

Happiness

“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.” Psalm 51:12

Religion can seem harsh, boring or even painful. After all, looking at our evils and shunning them is not fun! Have not we all heard the common complaint, “All I ever hear about in church is how evil I am”? Some feel that there is no joy in salvation. Some look at their lives, seeing their spiritual failures, and view regeneration as an unattainable goal, or a difficult trudge through the wilderness where there is no happiness.

Yet how far from the truth this is! Religion is not essentially an unhappy affair. Listen to these quotes from the Old and New Testament:

- “Let all those that seek You rejoice and be glad in You” (Psalms 40:16)
- “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice” (Psalms 32:11)
- “Fear not; for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10)
- “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11)

These are just a few of the many statements in Scripture that speak of happiness. Our life of religion should be one of happiness, not sadness. When we think of the Lord, His salvation, and the things of religion, our hearts should leap with joy. As is said in Isaiah “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (25:9).

Religion, regeneration, and salvation are not meant to be painful or impossible. The Lord created us to make us happy. It’s the very essence of His infinite Divine love. To this end He has established the heavens. What better demonstration could there be of His love, His mercy? Each of the many mansions in the Lord’s house is filled with eternal blessedness, happiness, and delight. It is the outpouring of His Divine love that enters into all hearts that will accept it, bringing them the joy that can only be described as indescribable. As we are taught about the life after death:

Heaven in itself is so full of delights that viewed in itself it is nothing else than blessedness and delight; for the Divine good that flows forth from the Lord’s Divine love is what makes heaven in general and in particular with everyone there.... Thus whether you say heaven or heavenly joy it is the same thing. (HH 397)

This is what He intends for us. He did not establish heaven for a small minority, or even a large majority, but for everyone. He wants to bring His infinite love to all, so that all may experience a happiness beyond words.

And consider the lesson read from the Arcana Coelestia – in heaven everyone pours out their happiness to all around them, and in return receives the happiness from everyone else, intensifying and magnifying the love and happiness for all (AC 2057:2).

How do the angels achieve this? It is because angels reflect the nature of the Lord. They have become images and likenesses of Him. They have learned to care more for others than for themselves. And this through being useful. “Angelic happiness is in use, from use, and according to use” (AC 454). The angels know heavenly happiness because their delight is in serving others. Even as the Lord’s love emanates to all others, so when we share our love with others, we are acting like the Lord. In so doing we establish a closeness with Him, for we have become similar to Him. And with everyone else there trying to be useful to us, it is an eternal cycle and increase of joy and happiness.

And this joy has many offshoots. We are told that,

In the heavens there is a communion of all good. There the peace, intelligence, wisdom, and happiness of all are communicated to everyone, and that of everyone is communicated to all....From this it is evident how great in heaven are the peace, intelligence, wisdom, and happiness. (AC 10723).

“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart” (Psalm 32:11). We are to rejoice in His salvation, for it is the blessing of His love. It is the communication of His love to us, and of our reception of that love and sharing with others. As the doctrines state:

Heavenly love is such that it wills what is its own to be another’s. Consequently, no one in heaven perceives his own good in himself to be good, unless it is also in another; and this is the source of the happiness of heaven. (HH 268)

The sharing of good in the heavens is so great that no one feels what he has “to be good” unless he perceives it in another. This genuine humility removes the yearning for what another has, or feeling a sense of loss if we do not have it also. Imagine caring so much for others that we could not be happy unless those around are also.

These descriptions of heavenly happiness are intended for us to see what life can be, and what it will be for us one day. And it is perhaps why at times we sense the lack of joy in salvation when we feel we are not that angelic. Yet, consider this: every last angel since the fall of the human race has had to deal with the inner strifes and turmoils that we face. Every angel in heaven has made mistakes, has acted from selfish motives, has done stupid, self-destructive things. And where are they? Enjoying the eternal bliss that the Lord offers to us. They had missteps, but did not allow them to stop them from eventually learning to find joy in the happiness of others.

It is evil, intense selfishness and worldliness, that prevents us from experiencing the joys of heaven while here on earth. We too could be like the angels, but for the fact that we allow these evils to focus our attention upon ourselves instead of others. When we turn inward, worrying or just being overly concerned with our own lives, then we lose the ability to share with others. Recall that the Psalmist asked that the joy of the Lord's salvation be restored to him. It is not that we have never experienced heaven, but it is that we can lose our sense of the joy in regeneration and religion.

