JAMES ARCHER SERMONS [5]

Mark 10:29–30

A Clothing[1] Discourse

There is no one who hath left House, or Brothers, or sisters, or Father or Mother, or Children, or Lands, for my sake, and for the Gospel, who shall not receive a hundred times as much now, in the world, and in the world to come Life everlasting. Words taken from out of 10th C. of St Mark and 29th & 30th V:

The grand promises here made, Dr [Dear] Candidate, by eternal truth, are not certainly intended, as a reward to those whom worldly disappointments, sudden reverses of fortune, unkind treatment, unexpected humiliations or a false piety, tear from a world of which their hearts continue to be enamored – however remote they may retire from friends or possessions, it cannot truly be said, that much abandon <u>any</u> thing purely for the sake of Jesus Christ. No it is to those

[1 "Clothing" A reference to the ceremony of investiture of the religious habit.]

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only who like you, Dr Cand. [Dear Candidate] actuated by a lively faith & guided by the pure attractions of Divine love, heroically make a voluntary renunciation of their earthly possessions & advantages, their flattering hopes and prospects, nay and their liberty too, that disengaged from the alluring bondage of a corrupted world, they may make a pure oblation & perfect sacrifice of their hearts and affections to their heavenly Spouse Christ Jesus – The magnificent promises of your Saviour, you observe Dr Cand. are not limited to a future state, or a crown of immortal glory, with which he has engaged to reward all those, who by a generous renunciation of all they possess, and a sincere contempt of earthly gratifications, magnanimously take up their cross, to follow him by the Gospel Road of self denial & mortification: – No, they regard also this life, & even <u>here below,</u> the generosity of the religious Soul, receives its hundred <u>fold reward</u>, when by a fervent correspondence & cooperation with Divine Grace, an increase of heavenly favor is merited; the bountiful goodness of God, boundless as his Omnipotence, being limited in its communication of graces & blessings,

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by the unfitness or incapacity alone of our hearts to receive them. What a motive of consolation Dr Cand. to you! and with what warmth of gratitude should not your heart glow towards your gracious Lord, who elevating your heart to the contemplation of eternal goods, & inspiring you with a desire of rendering yourself agreeable to him alone has also endowed you with courage to trample underfoot transitory goods – those deceitful vanities and baneful pleasures, which

unhappily lead astray, the great bulk of mankind from the peaceful paths of self denial & mortification so rigourously enjoined by the Gospel.

Convinced as we all are D^r^ Cand. of your faithful correspondence with the Divine Grace, in forming the heroic resolution of thus publically renouncing the pleasures of the world; pleasures as transitory as degrading to a Christian soul, with all the paltry advantages which it fails not to hold out to its deluded votaries; any exhortation to perseverance in your no less prudent than pious design, must be unnecessary from me: nevertheless, I shall entreat your attention to a few reflections on the nature of that pleasing promise of your Saviour cited in my Text.

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In the first place then, I will ask in what does this desirable recompense consist? It consists in the tranquility of mind, in the interior consolations, and in general in the spiritual gifts and graces, which a bountiful God imparts to those religious souls, who by a voluntary self denial, renounce the things of this world, for his sake. 2^ndly^ It consists in the solid security, which a religious state holds out, of obtaining the only happiness & glory really deserving of our ambition, the happiness & glory of Eternity.

The gay & inconsiderate children of the World, who fondly imagine themselves to be gifted with superior lights & wisdom, over the Children of grace, but of whom it may be justly said in the words of the Royal Prophet they that they have eyes, but see not the dangers impending over them for an Eternity – that they have ears, but which are impervious to the mortifying maxims of the Gospel – that they have understanding but which comprehend not the Gift of God; do not deny, that the hopes of religious recluses, in regard of a blissful immortality, are settled on more solid foundations, than their own; but at the same time, they dispute with us the possession of earthly happiness. – not conceiving how a state of daily self denial, of fatiguing regularity & constant restraint of the passions, can be made easy, much less

