

## The Joyful Sound

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*“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.”* (Psalm 89:15).

In this inconceivably precious Psalm, there are great truths, great promises and prophecies, which cannot but bring joy to the hearts of God’s people. In it we read of God’s everlasting covenant with the Church in Christ who is her Head; of His power to save and keep all who trust in Him; of His faithfulness and love towards all the heirs of salvation, and of the way in which His infinite perfections come to light in the work of redemption. The revelation, or declaration, of these truths, and of many more besides, is truly a “joyful sound” to His own people. Let me this evening offer a few comments on these words. Let us think first of:

### I. The Joyful Sound and what it is

To an Israelite the “joyful sound” might have meant some of those events which stood related to the Old Dispensation. There are, to begin with, those who associate the words with the great Day of Atonement. On that day the High Priest divested himself of the garments of beauty and glory — in which he was habitually clothed in the holy place — and put on the holy linen robe in which he was to minister in the most holy place. In the one hand he carried the blood of the Covenant, and in the other the golden vessel of incense. With these offerings he entered “within the veil” where he sprinkled the blood before the Mercy Seat on which, between the Cherubims, the divine glory permanently rested. Sin was typically put away. Atonement was made. And when the high priest re-appeared before the people the trumpets gave forth their joyful sound, and the people came forward with their sacrifices of praise. God had embraced them anew. Peace, through reconciliation, was once more established between Him and “the great congregation”. Truly this was a day of joy.

These words may be also related to the daily ministry in the holy place where sacrifices were continually offered for the sins of the people. An Israelite, for example, would move toward the outer court of the tabernacle with the lamb which the priest was to offer for his transgressions. There he would place his hand on the head of the lamb and transfer, typically, his guilt to the innocent creature which was presently to die for him.

And as the high priest offered to God this sacrifice, and moved within the holy place, the sound of the golden bells which were attached to his robe might be heard in the outer court. The sound of these would declare that atonement was being made for him, that his guilt was put away, and that God had accepted his offering.

A greater occasion than these was the year of Jubilee which was observed in the nation every fifty years. It began with the Day of Atonement. On that glad and longed-for day the trumpets sounded throughout the land to proclaim that all prisoners were released, that all debts were cancelled, that all inheritances forfeited through death or poverty were to be restored, and that all the weary were to rest from toil. It is easy to imagine the joy that would touch the heart of the prisoner in his cave or cell, the poor man oppressed with poverty and toil, or the heart of the widow whose lost inheritance would now be restored, as the trumpets gave their joyful sound in every corner of the land.

But these and other such events were mere typical occasions which pointed to greater events and blessings and which anticipated the fulfilment of these promises which, like stars, graced the firmament of the Old Testament Dispensation. These promises, types and prophecies were all related to Christ who is both the centre and substance of revelation. Christ is present in the first and in the last promise given to the Church of God in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The first promise speaks of “the seed of the woman” who was to come in the fulness of time to bruise the head of the serpent. The last speaks of “the sun of righteousness” or “the bright and morning star”, who was soon to arise with healing in His wings on His waiting people and on a fallen world. He therefore commanded us to “search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me.”

The true spiritual Israelite — while rejoicing in those occasions such as we have mentioned — knew that all these pointed to the coming of the Messiah who was to procure everlasting salvation for His people through His obedience and death. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and by faith, he knew that behind and beyond all these types and ceremonies God had provided eternal life and peace for all His people through the coming of the Just One. With His coming these types would for ever fade away. They were but mere shadows of good things to come. Think then of the joy that was in the heart of the Old Testament Church as she waited for the coming of her Lord, and as she could already hear the joyful sound of His voice in His Word! “The voice of my beloved, behold, he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.” She could already hear the sound of His footsteps coming over the mountains of time and separation.

The coming of our Redeemer into the world was therefore the occasion of the greatest joy, we believe, ever known in Heaven or on earth. On that night the heavenly host sang above our world. “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, and good will toward men.” A world “living in the wicked one”, and ruined by sin, became the scene of the greatest manifestation of God’s love ever given to men or angels. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The New Testament is replete with lovely stories of the

joy which the coming of Christ brought to His own waiting people. How wonderful, for example, are the words of Elisabeth who, when Mary who bore the Holy Child Jesus in her womb arrived at her door, exclaimed in ecstasy — “For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.” She had the secret of the Lord with regard to the One who was soon to appear in the world and, in a way too mysterious for words, her joy was communicated to the unborn child who was to be His forerunner on earth.

The question has often been asked as to who were the wise men who, at His birth, came to worship our Lord. To some they were mere superstitious star-gazers. Not so. They, also, had the secret of the Lord in relation to the coming of the Prince of Peace. And there is not in Scripture a lovelier word than that which describes their ecstatic joy when they saw His star, which for the moment had faded from their view. “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” That star, with its joyful tidings, brought them to the portals of bliss. Their Redeemer had come. And when they saw Him they fell down and worshipped Him. They did not worship Mary, as the poor benighted papists do. They had no eyes for any creature in Heaven or on earth but for “Jesus only”. O! the joy of knowing that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. This is “a joyful sound” that shall deepen and become more wonderful within the breast of every saved man and woman throughout the ages to come. Does it bring joy to us? The same joy was in the heart of Simeon when he took the Holy Child in his arms and blessed God that his eyes had seen His salvation. He was now on the threshold of eternal joy, and he desired to be here no more. “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word.”

