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SERMON DLXXVIII.

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THE MISSION OF WOMAN UNDER THE GOSPEL.

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.

"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

"Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."—JOHN XIX. 25-27.

THIS is the record of one of the most instructive and thrilling incidents in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Unrelated and alone, it is the simple narrative of the dying solicitude of a son for a kind and dependent parent. But clothed with the drapery of those sublime events which environed the cross of Calvary, it glows with divine beauty and majesty; it becomes voiceful and authoritative for every child of Adam who hangs his immortal hopes on that cross.

This event occurred at this world's historical and moral meridian; at that fulness of time, of which prophets wrote and poets sung; that glorious advent of light and hope and salvation, for which kings legislated and good men prayed; but

"Which kings and prophets waited for,
And sought, but never found."

Four thousand dark and gloomy years of human history had rolled away. Generation after generation had swept across this narrow earth to a doubtful destiny. Revolution after revolution had changed the face of society. The whole world had sighed and cried under the burden of human misery, with no hope of relief! Every experiment of self-emancipation and improvement which long life, family attachment, political policy and

Place your high aims distinctly before you, and dwell upon the magnitude of your responsibility, and the sublimity of your mission. Covet to occupy your true place in a Christian community. In your self-culture and activities, ever have in view the solemn fact that you are to decide the moral character of the community, and stamp your own likeness in imperishable traces on countless hearts around you. Link yourselves wisely, but resolutely, to the welfare of your race, and prepare to leave along the path of your earthly pilgrimage good fruit, and fragrant flowers, and charming melody, to gladden the steps of your chafed and wearied brothers, who shall rise up and call you blessed.

SERMON DLXXIX.

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THE HAPPINESS OF THE PIOUS.

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.”—Prov. III. 13.

It is common among men to judge of the weight of any sentiment by the character of him who utters it. If we apply this rule to our text, we shall see abundant reason for adopting it as a most certain and valuable truth. It was pronounced by Solomon, the man whose name has become another term for wisdom, and it is found in one of those writings which, being composed near the end of his life, are justly considered as containing the last product of his faculties ripened and disciplined by a course of long and varied experience. But more than this: the wise man in this book gives not only the matured result of his own elaborate reflection, but that conclusion to which he was led by the inspiration of the only wise God.

The sentiment of the text, however, claims our careful attention, as well on account of its nature as of its author. It professes to answer one of the most interesting and important inquiries man can make, *how he shall secure his happiness*; an inquiry which every human being is continually engaged in making. David tells us that in his day, the cry of the multitude was, “Who will show us any good?” and in the great state paper of our own country we find the pursuit of happiness mentioned along with life and liberty as one of the dearest rights and possessions

of man. From the child eagerly grasping after the first toy which meets his eye, to the old man trembling on the verge of the grave, every individual is seeking the great boon, happiness. And the ways in which it is sought are almost as various as the parties engaged in the pursuit. Some, differing but little from the brute beasts, find their paradise in sensual gratifications. Miserable beings are they indeed, unworthy to live, and alas! unfit to die. Others, elevating their views somewhat, make the supreme good to consist in the possession of wealth, or fame, or power. A nobler class labor for it in the pursuits of literature, or science, or the fine arts. A wiser class (we speak, of course, comparatively) place their enjoyment in the cultivation of the social and domestic affections, esteeming all beyond the narrow circle of home and kindred and friends a barren waste, as in truth it too often is.

For each of these views, when regarded in their most favorable light, much may be said. Yet on the whole the testimony of experience is, that they are not satisfactory. Where one has gained his end, hundreds have been miserably disappointed; and the successful aspirant has generally found that the fruit which dazzled his eye, and which he so eagerly grasped, has turned to ashes in his hand. In the midst of this scene of baffled expectation and blasted hope, how cheering is it to hear an authoritative voice pronouncing the words of the text. You will observe it does not say, *Happy will be*, but "*Happy is* the man that findeth wisdom," or piety, which are used as convertible terms in the writings of Solomon. It is a great mistake to suppose that the pious man is only *to be* blest; he is blest already. There is indeed an endless and glorious reversion before him hereafter; but even here, amid the darkening shadows of this vale of tears, he has the earnest of what is to come; he enjoys a happiness which is real, pure, and satisfying.

