

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

NO. 352

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 AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

*“And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.
 Job 1:4, 5.*

JOB was an exceedingly happy man before his great trial. He was as much blessed in the fruit of his body as in his basket and in his store. Our text gives us a very pleasing picture of Job's family. He was a happy man to have had so many children all comfortably settled in life. For you will perceive that they all had houses. They had left his roof. They had all established themselves and had so prospered in the world that there was not one of them who had not enough of the world's goods to entertain all the rest. So it seemed as if Job's prosperity in his business had attended his children in the different places where they had settled

To add to his comfort they were an undivided family—not like Abraham's household, where there was an Ishmael who mocked Isaac. Nor like Isaac's household, where there was an Esau and a Jacob who sought to supplant him. Nor like Jacob's household, where there was a Joseph and all the rest of his brethren were envious and jealous of him. Nor like David's household, where there was perpetual strife and bickering between the one and the other. Job's descendants were a large tribe. But they were all united and knit together in bonds of perfect happiness.

And moreover they seem to have had a great desire to preserve their unity as a family. Perhaps Job and his family were the only ones who feared God in the neighborhood. They wished therefore to keep themselves together as a little flock of sheep in the midst of wolves, as a cluster of stars in the midst of the thick darkness. And what a brilliant constellation they were—all of them shining forth and proclaiming the Truth of God! I say it was their desire not only to enjoy pleasantness and peace, but to maintain it. For I think that these annual meetings at the different houses were intended to knit them together so that if any little strife had arisen, as soon as they met at the next brother's house all might be settled. And the whole host might go on again shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot—as one phalanx of soldiers for God.

I think Job must have been a right happy man. I do not know that he always went to their feasts. Perhaps the soberness of age might have a little disqualified him for joining in their youthful enjoyments, but I am sure he commended their feasting. I am quite certain he did not condemn it. If he had condemned it he would never have offered sacrifice to God, lest they should have sinned, but he would have told them at once it was a sinful thing and that he could give no countenance to it. I think I see the happy group, so happy and holy that surely if David had been there, he would have said, “Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

Job was a godly man and so godly that unlike Eli he brought up his household in the fear of God. He was not only quick to observe any known sin but was exceedingly jealous over his children lest secretly and inadvertently in their hearts—while they were at their loaded tables, they might have said or thought anything which might be termed blaspheming God. He therefore as soon as the feasting was over, called them all together and then as a preacher, told them of the danger to which they were exposed. And as a priest, (for every Patriarch before the Law was a priest), he offered burnt sacrifices lest any sin should by any possibility remain upon his sons and daughters.

So says the text. I pray that now we may have grace to listen to it. And may what we shall now hear abide with us during the coming week, when some of you shall meet together in your own houses! May God grant that our parents, or

we, if we are parents, may be as Jobs and when the feasting is over, may there come the sacrifice and the prayer, lest we should have sinned and blasphemed God in our hearts!

I shall divide my sermon thus. First, *the text* and that is *festive: so we will ring in a merry bell*. Secondly, that which is in the text and that is *instructive: so we will ring the sermon bell*. And, thirdly, *that which follows the text* and that is *afflictive: so we will ring the funeral bell*.

I. First, then, the text itself and that is festive. Let us therefore RING THE MERRY BELL. I think I hear distinctly three notes in its merry peal. First, the text gives a license. Secondly, it suggests a caution. And thirdly, it provides a remedy.

First, the text gives a *license*. Now, you souls who would deny to your fellow men all sorts of mirth, come and listen to the merry bell of this text while it gives a license to the righteous especially—a license that they meet together in their houses and eat and drink and praise their God. In Cromwell’s days the Puritans thought it an ungodly thing for men to keep Christmas. They, therefore, tried to put it down and the common crier went through the street announcing that Christmas was henceforth no more to be kept, it being a Popish, if not a heathen ceremony.

Now, you do not suppose that after the crier had made the proclamation any living Englishman took any notice of it! At least I can scarcely imagine that any did, except to laugh at it. For it is idle thus to strain at gnats and stagger under a feather! Albeit that we do not keep the feast as Papists—nor even as a commemorative festival—yet there is a something in old associations that makes us like the day in which a man may shake off the cares of business and disport himself with his little ones.

