

# BACK TO BETHEL

Separation from Sin, and Fellowship with GOD

by

F. B. Meyer, B. A.

Author of

*"Old Testament Heroes," "Meet for the Master's Use," etc.*

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SONG OF THE LORD BEGAN

**“And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel” (II Chronicles 29:27).**

Abounding joy is the prime characteristic of our holy religion - joy unspeakable and full of glory. This is as natural to true religion as the bloom on a maiden's face is to perfect health. You can't create joy, but you can make the conditions from which it springs.

If your life is joyless, it must be because of some sin. Find out, then, the reason why your harp hangs on the willow, and joy has died out of your life. Our Lord said: **"These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full"** (John 15:11).

If your joy is not full you have not entered into the heart of our Lord's sermon about the vine and the branches.

Paul said: **"The fruit of the Spirit is joy"** (Galatians 5:22). Now, fruit is natural. There is no effort about fruit. Indeed the effort of the bough is to repress the fruit which presses forward into expression, so that gardeners have to prune away excessive production. If the bough is properly connected to the trunk, it bears fruit; and if you are properly related to our Lord, joy will be as natural to you as singing to a bird.

Is your religion somber and dour? Is there no spring and elasticity about it? Do children find you out or shun you? When you enter society, does the laughter and merriment die? Are you an element of perfect gladness at a party? If not, there is something wrong in your inner life, which is choking the spring of joy.

Some years ago my friend Dr. Handley Moule visited the excavations in the Forum at Rome. While there, as the rubbish was being cleared away, suddenly there gushed forth the waters of a

spring that had been choked for centuries. Poor little spring! Longing to express itself and flash in the sunlight, but choked by the accumulations of the years!

So, if you are a Christian at all, there is a spring of joy in your soul which has been stopped and silenced. My first mission is to put my hand on what is wrong.

In order to help me lay hold of your conscience, turn to II Chronicles 29:27, where we are told:

**"When the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also."**

The word **"began"** indicates that it had ceased. If you look into the preceding chapter you will find that for sixteen years the song of the Lord had never broken from Levite throats, had never floated through the temple courts. Those courts, intended by David to resound with the praises and worship of GOD, were still. In this they resembled your heart, for your heart was meant for music. If it has ceased, it is probably from the same reason.

### **THE CAUSE OF THE SILENCE**

What had happened during those sixteen years?

Turn to the twenty-eighth chapter, verses 24 and 25. **"Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Jerusalem he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers."**

King Ahaz was weary of the worship of GOD. So he put out the lights, he closed the doors, he took away the keys, he turned the Levites adrift. The sparrows made their homes, the birds of the air built their nests in the neglected courts of the temple. Neither Ahaz, nor the priests, nor the Levites frequented the holy place.

Then came a change. The burnt offering began after sixteen years of discontinuance, and the song of the Lord broke into utterance once again. Hezekiah became king, and **"in the first month of his reign he opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them. And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east street, and said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place"** (verses 3-5).

**"Carry forth the filthiness,"** that is what must first be done.

It is the call of the apostle Paul: **"Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,"** (II Corinthians 7:1). I have yet to learn what the apostle quite meant by the distinction between filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. Away back in the inner shrine of our spirit there must be filthiness.

The priests and the Levites gathered at Hezekiah's call. They "**went into the inner part of the house of the Lord, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found,**" (verse 16).

What followed? They made a sin offering; and so sin was put away (verse 24).

## **OUR CHURCHES**

Let us apply these truths first to our churches.

You are eagerly desirous of a revival of undefiled religion, that your hearts and homes should be full of praise to GOD. I call on the elders and deacons and leaders in our churches to come into the inner courts that they may be thoroughly cleansed from the filthiness that has accumulated there. Nobody brought it into the temple it just accumulated. And the dust and filthiness of the world has accumulated in our souls, and you and I must deal with it.

Some years ago I met a gray-haired minister who told me the following story from his own life. Said he:

"I was brought up under Finney, and after my seminary course was sent to carry on a decayed work in a distant country district. There had been no revival, no stirring up of the Holy Ghost in those parts for years. I gathered some godly people in the vestry every Friday night to pray for a revival. We kept this up for fifteen months, but the heavens were as brass above us.

