of our Lord Jesus. You may go to church or the meeting house, you may say prayers and read your Bibles, and do what you will besides, but bond slaves you are, and you shall not be heirs of the promise, for what says the Scripture, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

The child of God works not *for* life, but *from* life. He does not work *to be* saved, he works *because he is* saved. More zealously than the most earnest-work truster will the believer serve, and so he will prove that no power in all world is more mighty than the force of God's love. Not selfishly nor because of fear, but gratefully, joyfully, heartily, out of true affection the true servant of the Lord waits at his Master's doors.

Do you not see, then, how we can serve the Lord with gladness? Because when we make mistakes in serving God, we know they will not destroy us. Because, notwithstanding the thousand infirmities and imperfections of our service, we know that Jesus washes all away in His precious blood. When we sit down sometimes after a day's seeking to honor God, and deplore that we have so greatly failed in it, we do not despair, for we know that the righteousness which covers us has not to be spun by these fingers.

We rejoice that we are accepted not in ourselves, but in the Beloved, and so we rise again, and go once more to "serve the LORD with gladness," because we are still His beloved, still dear to Him, notwithstanding ten thousand slips, and flaws, and errors, and mistakes—still in His covenant, still saved.

Another reason why the Christian serves God with gladness is, because *he has a lively sense of the contrast between his present service and his former slavery*. What a hard, cruel, Egyptian bondage, was that out of which Jesus brought us! We thought it liberty, but when our eyes were opened, we found it to be captivity itself, for we found that the wages of sin is death.

When sin became exceedingly sinful in our esteem, then we felt the iron enter into our soul, and longed to break the chain. To serve the devil, even when he gives us most of the sweets of sin, is intolerable bondage to a sensible, awakened sinner.

But to serve Christ, how pleasant, how joyful! Do but look into the face of the black prince, and you will see reason enough to abhor him. But gaze into the eyes of Immanuel, the Prince of princes, the

fairest among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely, and you will feel that if His service involved lying in a jail, or burning at the stake, yet in comparison with the miseries of the bondage of sin, His “ways are ways of pleasantness.” Jesus is the Master and Lord, whom to obey is perfect peace, but Satan, the foul tyrant, is one from whom we rejoice to have been delivered.

Moreover, the believer’s joy in the Lord’s service springs from the fact that *he serves God from the instincts of his new nature*. Every nature has its instinct. If the Maker creates a bird, it is not painful to that bird to fly, and no force is needed to make it take wing—its instinct is to do so. For a fish to swim is no troublesome matter—that element, which might be very distasteful to the bird, is natural enough and pleasing enough to the fish.

Now, when God creates in His people a spiritual nature, He puts into them impulsive, energetic instincts, which push them forward or restrain them, as the case may be. Take the case of the Well-beloved, who is the pattern of all the family. When He was but a child, He was found in the temple hearing and asking questions of the rabbis. And when His father and mother asked Him how it was that He had left them, He said, “Wist ye not that I *must* be about my Father’s business? Did you not know that there was a necessity laid upon Me, an uncontrollable impulse within Me which drove Me forward to accomplish the will of Him who sent Me?”

So, when you see an earnest Christian working for God, and you inquire why he is earnest, he may well reply, “Wist ye not that I *must* be about my Father’s business?” The genuine Christian, full of the love of God, cannot be an idler. “Woe is unto me,” said the apostle, “if I preach not the gospel.” To tell out to others of the love of God becomes to the faithful heart no arduous service. Like Elihu, he can say, “I speak that I may be refreshed.”

I know that some Christians do not find it so. It is because the love of God in them has come to a low ebb, and the life of God is but feebly within. But the vigorous healthy Christian *must* serve the Lord, ay, and serve Him with gladness too, because he is then obeying the instincts of his nature, and God has made our instincts, when we follow them, to be pleasurable.

The instincts of the new nature, when we follow them out, lead us into service, and consequently there comes into our soul a pleasure unknown to those who are not partakers of the regenerate nature. I have said that to the Christian it is a delight to serve God, and so it is, because it exercises in him those powers which yield delight.

There is always a delight in benevolence. Now, to tell our fellow sinners the way of salvation is the exercise of the benevolence of our heart, and there must be pleasure in it. To serve God causes the exercise of faith, and to exercise faith is one of the grandest pleasures to which a mortal can attain. Hence, to serve God with faith and confidence must be delightful.

Believing service is not the performance of a work naturally irksome to us, to which we bring ourselves by effort, but Christian service is the doing of sacred duties, which to our new nature are congenial occupations, things in which we take our delights. Those grand old builders who erected the famous cathedrals of the olden times, and laid out so much time and skill in carving the ornaments, and piling the pinnacles, shall we pity them for having worked so hard? Far from it.

