

HEART AND SOUL

THE EMOTIONS OF JESUS

**A modern revision of a timeless
but forgotten spiritual classic by Robert Law**

Revised and edited by Peter M. Wallace



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The Joy of Jesus

'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, looked thrice dispirited.

I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
“Ill and o’erworked, how fare you in this scene?”
“Bravely,” said he, “for I of late have been
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread.*”

O human soul! As long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses’ ebb and flow,

To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam,
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
Thou mak’st the heaven thou hop’st indeed thy home.

—Matthew Arnold²²

“I have said these things to you so that my joy may
be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

—John 15:11

Jesus is called the man of sorrows. The title is forever his, like his crown of thorns. It expresses him truly as the one who has borne the whole immense burden of sinning, suffering humanity. But it does not fully, nor even fundamentally, express him.

Instinctively we would shrink from describing Jesus as an unhappy person, as one who at any moment or in any circumstance existed miserably. Instinctively we feel that the ground-tone of his life, underscoring its harshest conflicts, is joy. And as we think of what his mission was, of what he purposed and claimed to bring about, we see that it could not be otherwise.

No pessimist could be a savior. Unhappiness can never beget happiness, nor sickness health. "What I have I give you" (Acts 3:6). Only he can "strengthen the wavering line"²³ in whom joy is a force that is infectious and conquering, ringing in his voice, gleaming in his eyes.

This is how Jesus came.

He came with glad tidings. He came as the divine physician into the world's vast hospital. His words are beatitudes. He lifts up his hands in benediction. The blessings of the divine kingdom he was bringing to people he could compare to nothing so much as to the festive joys of marriage (Mark 2:19). He and his disciples were like a roving wedding party. He was the bridegroom whose joy overflows into the hearts of his friends and turns fasting into feasting.

Even at the last, on the verge of Gethsemane and in sight of Calvary, he speaks not of his sorrows, but still of his joy. He is the Lord of joy, and his crowning desire for his servants is that they may enter into the joy of their Lord and have that joy utterly fulfilled in them.

Yet Jesus is the man of sorrows, and it is because he is the man of sorrows that his joy is so precious a legacy, so strong an anchor to our souls. He is no "blue sky" optimist. This man of

joy has lived in the heart of blackest night. He has seen hell, here on earth, in human hearts, flaming in their eyes, triumphing in their deeds.

Yet his joy is unconquered and unconquerable. No one has ever sounded the depths of reality, has ever penetrated to the ultimate core of life, as Jesus did. And what he finds there is not an abyss of evil, but an infinity of good.

I desire then to speak of the joy of Jesus—of his *joy* rather than of his *joys*. There are joys that are transfigured sorrows, like the rainbow, which shines in the very substance of the lowering cloud. But the rainbow is the child of the sun. And I want to speak of that unfailing cause of joy that for Jesus transcended all causes of sorrow, which made the sunshine of his life, and which alone can make the sunshine of ours.

The Joy of Trust

All deep, lasting joy must be rooted in faith, in our conviction regarding reality—the eternal reality that lies within and beyond the outward show that passes before our eyes moment by moment.

What does life mean? What lies at the heart of it? Robert Louis Stevenson used to say in his half-humorous way that he had a tremendous belief in the “ultimate decency of things.”²⁴ And a biographer, speaking of the gaiety of John Wesley, said that such joy could be seen only in one who was at peace and confident trust with his religion.

And of this joyous faith, this firm confidence in an ultimate rightness and goodness in the whole nature of things, Jesus Christ is forever the author and perfecter. He had absolute, invincible faith in God and this was the root of his joy. “This is eternal life,” he said, “that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

We seldom realize, and never adequately, what a stupendous thing it is just to believe in God, in a God who is really God, whose presence, thought, and power permeate all existence, whose eternal purpose disposes all events, overrules all wills, shapes all destinies. Such belief, if sincere and vital, must color all life. God must be its strength and joy or its terror and despair. And Jesus believed in such a God as no other has believed.

To no other has God been a reality at once so universal and so immediately near. Jesus believed in God, not occasionally as we do, but all the time; not in the last resort, but as the first and last and supreme factor in every situation; not in the hours of crisis alone, on the mountaintop, but on the homely plain, in the daily, hourly process of events. God was the light in which Jesus saw, the atmosphere Jesus breathed.