"When fall came on, I set apart a day for united prayer. My heart rejoiced as I saw the farmers driving in with their families, until the schoolhouse behind the chapel was filled.

"I explained that we had gathered to pray for a revival. After the opening hymns and prayers the meeting was thrown open.

"The silence of death settled upon the audience. Every one waited.

"Presently a leading old elder rose in a front seat, and said:

" 'Pastor, I don't think there is going to be a revival of the Holy Ghost here so long as Brother Jones and I don't speak to each other.'

"He left his pew, walked down the aisle and found Brother Jones, and said:

" 'Brother Jones, you and I have not spoken for five years. Let's bury the hatchet. Here's my hand!'

"The old man returned to his pew, and sat down. A sob broke from the audience, and then there was silence again.

"Soon another elder rose, and said:

" 'Pastor, I think there will be no revival here while I say fair things to your face and mean things behind your back. I want you to forgive me.'

"We shook hands, and the audience relapsed into stillness again."

The minister told me that he then witnessed the strangest scene of his life. For ten minutes men and women crept noiselessly about the house, squaring old scores. And GOD began to visit them. The operatives in a factory nearby heard what was going on in the school-house, and at the lunch hour they came over in such numbers that they were diverted into the church. The pastor preached to them the simple gospel, and within five minutes four of the ringleaders in sin in that community were crying to GOD for mercy. A revival broke out that swept to and fro over the district for three years.

I told this story at Wandsworth, England, once. A few weeks later, when addressing a gathering of ministers in London, I told it again, and a brother minister rose and said that after I had preached at Wandsworth, as he was going out, a man who owed him twenty-five dollars took his hand, and said:

"Forgive my delay in settling that debt. You shall have the money tomorrow."

We must get back to first principles. We are right with GOD in the exact proportion that we are right with the men and women around us. Let us test ourselves, not by what we are on Sundays at church, but by what we are to the man whom we like least. That is the true gauge.

Is there any unkind, jealous feeling between pastor and pastor? any irritation or fretting because of another's success?

Are you Christian people prepared to square up old scores? to give up things in business that you know are not perfectly consistent with CHRIST's commands?

If so, shake hands; write that letter; pay that money; have done with that source of irritation. Let the love of GOD be poured into your soul, and after that joy will come.

## **THE INDIVIDUAL HEART**

Let us now come to your own heart. Is any secret sin harbored there?

Joy began in my life one solemn night when I knelt before CHRIST and had the holy light of His Spirit turned upon one thing in my heart that was filthy. It had accumulated there, and I hardly knew it. I had been living a very unsettled life for some time, when a young fellow came and spoke in my church, and led me to feel that he possessed a secret which I had not myself. The following morning, at 7 o'clock, I found my way to the house where he was staying. I knew the house very well, and went up to the room which he was occupying.

I said:

"You will excuse my coming, won't you? The fact is, I am very unhappy. I am a Christian minister, and people expect a great deal of me, but my heart is full of evil, and I cannot deal with it. Can you give me your secret?"

I could see by the candles that he had been up a long time, and in fact he told me he had been up since 4 o'clock. I asked him what he had been doing, and he said that the Lord had said, "**If ye love Me keep My commandments,**" and, said he:

"I was just going over the commandments to see if I have kept them."

I told him I wanted to learn his secret, and he said:

"There is nothing I have which you may not have."

"But how may I get right? I am a Christian, but how may I get entirely right?"

"Have you ever given yourself entirely to CHRIST?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, "in a general way I have."

"If you have not done so entirely, go alone and settle it."

That night I knelt by my bed, with the door of my room locked, and resolved that I would not sleep until I had settled the matter and surrendered everything to JESUS. It seemed as though JESUS was by my side, and as if I took from my pocket a large bunch of keys which I generally carry when I am at home. I took from that bunch one tiny key, which I kept, and then held to JESUS the bunch with the one missing, and said to Him:

"Here are the keys of my life."

He looked at me sadly, and asked:

"Are all there?"

"All but one tiny one, to a small cupboard. It is so small that it cannot amount to anything."

He replied, "Child, if you cannot trust Me with everything, you cannot trust Me with anything."

