

# The Joy of Following Christ

*In spite of the heavy messages to the contrary you may hear from the pulpit, the pursuit of God is a happy—not a glommy—endeavor.*

Sin and ill are the false notes struck by man across the harmony of God's will, and to strike upon or even remember such notes is instant banishment from the music of His presence. Where all is joy, there joy is all; and he who has not reached this joy does not know God—he is still a follower, and not a possessor, and he should refuse in his heart to remain satisfied with his condition, but climb on. Why stay behind? Climb on, climb on!

Often I have been mystified and disturbed by the attitude of many religious and pious people who appear to believe that to follow Christ is a way of gloom, of sadness, of heaviness. Often I have gathered from sermons that we are to give up all the bright and enticing things if we would follow Him, and the preacher goes no further!

Has the Lord, then, no enticements, no sweetnesses, no brightness to offer us, that we should be asked to forsake all pleasantness, all brightness, all attractions if we follow Him? This to me always seemed terrible, and my heart would sink. Indeed, to my poor mind and heart it seemed nothing more hopeful than a going from bad to worse!

All the pictures I have seen of either the crucifixion or the way of the cross (and especially those of more recent times and painting) portray Christ's blessed face all worn with gloom; and I know now that this is far from the truth. For perfect love knows agony, but no gloom. He went through all His agony, lifted high above gloom, in a great ecstasy of love for us.

To speak of sacrifice in connection with following Jesus is,

to my mind, the work of a very foolish person and one in danger of being blasphemous. For how dare we say that it is a sacrifice when, by the putting away of foolish desires, we find God! And to find God, through the following of Jesus Christ, is to gain so much (even in this world, and without waiting for the next) that those who gain it never cease to be amazed at the vastness of it.

We find this to be an absolute truth, that if we do not have Him we have, and are, nothing, in comparison with that which we are and that which we have when we have Him.

In my earlier stages I was greatly set back and disturbed by this gloom and sacrifice (which is no sacrifice) of myself so put forward by pulpit teaching. It was a great hindrance to me and blinded me to the truth. I was only a normal, ordinary creature, and melancholy pastors thrust a great burden into my arms.

Little by little, as I was able to learn directly from His own heart, I came to know Him as He is; and I could not reconcile the knowledge of Himself that He gave me, especially of His high willingness and serenity, with pulpit teachings of heavy gloom. The church too frequently spoke to me of following Him in terms that conveyed a burden: "Pick up thy cross, pick up thy cross!" they cried; and He spoke to me in terms that conveyed a great joy: "Come to Me, come to Me, for I love thee!"

I thought I was very cowardly and sinned by this inability to like the gloomy burden, and one day I came upon this out of Jeremiah: "As for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the Lord, I will even punish that man and his house. Because ye say this word, The burden of the will utterly forget you, and I will forsake cast you out of My presence" (Jer. 23:34,38-39, KJV).

Jesus did say, "'Come, take up the cross, and follow Me'"

(Mark 10:21), but whoever obeys this commandment will be shown by Jesus that the cross of following Him is no burden but a deliverance, a finding of life, the way of escape, a great joy and a garland of love.

The world thinks of joyousness as being laughter, cackling and much silly noise; and to such I do not speak. But Christ's joyousness is of a high, still, marvelous and ineffable completeness—beyond all words—and wholly satisfying to heart and soul and body and mind.

It is written, "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver" (Eccl. 5:10). Why? Because only those who know the gold of Christ are satisfied.

This is not to say that by following Him we shall escape from the happenings and inconveniences and sorrows and illnesses that are common to life; but that when these come we are raised out of our distress into His ineffable peace.

When your heart is sad, use this sadness to come to a better understanding of the deeper pain of Jesus, who was in the self-same exile we are. The more the soul is truly awakened and touched, the more she feels herself to be in exile; and this is her cross.

But the remedy for her sadness is that she should courageously pass out of her woes of exile and go up to meet her Lover with smiles. Now, He cannot resist this smiling courage and love of the soul, and very quickly He must send her His sweetness, and her sadness is gone.

Read a companion devotional.

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The book from which this excerpt was taken, titled *The Golden Fountain*, was originally published in 1919 by **John M. Watkins**

of London with the subtitle The Soul's Love for God. The only allusion to the author was the descriptive phrase under the subtitle: "Being some Thoughts and Confessions of One of His Lovers."