



J. A. Trench

THE

“JOY OF THE LORD.”

Notes of an Address (Revised).

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NOTES OF AN ADDRESS

(REVISED).

(PHIL III. : IV. 4-7.)

IT is a blessed thing to have such an epistle as this to the Philip-pians in which we find the true normal experience of the Christian presented to us; and that in the life of a fellow-servant. The more we think of it, the more we shall see the wisdom of God in presenting it thus to us, and not as a matter of doctrine. For in that case, in the treachery of our hearts, we might have said, It is all very fine, but such experience is impossible in a world like this; or else that it was apostolic, or in some sort ministerial, and not within the range of ordinary-christian life.

But the Spirit of God has inspired the apostle to record for us his own experience, in an epistle not addressed as from an apostle, but from “Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ.” (Ver. 1.) It is then simply normal christian experience—the true, proper fruit of the grace and power of the Spirit in the Christian, humbling as it is to own it; seeing that we know so little of it, though the resources that produced it in Paul are as available and effectual for us.

If there is one thing more characteristic of this blessed experience than another, it is joy. The epistle bears the stamp of it throughout. We might not, perhaps, have been prepared to find it so strongly marked here; we might have looked for it to be all joy in Ephesians, where the position of the Christian is in view, and that presented to us at the full height of

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God's eternal counsels, the fruit of a new creation in which they are accomplished, quickened together with Christ, raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavens in Christ. But we do not find that joy characterizes Ephesians, as it does Philippians; which presents the Christian in the path down here, in the circumstances of the daily life with Christ as the power and joy of going through them, and the heavenly glory of Christ as the end before us—a life of divine and heavenly joy in the circumstances whatever they be. Nothing could have been more trying than Paul's circumstances. Suddenly arrested in all the energy of that wonderful service; thrown into prison, from whence there was no probable outlook but a martyr's death; everything going wrong in the church—his deepest interest because it was Christ's; yet his heart is so

full, he only seeks that his brethren outside the prison might share the joy his own spirit drank into so deeply. If it were to be his last word, so to speak, it is "*Finally*, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." "*In the Lord*"—therein lay the spring of the joy for him and for us, a joy not found in, or dependent in any way upon, our circumstances, but which circumstances may be used to deepen as they shut us up to Him who is the source of the joy. How blessed to have this life of heavenly joy upon earth presented to us in the experience of this beloved servant, and to see the source and power of it in Christ known in heavenly glory as the object of the soul, "To me to *live* is *Christ*;" his characteristic existence was Christ, and the object is as powerful to produce it in us as in him.

It may be thought that the

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time is inappropriate to be speaking of joy, in days when the ruin of the church presses more and more upon our hearts. But they were not bright days in Nehemiah's time, when God first enunciated the principle, in His grace, that "The joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh. viii. 10.) They had opened brightly with a returned remnant, seeking out the original ground of their calling. But the early energy of faith needed to maintain it had already declined and there was grave departure. In the last days we find ourselves most surely : the principles of ruin, begun even in apostolic times, have been fearfully developed ; and even in a returned remnant, once more seeking out the original ground of a very different calling, the worst failure has been manifested. Is there any ground for discouragement ? There is the deepest ground for humiliation, but

no ground for losing heart. No epistle is so full of courage as 2 Timothy, which depicts for us the ruin in which we are. “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

It would appear that at this third chapter the apostle supposed he was about to close the epistle—“Finally,” &c. But the Spirit leads him to write on, and how well for us it is so. For now he takes up the various hindrances that might affect the realisation of this joy on earth; not indeed to occupy us with the hindrances, but that we may know resources of power to carry us on in joy, in spite of every hindrance. Verse 2 is a warning, in terms purposely contemptuous, against one and the same phase of evil that so early corrupted the church and dogged the apostle everywhere, in the form of Judaizing teachers, by whom Satan sought so early to drag down Christianity to

a religion for man and this world. "Concision" is a term of reproach, indicating that which was partial, in comparison with "circumcision," which was a total cutting off; this latter term he reserves for Christianity where alone the reality of it is known, verse 3 being a beautiful description of the christian position. "We are the circumcision;" that is, those who have accepted the total cutting off of man in the cross, under the judgment of God. "In whom ye also have been circumcised," &c. (Col. ii. 11.) It is not only that to faith "our old man" has been crucified with Him—that is, all we were as characterised by flesh and sin—but that we have bowed to the end of the man himself, the first man, in the death of Christ, and renounced his whole living status as such in this world. (See Col. ii. 20.) It is the complete end and setting aside, for God and for the faith

of our souls, of the first man in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. This makes room for another thing, even “worship by *the Spirit of God*” (the true reading), instead of by the machinery of the flesh, or its efforts; “and rejoice in Christ Jesus,” which gives us the spring of the worship, the overflow of the joy going up in worship—by the Spirit as the power of it. Now that is the characteristic position of the Christian.

