

In Thy Presence is Fullness of Joy

By Paris Reidhead*

Our Text is found in Psalm 16, part of the 11th verse.

“Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

This is the Psalm of Resurrection. Last Lord’s Day we remembered along with the so-called Christian world the fact that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. David knew this and understood it. He saw the day when the Lord said unto our Lord, I will make thy foes thy footstool. And so He has given to us this testimony. Let me read just a few verses preceding the 11th. “I have set the LORD always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psa. 16:8-10).

This, I say, the resurrection chapter, setting forth in prophecy in this lovely Psalm the truth that we remembered together last Lord’s Day.

But the question of great important to us today is this: Where is this risen Lord. That He is risen, the Christian world agrees. But where is He. This is the question of supreme importance. Your answer to this question determines the quality of your Christian life. There is, of course, one appropriate answer. He is enthroned at the right hand of the Father, for after His resurrection and the 40th day, He ascended into Heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. He is there today in His resurrection body. But who is He? Is He simply a man restricted to a form of flesh? Is He simply one whose personality can be confined to His resurrection body? Or is He, as we understand Him and believe Him to be, very God of very God. Then in that case He is in the 3rd Heaven in His resurrection body. There is a man in the glory. But He is not restricted to that body. We understand that this risen Lord is very God, and because of this He is-all the attributes of God are attributed to Him.

Perhaps the most encouraging facet of our faith is this that a man possesses and exercises all of the attributes of God, a man who walked where we walked, and as we walk, and lived as we lived, and was tempted as we are tempted. This man, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, now has all authority, all right to rule in Heaven and in earth committed unto Him, and all the attributes of the Triune God are manifest in Him. When He said, “Father, glorify Thou Me with the glory I had with Thee before the world was,” He said restore to Me the right to exercise all of the attributes of deity (Joh. 17:5). And thus our Lord Jesus today is possessing all of these attributes and exercising them.

But we must remember that even though He is at the right hand of the Father, He is not restricted to that place. For one of the attributes of God is His omnipresence. David gave it to us in the words that we read in our Scripture lesson, “Whither shall I flee from Thy presence, whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?” (Psa. 139:7) And then that statement that “If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost part of the sea, there Thy right hand leads me, and Thy hand sustains me” (Psa. 139:8-10). This is a testimony concerning Christ. And we, therefore, must conclude that our Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, is omnipresent. This means that He is here. We understand that the Jehovah compound names of the Old Testament refer particularly to our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever you read Jehovah, it is the eternal God in manifestation to men, the self-existent One who reveals Himself, and the compound names give to us aspects of His character.

For instance, we find that to Abraham He was Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who provides. We find that He was to David Jehovah-Rohi, the Lord our Shepherd. One of the tenderest names and one that ought to encourage every heart is the name Jehovah Shammah, the Lord who is there. This has been taken by our brother Bakht Singh¹ for the name of the Fellowship there in

1 Bro. Bakht Singh (1903 - 2000)

India, and he calls it the Jehovah Shammah Fellowship, the Lord who is there, testifying by this choice of names that they are recognizing our Lord Jesus in His omnipresence.

Therefore we will see Him exalted and enthroned, we will see Him omnipresent, but we must also see Him in His present relationship to His people. He said, I will come unto you and I will abide in you. And so it is the indwelling Christ. You understand that salvation is not a formula, nor is it a sequence of Scripture verses, nor is it even a decision. Salvation is a Person. I say this repeatedly, because so frequently we believe the Lord sends us salvation, rather than we ought properly to view Him as being salvation. David said in Psalm 27...And this disturbed me no end for considerable period of time. I could not quite see what he meant, "Jehovah, the Lord, is my light and my salvation" (Psa. 27:1). For I had viewed salvation as something that Jesus Christ bought for us, and gave to us, deliverance from hell, escape from punishment, that this was something that He purchased in the same way that one might in behalf of another prepay the premiums for an insurance policy and present it to one. But it is not set forth this way in the Word. He is our salvation. He that hath the Son hath life. There is only one Christ, and thus when Paul said in second Corinthians 13, "Examine yourself whether you be in the faith, prove your own self. Know ye not your own self how that Christ, this one resurrected Lord, Christ be in you except you be reprobate" (II Cor. 13:5). Salvation is in the Son, not from Him but in Him. He is salvation.