God forbid I should be such a Puritan as to proclaim the annihilation of any day of rest which falls to the lot of the laboring man. I wish there were a half-a-dozen holidays in the year. I wish there were more opportunities for the poor to rest. Though I would not have as many saint’s days as there are in Roman Catholic countries—yet if we had but one or two more days in which the poor man’s household and the rich man’s family might meet together—it might perhaps be better for us. However, I am quite certain that all the preaching in the world will not put Christmas down. You *will* meet next Tuesday and you *will* feast and you *will* rejoice and each of you, as God has given you substance, will endeavor to make your household glad.

Now, instead of telling you that this is all wrong, I think the merry bell of my text gives you a license to do so. Let us think a minute. Feasting is *not* a wrong thing, or otherwise Job would have forbidden it to his children. He would have talked to them seriously and admonished them that this was an ungodly and wicked custom to meet together in their houses. But, instead of this, Job only *feared* lest a wrong thing should be made out of a right thing and offered sacrifices to remove their iniquity. But he did by no means condemn it. Would any of you ask a blessing upon your children’s attendance at the theater? Could you say, when they had been in such a place, “It may be they have sinned?” No, you would only talk thus of a right thing.

I think I can prove to you that this was a good thing. First you will notice they met in *good houses*. They did not go to an ale-house to feast. They had no need to enter the tavern. But they met in their own houses—houses where prayer and praise were made. How much better for the working man to spend his money on his family than upon liquor sellers! And then it was *in good company*. They did not scrape together all the ruffians of the place to feast with them. But they kept to their own kith and kin. And feasting is good when good men feast—especially when they spare for the poor—as no doubt Job’s children did or else they were quite unworthy of their generous ancestor.

They feasted in good houses and in good company. And they observed during their feasting good behavior. Job never heard of a wrong expression they had used. No one ever told him that they had become riotous, or that they had uttered one wrong word, or else Job could not have said, “It *may* be,” but he would have said, “It *is* so.” He must be a good son of whom a father could say, “It may be he has erred.” All that he had was a *fear* lest secretly they might have done wrong. But it appears that openly their feasting had been such that even the busy tongue of scandal could not find fault with them. And besides, their feasting was a good thing, because it had a good intent. It was for amity, for cheerfulness and family union. It was that they might be bound together as a bundle of rods—strong and unbroken—that they might be as a strongly intertwined cord, interwoven by these their family greetings and meetings.

Now, I say that if in their case the thing was not wrong—and I think I have proved in four respects that it was right—it was in good houses, in good company, with good behavior and for a good purpose—the text gives a license for

us to do the like and to meet in our houses, in the company of our kith and kin, provided we feast after a good sort and do it with the good intent of knitting our hearts the one towards the other.

But again—*good men of old have feasted*. Need I remind you of Abraham's making a great feast in his house when his child Isaac was weaned? Shall I tell you of Sampson and his feasts, or of David, or of Hezekiah, or of Josiah and of the kings who gave to every man a loaf of bread and a good piece of flesh and a flagon of wine and they cheered their hearts and made merry before God?

But let me remind you that feasting, so far from being evil, was even an essential part of Divine Worship under the old Law. Do you not read of the Feast of Trumpets, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of the New Moons and how many other feasts besides? Come they not over again and again? Now if the thing were wrong in itself God would certainly never employ it as an emblem and token of the Divine, the pure and the heavenly doctrines of His grace. It is impossible that God should have taken a wrong thing to be the *type* of a right thing. He might take a common good and make it the type of a special favor—but not an evil thing. It is far from us to suppose such a thing of our God.

Besides, did not the Savior Himself countenance a feast and help to provide the guests with the wherewithal that they might have good cheer? Do you think the Savior out of place when He went to the wedding feast? And do you suppose that He went there and did not eat and drink? Was it not said of Him, "Behold a drunken man and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners"? Not that He was either drunken or a wine bibber, but that He "came eating and drinking," to dash to pieces the Phariseism which says that that which goes into a man defiles a man—whereas Christ teaches "not that which goes *into* a man, but that which *comes out* of a man, *that* defiles a man."

