

THE PARENT'S AND PASTOR'S JOY

NO. 1148

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 21 1873,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."
 3 John, 4.*

JOHN speaks of himself as though he were a father and, therefore, we concede to parents the right to use the language of the text. Sure am I that many of you here present, both mothers and fathers, can truly say, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in truth" [the Truth of God.] But John was not after the flesh, the father of those of whom he was writing—he was their *spiritual* father. It was through his ministry that they had been brought into the new life. His relationship to them was that he had been the instrument of their conversion and had afterwards displayed a father's care in supplying them with heavenly food and gracious teaching.

Therefore, this morning, after we have used the words as the expression of parents, we must take them back again and use them as the truthful utterance of all real pastors, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in the Truth of God."

I. First, then, one of THE PARENT'S highest joys is his children's walking in the Truth of God. He has no greater joy. And here we must begin with the remark that it is a joy peculiar to *Christian* fathers and mothers. No parents can say from their hearts, "We have no greater joy than to hear that our children walk in the Truth of God, or even *truth*" unless they are, themselves, walking in truth. No wolf prays for its offspring to become a sheep. The ungodly man sets small store by the godliness of his children since he thinks nothing of it for himself.

He who does not value his own soul is not likely to value the souls of his descendants. He who rejects Christ on his own account is not likely to be enamored of Him on his children's behalf. Abraham prayed for Ishmael, but I never read that Ishmael prayed for his son Nebajoth. I fear that many, even among professors of religion, could not truthfully repeat my text—they look for other joy in their children and care little whether they are walking in the Truth of God or not. They joy in them if they are healthy in body, but they are not saddened if the leprosy of sin remains upon them. They joy in their comely looks but do not inquire whether they have found favor in the sight of the Lord.

Put the girl's feet in silver slippers and many heads of families would never raise the question as to whether she walked the broad or the narrow road. It is very grievous to see how some professedly Christian parents are satisfied so long as their children display cleverness in learning, or sharpness in business, although they show no signs of a renewed Nature. If they pass their examinations with credit and promise to be well-fitted for the *world's* battle, their parents forget that there is a superior calling, involving a higher crown, for which the child will need to be fitted by Divine Grace and armed with the whole armor of God.

Alas, if our children lose the crown of life, it will be but a small consolation that they have won the laurels of literature or art! Many who ought to know better think themselves superlatively blessed in their children if they become rich, if they marry wealth, if they strike out into profitable enterprises in trade, or if they attain eminence in the profession which they have espoused. Their parents will go to their beds rejoicing and awake perfectly satisfied, though their boys are hastening down to Hell, if they are also making money by the bushel. They have no greater joy than that their children are having their portion in this life and laying up treasure where rust corrupts it. Though neither their sons nor daughters show any signs of the new birth, give no evidence of being rich towards God, manifest no traces of electing love or redeeming Grace or the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, yet there are parents who are content with their condition.

Now I can only say of such professing parents that they have need to question whether *they* are Christians, and if they will not question it themselves, they must give some of us leave to hold it in serious debate. When a man's heart is really right with God and he, himself, has been saved from the wrath to come and is living in the light of his heavenly Father's

countenance, it is certain that he is anxious about his children's souls, prizes their immortal natures and feels that nothing could give him greater joy than to hear that his children walk in the Truth of God. Judge yourselves, then, Beloved, this morning, by the gentle but searching test of the text.

If you are professing Christians, but cannot say that you have no greater joy than the conversion of your children, you have reason to question whether you ought to have made such a profession at all! Let us then remark, in the next place, that the joy which is mentioned in the text is special in its object. The expression is a thoughtful one. John did not write those words in a hurry, but he compressed a great deal into them. He says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Now, beloved parents, it is a very great joy to us if our children learn the Truth of God. I hope you will not suffer one of them to grow up and leave your roof without knowing the doctrines of the Gospel—without knowing the life of Christ and the great precepts of Scripture—without having as clear an understanding as it is possible for you to give them of the great principles and plan of salvation.