And to Jesus this was joy, perfect and ineffable. Because God was to him not only the supreme sovereign—the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent one—God was all this, but God was also the Father, who is love; the God who has bound Godself to us in our weakness, our ignorance, and even in our sinfulness by ties that cannot be broken. The God who, because God is what God is, must care, must provide, must pardon, guide, deliver from evil, and carry us safely into eternal life.

To envision the joy of Jesus, we would have to know the Father as Jesus knew him, to feel the emotion with which he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, “Father,” to have his entrancing vision of the Father’s infinite goodness, his adoring vision of his glory, his glowing trust in his work of redeeming love. We would have to know that responsiveness to all that the Father is and wills.

That joy is reflected in the Gospels exactly as it must have been ordinarily present in his life. Jesus does not pause in his work to speak of his joy. It does not so much appear in bursts of sudden splendor as it is the light that shines in the face of

common day and colors all the landscape. What must it have been like to hear Jesus say, “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22), to see his face glow with an inner joy, and to hear the ring of gladness in his voice when he spoke of doing the Father’s will and finishing his work? Joy in the absolute, all-embracing goodness, wisdom, and sovereign power of the Father, joy in imparting this joy to others—this was the joy of Jesus.

And it cannot be denied that such trust in God is the only basis for joy that can sustain the burden of rational, thinking people. We are dependent beings. Our life is brief and, against the force of circumstances, comparatively powerless—in the end wholly so. Only this pinpoint of a present moment on which we stand is ours. Tomorrow we cannot see—we know only that every tomorrow is a step nearer to the end of all things of which we seem to be a part.

There is a power—imagine it as we may—that holds us in the hollow of its hand, by which we are carried along “like flakes of foam upon a swollen river.”²⁵ Can we trust that power or not? Get to the center of things and there is no question to ask and to answer, if we can, but this: can we trust, joyfully trust, that power?

So how do we respond when people today urge strong and plausible reasons why we cannot trust that power? Who tell us that the world of facts is soulless and conscienceless, a world of blind, relentless forces bearing no trace of divine origin or purpose? How do we respond when we can see for ourselves so much that seems to support this viewpoint, when we face the inexplicable inequalities of life, the long misery and degradation of the world, the gaping wounds of nature and humanity? How do we respond?

Let us remember that Jesus Christ saw all that we see, and more. Because no one in this world has ever worn so godless a look as the one who died by the unparalleled iniquity of the

cross, with the hideous taunt in his ears, “He trusted in God that he would deliver him.”²⁶ Jesus knew the absolute worst—and for a moment even he was almost overwhelmed. The world, with all its mustered forces of evil, was on one side, and the solitary faith of the crucified man was on the other. But in that critical conflict, faith won the day. It was decisive. Though the fight goes on still and will never cease while the world stands, the battle has been won. Jesus calls us, and not in vain, to follow him in living out his victory.

He calls us to this not only by his example, but by the revelation of God that he has brought, or, to speak more truly, which he is. You and I are not Jesus Christ. There is a sense in which we cannot have his faith, his vision of God, his original, direct, sure gaze into the heart of the divine Fatherhood. But Jesus not only tells us what he has seen there. No, he could not do that—the vision was not given in words and cannot be communicated in words. Rather, he holds himself up as the living mirror in which we too may gaze upon it. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The character of Jesus is the character of almighty God; the holiness of Jesus, the holiness of God; the wrath of Jesus, the wrath of God; the compassion of Jesus, the compassion of God; the cross of Jesus, the revelation of the sorrow and self-sacrificing love with which the sin of humanity fills the heart of the Eternal One.

This is the Christian faith. And is it not a joyous faith? Is it not joy deeper than all sorrow to know that he who holds the rudder of my life, who holds the rudder of the great universe, is one whose character is the character of Jesus? This includes everything.

Such a God claims from us absolute trust. We cannot trust God at one point and not trust God at every other point. We cannot trust God for ourselves and not for every other being, for tomorrow and not for all eternity. Jesus is the image of the

invisible God, the Son of God's love. God is what Jesus is. That excludes all fear that ultimate victory can in any way rest with evil, forbids all acceptance of imperfection, and assures us that every purpose of righteousness and love shall reach its goal.