Jesus Christ, I say, was at the feast. And suppose you that He bore a sad countenance? Did He sour with the vinegar of a morose behavior the wine with which He had filled the watering pots? I think not. I believe at that marriage feast He joined with the guests. And if He were indeed "a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," as He certainly was, yet did He not keep His griefs to Himself, for if He came to suffer Himself, He came to make others glad and I doubt not that at the feast He seemed the most glad of the guests. Most glad because He was really the Master of the feast and because He saw in the wedding the type of His own marriage—His own Divine espousal with the Church—which is "the bride, the Lamb's wife."

And let me add once more—God has certainly made in this world provision for man's feasting. He had not given just dry bread enough for a man to eat and keep body and soul together. The harvests teem with plenty and often are the barns filled to bursting. O Lord, You did not give simply dry bread and water for mankind but You have filled the earth with plenty and milk and honey have You given to us. And You have besides this laden the trees with fruit and given to men dainties. You are not illiberal, You do not dole out with miserable hand the lean and scanty charity which some men would give to the poor, but You give liberally and You upbraid not!

And for what purpose is this given? To rot, to mold, to be trod on, to be spoiled? No, but that men may have more than enough. That they may have all they want and may rejoice before their God and may feed the hungry, for this indeed is one essential and necessary part of all true Christian feasting. My text, I say, rings a merry bell and gives *us* license for sacred feasting.

2. But now the same merry bell suggests a *caution*. Job said—"It *may* be." They were good sons. Good, godly young men, I am sure, or else Job would not have said, "It *may* be." But "it *may* be," said he, "it may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Or, as some translate it, "have blessed God too little in their hearts." They may not have been grateful enough for their prosperity and for the enjoyments which God had given them. "It *may* be." Well, hearken, Brothers and Sisters, "it *may* be," too, that you and I may sin and blaspheme God in our hearts and be as Job's sons may have been—too little thankful. If, though they were true men and true women, though they all had a Job for their father and though their feasting was in their own houses and after a right sort and a commendable sort, yet there was a "*may* be" that there might be sin.

Am I too careful when I say, Brethren, "it *may* be"? *It may be* that in our happiest gathering of our family together, it *may* be that we shall sin? I think we could not prefer ourselves before the sons and daughters of Job—that were self-righteousness indeed—we are surely not proud enough to think ourselves better than the sons of that "perfect and upright" man "who feared God and eschewed evil." I think I am not too severe and too strict, when I say, "It *may* be. "It

may be. Look to it—take heed to yourselves—be careful, be on your watch tower. Let me give you some reasons and arguments why this caution is not unnecessary.

And first, remember there is *no place* free from sin. You may set bounds about this mount, but the beast *will* touch the mountain. You may endeavor as much as you will to keep out Satan. But wherever there were two met together, Satan was ever the third. There was never a company met, but the Evil One somewhere intruded. Does he not come into your business? Do you not find him entering into your very closet? Yes, and the very Table of the Lord—has not Satan sat there and tempted Judas? Yes, and tempted you, too? How, then, can you hope that when your family are met together Satan shall not be there?

Is it not written, “The sons of God came together and Satan came also among them”? I am sure they never invited him. But he does not stay for that. And you will find it so. Never invite him by anything ungodly or unChristian-like. But since there are temptations everywhere, however pure and upright your intentions may be, however excellent your company, think you hear my little bell ringing—“It may be, it may be, it may be.” And it may be a blessed check to you.

Beside this, remember that there is many a special temptation where there is a loaded table. Old Quarles said, “Snares attend my board.” And certainly they do. More men have perished by fullness of bread than ever died by hunger. Hunger may break through stone walls but I have known feasting leap over golden walls—the golden walls of grace. Some men cut their throats with their teeth and many a man has swam to Hell down his own throat. More have been drowned in the bowl, ‘tis said, than ever were drowned in the sea. I trust I need not say anything of that to you. I hope not.

If there is a man here who falls into drunkenness—in God’s name let him tremble—for there is no admittance for the drunkard into the kingdom of Heaven. I am speaking now to Christian men—not to men who fall into *these* vices—and I say to them where you use the most proper moderation in receiving the things which God gives you, where you even totally abstain from that which might be a temptation, yet even *there* your table may be a snare unto you. Therefore, take heed to yourself, Believer, lest Satan lie in ambush beneath the family table.