The sweetest note in this joyful song is that Christ came to die. He took our nature that in our nature He might die for us. It is no contradiction to say that it is the death of Christ which produces godly sorrow and penitence in our souls, while, at the same time, there is no joy like the joy of knowing that He died to reconcile us to God and to put our sins away “as far as the east is distant from the west”. All the blessings of His people come through His death. And these in their number, preciousness and permanence, are unsearchable and beyond number. Take the case of Paul when he penned the words, “The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” This was his joyful song on earth. But it was also the source of his sorrow. He remembered his past with its hatred and opposition to the One who loved him. Christ forgave him, but here he could not forgive himself. “They shall look upon Him whom they have pierced and mourn.” When Joseph’s brethren wept on his shoulder, both sorrow and love filled their hearts. They remembered how they had hated him without cause. Who among Gods’ people ever stood before the Cross of Calvary without grief? It was their sin that nailed their Beloved to the Tree. But the song shall remain, after the years of their mourning have ceased. Heaven is the place of songs. There they sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. “Unto Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood . . . to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.” This is, then, the joyful sound, or song, which has its beginning here, but which shall continue to reverberate through the realms of glory for ever and ever. My friend, do you, through God’s grace and forgiveness, know it?

Is it not a joyful sound also to know that He who died rose again from the dead for our justification, and that He ascended up into Heaven where He is making continual intercession for us? By His resurrection “He proved to be the Son of God with power.” He overcame death. He robbed the grave of its prey. All those for whom He died shall experience His saving power and participate in His victory. Their spiritual resurrection out of a grave of trespass and sin is the evidence of “the exceeding greatness of His power.” This was the song of David.

**“O, Lord, my soul, thou has brought up  
And rescued from the grave.”**

Was that not a joyful sound which His stricken Bride heard when He passed her by and said, “Live”, and when He made her time “a time of love”. And their bodies are to share in this great honour and power. “I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

His ascension and priestly advocacy within the veil are the infallible guarantee that one day we shall see Him as He is and that not one for whom He died shall perish. You recall how He led His disciples out as far as Bethany; and after He had blessed them He was taken up into heaven. Usually when we separate for the last time on earth from our dearest friends we are full of sorrow, but it was not so with those, His followers, when, without His bodily presence and companionship, they moved toward Jerusalem. We are told that “they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.” Why this ecstasy? Just because they knew “the joyful sound”: “I am He that liveth and was dead.” It was a joy that remained with them amid all their sufferings here. The Lord had gone to prepare a place for them. Because He lived they also would live. They were partakers of the joy with which the hosts of Heaven welcomed the glorious Redeemer and Conqueror as the everlasting doors opened to admit Him, and in Him, all the heirs of salvation into the mansions above. Already they were there in Him. They were there also in their desires, hopes and affections. Their treasure was above.

So you see, dear friends, that both at His entrance into our world and at the hour of His bodily departure into the heavenly kingdom there was a song of joy. Does it end there? Ah, no. Is He not coming again to receive us unto Himself?

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul expounds all that His coming into the world procured for the Church, and he ends his great exposition with the words — “And unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” He, Himself, gives the promise: “I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also.” His last words to His waiting Bride are: “Behold, I come quickly.” And what is her answer? “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

I shall never forget that summer evening when I entered a Church in the Island of Skye and heard a Psalm being sung by a large congregation.

**“Let heavens be glad before the Lord  
And let the earth rejoice,  
Let seas, and all that is therein  
Cry out and make a noise  
Before the Lord; because He comes;  
To judge the earth come He . . .” (Ps. 96).**

That evening, as in the words of the Psalmist, the inanimate creation was commanded to rejoice at the prospect of His coming, something indescribably sweet and solemn touched my soul. I could, as it were, see through the vistas of future ages the happy day when the Beloved would come to judge the world and to gather His people to Himself. “The joyful sound” which filled my soul that evening was shared, I knew, by the people of God in every age. Again, I ask, is this a joyful sound to you? And we could also give this hope a personal application. While we should acquiesce in the Lord’s will for us, and while we would tarry here for a while to do something for Christ “in a day of small things”, we look forward to the day when we shall appear in Gods’ presence. How joyful is the sound of His word of promise in this connection. “And they shall see His face and His name shall be in their foreheads.”