Some of the main causes or elements of this happiness it is our purpose now to set forth.

I. *Peace of conscience.*

The first one we mention is a peaceful conscience; and this one naturally assumes this priority, because it is first both in time and in importance. There can be no solid comfort while a man is ill at ease respecting his condition before God. Whatever other earthly blessings may crown his lot, this drawback is the one mysterious drop which converts the whole contents of his cup into gall. He is like the wretched Haman, who had all he could desire, and yet the whole availed him nothing while Mordecai sat at the king's gate. The possession of the entire world, with all its honors and pleasures, would be but a mockery to him who feels the lash of an accusing conscience. While on the other hand, to him who is at peace with himself, there is a sweet and ample solace under whatever external evils may befall him.

To him, as has well been said, may be justly applied the vain boast of Horace respecting his just man—that the rage of the multitude, the threatenings of tyrants, the commotions of the elements, nay, the fall of the world itself, could not dismay him. (*Impavidum serient ruinæ.*) With an approving conscience, what has he to fear? His tranquillity, as it does not arise out of outward things, so it cannot be affected by their vicissitudes.

This peace, however, is not to be confounded with another state of mind nearly resembling it, but as different, in reality, as possible. There is a sense of security in regard to spiritual and eternal things which springs not from religion, but from the want of it. It has no solid foundation in reason or Scripture, and is destined sooner or later to a fearful overthrow. It results either from infidel or deistical principles, such as that there is no God, or that he will not visit for the conduct of his creatures; or from the power of sinful appetites and passions which shut out all serious thoughts from even momentary consideration; or from false ideas of the mercy of God, such as the persuasion that notwithstanding what he has said, still he will clear the guilty; or again, from men's most erroneous conceptions of their own character, as being by their self-righteousness, or by their antinomian faith, freed from any danger of incurring the Divine wrath. Now, the security thus produced is the consequence of ignorance and insensibility. It is that of a man who walks without fear on the verge of a tremendous precipice, because he is blind. It is the natural state of a darkened, hardened, or seared conscience.

How different the peace of the children of God! It is intelligent, and well-grounded, and Scriptural. It admits the existence of sin and punishment, of death and of hell. Truly pious men generally have profounder impressions of these realities than any others. They bow in humble acknowledgment of the Divine justice, feeling that their lives and their all are due to its violated claims. But at the same time they look with faith to an all-sufficient Redeemer; and in the merits of his obedience and death they see ample reason for confidence and hope. Having been led to accept from the heart his mediation and atonement, they have assured peace. Why should they not? What is there to disturb the tranquillity? There are, indeed, sin and guilt which cry with loud voices for punishment. But this punishment has been inflicted to the last iota, and now the law is satisfied; justice is satisfied; God is satisfied; their own sense of right is satisfied. What, then, remains to harass the conscience of the sincere believer? He has gone to the bottom of the difficulty between him and his Maker, and he has bridged the chasm so effectually, that it is even stronger than it was before. The lapse of time cannot develop any new facts, or make any stronger impressions than he has already had. Let sin assume its blackest hues, let his unworthiness be revealed in the

most startling form, still neither can surpass the merits of Christ's sacrifice, or the free grace of Him who gave his only-begotten Son, the just for the unjust. Hence, so long as he clings to the cross, and places his simple and exclusive trust in its exalted victim, the penitent sinner has in his conscience a peace which the world cannot give or take away. Happy, therefore, is the man that findeth this wisdom.

