

TO MY SON

An Expositional Study of II Timothy

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CHAPTER SEVEN -

SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT

II Timothy 2:11-13

11. **It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:**
12. **If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: we deny him, he also will deny us:**
13. **If we believe not, yet be abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.**

BIBLE religion is a singing religion: that is a theme that might profitably occupy us for a very long while. We have time only to take up two instances of the rule.

(a) First, the prophet. In Isaiah 12:2 we read, "**Behold, God is my salvation, my strength and my song**". That is to say, in the Lord JEHOVAH he found the Essential Thing: "**my salvation**" - the foundation of all else for here, and for hereafter. There are very few things that are relatively essential to our well-being; there is only one thing that is ultimately essential, and that is "**salvation**". So the prophet repeats at the end of the verse what he said at its beginning: other things are nice, one thing is necessary. In GOD, he also found the Every-day Thing: "**my strength**" - "**as thy days so shall thy strength be,**" ran the old promise of Deuteronomy 33:25; and the prophet tells us that he had discovered that it is all stored up in Him. Then came, also, the Extra Thing: "**my song.**"

No one can say that joy is essential to the Christian life; one can be a believer without it; indeed, many of GOD's children are quite cheerless. But then, GOD is not content to do only that which is needful. He always adds something extra - for example, His full purpose, and adequate provision, is that we shall be, not merely conquerors, but "**more than conquerors**" (Romans 8:37), and so on.

Consequently, He here reveals Himself in the overweight of "**song,**" in addition to the "**salvation**" and the "**strength.**"

(b) Then, the psalmist. In Psalm 11:1-3 we have that delightful bit of spiritual autobiography, "**He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay**" - there, again, is the Essential Thing; "**and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings**" - the Every-day Thing; "**and He hath put a new song in my mouth**" - the Extra Thing once more.

There's no need for the song; but it is a great help to have it, not only for our own delight, but also for the blessing of others. Note here that, most surprisingly, we are told "**many shall see it . . .**": "**hear it,**" is presumably what he said? No, there's no mistake: when we have the song, there is not only vocal effect, but visible result - the whole being and behaviour are happily irradiated, and many are led to "**trust in the Lord**".

For illustration of a song's effect read again Browning's "*Pippa Passes*".

When we come over into the New Testament, we find the same thing is true.

(a) In Ephesians 5:19, we are exhorted to be "**speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord**": our hearts in tune with our hymns, our songs being directed to GOD's ears as well as to man's.

Dean Armitage Robinson points out that the early Christians would inevitably have to exclude themselves from the public feasts of the Greek cities, because of the idolatrous rites, and ribald drunkenness, so much in evidence there. The loss of all this colour and brightness was more than compensated for in the sacred songs of the Christian's hospitable fellowship: wherever there was a supper, or a gathering, there would be sure to be singing.

(b) In Colossians 3:16, we come upon the joyous atmosphere again, "**teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord**" - the heart and the hymn reacting mutually upon each other, and both offering their praise to the Lord Who inspired it. We recall the place of song to the great Revival movements - of Wesley's hymns; of Moody's Sankey; of Torrey's Alexander.

Of course, some people simply can't sing - they have no voice, no ear; pitch and tone and rhythm are mysteries quite beyond them. For their encouragement, Psalm 95:1 invites, "**O come, let us sing into the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation**" - even those who can't sing, can make a joyful noise.

I suspect that the psalmist didn't mean that, but was directing his remarks first to the congregation, and then to the organist, for the psalms were usually sung to musical accompaniment; but all the same, I think we may legitimately apply the words to the less accomplished of our songsters. After all, GOD did make the crows, as well as the nightingales, and assuredly takes pleasure in the performance of each.

Bible religion is of such a fine quality that it can inspire a song even in the most unlikely and unpromising conditions. Let me justify that statement by calling your attention to two phrases in Psalm 77: Verse 2 has "**my song in the night**" - we are little likely to find much joy in the darkness and distress of such circumstances; but verse 6 has "**my sore in the night**". He, truly, will be one of GOD's nightingales! Or, there is that other occasion with which we shall all be familiar, in Acts 16:25, when "**at midnight Paul and Silas . . . sang praises unto God**".

More nightingales! Sore and stiff from their beating and from the stocks, flung into the foul and filthy dungeon of "**the inner prison,**" they yet found something to sing about.