But we have also all felt "the joy of another as joy in" ourselves (DLW 47). We have felt delight when a child or friend has received a reward or performed well in a sporting or artistic performance. When we have caused a child to smile or laugh. When we have joined with others to accomplish a goal. When our spouse is appreciated by others. It is then that our joy has not stemmed from self but from the happiness of others. And this can be the deepest sense of joy we experience also.

The Lord touches us at these times with a foretaste of heaven. For our life in this world is not a test, or trial; the Lord does not want us to be put through misery to see how well we stand up, or whether we are worthy enough for heaven. Rather, this world is a preparation for heaven. Although there is evil here, and we are drawn to it and will experience it, the Lord is always present encouraging what is good in us and others. And He blesses us with those glimpses of heaven that inspire and support us on our heavenly paths.

Another way in which we can taste something of heaven is when we experience or reflect upon the Lord's providence. As we learn about the Lord, how He operates to bring the greatest good out of all situations, we can realize that He cares for us in infinite detail. His love can be described as a flowing river, and the current of it is the stream of His providence.

They who are in the stream of Providence are all the time carried along toward everything happy, whatever may be the appearance of the means; and that those are in the stream of Providence who put their trust in the Divine and attribute all things to Him. (AC 8478:4)

Let all those that put their trust in You rejoice, let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them. (Psalms 5:11)

The Lord does defend and protect us in this stream of providence. We gain a trust in Him as we give thanks for all the blessings that He showers upon us, and realize He is there even in the dark and difficult times. For although He will allow evil things to happen, even there He softens their impact, insuring that we are never destroyed by them. And He is constantly leading us out of any evils we experience to what is good and heavenly. This is why the Heavenly Doctrines can state,

they who trust in the Lord continually receive good from Him; for whatsoever happens to them, whether it appears to be prosperous or not prosperous, is still good, because it conduces as a means to their eternal happiness. (AC 8480:4)

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices; and with my song will I praise Him. (Psalms 28:7).

A sense of trust, and thence of peace, can fill our minds. As we learn to accept that His merciful leading will bring us into heaven, then we can gain an ability to deal with problems and frustrations, and restore to us the joy of His salvation. It does not mean that our lives, at least on this natural plane, will be easy or always happy. But with those who are in the stream of providence there can be an inner calm, a faith that whatever happens, the Lord is in charge, and He will eventually bring heaven to us.

There is no merit or reward in being unhappy. Being miserable or a martyr does not lead to heaven. Yes, there will be times when we are not happy – recognizing we've harmed someone and apologizing or trying make amends is not delightful. And there are situations in this life that bring sadness and last a long time. But "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalms 30:5).

So when we are not conscious of the happiness of heaven, through mundane worries or selfish states, let us turn to the Lord and ask that He restore to us the joy of His salvation, for He said "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 15:22). This is the heavenly joy He intends for us eternally. Amen

Lessons Ps 51:7-19
 Jn 15:9-25
 AC 2057

Psalm 51

- Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.
- ¹³ *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
- ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.
- ¹⁶ For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;
You do not delight in burnt offering.
- ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.
- ¹⁸ Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹ Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

John 15

¹¹“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. ¹²This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. ¹⁴You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. ¹⁷These things I command you, that you love one another.

AC 2057:2

Mutual love in heaven consists in the fact that they love the neighbor more than themselves, the effect of which is that the whole heaven represents as it were one person; for by means of mutual love all are so consociated by the Lord, and hence it is that the happinesses of all are communicated to each one, and those of each one to all. Consequently the heavenly form is such that everyone is as it were a kind of center, thus a center of communications, and consequently of happinesses, from all; and this in accordance with all the differences of mutual love, which are innumerable. And because those who are in that love perceive the highest happiness in being able to communicate to others that which flows into them, and this from the heart, the communication becomes perpetual and eternal; and on this account, as the Lord's kingdom increases, so the happiness of each angel increases. As the angels are in distinct societies and abodes, they do not think of this; but the Lord thus disposes all things both in general and in particular. Such is the kingdom of the Lord in the heavens.