No pity did they require. Pity would be wasted on them. It was their life’s work. They were in their element when they were producing this thing of beauty, or that specimen of wondrous art. And so with the Christian. The service of God is not to him an employment from which he would escape even if he could. No, he feels it to be an intense delight, and only wishes that he could be more perfectly taken up with it.

Another reason why the Christian is conscious of great gladness in serving God is, that *he has a sense of honor with it*. Did you ever reflect how wondrous a condescension it is in God to allow a creature to serve Him? “The cattle on a thousand hills are mine,” says He. “If I were hungry, I would not tell thee.”

He sits on His throne and establishes it by His own power. He has no dependence upon His creatures. The greatest of spirits He has ever made are as nothing before Him, and yet, see! He

condescends to be served by us! Can I give something to my Creator? Can I do a service to my Redeemer? May I lay my humble tribute at His feet to whom all things belong? Ah, then, how am I honored!

It is an honor to receive from God, but a greater honor still to be a donor to God. Man is put in a very high place when God condescends to make him a co-worker with Himself in the economy of grace, and accepts from His creature the homage of his body and his soul.

Now, it is well known that every man will do work which he feels to be an honor much more easily than that which he thinks degrades him. There have been thousands of enterprises undertaken by men when they have been put upon martial honor which they never would have undertaken for mere fee or reward. Men have gone to the cannon's mouth for the sake of glory.

And shall the Christian be altogether insensible to the motive of honor? Shall he not feel it to be his greatest glory to serve his God? And will there not be from this a stream of joy flowing over all our holy work?

Furthermore, the believer, when he serves God, *knows that his service is not the highest place which he occupies*. "I am a servant," says he, "I am not ashamed of it—to serve God is royal dignity, but then I am not altogether and alone a servant." Here is the Christian's joy—he hears his Master say, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Then he recollects that beyond being a friend he is a child. The spirit of adoption within him cries Abba Father. He looks upon the Lord Jesus Christ as his elder Brother. Ay, and beyond that, he hears from the sacred Book that he is married unto Christ. Jesus has become his Bridegroom and he is the beloved spouse. He understands that there is a union near and dear, vital and matchless, between him and his Master, so that Jesus is the Head, and he is a member of the same body.

Do you see how the thought that the believer is more than a servant, enables him to do more than a servant could do, and gives him a gladness in his service which the mere servant cannot understand?

Again, there comes over the Christian's mind a gentle thought which in his darkest moments yields him joy, namely, that *grace has promised a reward*. We are not to be rewarded *for* the merit of our works, but still the free grace of God has promised that we shall not toil for nought. The diligent Christian looks for the time when he shall hear it said, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

He is "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as he knows that his labour is not in vain in the Lord." It may be that for the present he toils on, and no one gives him a good word—he sows the thankless flood, and no harvest springs from the bread cast upon the waters. But he can afford to wait—he has not measured things by the narrow inch of time, but he has taken a broad eternity into his consideration, and he knows that the time shall come when those who diligently serve on earth, by faith in Jesus Christ, shall participate in the glories of the coming King, and the bliss of the eternal inheritance.

So the humble, trustful worker, sets to his seal that God is true, and goes on in his service, waiting upon his gracious Master, not with despondency and timorous fear, but serving the Lord with gladness evermore. I think I have thus shown you as well as I could this morning, the secret springs which sustain the Christian's gladness when he is engaged in service.

II. Secondly, let us trace some of the MANIFEST STREAMS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE IN THEIR GLADNESS.

Beloved, in the first place, we should always serve the Lord with gladness in the *public assemblies of His people*. The more hypocritical people are, the more solemnly miserable their outward aspect when at worship. As a general rule, I believe that those places of worship where it is thought to be wicked ever to have smiling faces, are dens of formalism, where there is no life of God at all.

I know this, if you go through Continental churches, perhaps two out of three of the preachers are downright deists or infidels of some class or other. And you will find the most horribly sanctimonious

faces, and tones, and manners amongst clergymen, especially among the worst of them. Not believing a word they say, they are obliged to pull as long a face as possible, to look as if they were in earnest, though they are not.

I like to see you coming up to this place not as if you were going to a jail, but like children coming from school and going home to their Father's house. Last Sabbath week I was awakened at six o'clock, in the Hartz mountains, by the cheerful notes of a trumpet playing a sweet enlivening German air. It struck me that was a right fitting way to begin the Sabbath—to wake up with music, to leave off sleep with a dream of angels singing the songs of heaven, and to begin the day by uniting in their praise. Let each Sunday always begin so—not with the dull solemn note of the sackbut, but with psaltery and harp with joyful sound.