When we perceive that our children, when we question them, thoroughly understand the Gospel and are well rooted and grounded in its doctrines, it is a great joy to us, and well it may be! It is, however, far more a joy when those same children *feel* the Truth of God for, alas, we may know it and perish unless we have felt its power within! Parent, was not your heart glad when you first saw the tears of repentance in your daughter's eyes? Did you not rejoice when your son could say, "Father, I trust I have believed and am saved by the Grace of God"?

Yes, it is a greater joy that they should feel the power of the Truth of God than that they should know the letter of it. Such a joy, I hope, none of you are content to forego. It should be the holy ambition of every parent that all his house should be renewed by the Holy Spirit. It is a great joy when our children avow their sense of the Truth of God, when, knowing it and feeling it, they at last have the courage to say, "We would join with the people of God, for we trust we belong to them." Oh, happy as a marriage day is that day in which the parent sees his child surrendered to the people of God, having first given his heart to the Christ of God!

The Baptism of our believing children is always a joyous occasion to us and so it ought to be. Our parents before us magnified the Lord when they heard us say, "We are on the Lord's side," and we cannot but give thanks abundantly when the same privilege falls to us in the persons of our children. But, Beloved, there is anxiety about all this. When you teach your children, there is the fear that perhaps they will not learn to profit. When they feel, there is still the fear lest it should be mere feeling and should be the work of Nature and not the work of the Spirit of God. And even when they profess to be the Lord's, there yet remains the grave question, Will this profession last? Will they be able to stand to it and be true to the faith until life's last hour?

But the joy of the text is higher than these three, though these *have* to come before it, and it grows out of them. "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children *walk* in truth." That is the point—their practical religion—their actual exemplification of the power of the Gospel upon their lives. This proves that the teaching was well received, that the feeling was not mere excitement, that the profession was not a falsehood or a mistake, but was done in the Truth of God. What bliss it would be to us to see our sons grow up, and with integrity, prudence, uprightness and Grace, *walk* in the Truth of God! What a joy to behold our daughters springing up in all their beauty, lovely with the adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, becoming in their homes while with us, or in the new homes which speedily grow up around them, patterns of everything that is tender, gracious, kind and true!

"I have no greater joy than this," says John. And all of you to whom such joy as this has been allotted can say, "Amen. Amen. It is even so." The joy before us has, therefore, a special possessor and a special object. It is a healthful joy, Beloved, in which we may indulge to the fullest without the slightest fear, for it is superior in its character to all earthly joys. "Not too much," is a good rule for everything which has to do with time. But this joy in our children's walking in the Truth of God we may indulge in as much as we will, for, first, it is a *spiritual* joy and therefore of a superior order. We do not joy to the fullest in the things which are seen of the eyes and heard of the ears, for these are things of the flesh which will decay—such as the garment which is eaten by the moth and the metal which is devoured by rust.

We rejoice in the work of the Spirit of God—a work which will abide when this world shall have passed away. Hannah had some joy in the new coat which she made for young Samuel, but a far higher delight in the new heart which early showed itself in his actions. Our son promoted to be a king might cause us some delight, but to see our children made "princes in all the earth," according to that ancient promise, would be a greater delight by far. Rejoice in it, then,

without trembling, for spiritual joy will never intoxicate. Such joy arises from love to God, and is therefore commendable.

We love to see our children converted because we love God. Out of love to Him, by His Grace, we gave ourselves to Him and now, in later years, the same love prompts us to present our children. As Barzillai in his old age prayed David to accept the personal service of his son, Chimham, so would we, when our own strength declines, present our offspring to the Lord that they may supply our lack of service. We have said—

*“Had I ten thousand thousand tongues,
Not one should silent be.
Had I ten thousand thousand hearts,
I'd give them all to Thee.”*

Now as we have only one tongue of our own, we are intensely earnest that our children's tongues should sound forth the praises of the Savior. We have not another life on earth to call our own, but here are lives which the Lord has given us—and we are delighted that He should have them for Himself.

We cry, “Lord, take this child's life and let it all be spent to Your service, from his earliest days till gray hairs shall adorn his brow.” It is like the old soldier coming up to his king and saying, “I am worn out in your service, but you are so good a monarch that I have brought my son that he may serve you from his youth up. Let him take his father's place, and may he excel him in valor and in capacity to serve his king and country.”