Remember, also, that they who sit at the table are but men and the best of men are but men at the best. Men have so little grace that if they are not on the watchtower, they may soon be overtaken and they may say or do that which they will have to repent of afterwards. I have heard say that there are men who swallow mouthfuls of earth which they will have to digest in Hell and I do not doubt it. There have been times when a happy company have gathered together and the conversation has become trifling, then full of levity. Perhaps it has gone so far that afterwards, when they retired to their homes, they would have recalled their words, if it had been possible. Let this caution, then, sound in all our ears, “It may be—it may be—it may be!”—and let us so act that if Christ were at the feast we should not be ashamed to see Him.

Let us so speak that if Christ sat at our table we should not count it a hindrance to our joy—but rather that we should be the more free, joyous and glad—because of such thrice-blessed Company. Oh, tell me not that Christianity curbs our joy! My Brethren, it shuts up one of its channels—that black and filthy kennel into which the sinner’s joy must run. But it opens another channel, wider, broader, deeper, purer and fills it to the very banks with joy, more lustrous and more full of glory.

Think not that we who follow Christ and seek to walk strictly in our integrity are miserable. We tell you that our eyes sparkle as much as yours and that we have not the redness of the eyes in the morning. We can say to the worldling that our heart, despite its sometimes heaviness, *does* rejoice in the Lord and we have peace which is like a river and a righteousness which is like the waves of the sea. O Christian Brothers and Sisters! Let not the world think of you that you are shut out *here* from anything like happiness. But so act and so live at all times, that you may teach men that it is possible to be happy without sin and to be holy without being morose. This, then, is the caution which our merry bell rings out to us.

But, then, in the third place, having given a license and suggested a caution, the merry bell *provides a remedy*. “It may be”—it may be we have done wrong. What then? Here is a remedy to be used by parents and heads of families and by ourselves.

Job sent for his sons as a *father*. He sanctified them as a *preacher*. He sacrificed for them as a *priest*. By all which I understand, he first bade them come together and then he sanctified them—that is, he first spoke to them—commended

them for the excellent and admirable manner in which they had met together, told them how pleased he was to see their love, their union. But then he said, “It may be, my sons, you are like your father—there is some sin in you and it may be you have sinned. Come, let us repent together.”

And so, being, as I believe, all godly persons they sat down and thought over their ways. Then no doubt the good old man bade them kneel down while he prayed with them. And then he expressed his faith in the great coming Mediator and so, though one man’s faith cannot prevail for another, yet the faith of the father helped to quicken the faith of the sons. The prayer of the father was the means of drawing forth the prayer of the sons and so the family was sanctified. Then after that he would say, “There is no putting away of sin, except by the shedding of blood. So they fetched the bullocks, a bullock for every son and for every daughter. The old Patriarch slew the victims and laid them on the altar. And as the smoke ascended—they all thought if they had sinned against God—by His grace the blood shed and the victim offered could, as the type of Christ, take away their sin.

I think I see the good old man after the sacrifice was all complete—“Now, my children,” he says, “return to your homes. If you have sinned, your sin is put away. If you have transgressed, the atonement made has cancelled your transgression. You may go to your habitations and take a father’s blessing with you.”

Call to your recollection that Job is said to have seen to his sacred work “early in the morning.” It is ill lying in bed when we have sin on our conscience. He that has a sin unforgiven should never travel slowly to the Cross but *run* to it. So Job would sleep in the morning not an hour till he had seen his sons and his daughters sanctified and the sacrifice made. Mark well, that “he offered according to the number of his sons.” He did not leave out one. If he prayed for the eldest, he prayed for the youngest too—and if he made supplication for the sons, he did not forget the daughters. Ah, parents, never forget *any* of your children—carry them *all* before God—let them all be consecrated to Him and let your earnest prayer go up for them all—from your Reuben down to your Benjamin. Leave not one of them out, but pray God to grant that they may all be bound up together in the bundle of life.

And notice once again, “So did Job continually.” As often as they visited, so often was there the sacrifice. I suppose they had ten feasts in the year. And it is supposed by the old commentators that they assembled on their birthdays. They were not *always* feasting—that were sinful. In fact, that was the sin of the old world, for which God drowned it. “They ate and they drank, they married and they were given in marriage,” all which things are right enough in themselves. But if we are wholly immersed in them, always eating, always drinking, always feasting, *then* they become *sins* and indeed at all times they become sin, unless, like Job’s feasts they are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. If our meetings are thus sanctified, we can in everything give thanks. Then “he that eats, eats to the Lord and gives God thanks.” And being accepted in our thankfulness, the eating is to God’s glory. I say, then, my dear Friends, that Job did this continually which teaches to the parent his duty of continually pleading for his sons and daughters.