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agreeable or palatable to the restless heart of man, that is always craving new gratifications, to allay its insatiable thirst for happiness. – Real happiness, it must be allowed, cannot be possessed without pure enjoyment: – that is to say, an enjoyment that is not alloyed by any mixture of real evil & affliction. Now who does not instantly perceive, that the concurrence of an infinite variety of circumstances is absolutely requisite for such enjoyment? – To be rich for example and yet to be at the same time, the melancholy victim of disease – to be born of illustrious Parentage, & yet to be destitute of the means to support that dignity of birth: to be high in the estimation of the public, and yet to behold others bearing off the laurels of applause – Can this be called happiness? Again to be the object of affection to a numerous circle of friends, but yet to be exposed to the poisoned shafts of malicious Enemies; to cherish the tenderest regard for a spouse & yet to smart under the dire effects of pivishness [peevishness] & irritability, or the more

painful wounds of aversion & infidelity: to be the Parent of an idolized offspring & yet experience the pangs occasioned by undutifulness, or the forebodings of disgrace to a respectable family: to court affection by assiduity of love & kindness, & yet to meet with disregard, coldness, & perhaps persecution: to merit with toils the rewards of industry, & yet to behold the long cherished hope blasted in an instant by unforeseen calamity – Great God! can this be deemed a state of happiness? Ah! too true it is, that the Children of the

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world rarely taste the sweets of pure enjoyment! with them fears ever succeed to hopes; disappointments invariably overcloud the sunshine of prosperity: pleasures are the forerunners of vexation & anguish: hatreds counterbalance the sweets of friendship: perfidies, oppressions & calumnies are never wanting to imbitter the false joys, which their delightful World presents to its most ardent admirers. In a word; with them bitterness or reverses of favor or fortune, or pains or anguish in greater or less degrees form ingredients of the potion, which each revolving day, they are compelled reluctantly to drink. Pure unalloyed happiness is not, cannot be the enjoyment of one who places his consolation in the gifts & pleasures of the world. No D^{r} Cand. Man [is] only a momentary sojourner on the earth – man whose heart is formed for eternal and unchangeable enjoyments, cannot possibly be satisfied with transitory & mutable gratifications – Man whose essential distinction from the brute creation, consists in his spiritual faculties, cannot possibly, without a perversion of nature, be satiated, by pleasures, which merely affect the organs of sense: Man fashioned to the image of his infinitely holy Creator, cannot possibly be happy, but by a conformity with the Will of his Creator, and a resemblance (as far as his frail nature admits) with the perfections of his Creator. Wretchedness or at best false happiness, was from the moment of mans creation, the lot of every mortal, who

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limited his happiness to the enjoyments of the world |senses|. A Solomon on his throne, has no check whatever to the cravings of his natural appetites, yet declares all to be vanity and affliction of Spirit. An Aman[2] enjoying the full tide of his Sovereign's favor & disposing at pleasure of the fortunes of all the Subjects of a most extensive Empire, feels all his happiness imbittered, nay destroyed by the disrespect of an ignoble Jewish Captive. A Saul from the mean condition of a keeper of cattle, exalted by Divine appointment to the throne of a flourishing nation, is rendered wretched, because he becomes envious of the merit of David. Thus, in a word it is with all mortals, from the gay inhabitant of the stately Palace, to the lowly inmate of the despicable hovel, who place their happiness on the gratification of their passions = True happiness, being as opposite and incompatible with sinful gratifications as are light & darkness, can never reside in the heart, from which virtue & piety are excluded.

[^{2} On Aman, see Esther, chapters 3 through 16, passim.]

But now Dr Cand. are the enjoyments held out, nay, secured to you by the infallible promises of your Redeemer, of this disheartening complexion? No: I am authorized to assure you on the part of your Redeemer and Spouse, that your happiness will be real and true happiness— Content, happy, yea replenished with the truly

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gratifying satisfaction of belonging in a special manner to your Redeemer & God, to whom you desire to dedicate yourself entirely, without any reserve, & for whose love you renounce every thing that may withdraw your affections or attentions from him, you will meet with no real obstacles to your happiness. But why do I say obstacles? where every restraint, each regular observance, each self denial submitted to, for the sake of your divine Spouse & Redeemer, will contribute to your tranquility & interior Joy? – Who could believe it, My God, did not the experience of thy faithful Spouses of every age, no less than thy gracious promises assure us of its truth; that thou shouldest make things the most repugnant, mortifications the most painful to corrupt nature; duties the most galling to self love; humiliations the most hurtful to our pride, contribute to the happiness & form the delight of all those who devote themselves sincerely to thy service? That bitterness itself should become an abundant source of exquisite sweetness, & voluntary sufferings the fruitful parent of purest delights?– O omnipotent Lord! who commandes oil to issue from the veins of the hardest stone & light to beam forth from darkness! how wonderful art thou in thy Saints, and how amiable to thy servants! Though inebriatest them with

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purest enjoyments, which no real evil, no real affliction can destroy, interrupt or alloy!