**“They shall be brought with gladness great,  
and mirth on every side,  
Into the palace of the King  
and there they shall abide.”**

## **II. The Blessedness of knowing the Joyful Sound**

The blessedness, you will notice, consists not in hearing the joyful sound but in knowing it. To use an example, a stranger might be passing through the land of Israel as the trumpets sounded to proclaim the advent of Jubilee, but their sound might convey little or nothing to him. The joy which touched the hearts of the Israelites at that hour he could not feel, for he was ignorant of the blessings and privileges which the sounds conveyed. And are there not many who sit under the sound of the Gospel who, in their own experience, know nothing of the blessedness of those who are saved, and who, therefore, rejoice in the Lord? To them the Gospel is a savour of death unto death. There are those who have no ear for music; and, similarly, there are many whose inner ear is deaf to “the glad tidings of great joy” which the Gospel proclaims. No man ever spake like the Lord Jesus Christ; yet He condemned many of those who heard His words, but who failed to respond to the glorious overtures of His Gospel. “We have piped unto you and ye have not danced.” We may pretend to admire the Gospel, while we fail to respond to the overtures of God’s offer of salvation in Christ.

We might say of many of those who know the joyful sound that before it gladdened their heart they heard another voice which filled them with fear and concern. What voice or sound was this? It was God speaking to them from the dark and terrifying precipices of Sinai. God awakened them out of their sleep of death. They came to realise that they

were under the just sentence of a broken covenant, and under God's holy and just wrath. They were in the hands of God's Justice, and its hold on them would not, and could not, relax till all its demands were fully satisfied. The thunders of God's law made them fear and tremble exceedingly, for of themselves they had nothing whereby its voice could be silenced. They knew that God was just in the sentence which was pronounced against them.

But the purpose of the Lord in bringing them into such a state of concern, and in making them recognise where they were and how they were, was not their destruction but their salvation. Another voice, therefore, sounded from God's Word. It was the still small voice of peace and acceptance through the merits of Him who died on the Tree. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy." This was the hour when their mourning was turned into dancing, and when an undying love was born in their hearts for Him who died in their room and stead. That was the day when the bells of peace sent their sweet chimes through their conscience and mind. O! friend, was there such an hour in your life? Such an experience marks the beginning of our eternal happiness. As unforgiven sin is the source of everlasting despair, the forgiveness of it is the beginning of our unending joy. And with our forgiveness a new desire to praise the Redeemer is born in our souls.

Heaven is the place where we shall, in perfection, express our indebtedness and happiness to Christ in our praise.

With this love and desire to praise the Lord there is true spiritual discernment. The knowledge which God imparts to His people is seen in the way in which otherwise simple souls, who are but babes in His Kingdom, have a knowledge of the Gospel which is outwith the reach of the wise and the learned of this world. This is one of the evidences that the new creature in Christ is given a knowledge which mere religious formalism or schools of learning can never impart and which belongs to a world they cannot know or enjoy. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." "For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

There is no joy in this world to be compared with the joy which the voice of Christ brings to the heart of the gracious soul. "The companions hear thy voice: cause me to hear it." In my younger days I used to hear the Lord's people speak of how Christ would sometimes awake them out of sleep with His Word on their lips. Others would relate how, at the Throne of Grace, God would speak to them out of His written Word of what was relevant to their needs or trials. And others would tell how, unexpectedly, God's Word would become articulate within their spirits, bringing the needed warning or comfort, or anticipating something which was to emerge within the sphere of

Providence. Such people knew the Lord and His voice. This was their joy on earth. "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." To the Psalmist God's Word thus given was more precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

### **III. The Evidence in our life that we know the joyful sound**

"They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance."

These words mean that they are a people who obey God's voice. To know God savingly is to love and obey Him. Both the mind and the will of God are revealed exclusively in the Written Word. Any word, or tradition of men, which contradicts, adds to, or subtracts from, God's Holy Word is to be rejected, and is rejected by the true believer. An unenlightened world listens to "strangers" whether they be popes, graceless ministers and bishops, or the initiators of ensnaring and deadly religious cults. But God's people listen only to Him.

And the evidence of their obedience is that God is with them in the way. They often say, "Whom have I in Heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." This was how God's saints walked in every age. "Enoch walked with God." The Lord speaks of Abraham as His "friend". This is the meaning of those words in the fourth Psalm. "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself." To God's people His presence is often more real than the presence of those who dwell with them in their homes. This is their heaven on earth. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

There are seasons, however, when God's people walk without the light or comfort of His face; but "light is sown for the righteous." "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But whether it be in light or shade the Lord will enable us, by His grace, to go "from strength to strength" till we reach the place where we shall see His face without a cloud between.

Dear friend, do you know the joyful sound? Has God ever spoken to your soul: "Son, Thy sins be forgiven thee"? Is the name of Jesus sweet to your ear, since it was He who came to save His people from their Sins? If so, one day you will hear His voice welcoming you into that kingdom which fadeth not away. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But if we refuse to "kiss the Son", and to give Him our hearts, there is another voice we must listen to. "Depart from me." O! be wise and embrace Christ now. Then, not only would you have joy but we also would rejoice in your salvation. Heaven would rejoice as well. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Come and welcome to Jesus Christ. Amen.

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