Yes, a singing religion; but what has all this got to do with our present passage? Well-note that opening phrase, "**It is a faithful saying**". It comes also in I Timothy 1:15, and 4:9, and in Titus 3:8. The scholars think they are hymns, taken from a collection which was in use among the early Christians sung, for example, in the little services held in private houses, e.g. "**the church which is in his house**", Colossians 4:15, at the Table of the Holy Supper, on their partings one from another, on the occasion of a baptism, on the last journey to martyrdom. Such is the suggestion of Dr. Moule.

Professor David Smith thinks he can guess who was the composer of the hymns, and the compiler of the manual. Comparing the language of these four with that of the Acts, and of Luke, he is persuaded in his own mind, by the peculiarities common to both, that the author (speaking humanly) is none other than the worthy Doctor himself.

Of course, there was another hymn book also in use, for the synagogue worship, and for the celebrations of the great Feasts. It wasn't a great fat volume, with a lot of hymns that were never used - it had only 150, all in constant demand. You will recall a specific reference to this hymn-book in Matthew 26:30, "**when they had sung a hymn, they went out . . .**" As a matter of fact, we know what was the particular one chosen: it was Hymn No. 118 - you would know it as Psalm 118.

Doubtless, in addition to these two collections, one of the brethren would occasionally compose a special hymn, as people do now - like, for instance, A Hymn for Airmen. Dr. Handley Moule, in his Colossian Studies, suggests the conjectural classification - "psalms, the songs of the Old Testament saints; and hymns, the inspired praises of the Christian Church; and spiritual odes, compositions developed by gifted individuals".

The particular hymn that forms the portion for our present study may very well have been used as a baptismal hymn; for we cannot but see how closely its thought follows the lines of the baptism passage of Romans 6:3ff. And certainly it seems to be very appropriate for such a time, and full of inspiration for a young convert making public profession of CHRIST in baptism.

We shall observe this in more detail as we proceed. The hymn is constructed in four stanzas, or verses; and I think, if we want a title for it, we might do very well to borrow from Rudyard Kipling, and call it "**If**" - for each verse begins with "**If**". Let us now examine it, and see what there is in it to sing about. The opening verse brings us

THE JOY OF AN EXPERIMENTAL FACT

The fact of the believer's union with his Lord is here illustrated.

We are all familiar with the blessed doctrine of Justification by Faith; not quite so sure, perhaps, of Sanctification by Faith (Acts 26:18); here it is Identification by Faith. This last truth is unfolded in some detail in Romans 6:3ff, and in Ephesians 2:5ff. Just two links in the golden chain are here touched on - not merely as theoretical doctrine (no doctrine is simply that, in Paul's hands) but as experimental fact.

(a) "**If we be dead with Him.**" Paul, even as he dictates, is facing certain martyrdom, and he is

quite aware of it. Timothy, to whom he writes, will also, in all probability, become a victim. Scores of others will follow in that noble army. Many think that this is the death with Him to which the apostle refers.

But this can scarcely be the case, since, in that event, the verb would have to be in the future tense - as are, incidentally, all the other verbs in the passage - as if to read, "If we shall become dead . . ." Whereas, it is the aorist tense which is, in this one place in the passage, employed, as indicating that the reference is to something that has already, in some specific moment, taken place: "If we died. . ." When did this happen?

Potentially, when JESUS died; experimentally, when we were identified with Him by faith. Do you remember the old Sin Offering of Leviticus 4? The sinner brings his offering for sacrifice - and first, as he confesses his sin, he lays his hand on, and leans his weight on the animal, which is then slain in his stead. In the type-economy of GOD, this all pointed to the personal relationship of the believer with Him Who fulfilled the type when He came to be the Lamb of GOD. The sinner turns to Him, confessing his sin, and resting his whole weight of trust on Him - and GOD reckons the Identification of Faith to have taken place.

As in the old type, the offerer's sin was taken to have passed to the victim, and the victim's death accounted to the offerer - so, on our act of penitence and faith, our sin is "**laid on Him**" (Isaiah 53:6), and His death is reckoned to us (Romans 6:11). GOD accounts it so; let us "**reckon ourselves likewise.**"

It is in this sense that Horatius Bonar sings:

"I lay my sins on JESUS
The spotless Lamb of GOD"

and Isaac Watts:

"My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While, like a penitent, I stand,
And there confess my sin"

Our personal faith has identified us with Him; and because He has fully borne the penalty, so also, "**in Him**," have we. Is that not something to sing about? But, further -

(b) "**We shall also live with Him.**" This "**death**" we speak of is not the end, it is the beginning. In the language of Ephesians 4:22-24, "**the old man**" - that is, the man of old, the man you used to be - is done with; and "**the new man**" - the new-born man you are now going to be - is started upon his life.