Now, when our children walk in Truth and love to God, it makes us rejoice that another heart is consecrated to His service. We may well rejoice in the salvation and in the sanctification of our sons and daughters because this is the way in which the kingdom of Christ is to be extended in the world. The hand which has held the standard aloft in the midst of the fury of war is at last palsied in death—happy is that standard-bearer who, with expiring eyes, can see his own son springing forward to grasp that staff and keep the banner still floating above the host. Happy Abraham to be followed by an Isaac! Happy David to be succeeded by a Solomon! Happy Lois, to have Eunice for a daughter, and happy Eunice to have Timothy for a son!

This is the Apostolic succession in which we believe and for which we pray. How, in years to come, are we to see a seed of piety flourishing in the land and the world conquered to Christ? How, indeed, but by means of the young men of Israel? We shall be sleeping beneath the green ward of the cemetery in peace—other voices will be heard in the midst of the assemblies of the saints—and other shoulders will bear the ark of the Lord through the wilderness. Where are our successors? From where shall come these succeeding voices, and from where those nestled shoulders of strength? We believe they will come from among our children! And if God grants it shall be so, we shall need no greater joy.

I will tell you why this is peculiarly the great joy of some Christian parents—it is because they have made it a subject of importunate prayer. That which comes to us by the gate of prayer comes into the house with music and rallying. If you have asked for it with tears, you will receive it with smiles! The joy of an answer to prayer is very much in proportion to the wrestling which went with the prayer. If you have felt, sometimes, as though your heart could break for your offspring unless they were soon converted to God, then, I will tell you, when they *are* converted you will feel as though your heart would break the other way out of joy to think that they have been saved! Your eyes, which have been red with weeping over their youthful follies, will one day become bright with rejoicing over holy actions which will mark the work of the Grace of God in their hearts!

No wonder that Hannah sang so sweetly, for she had prayed so earnestly! The Lord had heard her and the joy of the answer was increased by the former anguish of her prayer. We have no greater joy then this—that our children walk in the Truth of God—and it is a right and allowable joy. It springs from good sources and we need not be afraid to indulge it. This joy is quickening in its effect. All who have ever felt it know what an energy it puts into them. Those of you who have never yet received it, but are desiring it, will, I trust, be quickened by the desire.

This is what it means. Is one son in the family converted to God? In that fact we rejoice. But we cannot linger over joy for *one*—we are compelled to think of the others. If God has been pleased to call half a household to salvation, there is a hunger and thirst in the parent's heart after this luscious delight, and that parent cries, “Lord, let them ALL be brought in, let not one be left behind!”

Are some of you, this morning, so happy as to see all your children converted? I know some of you are. Oh how holy and how heavenly ought your families to be when God has so favored you above many of His own people! Be very

grateful and while you are joyous, lay the crown of your joy at your Savior's feet. And if you have now a church in your house, maintain the ordinance of family worship with the greater zeal and holiness—and pray for others that the Lord, in like manner, may also visit them.

Beloved, have you some of your children converted while others remain unsaved? Then I charge you, let what the Lord has done for some encourage you concerning the rest. When you are on your knees in prayer, say to your heavenly Father, “Lord, You have heard me for a part of my house, I beseech You, therefore, to look in favor upon it all, for I cannot bear that any of my dear children should choose to remain Your enemies and pursue the road which leads to Hell. You have made me very glad with the full belief that a portion of my dear ones walk in Your Truth, but I am sad because I can see from the conduct of others that they have not yet been changed in heart, and therefore do not keep Your statutes. Lord, let my whole household eat of the Paschal Lamb, and with me come out of Egypt, through Your Grace.”

I am sure, Beloved, this is how you feel, for every true Christian longs to see all his children the called of the Lord. Suppose it could be put to us that one child of our family must be lost and that we should be bound to make the dreadful choice of the one to be cast away? We should never bring ourselves to it, it would be too terrible a task! God will never appoint us such a misery. We have heard of a poor Irish family on shipboard, very numerous and very needy. A kind friend proposed to the father to give up entirely one of the little ones to be adopted and provided for. It was to be entirely given up, never to be seen again, or in any way claimed as their own—and the parents were to make the selection.