But let it not be inferred that the religious Soul, has no difficulties to encounter– Far be it from me, to insinuate the idea. Yes the religious Soul had her difficulties, trials & combats – they are even necessary to her happiness, because [they are] necessary for her merit. She would with St Paul consider herself a spurious disciple or Child of her Redeemer, if she had nothing to suffer for his love, & would regard herself as a deformed or decayed member who sought to be separated from a crucified Head. Suffering she knows, forms the brightest wreath of glory in her Crown: assured by the same Apostle, that no one shall be crowned who hath not fought well: knowing also from her Redeemer that Heaven is gained only by violence, she views her little sufferings of love with an eye of delight, as the happy cause of her merit & her principal title to an eternal union with her God & to a diadem of never fading glory. United to Jesus Christ the spouse of her Soul, living[,] moving, acting in all things by his spirit residing in her, nothing appears so desirable to her as to resemble him; conforming herself, as the Apostle directs, to him in all things, that suffering with him, she may be glorified with him.

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Hence Dr Cand. it appears how visibly different are the light trials of religious souls, from

the sufferings of those, who seek their consolations in created things. The sufferings of the latter are real evils, those of the former, blessed sources of real consolation – the sufferings of the worldling beget despondency & wretchedness; those of the pious inmate of religious solitude, placid resignation & internal satisfaction in doing the holy will of God – those of the former, being generally the viperous offspring of the passions, or the avenging chastisements of an irritated God, cruelly sting & corrode the hearts of their unfortunate victims; those of the latter ruffle not the smooth tide of her peace: in a word, the sufferings caused by the world |of the worldling| yield not the smallest ray of hope, but engendering black despair, are the prelude to eternal despair; those of religion, working for them an eternal weight of glory, are invariably enlivened by the cheering & certain prospect of eternal reward. Her mind fixed on her suffering Redeemer, courageously does the religious Spouse of Christ, tread the narrow road of Gospel mortification, supported by his affectionate hand & animated by his example.

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Another essential requisite for happiness, is that the enjoyment should be of a solid, not merely a superficial good. To enter into a detail of the mean trifles or the disgraceful gratifications, which generally compose or are supposed to contribute to happiness in the world, is neither necessary here, nor adapted to my present subject. But with too just reason may it be asked, how is it possible, that men & Christians, can conceive to be conducive to happiness, what vilifies & disgraces their nature, or sinks & depresses them below the brute Creation? How can a Soul, whose immense capacity of desires, God alone can or ought to satisfy |satiate|, become content or happy by a disgraceful pleasure, which if not covered by darkness, must overwhelm her with shame, much more mortifying than any momentary gratification can possibly compensate? How can vain and transitory amusements, cloying festivities; sinful & censorious conversations; sensual indulgences of the appetite satisfy or content, ~~I do not say,~~ I do not say a Christian but a rational Being?

In place then of coveting the bare indulgences of Sinners, regarding them, D^{r} Cand. with an eye of compassion, let your heart overflow with gratitude to a merciful God, who calling you, as he formerly did holy Abraham from the midst of the Caldeans [Chaldeans], has vouchsafed

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to single out you also to become Heires of his eternal promises. While sinners, vainly seeking for happiness in the gratification of their passions, every where experience cruel disappointments, find trouble succeed to trouble, tempest to tempest: while their hearts, according to the words of the Prophet, like an agitated Ocean, are never at rest:– You D^{r} Cand. secured in the House of the Lord from the wild howling tempest, shall find a real & solid tranquility, founded on the testimony of a good conscience; which will assure you, that you love your God & are also most tenderly loved by him: for the fruits saith the Apostle of a good Conscience are peace and joy in the Holy Ghost– yes peace which surpasseth all understanding & expression of language —

Worldlings, ever guided in their Judgements, by sensual sentiments, cannot comprehend, how joy, peace & tranquility of mind can be enjoyed by those, who to be true religious, must be crucified & dead to the world: – whereas it is this very death of the passions & crucifixion of carnal desires, which alone can produce that peace and tranquility, that hundred fold promised in this life by your Saviour.– In a family or Kingdom, peace & harmony prevail, when all its members are united in submissive obedience to their Head: in like manner,