It is verily a resurrection life, linked up with His, knowing, as an experimental fact, "**the power of His resurrection**", Philippians 3:10. We have been saved from sin's eternal penalty by His death; and now we are to be saved from its daily power by His resurrection life-power within us - "**. . . being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life,**" as we read in Romans 5:10. Or, as we

have it in Galatians 2:20, "**I am** [have been] **crucified with CHRIST, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me**" - there is the old "I," and the New "I," and the small "I".

If, now that we are Christians, we try to live the Christian life of ourselves, we find how hard it is, and we have so many falls and failures; but if, reckoning upon our Identification with Him, we realise His indwelling presence, and get self out of the way, so that He may do the living in us, and out through us, the life becomes a very different thing. Now it is life indeed; now it is fulness of life; now it is what my friend Lindsay Glegg would call, life with a capital "L"; now it is that grand quality of life which, in John 10:10, the Master characterises as "**more abundant**."

Again we say, is this not something to sing about? And here is another of our happy possessions
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THE JOY OF A MAGNIFICENT FUTURE

Our religion deals with the past - which, for the believer, is most wonderfully accounted for.

It deals also with the present bringing him all he needs for the problems, perplexities, perils, and possibilities of his everyday life.

But let us never forget that it also guarantees to him a golden future. "**The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day,**" says Proverbs 4:18.

We often speak of "*the good old days*", and there is no mistake about it, they were, in so many ways, so very fine; but the new days just on ahead are going to be finer yet. In the poet Browning are some things "**hard to be understood,**" as Peter wrote of Paul (II Peter 3:16); but he never penned a plainer, simpler, truer word than when he said "*The best is yet to be*" - for the believer, that is.

Well now, Paul continues (a) "**If we suffer**" - as some Christians will be called to do. The father and son - writer and reader of this Letter - with the long line of those who have endured much for their loyalty to the Lord and His truth, right down to such as Pastor Niemoller, and his confreres, in concentration camps; those who lie, even for years, on a weary bed of pain, unyielding, and uncomplaining; those who, in Shakespeare's words, are the victims of "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". Many a believer, one way and another, is called upon to suffer.

I wonder if they have been able to enter into the brave utterance of Paul, one of the greatest sufferers that the Gospel has ever known, as II Corinthians 11:23ff. avouches, when he said, in Romans 8:18, "**I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed . . .**"

What is this far-outweighing" glory"?

In the words of our present passage, it is (b) "**We shall also reign with Him.**" An unimaginably wonderful prospect awaits the faithful believer, and amongst the golden experiences that lie before him is this reigning. All who are truly loyal to Him here, whether that loyalty incur suffering or not, will reign with Him hereafter.

Note three things about it:

(i) *The Nature of it* - "**to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne**"

Revelation 3:21. It is told that little Prince John, youngest child of King George V, who died at a tender age, used to love to play a game with his royal father. They would go to the Throne Room at Buckingham Palace, and when the King had taken his seat on the throne, he would bend forward and lift up his little son, and sit him beside him on the throne, to the infinite delight and pride of the little prince. A very pretty little story, if it is true. But it is something so very much more than just a pretty story that is revealed to believers in this verse. It is actually the case that, in some real sense, the faithful will share His throne, and be associated with His reign.

(ii) *The Place of it* - "**we shall reign on the earth,**" Revelation 5:10. I know some would translate that "**on**" as "**over**"; but I would point out that we have exactly the same word and construction in Matthew 6:10, Gk., as here: "**Thy will be done on the earth**".

This reigning idea is not to be spiritualised or relegated to the blissful experiences and occupations of Heaven. It is to take place in this very world where we now live. Some strange personal revolutions will be seen in that day when, in the words of Matthew 19:30, "**many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first**" - when prominent people will have to take a back seat, and erstwhile humble folks will constitute, in a literal sense, the ruling class. Yes, down here.

Isn't there an earth sound about the 28th verse of the same chapter, "**Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel**"? And this, from Luke 19:17-19, "**. . . have thou authority over ten cities . . . five cities**"?

(iii) *The Time of it* - "**they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years,**" Revelation 20:4. This is His glorious millennial reign on the earth. And to think that faithful souls shall have ruling responsibilities during that time: Does that give you something to sing about?

By the way, we may be reigning Christians even now. Do you recall that word in Romans 5:17 which speaks of some who "**shall reign in life**"? For the vast majority of Christians (let alone the worldlings), life reigns over them - their circumstances, their fears, their nerves, their feelings, and so on, are on top of them. But just the few Christians reign over life - they are on top of all those things we mentioned. Having formed the daily habit of receiving "**abundance of grace**", following upon the personal appropriation of "**the gift of righteousness**," they have the secret of royal living - even now, while they await their magnificent future.