The aim of my remarks is just this—you will most of you meet together next Tuesday and keep the household feast. I beg you to imitate Job on Wednesday morning and make it your special and peculiar business to call your children together and sanctify them by prayer and by pleading the precious sacrifice of Christ Jesus. So “it may be” there has been sin. But there will be no “may be” as to the putting away of the sin. For pleading with prayer and laying hold on the sacrifice by faith you shall stand accepted still—both you and your households.

Now, some may think that what I have said upon this point is unnecessary and that we ought not to speak about such common things as these. Do you suppose that the Christian pulpit was set up by God that we might always talk to you about the millennium, or the antediluvians, or the things that are to happen in Ethiopia or Palestine? I believe that the Christian ministry has to do with *you in your daily life*—and the more the preacher delivers that which is practically suggestive of profit to our souls—the more closely does he keep to the Master. I am sure if my Lord Jesus Christ were here He would say somewhat in these words to you, “Go your way and eat your bread with a joyous heart, for God has accepted you through My blood. But watch and be you as men that look for their Lord. Still keep your lamps trimmed and your lights burning and your loins girt about. Be steadfast and watch unto prayer, that should I come in the morning, or at cock-crowing, I may find you ready for My appearing.”

As for you young men and women who will be separated on that day from your own parents—having no family circle in which to join—perform this pleasant privilege yourselves. Set apart a season Wednesday morning in which by prayer and supplication you shall make confession of sin. And whenever the feast-time comes round—whenever you are

invited to a social meeting, or the like—look upon it as a necessary successor of the social gathering—that there is private supplication, private confession of sin and a personal laying hold anew upon the great sacrifice. If this is done, your meetings, instead of being unprofitable, shall be the beginning of better days to you and you shall even grow in grace through that prayer, that repentance and that faith which have been suggested by your gatherings together.

I think all this is most fairly in my text. And if I ought not to preach from such a passage, then the text ought not to be in the Bible.

II. And now let us turn to the second head, or what is *in the text* and that is *instructive*. We must, therefore, ring the SERMON BELL.

Well, it will be a short sermon. My sermon shall not be like the bell and preacher of St. Anthony's church which were said to be both alike, the bell was pulled a long while and was exceeding dreary in its tone and the preacher was precisely the same. The sermon which is fairly in my text is this—if Job found it right with a holy jealousy to suspect lest his sons might have sinned, how much more do you think he suspected himself? Depend on it—he who was so anxious to keep his children clean was himself more anxious that he might always fear his God and eschew evil.

God said Job was a perfect and an upright man. And yet he was jealous! How much more, then, shall you and I be jealous of ourselves? Say not in your heart, Christian, “I may go here and there and may not sin.” You are never out of danger of sinning. This is a world of mire. It will be hard to pick your path so as not to soil your garments. This is a world of pitch. You will need to watch often if in handling it you are to keep your hands clean. There is a robber in every turn of the road to rob you of your jewels. There is a thief behind every bush. There is a temptation in every mercy. There is a snare in every joy. There is not a stone on which you tread under which there is not a viper's nest.

And if you shall ever reach Heaven it will be a miracle of Divine Grace. If you shall ever come safely home to your Father's house it will be because your Father's power brought you there. If Job's sons were in danger at their own tables, how much more are some of you in danger, Christians, when you have to go among the ungodly? It may be that some of you are called to do business where you hear oaths and blasphemy. Your way of life is such that you cannot help being exposed to many temptations. Be on your guard. It was said of a certain great man that he was so afraid of losing his life that he always wore armor under his clothes. Take care *you* always wear armor. When a man carries a bomb in his hand he should mind that he does not go near a candle.

And you, too must take care that you do not go near temptation. But if you are *called* to go through the temptation, how watchful, how anxious, how careful, how guarded should you be! Brothers and Sisters, I do not think that we are any of us watchful enough. I have heard of a good woman who would never do anything till she had sought the Lord in prayer about it. Is that our custom? If we do even a common thing without seeking the Lord's direction we may have to repent it as long as we live. Even our common actions are edged tools. We must mind how we handle them.