II. *The Union of Inclination and Duty.*

One of the most common sources of uneasiness and apprehension among men is the opposition between their views of what is right and their views of what is desirable. There is a course which they know very well they ought to shun, but it is exceedingly agreeable; on the other hand, there is a course which they ought closely to follow, but alas! it is altogether repulsive. And whichever of these ways they take, they are unhappy. If they take the wrong way, the way pleasing to flesh and blood, they have all the time certain twinges of remorse, and even in the midst of the pleasures of sin are painfully conscious that a day of reckoning will come. If, however, they take the right way, and aim to live godly in the world, it is the hardest of all tasks. They have no kind of pleasure in it. Every step of the road is irksome. Nothing but stress of conscience, a stern sense of duty, keeps them from throwing up at once the disagreeable undertaking.

Now, there are in this respect three classes of impenitent persons. One, the smallest, pursues, or strives to pursue, the painful road of rectitude, toiling evermore in the vain struggle against nature. A second and larger class follows the downward path, and gives full swing to corrupt inclinations, although often sadly disturbed by the remonstrances of the inward monitor. The third, and by far the largest class, alternates between the two courses, never giving any decided or permanent predominance to either. But all alike are unhappy. When they do evil, of course they find the way of transgressors is hard; and when they try to do what is good or right, they are disappointed of the pleasure to which they have earned a title. Madame de Séigné has expressed this with her usual *naïveté*: "I wish very much I could be religious. I belong, at present, neither to God nor the devil; and I find this condition very uncomfortable, though, between you and me, the most natural in the world."

Now, the pious have this characteristic, that they not only, as a general thing, pursue the path of rectitude, but *delight in it* as being not merely their duty, but their choice. Retirement, prayer, study of the Sacred Scriptures, religious conversation, self-denial, are pleasant to them. They have a new spiritual relish, which makes religious duties as attractive to them as books are to a scholar, as parade-day is to a soldier, or as gay amusements are to the children of fashion. Thus a pious

young lady once, on being asked if she considered the worldly engagements and pleasures which she had renounced as being criminal, replied, that really there was no occasion for her to discuss that point, for she had lost all taste for such enjoyments, and whether innocent or not, would not care to engage in them.

And so it is with all genuine believers. I do not say, indeed, that they are never troubled with unlawful desires, or conflicts between impulse and principle; for even the best of Christians are in this world only imperfectly sanctified, and while old Adam lives, he will make himself felt. But, as a general thing, the very things which it is a pious man's duty to do, he loves; and those which it is his duty to avoid, he abhors. And thus the path which to so many seems girt with thorns, is to him strewn with flowers. For, happy is the man that findeth wisdom.

III. *Communion with God.*

The Sacred Scriptures often speak of a fellowship which is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ; of an intimate communion which believers have with their covenant God. This subject is eminently of an experimental nature, and one which cannot be made perfectly plain to those who have no heart for spiritual things. Yet is it not mysterious—much less inconceivable or impossible. As mind communes with mind and heart with heart on earth, so may minds and hearts here commune with the Infinite Mind on high. The only difficulty in the way is sin: remove this, and it rests with God alone to say whether or not his creatures below may have the intercourse with him which is enjoyed by the holy beings around his throne. This point he has graciously settled in his own Word. Said Jesus, "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Again, "If any man hear my voice, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." And so in numerous passages of the Old Testament, where God is described as the refuge, the resting-place, the only sufficient portion of believers.

Now it is true this communion is not susceptible of rigid analysis; just as you cannot set down in logical formulas the intercourse of two earthly friends, or the mutual affection of husband and wife. Yet it has an existence just as really and as certainly in one case as in the other. The pious man withdraws from outward and worldly things, and seeks intercourse with his God. He ponders over the revealed page, or he pours out his heart in prayer, or he gives wings to his soul in devout meditation on some truth of the gospel. As he proceeds, the fire burns; and oftentimes in the rapt exercise he loses consciousness of place and time. Whether the season be long or short, he has communed with his God. His own heart has gone out to God in various

emotions and exercises, and God has graciously come down to him. He is as sure that God has been dealing with his soul as was Abraham when he heard the promises, or as Samuel when repeatedly awoke by the voice in the temple. There is nothing fantastic or fanatical in this. Men may call it the dream of a disordered imagination; but it is, in truth, the reality of a sanctified heart, authorized by the Lord's own words, and confirmed by the testimony of his people in all ages. This is what David meant when he said, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul."