Thus when you answer the question, Where is Jesus Christ, you must, if you properly answer it, declare, Christ is in me, the hope of glory. For there is no hope of glory, or of pardon, or forgiveness unless He is there. This is the simple teaching of the Word of God that when you repent and believe, savingly believe in Christ, Jesus Christ Himself joins Himself to you, and you are born again because He is there. He is life. He did not send it. He is it. And it is Christ in you the hope of glory. I trust, therefore, that you will recognize that He is in Heaven at the right hand of the Father. He is omnipresent everywhere. And He is in saving relationship in His people.

But let me ask you another question, a hypothetical question perhaps. How do you know that Christ is in you? What is the reason why one can say, I know I have passed from death to life. Is it simply because they infer this from what they have done, making inference a deduction. I did this, I went there, I submitted to the other, and therefore, because I have followed the formula, I infer that I have been born of God. You understand that this is the reason why many in days past have suffered cruelly at the hands of their fellows I am thinking of John Wesley² whose experience as an Anglican clergyman of regeneration brought him to see that it was not enough to have followed the prescribed formula, that it was necessary for one to have personally been invaded by the risen Christ. And as he taught justification by faith, clearly set forth in the Word, he also taught that the way you know you are justified is not that you infer it from what has been said over you, done to you, or done by you, but you know because the risen Christ comes into your heart, and He tells you. The doctrine is called, The Witness of the Spirit. It is that personal awareness of life in Christ, life because of the presence of Christ. And in a sense He is the only one that has the right to tell anyone that they are born of God and children of God. So we recognize that our beginning awareness of God in His Person comes to us when, having seen the Lord Jesus as a person in history, dying in our place and stead, we have reached across the century to savingly receive Him, and He has come into our hearts, testifying to us that we are born of Him.

But does fellowship with God conclude at this point, or does it simply begin at this point? And now this is of great importance. I would simply answer the question by saying this, that we were made for God. We often think that we have been made for Heaven, but if He were to send us to Heaven, however blissful and beautiful we may conceive it to be, and Himself remain away; all Heaven would be an elegant prison, and a renamed hell. For there is no mansion and no provision for it and no picture that the mind can devise of beauty and comfort that might be considered heavenly that has any significance to the informed and illumined human spirit, if Jesus Christ is not the center of it. You see, we were not made for heaven; we were made for Christ. And we are created by Him in such a way that nothing can satisfy us but Him. Now this is a truth that you have heard declared here repeatedly, but it is one that we must see if we are to become the mature Christians that John described when he said, There were three classes; little children, your sins are forgiven; young men, you have overcome the wicked one;

² John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican cleric, Christian theologian, and founding the Methodist movement.

and fathers, you have known Him who is from the beginning. It is this latter group that we all would become. Those that have experientially known His presence from the beginning who is God Himself.

So be it understood by you that the witness of the Spirit is the beginning of our fellowship with God and not the end of it. We were made for God, not for heaven. We were made that He might indwell us and infill us. We have the testimony of the Book of Ecclesiastes, to which I refer increasingly frequently in outside ministries, because I see that so many are thinking of God as a means, instead of an end. The Book of Ecclesiastes gives a testimony of one who had every conceivable blessing from God. Solomon was rich beyond calculation, and had wealth beyond any measure that we would use, and with that wealth erected every kind of monument that would express his genius and his inventiveness, even some that are a marvel to engineers today, as they discover what Solomon did. And yet, as he looked out on all the money he possessed, and all that he had accomplished, he asked his heart, Are you satisfied? And the answer was an obvious No. It is all emptiness and soap bubbles. Then he tried pleasure. And finally he tried wisdom. Each of these in turn pressed to a degree that none of us will have opportunity to explore. When it was all over, and he had spent years of his life in an effort to fill the vacuum of his heart with something that truly satisfied, he said, What is the sum of the matter? What is the answer to this dilemma of life? What is our reason for being? And in his own words, or my words, not his, he simply said or the gist of the book is this, We are made for God. His words were, Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.