It is a long story, but you know how the discussion between the parents would proceed. Of course they could not give up the eldest, for the simple reason that he was the first-born. The second was so like the mother. The third was too weak and sickly to be without a mother's care. So the excuses went on throughout the whole family, till they came to the last—but no one dared even to *hint* that the mother should be deprived of her darling. No child could be parted with—they would sooner starve together than renounce one.

Now, I am sure if the bare giving up a child to be adopted by a kind friend would be a painful thing, and we could not come to a decision as to which to hand over, we could far less be able to surrender one beloved child to eternal destruction! God forbid we should dream of such a thing! We would cry day and night, “No, Lord, we cannot see them die. Spare them, we pray You!” We could almost rival the spirit of Moses—“Blot my name out of the Book of Life sooner than my children should be castaways. Save them, Lord! Save every one of them without exception, for Your mercy's sake!” We should make no differences in our prayers between one child and another.

Now, I am sure that we should be quite right in such desires and emotions, and very wrong if we were able to sit down and contemplate the eternal ruin of our own offspring with calm indifference. God has made you parents and He does not expect you to act otherwise than as a parent's relations require you to act. That which would be unnatural cannot be right. As a Father, Himself, the Lord yearns over His erring children and He can never be grieved with us if we do the same. Nowhere do you meet with rebukes of natural parental love unless it unwisely winks at sin.

Even David's bitter lamentation, “O Absalom, my son, my son, would God I had died for you! O Absalom, my son, my son!” is not censured by the Lord. Neither do we find Him rebuking Abraham for saying, “O that Ishmael might live before You!” These desires are so consistent with the natural instincts which He has, Himself, implanted, that, even if they are not always granted, they are never reprehended. Even if our child should turn out to be an Esau, or an Ishmael, or an Absalom, yet the prayers of the father for him are not forbidden. How could they be?

Do not be afraid at any time when pleading for the souls of your children! Be importunate, be eager, be earnest not for the child's life—that you must leave with God. Not for the child's *health*—that, also, you may make a secondary matter—but for the child's *soul*. Stint not yourself in this, but wrestle as hard as you will, and say, “I will not let go except You bless my children, every one of them! Their unregenerate state is my deepest sorrow! O Lord, be pleased to recover them from it.” Once more, this high joy of which we have spoken is very solemn in its surroundings, for it involves this alternative—“What if my children should not walk in the Truth of God?”

Well, that means for us, during this life, many sorrows, nights of sleeplessness and days of anxiety. I have seen good men and great men crushed beneath the daily trouble caused by their children. “Children,” said one, “are doubtful blessings,” and he was near the truth. Blessings they are, and they can be made by God the choicest of blessings—but if they shall grow up to be dissolute, impure, ungodly—they will make our hearts ache—

“How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is

To have a thankless child."

No cross is so heavy to carry as a living cross. Next to a woman who is bound to an ungodly husband, or a man who is unequally yoked with a graceless wife, I pity the father whose children are not walking in the Truth of God, who is yet, himself, an earnest Christian. Must it always be so, that the father shall go to the House of God and his son to the alehouse? Shall the father sing the songs of Zion, and the son and daughter pour forth the ballads of Belial?

Must we come to the Communion Table alone, and our children be separated from us? Must we go on the road to holiness and the way of peace, and behold our dearest ones traveling with the multitude the broad way, despising what we prize, rebelling against Him whom we adore? God grant it may not be so, but it is a very solemn reflection. More solemn, still, is the vision before us if we cast our eyes across the river of death into the eternity beyond! What if our children should not walk in the Truth of God and should die unsaved? There cannot be tears in Heaven, but if there might, the celestials would look over the bulwarks of the new Jerusalem and weep their fill at the sight of their children in the flames of Hell, forever condemned, forever shut out from hope!

What if those to whom we gave being should be weeping and gnashing their teeth in torment while we are beholding the face of our Father in Heaven? Remember the separation time must come. O you thoughtless youths! Between you and your parents there must come an eternal parting! Can you endure the thought of it? Perhaps your parents will first leave this world—oh, that their departure might touch your consciences and lead you to follow them to Heaven! But if you go first, unforgiven, impenitent sinners—your parents will have a double woe in their hour!