And who shall tell the joy and peace of the communion thus gotten? It is pure, heavenly, divine. Independent of all earthly circumstances, it is a possession incorruptible and undefiled. The believer may lose all external things, he may be left as destitute as when he first came into the world; but while God continues to be, his chief source of happiness continues unimpaired. The language of his soul is that of Asaph thousands of years since: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire beside thee." And therefore, happy, yes, happy is the man that findeth wisdom.

IV. *Confidence in Providence.*

One of the chief evils of this world is its uncertainty. Its fashion is continually passing away. Houses and lands, fame and honor, friends and relatives—whatever we love or prize, and whether it be intrinsically valuable or not—all are as fleeting as a flower, a bubble, a vapor:

"Like snow-flakes on a river,
One moment white, then gone for ever."

Ages upon ages ago grim experience taught the wise to say, "Call no man happy till he dies." The brightest morning often ends in the very blackness of darkness. The sources of pleasure are turned into sources of misery; and the identical beings or objects which prompted hope, become the instruments of unhappiness. Nor can human wisdom guard against these contingencies. The precautions which answer effectually in one case, are utterly fruitless in another. Sometimes, indeed, the very means used to preclude danger only bring it on more certainly.

Now, amid all these proverbial vicissitudes of this world, there is only one man who can walk with a charmed life, i. e., the wise or pious man. Believing as he does in a Providence which is not blind, but intelligent; not general only, but also particular; not fatalistic on the one hand nor capricious on the other, but sovereign, wise, holy and good; such a man can afford to walk on life's pathway with a light heart and a buoyant step. He knows not, nor does he want to know, what may befall him; but he is sure nothing shall happen to him which is not sent by a

divine hand, which is not wisely and kindly intended, and which shall not, in the end, minister to his eternal blessedness. It matters not what may be before his mind—his business, his property, his reputation, his family or his friends; all are alike under the covenant care of an all-seeing eye, and an all-mighty arm. Let cares like a wild deluge come, and storms of sorrow fall, the Lord of hosts is with him; the God of Jacob is his refuge. Let the heathen rage, and the earth melt, and the foundations be destroyed, he looks serenely up to that Being who rides upon the wings of the wind, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He knows that all things are in the hand of God. The fire and the flood are but ministers to do his pleasure. The bad passions of men and of devils are under his control, and He can say to either: "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther." The wrath of man he makes to praise him, and the remainder of wrath he restrains.

How happy is the man who has found this wisdom; who can and does thus habitually regard God! How free from care and anxiety his bosom! How peaceful his days, how tranquil his nights! In prosperity he is not elated; in adversity he is not disheartened; but in either calmly rests on the Divine promise as a confiding child on its mother's bosom. And therefore, happy, thrice happy, is the man that findeth wisdom.

V. *The Hope of Heaven.*

As we are concerned with the present and not the future happiness of the believer, I speak not of heaven itself, but of *the hope* of that blessed inheritance—two things which, however closely connected, are yet perfectly distinct in themselves. While, then, the pious man has in this life a number of sources of happiness, pure and solid and satisfying, he has superadded to them all the prospect of an immense and eternal weight of glory in the future life. And this prospect itself is one of the greatest joys conceivable.

"Heaven in reversion, like the sun, as yet
Beneath the horizon, cheers us in this world;
It sheds on souls susceptible of light
The glorious dawn of our eternal day." YOUNG, VIII. 1055.