Satan whispered to me: "You cannot give up that thing. Besides if you let CHRIST have His way, you don't know what He will ask of you next. Don't give it to Him!"

Then the thought came to me of my only child, who at that time was somewhat wayward. Supposing she were to come to me and say: "Father, I give my whole life up to you; you may choose anything you want for me," I knew I would not call her mother and say: "Now is our chance. What can we do to make her life miserable and unhappy?" I would say:

"Wife, here is our chance. We will take away everything that hurts her, and we will make her life one long summer day."

CHRIST would not be harder on me than on my child, and at last I said:

"Lord, I cannot give the key, but I am willing to have you come and take it."

It was as I expected. I seemed to hold out my hand, and He came and opened the fingers and took the key from me. Then He went straight to that cupboard, unlocked and opened it, and saw there a thing that was terrible and hideous. He said:

"This must go out. You must never go this way again."

And the moment He took the thing from me, He took the desire for it out of my soul, and I began to hate it. Then I yielded myself absolutely to Him, and said:

"From this night I want Thee to do as Thou wilt with my life."

The next morning I wakened expecting a sort of hallelujah feeling, but I was as calm and quiet as I am now. I only had a delightful sense that I did belong to JESUS CHRIST, and a hundred times that day I said to myself:

"I am His! I am absolutely His!"

Have you some hidden cupboard in your soul in which you are harboring things whose miasma is killing your joy? Face your true condition. Too often we are like those who fear their lungs are diseased, and who dread examination by the stethoscope and surgeon lest he should reveal the true condition. We can make no headway until we are clean.

Are you sure there is nothing in your heart you would not like CHRIST to deal with? Before you can have GOD's best, you must let Him search your soul, and show what the unclean thing is which entered years ago and has choked your spiritual vitality ever since.

## **THE SONG BEGAN**

Now notice what happened next. Hezekiah had the altar ready.

On one side were the priests with the whole burnt offering, which signified CHRIST's entire consecration to GOD in His death, and also the entire consecration of believers to CHRIST in life. On the other side was the Levite choir in white vesture, and other Levites with cymbals and psalteries and harps. At a given signal the burnt offering was laid on the altar. I know not whether GOD sent fire from heaven, or the wood was ignited with sacred fire that had somehow been kept burning all those years. But as the fire began the sweet voices of the choristers burst forth in song, and the music of the instruments was heard again.

The very heavens must have stood still to listen. Angels must have come in troops to hear the music in that familiar place after sixteen years of silence.

I found myself a few months ago in a bachelor's house. Bachelors are often taciturn, gloomy, and wrapped up in themselves; but this one lived in a beautiful house, and was one of the brightest men I ever met.

When supper was finished, I said:

"You seem very happy?"

"Yes," he replied, "I'll tell you my story. Years ago I was making money, and chose this solitary life so as to be free from the anxieties of wife and children. But though I had all that the world could give, I was not happy.

"Then my brother died. He had no genius for business, and was always poor. He left a large family of children. I tried to provide for them, but finally had to import them all into this house. I thought the peace of my life had then gone out.

"For the first week it was agony to see those children run all over the house. But then they got hold of me, and I began to like them. I sent them to school, and have been both father and mother to them. Two of them are now married. I don't believe there is a happier man on GOD's earth than myself."

When the burnt offering began, the song began.

A self-centered life is a miserable life. When that man began to sacrifice himself, happiness came into his life.

And if, to live for another is sweet, if it is lovely for a woman to live for a paralyzed husband, and if there is a song forever on her lips because she is all in all to him, what must it be when you are all in all for JESUS? Wherefore I beseech you, by the mercies of GOD, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice not a dead, but a living sacrifice holy, acceptable unto GOD; and be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may know what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of GOD.

How I fought GOD's will! I thought it was hard, inexorable, terrible; but when a man presents himself to it, he finds it good, acceptable and perfect. The thing you hate becomes your joy. As you look into CHRIST's face, and say, "Rabboni Master," Easter joy springs in your soul.

GOD help you to clear away all the filthiness, and yield yourself to Him. Whether you can sing or not with the voice, the song of the Lord will begin in your soul!

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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