

The Night of Weeping

by Horatius Bonar

The sermon explores the necessity of weeping and seriousness in the Christian life, contrasting it with the superficial joy of the world.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12:15, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 3:20, Colossians 3:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:22, Hebrews 12:1-2, James 5:9, 1 John 2:15

Topics: "Joy vs. Worldliness", "The Purpose of Affliction"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the contrast between the superficial joy of the world and the deep, abiding joy found in Christ. He warns that laughter and revelry are hollow distractions that can lead believers away from their true identity as children of God. Bonar explains that affliction serves as a divine tool to awaken us from worldliness and selfishness, drawing us closer to Christ and reminding us of our eternal hope. He encourages the saints to embrace a serious and solemn life, reflecting the gravity of their calling and the reality of eternity. Ultimately, Bonar calls for a return to spiritual seriousness, urging believers to live in a way that honors their heavenly heritage.

Transcript

Laughter and revelry belong to a fallen world. They are too superficial to have place among the holy; and too hollow to be known among the truly happy. With the peace of God in our hearts we feel that we do not need them. They may do for childhood; they may do for the world; but not for us. They do not suit our feelings; they are not deep or solid enough to be in harmony with our new nature. They are not the utterances of a truly happy soul. Yet we live in a gay world that rings everywhere with hollow laughter.

Around us are the sights and sounds of mirth by which vain men are seeking to cheat away their ever-fretting uneasiness, to soothe their ruffled consciences, or to drown their bitter sorrows. Oftentimes the saints seem to catch the tone of levity, making mirth with the most mirthful, jesting with the most foolish, singing, perhaps, the world's songs of vanity, speaking its idle words, walking in its vain paths as if its friendships and pleasures were not forbidden things. Apart, however, from the contagion of the world's influence our tone is apt to fall low and our deportment to lose that solidity and seriousness which become the saints.

Almost unconsciously and without knowing how, we get light and airy; we give way to the current of vain thoughts; we forget to set a guard upon our lips; we indulge in foolish talking and jesting in our meetings with each other. Our words are not "with grace, seasoned with salt." We forget the admonition, "Let no

corrupt communication proceed out of your mouths, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." This propensity grows upon us.

Seriousness becomes a thing reserved entirely for the closet or the sanctuary. We forget our character as saints, called out of darkness and "delivered from a present evil world." We lose sight of our heavenly parentage and divine adoption. Our whole habits of thought, feeling, speaking, and doing too much resemble the flippancies of a heedless, lighthearted world, whose maxim is, "let us eat, drink, and be merry." Thus our spirituality decays. Heavenly mindedness is gone. We become of the earth, earthly.

Our souls cleave to the dust, and we are content to grovel there. We become lean and barren, neither growing ourselves nor helping the growth of others. Our blossoms send forth no fragrance, our branches bear no fruit. We grieve the Holy Spirit of God whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption. He cannot dwell with levity and mirth any more than amid profanity and crime. He retires from the temple into which He had come and in which He would sincerely make His abode forever, driven out from it by the laughter and jesting with which we were making its consecrated walls to resound.

How can He dwell in a temple which, from being a house of God and a house of prayer, we have turned into a place of merchandise, a hall of revelry, a haunt of mirth and song? I do not mean, as I have said before, that the saint is ever to be gloomy. No. Gloom and melancholy are not our portion. "The lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places." They are not the inmates of a soul that has tasted the joy of pardon and is walking in light, as a happy child with a loving father.

But true joy is a serious thing. Its fountains are deep. It is the waking up of the heart's deep springs. Mirth and levity are not joy. They are too shallow to deserve the name. Like the sun-flash on a stagnant pool, they are a mere surface gleam of light. There is nothing in them of the calm radiance illuminating the ocean depths many a fathom down, as if the waters themselves were a mass of solid sunshine, and remaining amid the heaving of the billows, unbroken and unobscured.

In coming to Him, who is the fountain of all gladness, the saint of God bids farewell to gloom. Tribulation he may have- no, must have- but not gloom. That has left him forever since the day he knew the Savior, and opened his ears to the joyful sound. Peace is now his heritage. But still it is not levity that is his portion. It is joy. And this joy is not only far superior to this vain mirth, but it is utterly inconsistent with it. This levity is as much an enemy to real joy as it is to holiness and spirituality.

