

Christ's Joy in the Church Before His Incarnation.

by Edward Payson

Christ's joy in the world is a demonstration of his love and condescension towards humanity, and it should inspire us to return his love and serve him.

Scripture: Proverbs 8:31, John 1:1, Ephesians 5:25, Revelation 21:3

Topics: "Christ's Love", "Redemption Plan"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the eternal Word, identified as the divine nature of Christ, expressing joy in the habitable parts of the earth and delight in the sons of men, revealing a deep connection to humanity and a preference for earth over heaven. The sermon explores the reasons behind this joy, including the plan of redemption, the work of redemption as the most glorious of all works, and the destined residence of Christ's church on earth. Payson emphasizes Christ's everlasting love for his church, his intention to assume human nature, and his delight in giving spiritual blessings to humanity.

Transcript

"Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men"

Proverbs 8:31

chapter contains an authoritative and affectionate address to mankind, uttered by a speaker who is called Wisdom. It is evident from the language of this speaker, and from the description which he gives of himself, that he is a real, and not an allegorical personage: "I love them," he says, "that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me; but pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was.

When Jehovah prepared the heavens I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the abyss; when he established the clouds above; when he appointed the foundations of the earth; then was I by him as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." No attentive reader of the New Testament need be reminded how strikingly this language corresponds with what is revealed respecting the Word, who was in the beginning with God; who is in the bosom of the Father; of whom the Father said, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, and who was made flesh and dwelt among us in the

person of Jesus Christ.

Expositors are therefore doubtless right in saying, as they generally have done, that it is the eternal Word, or the divine nature of Christ, who speaks in this chapter, in the character of Wisdom. In the passage selected for our text, this divine personage gives us an interesting account of his feelings and employments previous to his appearance in the flesh: I was continually rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men. This, my hearers, is a very remarkable passage.

Our Saviour, the eternal Word, informs us, that, as soon as the world was made, the habitable parts of it, or the parts inhabited by men, became the scene and subject of his rejoicing; and that his delights (the expression is emphatical, denoting his chief delight) were with the sons of men. But had he not a heaven in which he might rejoice? Had he not myriads of holy angels in whose society and praises he might delight? He had; and yet it appears that he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, rather than in heaven; that his chief delights were with men, rather than angels.

This, surely, is not a little surprising; and what renders it more so, is, that he knew the world in which he thus rejoiced would he wet with his tears, and stained with his blood. He knew that the fallen race in which he thus delighted, were enemies to his Father and to himself; and that they would requite his love with the basest ingratitude; put him to a cruel and ignominious death, and persecute his friends with fire and sword. Why then should he rejoice in our earth, and delight in its human inhabitants?

It could not be simply because he created them, for he also created heaven and the angelic spirits. It could not be on account of man's intellectual worth and dignity; for in those respects the angels are greatly our superiors. Still less can we ascribe it to any moral excellence possessed by men; for, as has already been observed, they are fallen, sinful creatures. We must, therefore, look elsewhere for the reasons of the feelings and conduct here described; and we shall find them in the plan of redemption.

In the world, that plan was to be executed, and men were the objects of it. This, generally speaking, was the reason why the eternal Word rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and why his chief delights were with the sons of men. To be more particular, He rejoiced in the world, rather than in heaven, I. Because it was destined to be the place in which he should perform the most wonderful of his works, obtain the greatest victory, make the most glorious display of his moral perfections, especially of his love, which is the essence of them all; and in the most signal manner glorify his Father.

All this he was to do, all this he since has done, in effecting the work of redemption. We know but little of the work which he has performed in heaven. We know still less of what he may have done in the numberless worlds which appear around us. But we may venture to assert that, whatever he may have done in heaven, or in other parts of the universe, he has never performed any work so great, so wonderful, so glorious to the Father and himself, and so productive of happiness, as the work of redemption.

We are warranted to make this assertion by the declaration of Jehovah, who represents the work of redeeming love, as, of all his works, the most wonderful. We are warranted to make it by the fact that the blessed angels, who must be supposed to know what works he has performed, regard this as the most glorious of all his works, as the work into which they especially desire to look, and which is the most worthy of their admiration. It is the work which in a peculiar manner calls forth the praises of heaven.

It is the performance of this work which, in the view of the inhabitants of heaven, renders the Lamb who was slain peculiarly worthy to receive blessing, and glory, and honor, and power. Well, then, might our

divine Redeemer rejoice in the world where the greatest of his works was to be performed. He had from eternity rejoiced in the plan of it, and in contemplating its execution. Still more, were it possible, would he rejoice to see the world which was to be the scene of its performance, start from nothing into existence; to see preparation then making for the great work, and to mark the several parts of the earth in which the principal events connected with it would take place.

