

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

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## JOY, A DUTY

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A Sermon

Delivered by

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At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

On Lord's Day Evening, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1887

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*“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice .”*  
— *Philippians 4:4*

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THERE is a marvellous medicinal power in joy. Most medicines are distasteful; but this, which is the best of all medicines, is sweet to the taste, and comforting to the heart. We noticed, in our reading, that there had been a little tiff between two sisters in the church at Philippi — I am glad that we do not know what the quarrel was about; I am usually thankful for ignorance on such subjects; — but, as a cure for disagreements, the apostle says, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” People who are very happy, especially those who are very happy in the Lord, are not apt either to give offence or to take offence. Their minds are so sweetly occupied with higher things, that they are not easily distracted by the little troubles which naturally arise among such imperfect creatures as we are. Joy in the Lord is the cure for all discord. Should it not be so? What is this joy but the concord of the soul, the

accord of the heart, with the joy of heaven? Joy in the Lord, then, drives away the discords of earth.

Further, brethren, notice that the apostle, after he had said, “Rejoice in the Lord always,” commanded is one of the best preparations for the trials of this life. The cure for care is joy the Philippians to be careful for nothing, thus implying that joy in the Lord in the Lord. No, my brother, you will not be able to keep on with your fretfulness; no, my sister, you will not be able to weary yourself any longer with your anxieties, if the Lord will but fill you with His joy. Then, being satisfied with your God, yea, more than satisfied, overflowing with delight in Him, you will say to yourself, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.” What is there on earth that is worth fretting for — even for five minutes? If one could gain an imperial crown by a day of care, it would be too great an expense for a thing which would bring more care with it. Therefore, let us be thankful, let us be joyful in the Lord. I count it one of the wisest things that, by rejoicing in the Lord, we commence our heaven here below. It is possible so to do, it is profitable so to do, and we are commanded so to do.

Now I come to the text itself, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.”

**I.** It will be our first business at this time to consider **THE GRACE COMMANDED**, this grace of joy; “Rejoice in the Lord,” says the apostle.

In the first place, *this is a very delightful thing*. What a gracious God we serve, who makes delight to be a duty, and who commands us to rejoice! Should we not at once be obedient to such a command as this? It is intended that we should be happy. That is the meaning of the precept, that we should be cheerful; more than that, that we should be thankful; more than that, that we should rejoice. I think this word ‘rejoice’ is almost a French word; it is not only joy, but it is joy over again, re-joyce. You know *re* usually signifies the re-duplication of a thing, the taking it over again. We are to joy, and then we are to re-joy. We are to chew the cud of delight; we are to roll the dainty morsel under our tongue till we get the very essence out of it. ‘Rejoice.’ Joy is a delightful thing. You cannot be too happy, brother. Nay, do not suspect yourself of being wrong because you are full of delight. You know it is said of the divine wisdom, “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” Provided that it is joy in the Lord, you cannot have too much of it. The fly is drowned in the honey, or the sweet syrup into which he plunges

himself; but this heavenly syrup of delight will not drown your soul, or intoxicate your heart. It will do you good, and not evil, all the days of your life. God never commanded us to do a thing which would really harm us; and when He bids us rejoice, we may be sure that this is as delightful as it is safe, and as safe as it is delightful. Come, brothers and sisters, I am inviting you now to no distasteful duty when, in the name of my Master, I say to you, as Paul said to the Philippians under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

But, next, *this is a demonstrative duty*: "Rejoice in the Lord." There may be such a thing as a dumb joy, but I hardly think that it can keep dumb long. Joy! joy! Why, it speaks for itself! It is like a candle lighted in a dark chamber; you need not sound a trumpet, and say, "Now light has come." The candle proclaims itself by its own brilliance; and when joy comes into a man, it shines out of his eyes, it sparkles in his countenance. There is a something about every limb of the man that betokens that his body, like a well-tuned harp, has had its strings put in order. Joy — it refreshes the marrow of the bones; it quickens the flowing of the blood in the veins; it is a healthy thing in all respects. It is a speaking thing, a demonstrative thing; and I am sure that joy in the Lord ought to have a tongue. When the Lord sends you affliction, sister, you generally grumble loudly enough; when the Lord tries you, my dear brother, you generally speak fast enough about that. Now when, on the other hand, the Lord multiplies His mercies to you, do speak about it, do sing about it. I cannot recollect, since I was a boy, ever seeing in the newspapers columns of thankfulness and expressions of delight about the prosperity of business in England. It is a long, long time since I was first able to read newspapers — a great many years now; but I do not recollect the paragraphs in which it was said that everybody was getting on in the world, and growing rich; but as soon as there was any depression in business, what lugubrious articles appeared concerning the dreadful times which had fallen upon the agricultural interest and every other interest! Oh, my dear brethren, from the way some of you grumble, I might imagine you were all ruined if I did not know better! I knew some of you when you were not worth twopence, and you are pretty well-to-do now; you have got on uncommonly well for men who are being ruined! From the way some people talk, you might imagine that everybody is bankrupt, and that we are all going to the dogs together; but it is not so, and what a pity it is that we do not give the Lord some of our praises when we have better times! If we are so loud and so eloquent over our present woes, why could we not have been as eloquent and as loud in thanksgiving for the blessings that God formerly