Hence, it must be rooted up. God cannot allow it in His children. His desire is that they should set their affections on things above. This element of earthliness must be purged out. They must be made solemn and thoughtful. To this end He visits them with chastisement. In a moment, perhaps, He smites them to the dust; or, by some slower but withering, crushing calamity, He slays and casts out that foolishness which had wrought itself into the very texture of their being. His purpose is to make them thoughtful and solemn.

He lays on them accordingly something that will make them think. The blow prostrates them, and in a moment all levity is put to flight. They cannot laugh and jest now when their home is desolate and their heart is bleeding. They are withdrawn from communion with an airy, shadowy world and sent into the very inmost recesses of their spiritual being, or forward to the infinite eternity, whose vastness they had been but little alive to. Trials awaken us to a sense of our self-pleasing ways and our indifference to the condition of the world we live in, not only as being a world of sin, but thoroughly, and all over, a world of misery.

They bring us into contact with solid certainties and that produces thoughtfulness. They make us "acquainted with grief" and that drives off all levity. Sorrow and levity keep no companionship. It is through tears that truth is best seen. When looked at through this medium, objects assume their right proportions and take their proper level. Shadows then evaporate. Realities compass us about, and these make us solemn. Shadows only make us light and vain. They never stir the depths of our being, but merely flit around its surface.

Thus God solemnizes His saints, and brings them in this respect into closer sympathy with the mind of Christ. All was solemnity with Him. There was no levity ever found in Him. Everything about Him was serene, yet everything was solemn. And the nearer we are brought to resemble Him, the more will this calm, happy solemnity possess us. We shall live not only wakeful but solemn lives. Our whole deportment will speak the depth of the serenity that dwells within. Our looks and tones with all be solemn, and will of themselves testify for God and condemn the world.

We shall be men awake and alive, men zealous and in earnest; men who have no relish for levity, because it is incompatible with the deep peace which is their better portion, and who feel that they have no time for it, because eternity is so near. Yes, a near eternity rebukes and banishes frivolity. Even apart from positive trial this is its tendency. It is the eternal lifetime that makes the lifetime of earth such a solemn thing. Sever the living here from the living hereafter, and man's longest time on earth is little more in importance than the flutter of a leaf, his death no more than the falling of a blossom.

But fasten on the infinite and the eternal to our present existence, and everything in life becomes mighty, momentous, solemn. The briefest moment that comes and goes is the meeting place of two eternities. Traversing this narrow pass, with rocks on either side of infinite ascent and lost in impenetrable midnight, how can we fail to be solemnized unless our eyes be closed or our reason gone! The pang that shoots through our earthly frame and makes each fiber quiver would be quite endurable were it but for a moment, were it to die and be buried with us in the same tomb, were there no capacity of eternal anguish in our nature, or no eternity in which that capacity must develop itself.

The sting of a moment is a trifle, but the eternal stinging of the undying worm is terrific beyond all utterance. In like manner the thrill of fresh joy which makes the whole man throb with delight would scarce be worth the having or the losing were it only like the lightning, flashing out in its brightness and then quenched forever. But a nature gifted with faculties for infinite enjoyment, and with a whole eternity in which these joyous buds shall expand themselves, turns all our life into a deep and awful reality.

A flower that folds up its leaves and withers down at sunset may be carelessly trodden underfoot; but a star that shall roll around forever in its orbit, either effulgent in beauty or dark in the gloom of its own chaos, is an object of wonder and awe. Such is the life of man! Not the life of one man or some men, but of every man. By itself it may seem a plaything, a mere insect's life; but in connection with the everlasting future, it becomes awfully real and solemn in its aspect.

We may be noble and famed upon the earth, or we may be poor, unlettered, hard-toiling men, still our life is a vast reality. It is no mere shadow, or rainbow, or vision of the night, but an inconceivable reality in all its parts, great or small. Such especially is the life of the saint! He not only knows that there is an eternity, but he has seen and felt it. Each hour he is looking out upon it like a traveler looking over a dark and infinite precipice which flanks the road on which he is passing along.

He not only knows that there is such a thing as forgiveness and eternal life, but he has found them, he has tasted them; his eyes have been opened, and he has now come into the very midst of realities. They compass him about on every side. And especially as he "looks for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing" of the Lord, he feels what a solemn life he is called upon to lead, and levity and mirth as ill become him as they would have done the High Priest, when standing within the veil under the immediate vision of the glory.