II. Our divine Redeemer rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, because they were the destined residence of his then future church. Christ loved the church, says an apostle, and gave himself for it. He gave himself for it because he loved it; loved it before it had a being. He calls the things which are not, we are told, as though they were. He could love the church before it was created, no less easily than he can love it now. Agreeably, he says to it, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, that is with a love that has existed from eternity; therefore with loving kindness will I gather thee.

In consequence of this everlasting love to his church, he rejoiced in the world which was to be its residence, while preparing for heaven, rejoiced to visit it, as we are pleased to visit the habitations of our children or friends. For this reason he rejoiced in all the habitable parts of the earth; for they are all destined to be filled with his disciples. Every where churches are to be established. And to his omniscient eye, which saw the end from the beginning, every habitable spot on earth was made to appear interesting by some event connected with his church, of which it was to be the scene.

As he walked invisibly through the world, immediately after its creation, he would say: Here the first martyr will seal the cause of truth with his blood. From this spot, Enoch, and from that, Elijah, shall be translated to heaven. Here Abraham shall pitch his tent, and build his altar, and rejoice in my gracious visits. There I will conduct my people through the wilderness; on that mount I will appear, to give them my law; at its foot, I will meet my servant Moses, and converse with him, face to face, as a man talketh with his friend.

And while he thus marked the future scenes of all the great events in the history of his church, innumerable other places would be rendered pleasing to him by the foresight of less important, indeed, but still highly interesting events. Here, he might say, some trembling penitent will begin to find relief in prayer. There, I will first reveal myself to some broken-hearted sinner, and listen to the joyful praises and thanksgivings which he will in consequence pour forth. On this spot, one of my ministering servants shall preach my gospel with power and success; and on that, a temple shall rise, where many shall be taught to know and love me; where a numerous church shall be trained up for heaven, where I will often meet and commune with them at my table.

In this part of the world, also, though destined to remain long uninhabited, and destitute of the gospel, he rejoiced. He saw all the temples which now adorn our land, all the churches which he here established. Nor did this house of God, or this church escape his notice. He knew of whom it would be said, this man was born to glory there. He saw this day, saw you, my Christian friends, listening to these truths, and meeting around his table; entered every spot where you or any of his people would reside; where habitations would be erected, in which prayer would be offered up in his name.

He not only saw all his churches that now exist, but all that will exist hereafter. He saw the Ethiopian stretch out his hands to God, and the isles waiting for his law. He saw the Jews coming in with the fullness of the Gentiles; he saw the whole earth filled with the glory of God, as the waters fill the sea. All this he saw, for he enabled his prophets to predict it. And while he saw this, he heard all the prayers and praises which would be uttered by his people, in all ages and parts of the world, so that the whole earth,

immediately after its creation, while all was solitary and still, resounded to his ear with praises, thanksgivings, and songs of joy.

Is it then strange, that, seeing and hearing this, he should rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth, even more than in heaven; in heaven, which, if I may venture to say it, would appear comparatively empty, till his beloved people were brought in to share it with him. III. While our divine Redeemer thus rejoiced in our world, rather than in heaven, his chief delights and pleasures were with men, rather than with angels. They were so, 1. Because he intended, in the fullness of time, to assume our nature, and become himself a man.

He is called the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world; because before the world was created, it was determined and foreseen that he should be slain. For the same reason, he may be said to have been a man, before the foundation of the world; because it was determined that he should become so; that he should be made flesh and dwell among us. In consequence of this, he felt, if I may so express it, related to man; felt that he was their brother, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, --feelings which he could not, with equal reason, exercise towards angels.

A heathen writer represents one as saying, I am a man, and therefore cannot but feel interested in any thing which relates to man. 2. To great numbers of our race the divine Redeemer was destined to become still more nearly related. They had even then been given to him by his Father, and were appointed to compose his church, to be united to him in the most intimate and indissoluble of relations; for the church is styled his body, a body of which he was the constituted head, of which his Spirit is the animating soul.

Hence the apostle, speaking of Christ, says, we are members of Christ's body, of his flesh and of his bones; and he loves and cherishes the church, even as a man loveth and cherisheth his own flesh. The union between Christ and his church is to be eternal. Its members are destined to share heaven with him, to live and reign with him for ever and ever. All this he knew from the beginning. He knew also that his church would, in process of time, return his love; that all its members would love and praise him through eternity, as their deliverer from everlasting death, and the source of all their felicity.

Hence he felt himself drawn to them by a most powerful attraction, and hence his chief delights were with the race from which his church was to be selected, and among which some of its members were in all ages to be found. 3. Another reason why his chief delights were with the sons of men, may be found in the disposition which prompted him to say, It is more blessed to give than to receive. In heaven, he could receive the praises of angels, but on earth he could give gifts to men.