“And have no confidence in the flesh:” this brings us to the first great hindrance—religious flesh; I say religious, because it is that side of the flesh that specially makes the difficulty in the experience of souls. One who is brought to God from open evil has not the same temptation to occupation with self. If he looks back at what he was it is with a shudder; but one who has successfully cultivated the

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flesh as Saul of Tarsus had, and gained a high position among his fellowmen by it, is in danger of a reflex eye upon that which had been his pride. Now the apostle can present himself as having gone further than his fellows in this self-cultivation; his experience is briefly summed up in verses 4-6. How earnestly religious—of the straitest sect of the Jews, he had lived a Pharisee; "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" in outward conduct; and, we learn from Acts xxiii. 1, strictly conscientious in all his life. But what was all that is so highly esteemed among men found connected with? With the most determinate enmity to Christ, not in humiliation but in glory now, ever expressed in man, seeking to blot out the very memory of His name from the earth. What a moment when he saw that blessed

One, against whom he had been running full tilt with all the energy of his being, reveal Himself to him in a light above the brightness of the sun! What an appalling exposure of what man is at his best before God! "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ"! When his eyes were opened thus on the Lord Jesus gone up as Man in divine righteousness into the glory of God, and He became revealed to him as his life and righteousness before that glory, what became of moral, religious, earnestly cultivated self? He counts it as refuse—

'dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

But it may be asked, How could the apostle *look* to be found in

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Him as a still future thing? Was not Christ already the ground upon which as a believer he stood before God? Most surely it was. If it were not so he could not have looked to be found in Him in heavenly glory. But this brings before us what is the immense power of the epistle; namely, the things that are *before the heart*, what it has as *its object*. It is not merely that my place as a Christian involves the renunciation of all that is of self, "the end of all flesh" as having come in the cross; but as Paul looks on into the everlasting glory, his object is to be found there only in Christ, in a righteousness which is of God instead of anything of his own—divine righteousness instead of the best human righteousness. How completely this sets aside everything of that once highly cultivated self—a righteousness which is

wholly, absolutely of God, and become his only by faith in Christ Jesus. Self is no longer before the mind's eye. Where is there a loophole left for anything of the first man to come in? How immense the power practically, for the displacement of self in all its subtle forms, in having Christ *before him* as the One in whom he was looking to be found in the glory of God forever. And thus the first great hindrance is cleared out of the way.

The next thing that comes before him as a hindrance to the realisation of this life of joy is all that surrounds us in this world. We see now how deliverance is found from this great snare. It is still by the power of that which I make my object. (Ver. 10.) “That I may know him.” How the heart is arrested by that word! He has just told us of the effect upon him of “the excellency of the knowledge

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of Christ Jesus my Lord." It was not merely the surrender of what had been his gain, in the first flush of his joy in that wonderful revelation; but there had been the *maintained* estimate of the worthlessness of everything here, "I *count* all things but loss." But more, the test *had come*, and he had "*suffered* the loss of all things," and was able for the sake of Christ so known to look back on all he had lost as only refuse, no loss at all, "and do count them but dung." What can be the meaning of it then, you ask, "That I may know him"? Who ever knew Him as Paul? It means, beloved brethren, that the knowledge of Christ is insatiable. The more we know Him, the more we *must* know. All the heart has learned to know of Him in any feeble measure is only the foundation for a deepening longing to know

Him better. Surely there comes a divine satisfying in every divinely-created longing. For “He satisfieth the longing soul.” The longing desire of his soul was “That I may know him.” Does not that carry with it a divine satisfaction? It does, but only to create capacity for a deeper longing, then a deeper satisfying; and so the growth of the soul is carried on as long as we are here in these longings, with their divine satisfyings, till at last the fulness is reached in His blessed presence for ever. Do we know anything of such desire? It is a totally different thing from resting in Him as a Saviour, at peace with God by all He has brought us out of and into. We must begin there; but all the *growth* of the soul depends upon having *Him*, God’s object for me, as my object for myself, as we see it brought out in the apostle.

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"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection;" that is, the power of the place where He has associated us with Him; and this sought, not that peace may be more perfect, or any blessing better entered into, but that we may go down more fully into the path of rejection with Him here, "the fellowship of his *sufferings*." No such fellowship will ever be known in the eternal glory: if we have missed it now, it is missed for ever. Do we know what it is to be attracted to Him by all His grace, and by the glory of His Person, in this time of His rejection? There is a fellowship of His sufferings more sweet than even that of His glory. David's mighty men had no such intimacy with him in the glories of the kingdom, as when he was hunted like a partridge on the mountains. How incalculable the loss if, through

unfaithfulness or lack of purpose of heart for Christ, we miss the fellowship of His sufferings which we are called to now as the richest privilege of our association with Him in this time and place of His rejection. And the apostle would stop at nothing short of being conformed unto His death. He would go the whole path with Him.