Even without the positive infliction of chastisement there is enough to solemnize a saint in what he sees and knows of things as they are. A dying world, a groaning creation, a curse-laden earth, a divided, bleeding church, an absent bridegroom- these are at all times enough to subdue and soften a believer's frame. And thus he walks through earth like Paul after he had been in the third heaven- an inhabitant of another star- one who has his life in heaven- who is too happy ever to be gloomy, but too happy also ever to be light or vain.

Affliction is full of warnings. It has many voices and these of the most various kinds. It speaks counsel, it speaks rebuke, it speaks affection. But it speaks warning too. Let us hear some of its words of warning. 1. Affliction says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (I John 2:15). There is no enforcement of this warning so solemn as that which affliction gives. It exposes the world's hollowness and says, "love not."

It shows us what a withering gourd its beauty is and says, "love not." It points out to us its hastening doom and says, "love not." It declares the utter impossibility of loving both the world and the Father, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "Know you not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" There can be no companionship between God and the world. They cannot dwell together under the same roof or in the same heart. 2. Affliction says, "Take heed and beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15).

Riches cannot help, neither earthly comfort avail us in the hour of grief. They cannot dry up tears, nor reunite broken bonds. They cannot heal the living, nor bring back the dead. They profit not in the day of darkness. Their vanity and emptiness cannot then be hidden. "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you, then whose shall those things be which you have provided." It is then we find that we need a "treasure in the heaven that fails not." "I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich." 3.

Affliction says, "abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess 5:22). "Hate even the garments spotted by the flesh." It is not the flesh merely that we are to hate, but even its garments. Nor is it the garments dyed and defiled with the flesh, but even "spotted" with it. It is not merely abstain from evil, but from all appearance of evil. Suffering teaches us to shrink from sin- even from the remotest and most indirect connection with it. It says, "Oh, do not that abominable thing which I hate!" 4 Affliction says, "Grudge not one against another" (James 5:9).

Let there be no halfhearted affection in the family of God. Let there be no envy, no jealousy, no misunderstandings among the brethren. Why should we be less than friends who are both fellow-sufferers and fellow-soldiers here? Why should we, who are sharers in a common danger and a common exile, bear for each other anything but the sympathies of an intense affection? Why should we not love one another with a pure heart fervently? Yet oftentimes it needs affliction to teach us this, to remove our jealousies, and to draw us together as brethren in sympathy and love. 5.

Affliction says, "Keep yourselves from idols" (I John 5:21). If there be one remaining idol, break it in pieces and spare it not. Nothing is so fruitful a cause of suffering as idolatry. Nothing so forcibly displays the vanity of our idols as suffering. It is with this whip of cords that Christ scourges out of us the buyers and sellers- allowing no earthly traffic to proceed in His Father's house. I give these warnings merely as specimens, a few out of many which might be adduced.

There is no room for citing more, though more might easily be found. The two great points against which the warnings of chastisement are directed seem to be selfishness and worldliness. To scourge these thoroughly out of us is God's design. 1. Selfishness. "All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's." This was Paul's complaint, not of the ungodly, but of the churches of Christ. It was the selfishness he saw in the saints that gave occasion to these sorrowful words.

This selfishness is of various kinds, and shows itself in various ways. It is selfishness in reference to the things of Christ; or in reference to the Church of Christ; or in reference to the work given us to do; or in reference to the sacrifices we are called upon to undergo, and the toils we are called upon to endure. It would be easy to show how God's chastisements are pointed at all these forms of selfishness, aiming deadly blows at each one of them from the outermost to the innermost circle.

But this is too large a field. We shall merely take up the first, and even it we can only touch upon. It is the most important of them all, and stands so connected with the rest that whatever uproots it destroys the other also. Selfishness, in reference to the things of Christ, obviously springs from coldness towards Christ Himself. A preference of self to Christ is its root and source. Anything, therefore, that tends to obscure or keep out of view the person of Christ must lead to selfishness.

It may be the love of the world; it may be the love of the creature, it may be the love of man's applause. These are the dark bodies that eclipse the glory of a living Savior and nourish self. But these are not all. Satan has deeper devices still. He brings in religion between us and the Savior! Religious acts, ordinances, duties, are all turned by him into so many instruments for exalting self and lowering the Savior. But even this is not all. He has a subtler device still for these last days.