He could here exercise pardoning mercy, and dispense spiritual blessings to his people. This he began to do at least as early as the time of Abel, and he continued to do it until the period of his resurrection. During all that time he was delightedly employed in instructing, protecting, and blessing the church which he was afterwards to purchase with his blood; and in making preparation for his visible appearance on earth. It was the Spirit of Christ, as St. Peter informs us, which inspired Noah to preach to the inhabitants of the old world, and the prophets to foretell his own incarnation, death and resurrection.

From a comparison between different parts of the Scriptures, it appears that it was he who appeared to the patriarchs who commissioned Moses, who led Israel through the wilderness, who dwelt in the Jewish temple, who said of Zion, This is my rest forever, here will I dwell, because I have desired it. We need not wonder, then, that one who feels more happiness in giving than in receiving, should delight in visiting the sons of men, whom he could thus pardon and bless, and save, rather than in dwelling with angels, who

needed no pardon or salvation; or that he should rejoice more over one sinner that repenteth, than over many of the inhabitants of heaven who needed no repentance.

It would be easy to enlarge on these and various other considerations of a similar nature; but leaving you to do this in your private meditation, I proceed to make some improvement of the subject. And, first: How ungrateful and inexcusable does the treatment which Christ has received from men appear, when viewed in the light of this subject. He chose our world in preference to all the worlds around us, to be the scene of the most glorious of his works, and our race to be the subjects of it.

No sooner was the earth formed, than he rejoiced in it, and chose to dwell in it rather than in heaven. No sooner were men created than he made it his supreme delight to visit and bless them, preferring their society to that of the holy angels. When part of the angels sinned and fell, he did not assume their nature, or offer himself a sacrifice for their salvation. He took not on him, says the apostle, the nature of angels, but he took upon him the seed of Abraham. Yet when, after the lapse of four thousand years, this friend of man, this divine philanthropist assumed our nature, and visited the world which he had loved, in human flesh, how was he treated?

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, but it acknowledged him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. Poverty, contempt, the crown of thorns, and the cross, were all which he received from the world in which he had so long rejoiced, from the ungrateful race in whom he had so long delighted. And we, my friends, though we condemn his murderers, treat him little better. We disbelieve him, disobey him, slight him, refuse to comply with his invitations, neglect his offered mercy and grace, and grieve him in a thousand different ways.

Even in the house of his friends he is often wounded and crucified afresh. Surely those of our race who finally reject such a Saviour, will be as much distinguished by the severity of their punishment, as they have been by the greatness of their privileges and mercies. Again: Did our Saviour, before his incarnation, rejoice in the habitable parts of our earth, and delight in visiting and blessing the sons of men? Then we may be certain that he still does so; for he is, yesterday, today, and forever, the same.

Still he prefers earth to heaven; still his chief delights are with the sons of men; and while, as man, he intercedes for them in heaven, he still, as God, visits our world, to meet with and bless his people; for his language is, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them to bless them. I will come to every one that loves me and take up my abode with him. I am he that walketh in the midst of the churches.

And while he thus addresses his people, he says to sinners, Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. My hearers, shall we not all return, and love and serve this condescending, long tried, and unalterable friend; who has for so many ages rejoiced, who still rejoices in our world, and delights in doing us good? Shall we any more grieve and offend him by our neglect, or by indulging those sins which caused his death?

Shall not we, my Christian friends, who expect to meet him at his table, yield ourselves wholly up to him without reserve, subdued by his all-conquering love, and constrained by his grace to live henceforth, not unto ourselves, but to him who has so long loved us, who died for us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood! Surely, if he rejoices in our world the whole world ought to rejoice in him; if his delights are with the sons of men, surely the sons of men ought all to place their happiness in being with him.

Lastly: How great, how inconceivable will be our Saviour's happiness, after the final consummation of all things! Then the plan for which our world was formed, will be completed. Then every member of his church, for the sake of which he loved and visited our race, will have been brought home to heaven, to be with him where he is; and if he loved and rejoiced and delighted in them before they knew and loved him, how will he love and rejoice in them, when he sees them surrounding his throne, perfectly resembling himself, in body and soul, loving him with unutterable love, contemplating him with ineffable delight, and praising him as their deliverer from sin, and death, and hell, as the author of all their everlasting glory and felicity.

Then, O blessed, animating thought! then he will be amply rewarded for all his sufferings, and for all his love to our ruined race. Then his people shall cease to grieve and offend him; then they will no longer degrade him by weak, confused, inadequate conceptions of his person, character and work, for then they shall see as they are seen, and know as they are known. Then the whole church shall be presented to him a glorious church, without spot, or blemish, or imperfection, and shall be as a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and as a royal diadem in the hand of our God.

Then, O Zion, as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. Then thy sun shall no more go down, nor thy moon withdraw itself; but the Lord shall be thy everlasting light, and thy God thy glory; and the days of thy mourning, and of thy Saviour's sufferings shall be ended.

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