Alas! with many the cry is—"Here's another dull day, in which the Crystal Palace is shut up, and all amusement denied us!" An English Sabbath is called by many a dull and dreary day! Ah! you miserable heathens, well may you speak so. It must be dreary to you—but to the genuine Christian, the thought that the world's burden is laid aside, and that now he is to commune with heaven, is as the sweet sound of the trumpet, waking him to a day of feasting and delight.

Then when we come up to the house of God, what is there to make us sad? Is there not everything to make us happy? Shall we sing the praises of God mournfully, and imitate the worshippers of Moloch, who serve him with shrieks and groans? Nay, the God we adore is to be praised with happy hearts, and smiling faces, and joyful notes.

And when we pray to Him shall we be sorrowful? To pray to our Father—a child to spread his wants before his father—can that be bondage? Nay, blessed be His name, if there is a sweet place on earth, it is the mercy seat where earth communes with heaven.

And when we listen to the reading of the Word of God, or the preaching of His truth, shall that be a weariness? Yes, when we have no part or lot in it, when it is like reading a will in which we have no legacy. But if the Gospel be preached as *our* Gospel, the Gospel of *our* salvation, and we have a share in it, what can so inspire our soul with joy?

Yes, let the bells of your heart ring merry peals on the Sabbath. O you chosen seed, be glad, and of all the days in the week, look at the first as the prime glory of all the feast-days of the soul. Do not pull the blinds down, let the sun shine into the room more cheerily than on weekdays. Your God is happy, and would have you happy. And if all the other six days you have to bear your burdens, yet, at least, cast them aside on this resurrection-day, when you must not slumber in the grave of sorrow.

Well, but by serving God, we do not mean merely when we come to a place of worship. For to us, in one sense, there are no places of worship. All places are places of worship to a Christian. Wherever he is, he ought to be in a worshipping frame of mind.

Brethren, when we serve God at the family altar, let us try as parents to mix gladness with it. It is a great mistake when the Christian parent makes the reading and prayer in the family a dull monotonous work. Let us be cheerful and happy at family worship.

In your private devotions you should also "Serve the LORD with gladness." When you get half an hour or more with the Most High, ask Him to enable you to carry out that command of this one hundredth Psalm—"Serve the LORD with gladness." But then the Christian's service for God lasts all the day long!

The genuine Christian knows that he can serve God as much in the shop as he can in the meeting house. He knows that the service of God can be carried on in the farmyard and market, while he is buying and selling, quite as well as in singing and praying. Should not we do our business much better if we looked upon it in that light? Would it not be a happy thing, if, regarding all our work as serving God, we went about it with gladness?

Perhaps your work is very hard. Well, be not an eye-servant or a man-pleaser, but with singleness of heart serve God in that work and you will perform it with gladness. Perhaps your situation is one in which your toil is very arduous. Consider that God has put you there. If you cannot see a door of

removal, accept what God has given. And accepting it from a Father's hand, you will be able to serve Him with gladness. That is a real religion which goes with us through all the acts of daily life—that is a sham religion which only shows itself when a man is on his knees.

A few days ago, in the mountains, we went down in a valley to see a wonderful cascade, a marvelous sheet of water precipitating itself from lofty rocks, and there sat our German friends by scores contemplating it, and reverently admiring its sublimities.

As I looked at the cascade, the thought struck me it was rather too orderly to be altogether what it professed to be. And looking on, I noticed that the floods which poured down from the rocks had suddenly diminished, as if the supply of the liquid element was exhausted. Truly so, we found that this wonderful waterfall was played three or four hours a day, and was an artificial wonder.

I walked away feeling wonderfully taken in, coming to see a cascade of a kind that was played three hours a day! But there is plenty of religion of that sort. It is not genuine. It is played three hours a day or so many hours a week. At certain set times, if you catch the man rightly, he will be very gracious and godly, but if you stumble in when he is immersed in all the cares of the world, you find he is all a sham.

O beloved, let our religion show itself throughout the whole of life. Let us go about our business with a holy gladness because we are serving the Lord. Let us be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, and putting gladness into the whole thing.

Above all, let gladness sparkle in all those actions which we feel called upon to perform for our Master's service. Dear Sabbath school teachers, make the Sabbath happy, and your children happy, by serving the Lord with gladness. City missionaries and Bible women, do not go round your districts as though you were undertakers' men, but go there with gladness, serving the Lord.