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placid calm & serenity sway the heart, when the passions are submissive to reason & reason is subjected to its God. Yes, D^{r} Cand. it is this this very self denial; this very restraint on the passions, – this very constant regularity of duties required of you in a religious life – this very exclusion of all vanity by a modest and penitential habit – this very sacrifice of your liberty by obedience – this crucifixion of your appetites by abstinence & other austerities, this absence from the most dangerous of temptations by inclosure, will become, if you persevere faithfully corresponding with the graces given you, a source of true peace to your soul – will render you an object of complacency to your God & his Angels, will entitle you to the hundred fold reward of your Saviour in this life, & will enable you confidently to say with S^{t} Paul, at that awful moment, which putting an end to all earthly vanities, pleasures & sufferings, will become the commencement of eternal & unchangeable life[.] "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course,… for the rest there is laid up for me a crown of Justice, which the Lord just Judge will render to me[."[3]]

Allow me to make one more reflexion, which I will do by asking, on what the happiness of those who conform to this world

[[3] See 2 Timothy 4:7.]

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depends? Yes on what does this happiness depend? On What? why, on the most unsettled of all foundations– on the success or miscarriage of designs, enterprises or hopes, the issue of which rests not on human industry, wit or wisdom, but on the caprice of fortune – I should say, on the Will of a despised, but just & avenging God, whose glory requires that he frustrate the vain hopes of the wicked. On what again, ~~does the~~ does the worldling's happiness depend? On the smiles or frowns – on the friendship or aversion – on the constancy or capriciousness of men, equally enterprising – equally capricious, equally ambitious, equally envious, equally proud, equally revengeful, equally hurtful, equally enslaved to passion as himself – And consequently on men, whose interest welfare or delight it is or may be, to thwart or crush all his projects of happiness – No longer then let it be [a] matter of astonishment, that no true felicity, no real content is experienced by those, who make not the Law & Will of their God, their delight, but confine their consolation & happiness to the acquisition of vain enjoyment, for which they were not created.

Now need I ask, on which side happiness preponderates? In favor of the mortified Disciple of the Cross; the hidden, cloistered Spouse of Jesus, or the toiling, anxious Slave

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of the World? No surely it is needless. Your happiness Dr Cand. – your desires being to please your God alone, who essentially faithful to his promises, cannot refuse the hundred fold reward even in this life – your study & your cares being to combat, to check & finally to crush those very passions which engender all the wretchedness of Worldlings; – your principal delight being to conform your conduct to the lessons and example of your Redeemer, must most certainly be settled on better hopes – nay fixed on the most stable & solid of all foundations – Yes Dr Cand. if you continue faithfully to correspond with his grace, the infinite goodness of your God, must necessarily support your happiness – The Glory of your God must demand your happiness, & the promises of your God must secure your happiness.

Go on then, Dr Cand. in the high road to happiness: Proceed in the Career of Glory. I mean not that false glory, which dazzling only for a moment, is succeeded by everlasting shame, but that true glory which destructive time cannot tarnish or efface and which receives additional rays of honor every moment of Eternity. Go on Dr Cand. in the Career of honor – not that disgraceful honor, which results from cruel, scandalous, or vain exploits – not that absurd honor, attained by the acquisition of perishable riches, or by trampling under foot

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the holy Law of God & the sacred Right of humanity, but that genuine honor, which arises from the most difficult of all victories; the victory over your passions, submission to the reasonable & sanctifying Law of your Creator, & the practice of every virtue.

Go on, Dr Cand., cheerfully advance in the road of self denial & hatred of the false and destructive pleasures of the world & the flesh, beaten by your gracious Saviour & those Millions of his heroic Disciples– Go on Dr Cand. courageously in the Practice of those holy duties, which carrying final destruction to self love & the passions, and purifying in you the fatal effects of corrupted nature, must finally fit you for the pure, glorious & eternal society of your Redeemer, & of those magnanimous Souls, who tutored by his Divine lessons & animated by his example walked undefiled, through the baneful corruptions of a sinful world. Go on Dr Cand. persevere in meriting the hundred fold consolation promised by your Saviour in this life. Go on prudent Virgin, bearing in your hands, the lamps of good works, to meet your Saviour, who thus most affectionately invites you to the Nuptial Feast: “The winter is now passed, the rain |Cant. 2|, the storms are gone by forever,[4] arise my friend, and come to receive the Crown, which thy God has prepared for thee for Eternity – A Blessing which I wish you &c [etc.]

[4 See Canticle of Canticles (Song of Solomon) 2:11.]