vouchsafed to us? Perhaps the mercies buried in oblivion have been to heaven, and accused us to the Lord, and therefore He has sent us the sorrows of today. True joy, when it is joy in the Lord, must speak; it cannot hold its tongue, it must praise the name of the Lord.

Further, *this blessed grace of joy is very contagious*. It is a great privilege, I think, to meet a truly happy man, a graciously happy man. My mind goes back at this moment to that dear man of God who used to be with us, years ago, whom we called “Old Father Dransfield.” What a lump of sunshine that man was! I think that I never came into this place, with a heavy heart, but the very sight of him seemed to fill me with exhilaration, for his joy was wholly in his God! An old man and full of years, but as full of happiness as he was full of days; always having something to tell you to encourage you. He constantly made a discovery of some fresh mercy for which we were again to praise God. O dear brethren, let us rejoice in the Lord, that we may set others rejoicing! One dolorous spirit brings a kind of plague into the house; one person who is always wretched seems to stop all the birds singing wherever he goes; but, as the birds pipe to each other, and one morning songster quickens all the rest, and sets the groves ringing with harmony, so will it be with the happy cheerful spirit of a man who obeys the command of the text, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” This grace of joy is contagious.

Besides, dear brethren, *joy in the Lord is influential for good*. I am sure that there is a mighty influence wielded by a consistently joyous spirit. See how little children are affected by the presence of a happy person. There is much more in the tone of the life than there is in the particular fashion of the life. It may be the life of one who is very poor, but oh, how poverty is gilded by a cheerful spirit! It may be the life of one who is well-read and deeply instructed; but, oh, if there be a beauty of holiness, and a beauty of happiness added to the learning, nobody talks about ‘the blue stocking’ or ‘the book-worm’ being dull and heavy. Oh, no, there is a charm about holy joy! I wish we had more of it! There are many more flies caught with honey than with vinegar; and there are many more sinners brought to Christ by happy Christians than by doleful Christians. Let us sing unto the Lord as long as we live; and, mayhap, some weary sinner, who has discovered the emptiness of sinful pleasure, will say to himself, “Why, after all, there must be something real about the joy of these Christians; let me go and learn how I may have it.” And when he comes and sees it in the light of your gladsome countenance, he will be likely to learn it, God helping him, so as never to

forget it. “Rejoice in the Lord always,” says the apostle, for joy is a most influential grace, and every child of God ought to possess it in a high degree.

I want you to notice, dear friends, that *this rejoicing is commanded*. It is not a matter that is left to your option; it is not set before you as a desirable thing which you can do without, but it is a positive precept of the Holy Spirit to all who are in the Lord: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” We ought to obey this precept because joy in the Lord makes us like God. He is the happy God; ineffable bliss is the atmosphere in which He lives, and He would have His people to be happy. Let the devotees of Baal cut themselves with knives and lancets, and make hideous outcries if they will; but the servants of Jehovah must not even mar the corners of their beard. Even if they fast, they shall anoint their head, and wash their face, that they appear not unto men to fast, for a joyous God desires a joyous people.

You are commanded to rejoice, brethren, because this is for your profit. Holy joy will oil the wheels of your life’s machinery. Holy joy will strengthen you for your daily labour. Holy joy will beautify you, and, as I have already said, give you an influence over the lives of others. It is upon this point that I would most of all insist, we are commanded to rejoice in the Lord. If you cannot speak the gospel, live the gospel by your cheerfulness; for what is the gospel? Glad tidings of great joy; and you who believe it must show by its effect upon you that it is glad tidings of great joy to you. I do believe that a man of God — under trial and difficulty and affliction, bearing up, and patiently submitting with holy acquiescence, and still rejoicing in God — is a real preacher of the gospel, preaching with an eloquence which is mightier than words can ever be, and which will find its secret and silent way into the hearts of those who might have resisted other arguments. Oh, do, then, listen to the text, for it is a command from God, “Rejoice in the Lord always!”