Now this is the point that I wish to press upon your heart now. We were made to know God now, right now, today. The end of our faith is not simply activity for which we will receive a reward. I think Christian activism has been pressed almost to the extreme, to the point of no return. We have begun to think that God is primarily a means, and to be filled with the fullness of God is simply to be quickened for some kind of service, and frequently in talking with young people from our schools and seminaries, I find that they are interested in knowing the fullness of the Spirit of God so that they can be more effective witnesses, better preachers, and they have read about Moody³ and Finney⁴ and others of the great men of other days, and they want to use God as the means to achievement in their chosen field.

Now I would point out immediately that this is in contradiction to the Word. God is not to be sought as a means to anything. He is the sublime, glorious end, and He is to be sought for His own sake, because He is worthy to be sought, And because He is satisfied by being known. The reason for you to want to abide in His presence is not primarily that you might have the fullness of joy, but that He might have the fullness of joy. You see, we are so man-centered in our thinking. The Westminster Catechism, if presented by a committee in the 20th century, would be revised to something like this: The chief end of God is to save man and glorify him forever. This is our thinking. God is viewed so regularly, so consistently, in books and preaching and articles, as being a means. Believe so that you can be healed. Believe so that you can be successful. Believe so that you can have relief from frustration. Well, I would say so that you if necessary fail. Know God if necessary to be a stark failure. If it increases your frustration 100 fold then I would still say, Know Him because He is worthy to be known. And He is to be desired for His own sake, not as an agency, not as a means, not as an instrument for some other purpose.

Now Solomon saw this. He had, through the instrumentality of God, a kingdom and all that that kingdom could represent. He had position, power, influence, every kind of experience, everything that the human heart might say is desirable and then he had to answer as he tested it against the inner need of his own spirit: It is just vanity. It is emptiness. It is soap bubble.

Well this is absolutely the testimony of the entire Word. We are made for God. And the successful human being is the one that knows God. Now I am confident that if we obey the principles of the Word and use those teachings that are there, that there will be concomitant blessings. But I get so weary when I find that there is a tendency to suggest that people should seek God because of some secondary result. And would raise one feeble little voice in protest. I know it won't be heard far or long, but I still want to say it, and say it again and again, God is to be sought for His own sake, not for any blessing that He brings, or anything that He does; simply because He is supremely worthy to be sought.

3 Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899) An American evangelist and publisher who founded Moody Church

4 Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) Leader in the Second Great Awakening in the United States

I believe that we should begin this way. We ought to repent not primarily to be forgiven, but simply because it is such consummate folly to be a rebel against such a worthy Sovereign as Jesus Christ. We ought to repent, not to strike a deal or bargain with God. Now, Lord, I will cease my crime of being God and ruling my life, and will consent to the government of Jesus Christ, if you forgive my past sins, and if you take me to Heaven when I die. Well this I am sure can have no answer from Heaven at all. God cannot meet such a sacrifice as that. Fire won't come down to such a heart as that. The attitude that will release God to bless is this, I have seen Jesus Christ to be very God. I have seen that He is the eternal Son, supremely worthy to be worshipped and adored, loved and obeyed, and I consider it simple logic and moral rightness to allow Him to have the place in my life that I have defrauded Him of by being God and playing God in the precincts of my own little life. So the truly repentant heart says, Look, Lord, I am going to serve Jesus Christ. I am going to obey Jesus Christ. I am going to worship Jesus Christ as long as I live, because He is worthy; even if at the end of the road I go to Hell. No striking of a bargain. No making of a deal. Simply saying He is worthy. Now I believe we are going to get a lot further with people today if we begin to start talking of Jesus Christ as being worthy of worship and worthy of love and worthy of obedience, and not simply a stepping stone over the mouth of the pit. And if we begin to tell sinners that the reason they ought to repent is not that they will go to Heaven, but simply because Jesus Christ is God, and as God He deserves to be worshipped and served. Now this makes sense to me, and it makes sense to a great many others. But the moment that you say, Repent and believe so that you won't be hurt, you have turned the sublime, glorious, exalted Son into a mere agent for comfort. And this is demeaning to Him and disgraceful to us. And so I think we had better say, Jesus Christ is God, God-Man, and because He has been exalted, raised from the dead and glorified, He is to be served simply because He is worthy to be served. Then we will go from that to the next step and say, He is to be sought, simply because He is worthy to be sought. He is to be known because He is worthy to be known, and He is satisfied by being known. And we will come back then to the grounds of Biblical thinking as expressed in that first question of the catechism, What is the chief end of man? It is to glorify God, to enjoy God forever.