And now (ver. 11) we have the key to this blessed decision in the object before him, “If any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead.” (See New Trans.) Is it that the apostle is uncertain of reaching his destination? No; such a thought would be to miss the whole point of the passage. It is only the expression of the energy with which, his eye being on the *end* of the path, he is pressing on to reach that end. The character of the way that leads there is nothing to him. It might

be painful and toilsome ; a martyr's death might lie on it ; it is nothing to him. His eye and heart are wholly pre-occupied with the glorious end—full resurrection conformity to the image of the Son of God. He knows that that was what he was apprehended for, and nothing short of it will satisfy the apostle. How is it with us, beloved brethren ? Are we resting in being saved ? or pressing on with every energy of our whole being to reach what God has set before His people—what we have been saved for—to be with Christ and like Christ in heavenly glory ? How complete the deliverance by such an object from the world and its things ! Let Satan deck out the world in its best, there is what eclipses it totally in the One who shines before the apostle's heart here. Let him be offered the finest place there ever was for man in this world ; of what value would

it be to one who is pressing on to be conformed to Christ's image in glory? Nothing else will deliver us from the scene that surrounds us, but the power of an object outside it altogether. Satan's objects are all bounded by the horizon of this world; he cannot present to us one thing outside it. The object God presents to us is absolutely outside this world. Tell me, Is to reach Christ in glory an adequate object to absorb our hearts? We little estimate the present practical power even in natural things of what we make our object. We see it here in the divine object before the apostle: it forms him.

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after it that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended by Christ Jesus.” Apprehend is, according to the force of the word here,

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laying hold of the thing. It is not any apprehension of the mind, as we now commonly use the word ; it is laying hold in actual glory of what Christ laid hold of me for. When the first arrow of conviction reached the conscience, and divine love brought in the rays of divine light that shewed us to ourselves and shone on to shew Him to us, He laid hold of us to be like Him in glory. That is what the apostle was following after. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended ; but this *one* thing I do." He had not twenty irons in the fire, as is often supposed to be desirable. Oh, for more concentration of mind on the object God has set before us ! "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I *seek* after." What energy of *pursuit* of that which he desired. Ah ! there is where we so often fail. We lack the energy of faith that

will not be turned aside from the object that we have desired. “Forgetting those things which are behind” will be understood in the measure in which the goal is before the soul, and we are running on to it. It does not refer to failure—we are never meant to forget that; the remembrance of it is needed to keep us humble; but the past points of *progress* are not thought of in the earnestness of the pursuit of what is still before. “Reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus.”

What a deliverance from the poor things of the scene the race lies through! And the apostle sets it before us as proper normal christian experience—not merely to be admired in Paul,—“let us, as many as be perfect.” There can be no perfection of *condition* short of reach-

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ing Christ in glory. He had used the word in this sense in verse 12. Here (verse 15) the perfect are those who are in the faith of their souls in Christ, the christian position. "Be thus minded"—have no other mind or range of object than that presented to us in the experience of this blessed servant. "And if in anything ye be otherwise minded,"—he will not let down the standard to any one's imperfect realisation of it—"God shall reveal even this unto you." The next verse would meet another tendency. Lest I should suppose it to be Christianity to go on by myself alone, and think of no one else, he encourages us to seek out what we have reached in common, and "keep rank"—"walk in the same steps": he cannot say, "mind the same thing" (which has no authority), for the case supposed is of those who are as yet "otherwise

mind.” (Ver. 15.) It is the will of God then that we should consider others, who may not have as fully got hold of the true christian object, to lead them on to this instead of giving them up, though at last it may have to come to this. If all were formed by the object of the apostle’s mind, the difficulty would not arise.

In a few closing words we have the reality of these things brought out the more by a terrible contrast. “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” And then verses 18, 19 tell the sorrowful tale of what had already come true in the profession of Christianity. For it was not over heathen he was thus weeping; nor can he say that they were enemies of Christ, for they professed to be His friends; but he says that they were enemies of the cross of Christ—of that which

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was the separative power in Christianity, bringing His death between us and man and his world, "whose end is destruction." Here it is often asked, are these mere professors: and thus our deceitful hearts would turn away the whole point of the instruction, and miss the solemn warning for ourselves. The apostle does *not* introduce the question of their soul's relationship with God. He pronounces upon their outward path—"who mind earthly things;" that we should solemnly consider it, "whose end is destruction." We know that if a true child of God be found on that road, he will be delivered out of it before it reaches its fearful end. But let there be no weakening of the warning: minding earthly things is the road to hell. Do we then never mind earthly things? Where have our minds been to-day? Have they been reaching forth to the things

that are before, as God has presented them to us? or have we been pursuing some wretched object of earth? How needed the word ‘The Lord give us to open our consciences and hearts to it that we may be preserved. For this is the true effect of the warnings of scripture for those who know His grace. As I might say to my child, “If you fall over that precipice you will be dashed to pieces:” not that I mean to let it fall; but the moral effect is to make the child cling close to me. We are preserved by such warnings.