May I just pause here, and hand this commandment round to all of you who are members of this church, and to all of you who are truly members of Christ? You are bidden to rejoice in the Lord always; you are not allowed to sit there, and fret, and fume; you are not permitted to complain and groan. Mourner, you are commanded to put on beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for mourning. For this purpose your Saviour came, the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him for this very end, that He might make you to rejoice. Therefore, sing with the prophet, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he

hath covered me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.”

**II.** Now we come to the second head, on which I will speak but briefly; that is, **THE JOY DISCRIMINATED:** “Rejoice *in the Lord.*”

Notice *the sphere of this joy:* “Rejoice in the Lord.” We read in Scripture that children are to obey their parents “in the Lord.” We read of men and women being married “only in the Lord.” Now, dear friends, no child of God must go outside that ring, “in the Lord.” *There* is where you are, where you ought to be, where you must be. You cannot truly rejoice if you get outside that ring; therefore, see that you do nothing which you cannot do “in the Lord.” Mind that you seek no joy which is not joy in the Lord; if you go after the poisonous sweets of this world, woe be to you. Never rejoice in that which is sinful, for all such rejoicing is evil. Flee from it; it can do you no good. That joy which you cannot share with God is not a right joy for you. No; “in the Lord” is the sphere of your joy.

But I think that the apostle also means that *God is to be the great object of your joy:* “Rejoice in the Lord.” Rejoice in the Father, your Father who is in heaven, your loving, tender, unchangeable God. Rejoice, too, in the Son, your Redeemer, your Brother, the Husband of your soul, your Prophet, Priest, and King. Rejoice also in the Holy Ghost, your Quickener, your Comforter, in Him who shall abide with you for ever. Rejoice in the one God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; in Him delight yourselves, as it is written, “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” We cannot have too much of this joy in the Lord, for the great Jehovah is our exceeding joy. Or if, by “the Lord” is meant the Lord Jesus, then let me invite, persuade, command you to delight in the Lord Jesus, incarnate in your flesh, dead for your sins, risen for your justification, gone into the glory claiming victory for you, sitting at the right hand of God interceding for you, reigning over all worlds on your behalf, and soon to come to take you up into His glory that you may be with Him for ever. Rejoice in the Lord Jesus. This is a sea of delight; blessed are they that dive into its utmost depths.

Sometimes, brethren and sisters, you cannot rejoice in anything else, but you can rejoice in the Lord; then, rejoice in Him to the full. Do not rejoice in your temporal prosperity, for riches take to themselves wings, and fly away. Do not rejoice even in your great successes in the work of God.

Remember how the seventy disciples came back to Jesus, and said, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name,” and He answered, “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” Do not rejoice in your privileges; I mean, do not make the great joy of your life to be the fact that you are favoured with this and that external privilege or ordinance, but rejoice in God. He changes not. If the Lord be your joy, your joy will never dry up. All other things are but for a season; but God is for ever and ever. Make Him your joy, the whole of your joy, and then let this joy absorb your every thought. Be baptized into this joy; plunge into the deeps of this unutterable bliss of joy in God.

**III.** Thirdly, let us think of **THE TIME APPOINTED** for this rejoicing: “Rejoice in the Lord *always*.”

“Always.” Well, then, that begins at once, certainly; so let us now begin to rejoice in the Lord. If any of you have taken a gloomy view of religion, I beseech you to throw that gloomy view away at once. “Rejoice in the Lord always,” therefore, rejoice in the Lord now. I recollect what a damper I had, as a young Christian, when I had but lately believed in Jesus Christ. I felt that, as the Lord had said, “He that believeth in me hath everlasting life,” I, having believed in him, had everlasting life, and I said so, with the greatest joy and delight and enthusiasm, to an old Christian man; and he said to me, “Beware of presumption! There are a great many who think they have eternal life, but who have not got it,” which was quite true; but, for all that, is there not more presumption in doubting God’s promise than there is in believing it? Is there any presumption in taking God at his word? Is there not gross presumption in hesitating and questioning as to whether these things are so or not? If God says that they are so, then they are so, whether I feel that they are so or not; and it is my place, as a believer, to accept God’s bare word, and rest on it. “We count cheques as cash,” said one who was making up accounts. Good cheques are to be counted as cash, and the promises of God, though as yet unfulfilled, are as good as the blessings themselves, for God cannot lie, or make a promise that He will not perform. Let us, therefore, not be afraid of being glad, but begin to be glad at once if we have hitherto taken a gloomy view of true religion, and have been afraid to rejoice.