Hope is often spoken of as the one great blessing of man which survived the ruin of the fall. It is the grand spring of enterprise, the chief incitement to active effort, the main support in misfortune; nor is there any lower deep of distress for him in whose breast hope has expired. He who possesses it is transported from the scene around him to another, fairer and more blissful; and, tasting by anticipation its delights, is raised far beyond his existing circumstances, whether of joy or of sorrow. Prose and poetry have both been tasked to the utmost in setting forth its animating, encouraging, and consolatory influence.

But if this be its effect when it is only an illusion of fancy, or when, at best, its objects are confined to the narrow bounds of space and time, what must be its power when it takes hold of eternal life, and brings near the glories of the world to come! Borne aloft upon angels' wings, the soul reaches the very secret of God's presence, and revels there in the contemplation of those joys which are at His right hand, and those pleasures which are for evermore. Nor is its upward flight arrested by any consciousness of uncertainty, or any fear of disappointment. These are left for the children of the world, whose brilliant expectations, indeed, often dazzle only to delude and to destroy. The hope of the Christian, on the contrary, stands like an anchor of the soul, and never makes ashamed. It is based upon the all-sufficient righteousness of Christ; it is inspired by the Holy Spirit of truth and grace, and it is confirmed by every day's progress in the service and knowledge of God. The earnest of its glorious objects is already experienced in this world, the believer's present exercises being "a well of living water springing up unto everlasting life." Having, then, in addition to other joys of the most substantial character, a hope so exalted in its nature, and so immovable in its foundation, there is nothing wanting to the completion of the Christian's blessed lot. If any thing be true, it is this: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom."

There is, however, an objection sometimes offered to this statement. "If this be so," it is said, "then Christians ought to be distinguished by a uniform sense of contentment and peace; they should be the happiest of mortals: whereas frequently the reverse of this is the case." The objection is fair, and we purpose to answer it fairly. First, then, all professed Christians are not such in reality; and, of course, it is no wonder that nominal believers should have only nominal joy. Man may make a wax flower exactly resembling the production of Nature, but only a simpleton would expect from it the fragrance of God's own handiwork. But, secondly, many real children of God are constitutionally of a gloomy or desponding temperament. This is a part of their physical nature, and will cleave to them until the soul drops its earthly clogs, and soars on high. While, therefore, they may have grace in lively exercise, they will not have the evidence of grace; while they may have abundant reason to rejoice and be glad, they will rather be a prey to anxious forebodings. But as piety does not pretend to change the outward man, these sporadic cases are no objection to the general truth we have laid down. But, thirdly, a great many, of whom we may hope that the root of the matter is in them, feel and show but little of the happiness we have spoken of, because of their weak faith and careless living. God, of course, will not smile upon his disobedient children. If they set their affections upon any

other than Him, they must needs lose the light of his countenance : just as, if we hold up a dark body between us and the sun, we cannot but be in the shade. So if faith languishes, joy will languish in like measure. The most beautiful landscape conveys no pleasure to the man who does not see it. The largest promises mean nothing to him who does not know or believe that he has some title to them. And hence the disquietude of many of whom it would be harsh to say they had no interest in Christ. Whatever real happiness they have, is because they have a spark of grace ; whatever they lack, is because they have *only* a spark.

I submit, then, the objection is fully met. Apart from these cases, it is, it has been, it will be ever true : " Happy is the man that findeth wisdom." Never has a really godly person, of an ordinarily cheerful temperament, walked close with God without being happy. Ransack the history of the world, and you will find no such case. Catechise every soul now living in Christendom, and you will find no such case.

My impenitent hearer, you want happiness, and you know where to obtain it. Let me now earnestly entreat you to seek it at once. It is not true that all religion's blessings lie beyond the grave. Oh ! no ; they are here ; they lie around you ; they await your extended arm. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. Like the man in the parable then, sell all that you have and buy the field which has this pearl of great price. Then life will flow on in pure and tranquil pleasures ; mercies will acquire a sweeter relish ; afflictions will lose half their bitterness ; death will be divested of its terrors ; the present will be the seed-time of grace, the future, the harvest of glory ; and in short, you will " enjoy God in every thing, and every thing in God."