There is nothing in this world that can foster a Christian's piety, but everything that can destroy it. How anxious should we be, then, to look up—to look up to God—that *He* may keep us! Let your prayer be, “Hold me up and I shall be safe.” Let your daily cry be, you young Christians especially, yes and you old Christians too, , “Lord, keep me! Keep my heart, I pray You, for out of it are the issues of my life.” Do not expose yourselves unnecessarily but if called to exposure, if you have to go where the darts are flying, never go abroad without your shield. For if once the devil catches you abroad and your shield at home, then he will say, “Now is my time.” And he will send an arrow which may rattle between the joints of your harness and you may fall down wounded, even though you cannot be slain.

The Lord grant, then, that this sermon bell of my text may ring in your ears during the next week and as long as ever you live may you hear it saying to you, “Be careful. Be watchful, be vigilant. danger may be in an hour when all seems secure to you.” Inspect the vessel, see to her keel, look to the sails. Look to the rudder bands. Watch every part of the ship for the storm may be coming though the calm rule at present and the rocks may be ahead though the breakers roll not and the quicksand may underlie your keel, though you think all is well. God help you then, Christian, to watch unto prayer! What we say unto you, we say unto all—WATCH!

III. But now what follows the text—and that is afflictive: and here let us ring the FUNERAL BELL.

What follows the text? Why hear this, “Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house. And behold there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote the four corners of the house and it fell upon the young men and they are dead and I only am escaped alone to tell you.”

Between the table and the coffin there is but a step, between the feast and the funeral there may be but a day and the very bell that rings the marriage peal tolls the funeral knell. Here is a death's head for you to put on your table. The old Egyptians set a corpse among the guests—that all might know that they must die. I set the bodies of Job's sons and daughters at your table—to make you think that *you* will die. Our very eating is the grave of God's mercies and should remind us of our own graves. What do we do when we eat but patch the old tenement, put fresh plaster on the dilapidated and naked rafters? So, then, we should remember that the time will come when we can no more do this, but when the tenement itself shall be shaken and be blown down.

Sinner! Let no joy cross your face till death and you are friends. Saint! Let no joy be in your heart either, till you can say, "Welcome, Death. I gladly go with you." Do nothing that you would not willingly die doing. Be found in no position in which you would be unwilling to stand forever. Be you today what you would wish to be in eternity. And so live and so act and so sit at the table that if the wind should come and smite the four corners of the house and you should die, yet you fall asleep at one feast, to wake up at another feast where there would be no "may be," about sin, but where you should eat bread in the kingdom of God and drink the new wine of which Jesus Christ spoke when He rose from the supper and left His disciples.

Ah, my spirit rises on wings of delight at the solemn tones of that funeral knell—for it has more music in it, after all—than my merry bell. There is a pleasing joy in sorrow and mirth is akin to sadness. Hearken, friends, the bell is speaking, "GONE, GONE, GONE, GONE. "Who is that for? Who is dead in this parish? "That is poor So-and-so." My God, when it shall be my turn, may my soul behold Your face with joy. O may my spirit, when it receives the last summons cry with delight, "Blessed be God for that sound! It was the merriest sound my soul could have desired, for now I sit with Jesus and eat at His table and feast with angels and am satisfied and have the privilege of John—to lean my head upon my Savior's breast."

Christian! I say never let the thought of dying plague you. Let it be a comfort to you and stand you so ready that when the Master shall say, "Arise!" you will have nothing to do but to rise at His bidding and march to Heaven—leading your captivity captive.

But you, sinner, when you are sitting at your table, remember my funeral bell tolling in your ears. And if you should step aside and the rest should say, "What ails you?"—if you should be compelled to rise while they are laughing and go upstairs to pray, I shall not mind. Though some may say I have made you melancholy and have marred your feast—Sinner it is no time for you to be feasting while God's sword is furbished and sharp and ready to divide soul from body. There is a time to laugh, but it is not till sin is pardoned that there is time to dance. It is not till the heart stands with joy before the ark that there is time to make merry—it is not till *sin is forgiven*.

Your time is a time to weep and a time to rend your garments and a time to sorrow and a time to repent. May God's Holy Spirit give you the grace! The time is *now*. And the grace being given, may you fall before the Cross and find pardon and mercy there and then we may say, in the words of Solomon—"Go your way, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart. For God now accepts your works."

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