Well now, we will glorify Him when we understand His purpose and fall into line with His purpose. What is His purpose? What is His purpose? I suppose there is no place to find His purpose so succinctly and clearly set forth as in our Lord's High Priestly prayer. The moment of moments in the crisis of our Lord's experience when He brought to bear all of the eternal longing of the Father's heart, and there we hear Him say, Father, I neither pray for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on Me through their word, that they all may be in union. And thus He gives us the key to this eternal purpose. "Just as Thou Father art in union with Me, and I am in union with Thee, they may be in union with us, and the glory Thou gavest Me I have given them that they may be in union even as we are in union. I in union with them, Thou in union with Me, that they may be made perfect in union" (Joh. 17:21-23).

Now, this is our Lord's prayer. This is His desire. Let us reduce it down to terms that may be simpler for us to grasp. Actually this is what our Lord is praying, Father, I want to live in her and in him. And I am thinking of you, not the one next to you, or on either side of you, but you. He had you in mind. He said, I want to live in him. I want to live in her with the same freedom, the same liberty, to be myself in her and in him, as You have lived in Me and have had freedom and liberty to do through Me what You have wanted to do. And so it is reciprocal indwelling indeed. This is His prayer. This is His desire. And it ought to be your desire above all other concerns. You ought to want to satisfy His heart. Not even that you be satisfied. You will be. You will be satisfied, but your concern here ought not to be just primarily that you be complete, and you be fulfilled, and you be happy, you be satisfied. This we have got to go beyond. We have got to see that He has interests. He has a desire. And His desire is that your human body, clean through His precious Blood, be presented to Him so that He can dwell in you, tabernacle in you, live in you. When you understand this, then you realize that the answer to the question, Where is He?, has another answer to it. He can be in you as the source of life, and yet not have been given the key to every room in your heart, and have been allowed to fill you with His fullness and to exercise the same liberty and freedom in you that the Father exercised in Him. Our Lord Jesus declared this of His relationship. I do not speak of Myself. The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. I do nothing of Myself. I only do what I see the Father do. And this is the life of rest. This is the life of blessing. This is the life of joy. For He said, "In Thy presence is the fullness of joy. And the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). So thus when the Lord Jesus Christ is at liberty to fill me and fill you and live in us His own life, His primary purpose is not to make us successful, not to make us notable, not to even bring us into outward peace or calm, for He promised frankly that it would send a sword and distress, and many difficulties and problems

would confront us, and you have no reason to think you will have any more general acceptance in your day than He had in His day. The idea that if you are filled with the Spirit you are immediately going to be an outstanding success is totally contradicted by our Lord, and that you are immediately going to do this or that or some other preset prototype of thinking dictates. Oh, no. Not at all. Not necessarily. You may have... You see, it was not only Peter. It was also Stephen. Stephen was stoned. It was not only Peter delivered from the prison. It was James beheaded inside of the prison. And James was just as full of the Spirit as Peter was. Stephen was just as full of the Spirit as Peter was.

And so, being filled with the fullness of Christ simply insures that God's longing from eternity past is going to be fulfilled in you. So, I would speak a word this morning for God, saying, He has interest in us. Let us not view Him as a means to anything, but the sublime, glorious, supreme end, and desire Him for His own sake, for what He will get out of us, and leave the matter of what we get out of Him entirely to His hands and to approach it entirely from the standpoint of almost indifference. Really, what difference does it make whether He gives you this token or that token. If you have Him, you have all He is. And thus it behooves us to recognize that when David saw Him exalted and enthroned, he then could say In Thy presence is fullness of joy. And the fullness of joy that is going to come to you as a Christian is not from your achievement, from your success, from your prominence, from your being known, or used or accepted; the fullness of joy that will come to your heart will only be there when you realize that He has in you what He wants. And then you will rejoice, not because He has made you happy, but that somehow you, stained by sin, and ruined by the fall, have been instrumental in making Him happy.