How sadly have I marked the difference when I have gone to the funeral of different young people. I have been met by the mother who told me some sweet story about the girl and what she did in life and what she said in death, and we have talked together before we have gone to the grave with a subdued sorrow which was near akin to joy! I have not known whether to console or to congratulate! But in other cases, when I have entered the house, my mouth has been closed. I have asked few questions and very little has been communicated to me.

I have scarcely dared to touch upon the matter. By-and-by the father has whispered to me, "The worst of all is, Sir, we had no evidence of conversion. We would have gladly parted with the dear one might we have had some token for good. It breaks my wife's heart, Sir. Comfort her if you can." I have felt that I was a poor comforter—for to sorrow without hope is to sorrow, indeed. I pray it may never be the lot of any one of us to weep over our grown-up sons and daughters dead and twice dead. Better were it that they had never been born! Better that they had perished like untimely fruit, than that they should live to dishonor their father's God and their mother's Savior—and then should die to receive, "Depart, you cursed," from those very lips which to their parents will say—"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."

Proportionate to the greatness of the joy before us is the terror of the contrast. I pray devoutly that such an overwhelming calamity may never happen to anyone connected with any of our families. So far I have conceded the text to parents. Now I am going to take it for myself and my Brothers.

II. You may view, dear Friends, the text as specifying the PASTOR'S greatest reward. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the Truth of God." The minister who is sent of God has *spiritual* children. They are as much his children as if they had literally been born in his house, for to their immortal Nature he stands under God in the relationship of father. It would seem we shall have but faint memories in Heaven of earthly relationships, seeing they are there neither married nor given in marriage, but are as the angels of God.

Therefore, the relationship of son and father will not exist in Heaven, though I cannot but think that spirits which were grouped on earth will be associated in Glory. But the duties and bonds of relationship will be ended. Relationships which relate to soul and spirit will last on. I may not look upon my sons in Heaven as my children, but I shall recognize many of you as such, for it is through your soul, or rather your new-born spirit, I am related to you. No minister ought to be at rest unless he sees that his ministry brings forth fruit, and men and women are born unto God by the preaching of the Word.

To this end we are sent to you, not to help you to spend your Sundays respectably, nor to quiet your conscience by conducting worship on your behalf. No, Sirs, ministers are sent into the world for a higher purpose! And if your souls are not saved, we have labored in vain as far as you are concerned. If in the hands of God we are not made the means of your new birth, our sermons and instructions have been a mere waste of effort and your hearing has been a mere waste of

time to you, if not something worse. To see children born unto God—that is the grand thing! Therefore every preacher longs to be able to talk about his spiritual sons and daughters.

John did so. Those who are the preacher's children are often known to him. They were to John, else he could not have spoken of them as, "my children," and could not have had joy in them as his children. From this I draw the inference that it is the duty of everyone who receives spiritual benefit, and especially conversion, from any of God's servants, to let them know of it. John speaks about his children, but supposing there had been persons converted and John had never heard of it? Suppose they had never made any profession, never joined the Church? John might have lived and died without the comfort of knowing them—and without the joy of hearing that they walked in the Truth of God.

Therefore, permit me to remind some of you who, I trust, know the Lord, but have never confessed His name, that you do us grievous wrong! We have sought your good and God has blessed us to you. But you deny us the fruit of our labor, which is that we should hear that God has owned our ministry in your consciences! Do not continue to defraud the laborer of his hire! You know how refreshing to the preacher is information that he has won a soul for Jesus. As cold water to a thirsty soul in a parching desert is such good news to us! I have had many such cups of water, but I am growing thirsty for more. I am grateful when the Lord works as He did only the other day, and I hear of it.