Next in our hymn comes

THE JOY OF A PROVED FIDELITY

This verse sounds a solemn note; yet even here, if we are on the right side of the matter, the happy note persists.

(a) "**If we deny Him**". But can we Christians do such a thing? Ah, "**let him that thinketh he**

standeth take heed lest he fall", I Corinthians 10:12. The Christian life has not removed us from the possibility of temptation: we may grievously succumb. When I John 2:1 says "**If any** [Christian] **man sin . . .**" (I John 2:1) it implies that a believer need not; but it also implies that he may.

We must be carefully and prayerfully on our guard lest, through needless fear, or through false shame, or through hope of gain, we even go so far as to deny our Saviour. Do you indignantly repudiate the suggestion? Well, hear another, and a familiar voice: "**Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee. Likewise also said all the disciples**", Matthew 26:35. In spite of earnest asseverations of loyalty, let young man Timothy beware, for he will be sorely tried; let every reader beware, for the disciples' failure might so easily become ours.

May GOD forbid; for

(b) "**He also will deny us**". How awful if He should ever say to us, "**I never knew you**", as He did to some people - spurious Christians, in their case - in Matthew 7:23. Yes, but this need not be. I take refuge in that "**If**" of our verse. It is said of Judas, in Matthew 26:16, that "**he sought opportunity to betray Him**". We have not to seek such: chances for disloyalty abound on every hand - in the home, in the office, in the workshop, even in the church; but how happy if those chances are ignored, if, by His grace, we prove our fidelity!

For remember that every "**opportunity to betray**" is also an opportunity to be true. Lack of space must send us hurrying on to consider

THE JOY OF AN UNSWERVING FRIENDSHIP

The opening of this last verse of our hymn retains still the solemn tone, before it passes to its glad finish.

(a) "**If we believe not**" - it says. The Greek word is in the negative form, exactly the same as that translated later by "**faithful**." How many unbelieving believers there are: they have believed on Him to the saving of their soul, but there their believing has stopped. Come: do we really believe Him? Let us test ourselves by any of His words, taken just at random: Acts 20:35. "**It is more blessed to give than to receive**" - do we really believe that? John 10:28-29, "**I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of My hand**" - what peaceful assurance of salvation we enjoy if we really believe that.

Matthew 28:20, "**Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age**" - do we, like David Livingstone, take that to be "the word of a gentleman"? Matthew 6:33, "**Seek ye first the kingdom of GOD and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you**" - pause a moment: do you really believe that?

If we fret and worry about these necessary things of life, quite obviously we just do not believe what He says. Oh but, you say, perhaps, it is so difficult to believe? That reminds me of a man who once went to consult Dr. Torrey about a spiritual difficulty. "You know, Doctor", he said, "I can't believe" - expecting him to reply, "And what can't you believe?" Instead, to the accompaniment of those piercing eyes, came quick, and revealing as lightning, the answer,

"Whom can't you believe?" Really and truly, it is not the saying, but the Speaker, that we don't believe. Tell me now: is it so very difficult to believe Him? "**Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.**"

Well, sense the sheer joy of it, whatever may be our own spiritual condition,

(b) "**He abideth faithful**" - an unswerving Friend. He will always remain

(i) *True to His word* - "**He is faithful that promised**", Hebrews 10:23; "**He will not call back His words**," Isaiah 31:2. Even the word of warning, as in our verse 12.

(ii) *True to His people, who are exhorted to commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator* - one Who will not let down His creatures.

(iii) *True to Himself*, "**He cannot deny Himself**", our verse 13. Every divine and human quality in Him is held in perfect poise and balance; no part of His being contradicts, or contravenes, another part; what He ever was, He always is - "**Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever**", as Hebrews 13:8 teaches us.

Here is One on Whom we may always depend, however undependable we ourselves may be.

If, from sheer physical weakness, or from the extreme pressure of untoward circumstance, or from the insidious oncoming of doubt, or from any other cause, you find faith faltering or failing, turn away from yourself and cling on to this, that He isn't faltering, or even altering, "**He abideth faithful**".

Even though we are so faithless as to disbelieve Him! What a Friend! What a joy!

At the beginning of this Lecture I referred you to Isaiah 12; let me take you back to it, as we close. Note these three words "**say**," in verse 4; "**sing**", in verse 5; "**shout**", in verse 6. In view of all that we have been finding in to-day's portion, am I justified in claiming that the Christian has something to speak about, something to sing about, even something to shout about?

~ end of chapter 7 ~