If this faith is ours, our religion is a religion that rests upon the whole nature of things, and one in which we can rest. And it ought to fill our lives with joy much more than it does. Though clouds and darkness may trouble the circumference of life, at the center is that eternal light the radiance of which we behold joy and strength.

The Joy of Obedience

In bringing to humanity a new conception of God, Jesus revealed also a new obedience, new not in its rightness only, but a new type—free, reasonable, spiritual, springing from a community of spirit and purpose, responding to the will of God as a child to a parent, and therefore joyful.

Obedience is not in itself a joy. It is not to a laborer nor was it to a slave under a taskmaster's whip. It was not in the hard, legalized Judaism of Jesus's time. The Pharisees were scrupulous in their obedience. It might even be said that their delight was in the Law of the Lord. But to them the Law did not represent a high moral ideal to be embraced with all one's heart and soul and strength. It was not the expression of the character and will of God as intrinsically loving and righteous. God was very much a supreme dictator issuing arbitrary decrees to test the obedience of his subjects. God's Law to them was a statutory requirement, the chief use of which was to enable people to pile up merit in the eyes of the Divine Potentate.

One of the deep joys of Jesus was to be free himself, and to emancipate others, from this merely external, mechanical, servile relationship to the will of God. He toiled at the Father's

work as no Pharisee of the Pharisees ever did. But the idea of merit has no place in the spirit of Jesus—it belongs to quite another plane.

Jesus obeys because he loves the things the Father loves, and hates those the Father hates, and wills all the Father wills, as most holy, wise, and good. And he unites himself in spirit and truth with the Father's purpose. This, Jesus himself declares, was his joy. Daily, hourly, to respond to every inkling of the Father's will, to take up and finish another aspect of the Father's work, to make himself the channel of the Father's patient, mighty love to human beings—this was in life and death his ruling passion, his “meat” that so satisfied and regaled his whole nature as to make him forget weariness, hunger, and thirst. For this he went to the wilderness, to the crowded city, to the cross and the grave.

It is true that this joy is won only through the birth pangs of pain. One must say “no” to self so that one may say “yes” to God. And it was so for our Lord himself. He was tempted in all points as we are—tempted to take the short way, the easy way, rather than God's long and arduous way. Once at least, as we read, there was a “but” between Jesus's will and the Father's; once it was not “your will and mine,” it was “Not my will, but yours be done.” And that “but” was crimsoned with the blood of Christ's soul. It marks the uttermost triumph over self, the point beyond which self-surrender absolutely cannot go. Only in this way could he exhaust the possibilities of obedience and his victory become potential victory for every person.

Yet even here, not to mark the pervasiveness of joy would be to entirely misconceive the spirit of Jesus. If we could have heard that “your will be done,” we would have heard no groan of reluctant submission, no sob of compliance forced from an exhausted will. Nor would we have heard any full-throated shout of triumph. It was a low yet glad and loving “yes” in that final struggle that Jesus whispered into the Father's ear. Not

the nay-saying but the final yea-saying of life, its attainment to the supreme joy in self-surrender to the divine purpose of life through death.

All the masters of the spiritual life declare with one consent that only in such union with the will of God is the perfect joy. My revered teacher, Principal Cairns, from his deathbed sent the message to his students: “Tell them that the chief thing is to forget self utterly in the service of the great cause.” The secret of life, another says, is “freedom from pride, prejudice, and self; absolute simplicity of truth; resignation to the order of the world and to the divine will, and not resignation only, but active cooperation with them, according to our means and strength, in bringing good out of evil and truth out of falsehood. Those whose minds are absorbed in these thoughts has already found life eternal. They may be disabled or blind or deaf. Their home may be a straw-built hovel, but they have learned to see and hear with another sense, and are already living in the house not made with hands.”²⁷ In this reality lies the true joy of life.

Without this, a person may be various things. They may be a worker drone, a simple cutter of timber and drawer of water, a vigorous tool to be thrown on the scrap heap when it is broken or blunted. They may be an egotist who sets themselves on a pedestal and wonders why others do not see their greatness—“a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making [them] happy.”²⁸ But the only way to joy is to rise above self. And the only real way to rise above self is by getting to God, uniting ourselves to the infinite Good, for which we are made.

This is the joy of Jesus. And it is a joy—the one joy—we may all possess. It is a joy that may shine for us in the humblest details of daily duty. You can unite yourself with the Infinite, live the eternal life, by doing the most transient task in the spirit of Christ.