Preacher, throw your soul into your work, do whatever you undertake to do for the Master, with a soul flashing with fire. Look upon it not as bondage, but joy, and serve the Lord in it with a sacred alacrity and delight. Thus I have tried to show some of the manifest streams of the Christian's delight.

III. But now, somebody says, "It is much easier to have this than to practice it, and though it may be very easy indeed to tell us to serve the Lord with gladness, does the preacher himself always find it easy to do so?" Well, this is not the place for him to make confessions, but he is quite prepared to admit that it is not always easy to serve God with gladness. That if it were, we should not need to be told to do it, but on account of THE DIFFICULTY OF IT, we are therefore oftener bidden to be happy.

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again," says the apostle, "I say, Rejoice." If he had felt it would be easy, it was sufficient to tell us once, but the repetition shows the difficulty. Our inbred sin—is not that enough, when we serve God, to make us do it with the bitter cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"

Yes, but we shall be delivered, I thank God, through Christ our Lord, we shall be delivered from the bondage of our corruption. Let us not think so much about the disease as about the remedy. While we sigh over infirmities, let us bless God that there is a way of glorying in infirmities because the power of Christ will be manifested therein. Let us serve God in infirmities with the glad thought that we shall not always be imperfect, but by and by shall be in the glory of our Master, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

Outward trials, again—how hard it is to serve God with gladness when one is losing an estate, or when the cupboard is bare, and there is scarcely money to provide the children with clothes! Yet the Christian does not live upon what he sees alone. He knows there is a secret strength, a secret Helper, and he knows how to go to God in times of outward trouble, and cast his care upon Him who cares for him.

Have you never read, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose?" Does not that lantern show a light over your dark path? Beloved, may the Holy Ghost enable you to go on serving God with gladness, even though the fig tree should not blossom, and though there should be no herd in the stall.

"Yes, but," says another, "it is difficult to serve God with gladness when placed in the midst of the ungodly!" So the best of men have found. They have hung their harps upon the willows sometimes.

How could they sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If you cannot sing His song, yet, let me tell you, go on in His work. If you cannot touch the harp strings, yet still serve Him, and by and by the Lord who gives you grace to serve, will give you grace to sing.

For though you are a stranger, yet you are not a stranger with your God. He is with you, and you are a sojourner with Him. Though in the midst of the ungodly, you walk as in a furnace—yet, when the three holy children were in the fire, there was a fourth with them, and so there is one with you like unto the Son of God.

Brethren, we are not to take up those duties which we think to be easy, and to leave those we think to be difficult, but the more difficult the command of God may seem to be, the more earnestly must we set ourselves to carry it out by divine aid.

The text, "Serve the LORD with gladness," may seem to be very difficult to those of a gloomy temperament, or depressed spirit, or those who are under trying circumstances, but O beloved, we can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us. What sense says is impossible, faith accomplishes, therefore let us lift up our hearts and say, "Heavenly Father, help us to serve Thee with gladness according to Your command."

IV. In the last place, there is much EXCELLENCE in cheerful service.

Is it possible that when we serve God with gladness, we thereby escape many Fatherly chastisements which otherwise might come upon us? I was reading, reading with some degree of fear, in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, at the forty-seventh verse, these words, "Because thou servedst not the LORD your God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck."

I was wondering whether if we receive God's mercies, and do not serve Him joyfully, it may not be more than probable that He will withdraw His hand of mercy for awhile, and make us smart under the hand of chastisement till we humble ourselves before Him. Let us serve God with gladness while we have health and strength—we may soon be on the sick bed.

Let us be glad to have anything to give to His cause—we may be reduced to poverty yet, and have no place whereon to lay our heads. While we have the power to serve God, let us do it with gladness, being thankful that we are enabled to do it, or else it may be, seeing we prove unworthy of those things, He may make the sky to be covered with clouds, and send us dark days and bitter seasons.

Do you not think, too, that when Christians serve God with gladness, they derive many benefits themselves? Does not the Lord water those who water others? Is it not the way with Him, when He sees us diligent in service, to give us greater comforts? We are not under the economy of law, as I have said before, but still we are under the paternal economy of God's house.

Just as we do with our own children, if we see them obedient, we are apt to give them much more than we should do if they were constantly seeking to have their own way and their own will. No father uses the rod from choice. He only uses it if driven to it.

So is it with us. If we, as dear children, bring forth much fruit unto God, we shall have much boldness in prayer and much communion with God, and a thousand blessings which otherwise we might not receive shall be ours.