Now there is a great price for this. He said, "My name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place. With him that is of a broken and a contrite spirit, to revive the hearts of the broken and to revive the spirits of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15). And so it behooves us to recognize that the means whereby He is going to fill us with Himself is on the level of our brokenness. When we come to that place with the Apostle that we are broken by the Cross, I am crucified with Christ, then we have made it possible for Him. You see, He won't force us to the Cross. He will present it to us, but it is our choice as to whether or not we will walk that extra step which is going to mean that we are pierced by the circumstances God has put in our way. We can avoid the circumstances, but if we avoid them, we avoid the Cross, and if we avoid the Cross we deprive the Lord Jesus of what He is after. So when it comes to that point, we are prepared to say, Well at any expense, at any price, or cost, I want Him to be glorified in my life. Then it will be as John said, "He must increase; I must decrease" (Joh. 3:30). And it will be, with Paul, "The things I counted gain to me, I count loss to Christ" (Php. 3:7). And so we find that there is a tremendous price, but oh my there is such blessed fruit. For when He fills you with His own fullness He Himself becomes the supreme satisfaction of your heart. A human being is made for God, and the fulfillment of humanity is to be filled with the fullness of God. No one knows the dignity, the honor, the glory of being a human being until he has been filled with the fullness of God, and walks in that fullness.

Now this is not that we make God an instrument for anything, but that this is simply the purpose for our being, the reason for our being. And the great desire of my heart for us as a people today is this, that there is going to rise up within us a passionate longing that Jesus Christ will in us see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, that He will get out of us that which He wants. Now I believe that when this becomes our unified and common desire that there is no limit to what He will do, for if we look at what we want Him to do for us, we have gotten our eyes off of the source. But when we say, O Lord, the only interest of our hearts is what you get out of us, then it is amazing what He can do. And so for the sake of those about us, around us, and on every side, let us desire above all else that we might enter into His presence and the fullness of what His presence means, for there and there only is the fullness of joy. This is a wonderful life, to be filled with the fullness of Christ, worth everything. We have the contrast with Solomon who had everything and said, It is nothing. And then we have Paul who had nothing and said, He is everything. And this is the course of wisdom. Let us bow together.

Have you been born of God? Do you have the witness of the Spirit that you have passed from death to life? Have you ever had any taste of fellowship with God? Has God ever said one word to you? Have you ever had one moment of awareness of God? Or is it all just words and ideas and doctrines? Oh, dear heart, He wants to be known. Do you know He died out of longing for you, and He longs to be longed for. He wants to be wanted, not for anything He will bring or give, but just for Himself. He made us for Himself. Now He wants us to want Him just for Himself. Do you know Him at all? Have you had any beginning contact with Him? Oh, does not your heart hunger to know Him better? And with the apostle Paul, you can say, "All the things I counted gain to me, I count as refuse that I may know Him, that I may know and the fullness of His presence" (Php. 3:8).

Our Heavenly Father, look down upon us. Here is a people that have gathered to this testimony, to this place of worship and fellowship, and Oh, we do long that Thou shouldst this day get a people that are concerned about Thine interests, not their own. Haven't plans they make for Thee, and then say, Now, Lord, You become the agent of operation here, the source. You fulfill our plans. Oh, that we can look into His face and say, We have no plans, Lord Jesus, Thou art our plan. Thou art our strength. Thou art our wisdom. Thou art our desire. Our only longing is that Thou shalt be happy with us, pleased with us, that Thou shalt joy over us with singing, that somehow we can render to Thee what Thou dost deserve, and glorify Thee in some beginning measure as Thou dost merit. Let this come to our hearts. Might there rise within us even now some sense of the meaning of the text, In Thy presence is the fullness of joy. Not in things accomplished, not in work, not in ministry. Only in Him. He is our joy. So to that end, bring us so that whatever direction we have looked, some down in discouragement, some around in vanity, some ahead in ambition, Lord, bring all our eyes and may we standing at this moment of Benediction "look full in His wonderful face, until the things of earth grow strangely dim in the Light of His glory and grace."⁵ And we shall leave this house unitedly wanting that He get out of us that which He wants and which He deserves. We want our Lord Jesus to be satisfied. We want Him to have some joy. It has cost Him so much to redeem us. Oh, that He should have some joy in this people. And we will give Thee the praise for uniting our hearts thus. In His worthy Name.

Let us stand for the Benediction. Now "may the love of God the Father, and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be and abide with each of us now and until Jesus comes again. Amen" (II Cor. 13:14).

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, April 29, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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5 "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" by Helen H. Lemmel, 1922.