One time I knew an old laborer, a member of my congregation, whose task year in and year out was to trundle a wheelbarrow. After his death some of his fellow workmen said that when at his work he had a habit of talking to himself, and when they listened they would sometimes hear this: “The chief end of man is to glorify God, and to enjoy [God] forever.”²⁹ Was that not sublime? A person thinking of the chief end of human life and the glory of God between the shafts of a wheelbarrow. He found the infinite, he found life eternal, in his simple daily work. So may we.

Yet none of us is limited to a dull, ordinary life—“the trivial round, the common task.”³⁰ We all have a larger part to take in the building of the kingdom of God. We are called in many directions to lay our lives alongside God’s great work in this world, in the work of the Church, in its mission enterprises at home and abroad, in all that makes for social, civic, political, and international progress. We have to create a community without slums for the poor and unnecessary perils for the weak, without conditions that make virtue gratuitously difficult, vice easy and certain. We have to create a community of truth and holiness and love, a city of God. We have to labor on to bring in the “Christ that is to be.”³¹

And this is joy—the service of duty in the spirit of love, the service of God and of others in the spirit of Jesus. This is life, this alone satisfies. And of this we may have as much as we please—it is the only thing of which we may have as much as we please.

Be sure that if we are not getting what we want out of life, it is because we do not want the best. The best is unlimited. “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

The Joy of Hope

The third and completing element in the joy of Jesus was that of hope. For Jesus, God was that present reality that embraces and transcends all else, and the will of God was the infinite good, so the one glorious vision the future held for him was the kingdom of God. Already Jesus saw Satan hurled from his throne. God would arise; righteousness, peace, and joy would triumph. He foresaw all difficulties, discounted all disappointments. But, despite all obstacles, God's rule would find its way into human hearts.

Not even in the darkest hour of Jesus's—and the world's—history, when injustice, hypocrisy, and hate were at the height of their power, did he doubt that “clouds would break” or fear that though “right were worsted, wrong would triumph.”³² He himself was the seed of the kingdom, which must fall into the ground and die. His life was the price of victory. For this joy set before him, he endured the cross.

And this joy of hope should fill our lives too. We cannot hope too much if our hope is based upon God, upon God's character and purpose. Nothing can be too good to be true. The only possibility is that what we think good, even very good, may not be good enough for God. We cannot take too bright a view of the future, our own future, our country's future, the Church's and the world's future, if in the center of that view we set Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and enthroned.

Such was the joy of Jesus. It may be ours in ever-growing measure. And it will, if we only have the courage to venture ourselves upon his God and our God, to surrender ourselves loyally to live for God's ends, and nevertheless to trust in God when we cannot see, and hope in God when all seems doubtful.

Lift up your hearts. Go into the year ahead without fear.³³ Go not seeking joy, but with a fresh resolve to live for the highest.

And the joy of Jesus will be more and more fulfilled in you. For joy is given never to those who seek joy, but always to those who seek first the kingdom of God.

Questions for Meditation or Discussion

1. When you think about Jesus, how do you feel? What emotions bubble to the surface of your mind and heart?
2. What sort of personality do you assume Jesus had? Do you naturally consider him as being a joyful, good-humored soul?
3. What keeps you from believing in a joyful Jesus?
4. Law writes, “No pessimist could be a savior. Unhappiness can never beget happiness, nor sickness health.” Does this comport with your image of Jesus and his ministry?
5. On the other hand, Law says Jesus is not a “blue sky” optimist. He “lived in the heart of blackest night. He has seen hell, here on earth, in human hearts.” How do you think Jesus balanced the realities of life and maintained an unconquerable joy?
6. What was the root of Jesus’s joy? Where does your joy come from?
7. Law writes: “Joy in the absolute, all-embracing goodness, wisdom, and sovereign power of the Father, joy in imparting this joy to others—this was the joy of Jesus.” What are some ways you can share this joy with others?

8. “The only way to joy is to rise above self. And the only real way to rise above self is by getting to God, uniting ourselves to the infinite Good, for which we are made.” How do you imagine this happens?
9. Law makes the point that we should live not seeking joy, but living for the highest. “Joy is given never to those who seek joy, but always to those who seek first the kingdom of God.” What does it mean to you to seek first God’s kingdom?