He is trying to make the work of Christ a substitute for His person, to fix attention so much upon the one as to exclude the other. The result of this is a thoroughly selfish and sectarian religion. I know this is delicate ground, but the evil is an augmenting one and ought to be made known. There are not a few who are so occupied with truth that they forget "the true one," so occupied with faith that they lose sight of its personal object, so given to dwelling upon the work of Christ that they overlook His person.

They seem to regard the latter subject as a matter, if not beyond them, at least one about which it will be time enough to concern themselves when they see Him face to face. What He is seems a question of small importance, provided they know that He has accomplished a work by which they may secure eternal life. "We are forgiven," they say, "we have peace- all is well." They take but little interest in the person of Him who has purchased these blessings. The redemption is all, and the Redeemer is nothing, or, at least, very little!

The sufficiency of His work is all, the glory and excellence of His person, nothing! What is this but selfishness? We get all the benefit we can out of the work of Christ, and then leave Him alone! And this selfishness introduces itself everywhere into the actions and thinking of this class. We can trace it in the mold of their doctrines. Their views of the atonement are selfish, being framed not upon the principle of how God is to get His purpose fulfilled and His glory displayed, but simply of how a sinner is to be saved.

Their views of Jehovah's sovereignty and electing grace are selfish, being just so many devices for taking the sinner out of God's hands, and leaving him in his own control. . Their views of the Spirit's work are selfish, being just an attempt to make His aid appear less absolutely indispensable and man's own skill and strength of very considerable avail in the matter of salvation. But even where those selfish views of doctrine have not been adopted, there is a latent tendency toward selfishness among many, which can only be ascribed to their neglect of the person of Christ.

But what has chastisement to do with this? Much every way. Chiefly in this that it throws us more entirely for consolation and strength upon the person of the Savior. Never do we feel more brought into contact with a living personal Savior than in our days of sorrow. It is Jesus- Jesus alone- Jesus Himself- whom we feel to be absolutely necessary. The truth is precious; His work is precious; but it is with Him that we have chiefly to do it is to Him that we pour out our sorrows.

Thus by creating a necessity for our leaning on the person of Jesus (blessed necessity!) affliction strikes at that which was the root of selfishness. By bringing before us another and far more glorious self, it absorbs our own miserable self, until in the person of Jesus we lose sight of our own selves altogether. There is nothing that so makes us acquainted with Christ Himself as sorrow; and hence, there is nothing so efficacious in eradicating self. It is God's cure for selfishness.

It is His way of making us seek, not our own, but the things that are Jesus Christ's. It is His way of carrying us beyond truth even to "him that is true." Truth is precious, but in itself it is cold. But the glory of the Gospel is this that it carries us up beyond truth to its living fountainhead. No, it brings us into the very bosom of Him who came out of the Father's bosom and has now returned to it carrying with Him all those whom the Father has given Him, there, with Him to abide in happy fellowship, world without end.

This, however, is a large subject, and these are but a few hints. We cannot, however, pursue them further here. We pass on to notice the other evil against which the rebukes of God are directed. 2. Worldliness. We have seen that God's cure for selfishness is the setting before us of another self to absorb our own in the person of Jesus. We have now to see that His cure for worldliness is the bringing before us of another world, more glorious than that which He calls on us to forsake.

There is no thorough cure for it but this. It is lack of faith that makes us worldlings; and when the believing eye gets fixed on the world to come, then we learn to set our affections on things above. So long, however, as all here is bright, we are content with them; we allow ourselves to sink down and settle quietly among the things of earth. But when God unroofs our dwelling, or tears up its foundation by an earthquake, then we are forced to look upward and seek a better and more enduring portion.

Many such shocks, however, are often needed before our souls are broken off from their cleaving to the dust. The opposite of worldliness is heavenly mindedness or spiritual mindedness. This, the new relish which the Holy Spirit imparts at conversion, in some measure produces. But it is feeble. It easily gives way. It is not keen enough to withstand much temptation. God's wish is to impart a keener relish for the things of God and to destroy the relish for the things of time.

This He effects by blighting all objects in which there was earthly sweetness, so that by being deprived of objects to "mind" on earth, it may of necessity be led to "mind" the things above. He dries up all the "nether springs" of earthly joy, that we may betake ourselves to the "upper springs" which can never fail. There is much worldliness among the saints. There is worldliness in their motives and actions, worldliness in their domestic life and in their interaction with society, there is worldliness in the arrangements of their

households and in the education of their families; there is worldliness in their expenditure, so much being laid out for self, so little for God; there is worldliness in their religious schemes, and movements, and societies; there is worldliness in their reading, and in their conversation; there is, in short, too much of the spirit of fervent worldliness about their whole deportment, and little of calm, happy superiority to the things of earth.