When are we to be glad? “Rejoice in the Lord always;” that is, *when you cannot rejoice in anything or anyone but God*. When the fig-tree does

not blossom, when there is no fruit on the vine and no herd in the stall, when everything withers and decays and perishes, when the worm at the root of the gourd has made it to die, then rejoice in the Lord. When the day darkens into evening, and the evening into midnight, and the midnight into a sevenfold horror of great darkness, rejoice in the Lord; and when that darkness does not clear, but becomes more dense and Egyptian, when night succeedeth night, and neither sun nor moon nor stars appear, still rejoice in the Lord alway. He who uttered these words had been a night and a day in the deep, he had been stoned, he had suffered from false brethren, he had been in peril of his life, and yet most fittingly do those lips cry out to us, "Rejoice in the Lord alway." Ay, at the stake itself have martyrs fulfilled this word; they clapped their hands amid the fire that was consuming them. Therefore, rejoice in the Lord when you cannot rejoice in any other.

But also take care that you *rejoice in the Lord when you have other things to rejoice in*. When He loads your table with good things, and your cup is overflowing with blessings, rejoice in *Him* more than in *them*. Forget not that the Lord your Shepherd is better than the green pastures and the still waters, and rejoice not in the pastures or in the waters in comparison with your joy in the Shepherd who gives you all. Let us never make gods out of our goods; let us never allow what God gives us to supplant the Giver. Shall the wife love the jewels that her husband gave her better than she loves him who gave them to her? That were an evil love, or no love at all. So, let us love God first, and rejoice in the Lord alway when the day is brightest, and multiplied are the other joys that He permits us to have.

"Rejoice in the Lord alway." That is, *if you have not rejoiced before, begin to do so at once; and when you have long rejoiced, keep on at it*. I have known, sometimes, that things have gone so smoothly that I have said, "There will be a check to this prosperity; I know that there will. Things cannot go on quite so pleasantly always."

*"More the treacherous calm I dread  
Than tempests lowering overhead."*

One is apt to spoil his joy by the apprehension that there is some evil coming. Now listen to this: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." "Rejoice in the Lord alway." Do not anticipate trouble. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Take the good that God provides thee, and rejoice not merely in it, but in Him who

provided it. So mayest thou enjoy it without fear, for there is good salt with that food which is eaten as coming from the hand of God.

“Rejoice in the Lord *always*.” That is, *when you get into company, then rejoice in the Lord*. Do not be ashamed to let others see that you are glad. *Rejoice in the Lord also when you are alone*. I know what happens to some of you on Sunday night. You have had such a blessed Sabbath, and you have gone away from the Lord’s table with the very flavour of heaven in your mouths; and then some of you have had to go home where everything is against you. The husband does not receive you with any sympathy with your joy, or the father does not welcome you with any fellowship in your delight. Well, but still, “Rejoice in the Lord *always*.” When you cannot get anybody else to rejoice with you, still continue to rejoice. There is a way of looking at everything which will show you that the blackest cloud has a silver lining. There is a way of looking at all things in the light of God, which will turn into sweetness that which otherwise had been bitter as gall. I do not know whether any of you keep a quassia cup at home. If you do, you know that it is made of wood, and you pour water into the bowl, and the water turns bitter directly before you drink it. You may keep this cup as long as you like, but it always embitters the water that is put into it. I think that I know some dear brethren and sisters who always seem to have one of these cups handy. Now, instead of that, I want you to buy a cup of another kind that shall make everything sweet, whatever it is. Whatever God pleases to pour out of the bowl of providence shall come into your cup, and your contentment, your delight in God, shall sweeten it all. God bless you, dear friends, with much of this holy joy!

**IV.** So now I finish with the fourth head, which is this, **THE EMPHASIS LAID ON THE COMMAND**: “Rejoice in the Lord *always*: *and again I say, Rejoice*.” What does that mean, “Again I say, Rejoice”?

This was, first, *to show Paul’s love for the Philippians*. He wanted them to be happy. They had been so kind to him, and they had made him so happy, that he said, “Oh, dear brethren, do rejoice; dear sisters, do rejoice. I say it twice over to you, ‘Be happy, be happy,’ because I love you so well that I am anxious to have you beyond all things else to rejoice in the Lord *always*.”

I also think that, perhaps, he said it twice over to suggest the *difficulty of continual joy*. It is not so easy as some think always to rejoice. It may be

for you young people, who are yet strong in limb, who have few aches and pains, and none of the infirmities of life. It may be an easy thing to those placed in easy circumstances, with few cares and difficulties; but there are some of God's people who need great grace if they are to rejoice in the Lord always; and the apostle knew that, so he said, "Again I say, Rejoice." He repeats the precept, as much as to say, "I know it is a difficult thing, and so I the more earnestly press it upon you. Again I say, Rejoice."