I preached to you, one morning, a sermon to despairing souls [#1146 *Consolation for the Despairing.*] I said there might be few, then, present to whom it would apply. It was very grateful to me to find, a day or so after, that a friend from a considerable distance had been moved to come here that morning, and, after many years of despair, was brought into light and liberty through the sermon. Oh, how glad I felt! You cannot help preaching when you know that saving results follow! If God's Holy Spirit has blessed our word to you, do not refrain from acknowledging the blessing! Put on Christ publicly in Baptism, according to His command—unite yourself with His Church and commune with the people among whom you have been born unto God.

It seems from our text that John was in the habit of hearing about his spiritual children—"I have no greater joy than to hear"—mark that—"than to *hear* that my children walk in the truth." That implies that if you make a profession of your faith, people will talk about you. John could not have heard if others had not spoken. The man who makes a profession of religion, especially in a Church like this, will be watched by all the world's eyes, and not by very friendly critics, either. There are those at home, who know not the Savior, who, if they can find any fault in your character, will throw it at you, and say, "That is your religion, is it?"

You will be men much spoken of, and reports of you will come to us—bad or good, we shall be sure to hear of them. We practice no spy system among the members of our Church and yet somehow or other in this large Church of 4,500 members, it very rarely happens that a gross act of inconsistency is long concealed. Birds of the air tell the matter. The eagle-eyed world acts as policeman for the Church, and with no good intent becomes a watchdog over the sheep, barking furiously as soon as one goes astray. I assure you, I have no greater joy than when I hear that the members of the Church are walking in the Truth of God.

When, for instance, a young Christian man dies, and his master writes to me, saying, "Have you got another member in your Church like So-and-So? I never had such a servant before. I deplore his loss, and only wish I might find another of equally excellent character." Very different is our feeling when we hear it said, as we do sometimes, "I would sooner live with an ungodly man than with a professor of religion, for these professing Christians are a great deal worse tempered and more cantankerous than mere worldly people." Shame, shame on anybody who makes the world justly bring up so evil a report! Our joy is that there are others against whom no accusation can justly be brought.

You notice that he speaks of their "walk." The world could not report their private prayers and inward emotions. The world can only speak of what it *sees* and understands. So John heard of their "walk," their public character and deportment. Be careful, be careful of your private lives, my Brothers and Sisters, and I believe your public lives will be sure to be right. Remember that it is upon your *public* life that the verdict of the world will very much depend—therefore watch every step, action, and word lest you err in any measure from the Truth of God.

What is it to "walk in the Truth of God"? It is not merely resting in the Truth of God, or else some would suppose it meant that John was overjoyed because they were sound in doctrine and cared little for anything else. His joyous survey did include their orthodoxy in creed—it reached far beyond. We will begin at that point and grant that it is a great joy

to see our converts standing fast in the Truth of God, and, Brothers and Sisters, I am glad, indeed, when I hear that you hold fast the essential, fundamental, cardinal Truths of our holy faith.

I rejoice that the nonsense of the so-called “modern thought” has no charms for you! You have not turned aside to doubt the Deity of Christ, or the fall of man, or the substitutionary Sacrifice, or the authenticity and Inspiration of Scripture, or the prevalence of prayer. I am thankful that you hold fast the grand old Doctrines of Grace and refuse to exchange them for the intellectual moonshine so much in vogue just now. It is a great thing to hear of our people that they are abiding in the Truth as they have been taught. But to *walk* in the Truth of God means something more—it signifies *action* in consistency with Truth.

If you believe that you are fallen, walk in consistency with that Truth of God by watching your fallen nature and walking humbly with God. Do you believe that there is one God? Walk in the Truth of God and reverence Him and none beside. Do you believe in Election? Prove that you are elect—walk in the Truth of God as the chosen, peculiar people of God, zealous for good works. Do you believe in Redemption? Is that a fundamental Truth of God with you? Walk in it, for “you are not your own, you are bought with a price.” Do you believe in Effectual Calling and Regeneration as the work of the Spirit of God? Then walk in the power of God and let your holy lives prove that you have, indeed, been renewed by the supernatural work of God's Grace. Walk in consistency with what you believe!