They are fretted, disturbed, hustled just like the world. They grudge labor, or fatigue, or expense, or annoyance in the cause of Christ, or in serving their fellow-men. They have much of earth, little of Heaven about them. They are not largehearted, openhanded- willing to spend and be spent, unmoved and unruffled, as those whose eye is ever set on the incorruptible inheritance on which they so soon shall enter. They are low and unaspiring in the things of God. Perhaps there are few things against which we require to be more warned than against this spirit of worldliness.

The Church is very prone to forget her pilgrim character in this present evil world and to live as a citizen of earth. Her dignity as the eternally chosen of the Father is lost sight of; her hope as the inheritor of the glory and the kingdom of the Son is obscured. And oh, how much of sorrow she is preparing for herself by thus losing sight of her calling! What desolation may be even now hovering over the tabernacle of many a saint, because they will not come out and be separate, because they refuse to be "strangers on the earth as all their fathers were."

Sad it is, indeed, that we should need affliction to teach us this! Why should we whose home and treasure are above, ever again seek our home or our treasure here? Why should we stoop from our heavenly elevation to mingle again with the company which we have forsaken? Have we repented of our choice? Are we ashamed of our pilgrim staff and our pilgrim road? Surely not. Oh, if to be a stranger on earth is to be divided from sin and sinful appetites, from the seducing vanities and worthless mockeries of the world, from the fascinating beauty and perilous splendor of this decaying scene- if to be a stranger on earth is to be a friend of God, a member of the heavenly household, an expectant of the kingdom, an heir apparent of the crown of glory- who would not be a stranger here?

What higher honor would we seek than to share the homelessness of Jesus, the homelessness of the Church from the beginning? Why should we seek to enter into nearer fellowship and dearer relationship with such a world as this? If we knew of no fairer heritage, we might not be wondered at for lusting after our forsaken pleasures. But we have the pleasures that are at God's right hand forever, and what are earth's allurements to us? What to us are the sights and sounds of earth, who "shall see the king in his beauty," and hear His voice, into whose lips grace is poured?

What to us is the green fertility of earth, who shall enter into the possession of the new earth, when "the winter is past, the rain over and gone"? What to us is the gay glory of a city's wealth and pomp, who shall be made citizens of the New Jerusalem, where dwells the glory of God and of the Lamb, whose foundations are of precious stones, whose walls are of jasper, whose gates are of pearl, whose streets and pavements are of transparent gold? Let us, then, "pass the time of our sojourning here in fear."

Let our loins be girt about and our lamps burning, and let us be as men ready to go forth to meet our returning Lord. If we watch not, if we reject the warning, our chastisement will be sharp and sore. The present seems a time of peculiar warning to the saints. Many are lying under the rebukes of the Lord. Judgment has begun at the house of God. God is dealing very closely and very solemnly with His own. On many a saint at this moment is His rod lying heavily, for He would sincerely warn and arouse them before

the evil day arrive.

He is dealing with them as He dealt with Lot on the night before the desolation of Sodom. Let the saints, then, be warned. Let them be zealous and repent and do their first works. Come out, be separate, touch not the unclean thing! Put off the works of darkness; put on the armor of light. He is calling on them to get up to a higher level in the spiritual life, to be done with wavering, indecision, and compromise. He is calling on them to consider the apostle and High Priest of their profession and walk in His steps.

He is calling on them to look at the cloud of witnesses, and lay aside every weight, especially that sin (of unbelief) which does so easily beset them, and to run with patience the race set before them- "looking unto Jesus." Church of the living God! Be warned. Please not yourself, even as Jesus pleased not Himself. Live for Him, not for yourself, for Him, not for the world. Walk worthy of your name and calling, worthy of Him who bought you as His bride, worthy of your everlasting inheritance.

Up, too, and warn the world! The chastisements that are falling so thickly on you are forerunners of the fiery shower that is preparing for the earth. Up, then, and warn them- urge and entreat them to flee from gathering wrath. They have no time to lose, neither have you. The last storm is on the wing. Its dark skirts are already visible in the heavens. Judgment has begun at the house of God, and if so, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God!

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