I think, too, that he said it twice over, *to assert the possibility of it*. This was as much as if he had said, "I told you to rejoice in the Lord always. You opened your eyes, and looked with astonishment upon me; but, 'Again I say, Rejoice.' It is possible, it is practicable; I have not spoken unwisely. I have not told you to do what you never can do; but with deliberation I write it down, 'Again I say, Rejoice.' You can be happy. God the Holy Ghost can lift you above the down-draggings of the flesh, and of the world, and of the devil; and you may be enabled to live upon the mount of God beneath the shinings of His face. 'Again I say, Rejoice.'"

Do you not think that this was intended also *to impress upon them the importance of the duty*? "Again I say, Rejoice." Some of you will go and say, "I do not think that it matters much whether I am happy or not, I shall get to heaven, however gloomy I am, if I am sincere." "No," says Paul, "that kind of talk will not do; I cannot have you speak like that. Come, I must have you rejoice, I do really conceive it to be a Christian's bounden duty, and so, 'Again, I say, Rejoice.'"

But do you not think, also, that Paul repeated the command *to allow of special personal testimony*? "Again, I say, Rejoice. I, Paul, a sufferer to the utmost extent for Christ's sake, even now an ambassador in bonds, shut up in a dungeon, I say to you, Rejoice." Paul was a greatly tried man, but he was a blessedly happy man. There is not one of us but would gladly change conditions with Paul, if that were possible, now that we see the whole of his life written out; and to-night, looking across the ages, over all the scenes of trouble which he encountered, he says to us, "Brethren, rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

Did you ever notice how full of joy this Epistle to the Philippians is? Will you spare me just a minute while I get you to run your eye through it, to observe what a joyful letter it is? You notice that, in the first chapter, Paul gets only as far as the fourth verse when he says, "Always in every prayer of

mine for you all making request with joy.” Now he is in his right vein; he is so glad because of what God has done for the Philippians that, when he prays for them, he mixes joy with his prayer. In the eighteenth verse, he declares that he found joy even in the opposition of those who preached Christ in order to rival him. Hear what he says: “The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.” And he does not finish the chapter till, in the twenty-fifth verse, he declares that he had joy even in the expectation of not going to heaven just yet, but living a little longer to do good to these people: “And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.” You see it is joy, joy, joy, joy. Paul seems to go from stave to stave of the ladder of light, as if he were climbing up from Nero’s dungeon into heaven itself by way of continual joy. So he writes, in the second verse of the second chapter, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. When he gets to the sixteenth verse, he says, “That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.”

But I am afraid that I should weary you if I went through the Epistle thus, slowly, verse by verse. Just notice how he begins the third chapter: “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” The word is sometimes rendered “farewell.” When he says, “Rejoice,” it is the counterpart of “welcome.” We say to a man who comes to our house, “Salve,” “Welcome.” When he goes away, it is our duty to “speed the parting guest,” and say, “Farewell.” This is what Paul meant to say here. “Finally, my brethren, fare you well in the Lord. Be happy in the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord” And I do not think that I can finish up my sermon better than by saying on this Sabbath night, “Finally, my brethren, fare you well, be happy in the Lord.”

*“Fare thee well! And if for ever,  
Still for ever, fare thee well.”*

May that be your position, so to walk with God that your fare shall be that of angels! May you eat angels’ food, the manna of God’s love! May your drink be from the rock that flows with a pure stream! So may you feed and so may you drink until you come unto the mount of God, where you shall

see His face unveiled, and standing in His exceeding brightness, shall know His glory, being glorified with the saved. Till then, be happy. Why, even —

*“The thought of such amazing bliss,  
Should constant joys create.”*

Be happy. If the present be dreary, it will soon be over. Oh, but a little while, and we shall be transferred from these seats below to the thrones above! We shall go from the place of aching brows to the place where they all wear crowns, from the place of weary hands to where they bear the palm branch of victory, from the place of mistake and error and sin, and consequent grief, to the place where they are without fault before the throne of God, for they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Come, then, let us make a solemn league and covenant together in the name of God, and let it be called, ‘The Guild of the Happy’; for the —

*“Favourites of the Heavenly King  
May speak their joys abroad;”*

may, they *must* speak their joys abroad; let us endeavour to do so always, by the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen and Amen.



*Come, we that love the Lord,  
And let our joys be known:  
Join in a song with sweet accord,  
And thus surround the throne.*

*Yes! And before we rise  
To that immortal state,  
The thought of such amazing bliss  
Should constant joy create.*



*(Verses from the last hymn sung after Mr Spurgeon preached the above message.)*