Besides, beloved, does not our God deserve to be served with gladness? Oh, when we get to heaven, if we could have regrets, would not this be one, that we had not served Him better? When we served the world, some of us, we used to do it very heartily. When some of you were in the devil's service, what bold soldiers you were! Nothing was too hot or too heavy in his cause. And shall we serve Christ with less zeal than men serve the great enemy of souls? Our Master deserves to have the best love, the warmest confidence, the sternest perseverance, the utmost self-denial—let us seek to give Him these, and to give them with a cheerful heart.

Besides, if we would do good to our fellow men, we must serve God with gladness. I believe thousands of young people are kept from considering the Gospel by the gloom of some professors. I

know that the world constantly makes this its excuse for not being religious, that if it began to think of God it would have to give up its happiness.

O Christians, I would have your faces so gleam with the light of heaven that even the ungodly, if they care not for your secret life, may love the manifest joy that springs from it. Many a young woman has been led to think of Christ by the holy cheerfulness of a godly mother. There is no doubt that Christian servants have often been the wedge, in the hand of God, to break a way for the Gospel into ungodly families, by their holy, cheerful conduct.

Talk of religion by all manner of means, but above all, live religion and let your religion be cheerful. Let the world see that you serve a good Master. Do not go about slandering the King of Zion, and say He starves His people, and makes them of a sad countenance. When the four young men in Babylon would not defile themselves with the King's meat, "And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king."

But they put it to the test, and said, "Let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenances of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat."

We will put it to the test too. We will try if our joy is not greater than the worldling's. We will stand foot to foot with them and see the result.

Now, beloved, we have come to a conclusion, but I must have two or three last words. Beware of being like those speculative Christians who do not serve God at all, but are content to play games of puzzles with the Bible. It seems to be the genius of some professors nowadays, to take up with explaining prophecies, or finding out novel interpretations of the types, while they forget to do good to the people among whom they dwell.

Let me warn you against that. The life of the Christian should be service, not speculation. If you have time and leisure, addict yourselves to the pursuit of knowledge in the Word of God, and despise not prophecies. Give a fair place to everything, but still always understand that all the speculations in the world, all the understandings of prophecy in the world, are not worth the snapping of a finger compared to bringing forth fruit unto righteousness in the feeding of Christ's sheep and lambs.

That is the business of Christ's Peters. Our business is to save souls. Brethren, you will hear me expounding the Revelation one day—that is, when there is not another of the elect to save. When all the chosen are saved, we will preach upon the deep mysteries of Daniel and Ezekiel, but so long as souls are unsaved, we mean to keep to the plain Gospel—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the simple Gospel of Jesus.

Take this home with you, you who are so fond of knotty points, serve the Lord, and give up your star-gazing. And if you want gladness, you will find it there, but you will not find it in your endless genealogies, and looking into the futurity.

There are other professors, too, who will do anything rather than serve God. The little service they do is done as slovenly as possible and they are always unhappy. They want a comforting ministry! They want to hold on to the promises! My dear brother, it is most probable what you want is neither. You want to serve God, for there is gladness.

If some of you were to take a class in a Sunday school, you would soon find your spirits revive. Some of you dyspeptic Christians who find the Sabbath drag heavily, if you were to go up into that alley or court to visit sick folk, you would find your hearts grow glad. Only try it, now, and give us a report, and if you do not find it a pleasant thing, I am much mistaken.

Our last word shall be a rehearsal of the text, "Serve the LORD with gladness." Do not let us get to be like Martha, who complained because she served alone. Suppose we do—the fewer men, the greater

honor. And if Mary will not serve the Master as we wish that she should, yet as she sits at the feet of Christ, we will thank God that there are diversities of operations, but the same Lord, and we will not get gloomy in spirit because we are not all serving God in one direction.

Let us serve God with gladness, not like the elder brother in the parable, who said, “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.” Why had not the father given him a kid that he might make merry? Because he had never asked him.

So if you and I have been at work in heaviness for years, like the elder brother, let us ask the Father to let us have a feast too. And the surest way to get it is to go out into the fields, and see if you cannot find some poor wandering brother—for if you do get a feast, it will be when the prodigal comes home.

The pith and marrow of what I have to say is, do not sleep away the few hours of this mortal life, but be up and diligent in the cause of Jesus Christ and be glad in it. Be glad, if you are saved yourselves, that you are called to be the means of saving others. and so with holy service, let us begin a new period of time, and go on till God shall take us up to serve Him with perfect gladness where they see His face, and never sin, but from the rivers of His grace, drink endless pleasures in.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 147

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.