But walking in Truth means yet more, it signifies “be real.” Much of the walking to be seen in the world is a vain show, the masquerade of religion, the mimicry of godliness. In too many instances the man wears two faces under one hat and possesses a duplicate manhood. He is not real in anything good—he is a clever actor and no more. Alas, that one should have to say it, very much of the religiousness of this present age is nothing more than *playing* at religion! Why, look at the Christian year of the Ritualistic party in our national Church, look at it, and tell me, what is it? It is a kind of practical charade, of which a sort of Passion Play is one act!

The life of Christ is supposed to be acted over again, and we are asked to sing carols as if Jesus were just born, eat salt fish because He is fasting, carry palms because He is riding through Jerusalem, and actually to hear a bell toll His funeral knell as if He were dying! One day He is born and another day He is circumcised, so that the year is spent in a solemn make-believe, for none of these things are happening! The Lord Jesus sits in Heaven, indignant to be made a play off! Have nothing do with such things! Leave the shadows and pursue the Substance. Worship Christ as He is and then you will regard Him as “the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

When men see you, let them see that what you believe you believe in downright earnest, and that there is no sham about you. Then they might call you a bigot—for which be thankful! Take the word home, keep it as an honorable title, far too good to be flung back upon your foe. They may call you a wild enthusiast—in return pray God to make them enthusiastic, too—for in such a cause one cannot be too much in earnest. Do not go through the world like respectable shades, haunting the tomb of a dead Christ, but be alive with the life of God—alive from head to foot to Divine realities! So will you *walk* in the Truth of God!

See how truly the Apostles bore themselves. They were ready to die for the Truth of God they held, and all their lives they were making sacrifices for it. Let your truthfulness be so powerful a force that others can see that you are carried away by its force and governed by its impulses. “I have no greater joy than this.” Why, when a preacher sees men thus walk in the Truth of God, does he make it his great joy? Because this is the purpose of our ministry! It is this we aim at. We do not live to convert people to this sect or that, but to holy living before God and honest dealing with men. This is the grand thing and when we see this achieved, we have no greater joy. This is the designs of the Gospel, itself! Christ loved His Church and gave Himself for it, that He may present it to Himself, a perfect Church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

A holy people are the reward of the Redeemer's passion! Well may they be the joy of those friends of the Bridegroom who stand and rejoice greatly because the Bridegroom's joy is fulfilled. The holiness of Christians is the great means of spreading the Gospel. Beyond all other missions I commend the mission of holiness. They preach best for Christ who preach at the fireside, who preach in the shop, whose lives are sermons, who are themselves priests unto God, whose garments are vestments and whose ordinary meals are sacraments. Give us a holy, consecrated people, and we will win, for these are the Omnipotent legions with which the world shall be conquered to Christ!

We joy in a holy people because they bring glory to God. Mere professors do not do so. Inconsistent professors dishonor God, of whom I tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ! A people walking in the Truth of God crown the head of Jesus. They compel even blasphemers to hold their tongues, for when they see these holy men and women they cannot say anything against the Gospel which has produced such characters. Beloved, if you love your pastor, if you love the Bible, if you love the Gospel, if you love Christ, if you love God—be a holy people!

You who profess to be saved, be true, be watchful. If you would not grieve us, if you would not dishonor the Gospel, if you would not crucify Christ afresh and put Him to an open shame, walk as Christ would have you walk—abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be in your speech and in your temper, in your business transactions with your fellow men and in your communications in the family circle—men approved of God—such as you will wish to have been when your Lord shall come, for He is at the door and blessed are those servants who are ready for His coming. If you are not what you ought to be, I beseech you do not make a profession! And if you have made a profession, and have dishonored it, humble yourselves in the sight of God and go once more to the fountain filled with blood, for there is still forgiveness and mercy for you.

Jesus will willingly receive you, even though you have done Him such despite. Return as a prodigal son to the Father's house and you shall find the fatlings killed for you, and the best robe put upon you. As we are getting near the close of the year, earnestly pray that if anything in the time past has been evil, it may suffice us to have worked the will of the flesh. And now, from now on, in the new year may we live in newness of life and enjoy together the sweet privilege of hearing that our children walk in the Truth of God, while we ourselves, through Grace, are walking in it, too, and the Church is built up and multiplied by the Spirit of Truth. May the Lord bless you all, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John's Second and Third Epistles.

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