And now in one beautiful word the Spirit sums up the Christian’s position. (Ver. 20.) “Our conversation is in heaven.” It is hardly possible to render the full force of it in English. It is “citizenship”; but that to our minds is a cold political thing; to a Greek it was everything: his citizenship came

before wife, children, or any other interest in life. The Spirit can thus take up this word to bring out the truth of such deep moment for us, that all that forms the Christian's life morally, in its deepest springs, is in heaven now. What a wonderful contrast for us who once belonged to earth! What a new circle and sphere of glory is this we have been brought into! Our new relationships, interests, objects, joys and hopes are found in heaven! In one far-reaching word, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour" (ver. 20); so that we may reach the glorious goal without death at all. But there is no clashing between these two aspects of the things before: resurrection conformity to Christ in glory for which we are pressing on, instead of seeking any object this side that glory; and the

hope of His coming that satisfies the affections while we wait and watch. How blessed to be found of the Lord at any moment that He comes, pressing on through everything here in the power of an object that is His for us, even to bear His image in the glory—changed in the twinkling of an eye then into it, all that is mortal being swallowed up in the power of a life that is already ours in Him.

No wonder that the apostle can now return to his final exhortation with redoubled force. (Chap. iv. 4.) “Rejoice in the Lord *always*: again I say, Rejoice.” But some one may think that the greatest hindrance of all to joy has been overlooked. What about care? One absolute word, “Be careful for nothing.” “Ah!” says some one, “if you only knew my circumstances you would know that it was perfectly impossible for me to be without care.”

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But does not He who inspired this word know every circumstance of yours, beloved brother or sister? It is God who says to you, "Be careful for nothing." And with the word He gives the resource to lift you above all that would have otherwise pressed on you for care, "*in everything*"—again how absolute—the merest trifle or what seems of the greatest concern; it is enough that it presses on you: "by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God." It is His will that we should lay before Him whatever it is that presses upon us. But I have omitted a clause, "with thanksgiving"—how important as to the state of the soul! giving thanks, not for the answer that we expect (He has something far greater than this for us), but because we know His love; we have the only gauge and measure

of it, in that He has not spared His own Son but given Him up for us all, and we *know* that all is well, and can bow in thanksgiving. It is the normal expression of the Christian's confidence in the heart of God. And now comes the greater thing, “The peace of God . . . shall keep your hearts and minds.”

It is not the peace of Christ here, “my peace” that He gave us in John xiv.—the peace of the Man who passed through my circumstances, the calm, unruffled peace of resting in the Father's love, and submitting in all things to Him. That is given us unconditionally. This is conditional, but the condition is only that we trust God with what would bring care instead of carrying it as a burden ourselves. And it is the peace of *God*, of Him who sits on the throne where no breath of trouble ever came. He guarantees by His faithful word to

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put this peace, in all this its wonderful character, in the heart of the one who puts his cares into God's heart. Well, you say, I cannot understand it. Ah! God has anticipated you, for He says, "which passeth all understanding." We have then only to confide in Him as to anything that would suggest a care, to prove the blessedness of His peace keeping the heart and "thoughts" (as the word really is, often so difficult to regulate) in a way to make us a wonder to ourselves and to all who know us.

Well, beloved, in conclusion I can only put it to myself and to you, Do we know much in practical experience of this life of joy upon earth? I admit that peace is a deeper thing. God never takes the name of the God of joy, as characteristic of His relationship with us, but He does that of "God of peace" continually. It is because peace

depends on the work done for us, and is as stable, to the faith that rests in that work, as the throne on which the Lord Jesus sits; while joy depends so much on our state, on the power and realisation in communion of the things in which the joy is found—Christ and His sphere of glory. Is He “enough the mind and heart to fill?” or are we, instead of with a mind fixed on Him, allowing ourselves to be distracted, if not as, alas! too often actually attracted, by the thousand and one things Satan has to present to us in his sphere of the world? It is here, and now, we are tested, as to how far Christ is known where He is—“the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord”—to satisfy and form us by heavenly objects, so as to have power to express a life of divine and heavenly joy upon earth—the most blessed

testimony we can render to Him, and without which there is none. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." May it be yours and mine, beloved brethren, to realise it increasingly, allowing the sharp edge of His word and warning to come upon all that would obstruct and hinder it, till we enter into the fulness of it, where there will be no more to distract in His presence for ever.

J. A. T.



By the same.

OUR ASSOCIATION WITH CHRIST, 1D.

THERE IS ONE BODY AND ONE SPIRIT.