

Boys and Girls Playing



J. C. RYLE (1816-1900)

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Boys and Girls Playing

*“The streets of the city shall be full
of boys and girls playing.”*

—Zechariah 8:5

Dear children, the text at the top of this page is about things to come. God tells us what there will be one day in the streets of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, you know, is a very famous place. It was the chief town of the Jews. It was the city where David and Solomon lived. It was the city where Christ died on the Cross and rose again. All boys and girls who read the Bible know something about Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was once a very grand and rich town. In all the earth there was no city like it when the Jews feared God. But the sins of the Jews brought ruin on Jerusalem. It became a poor, decayed, dirty place, and a sorrow to all who see it.

But a day shall yet come when Jerusalem shall be once more a grand and beautiful place...And then the words of the text will come to pass: “The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing.”

Dear children, there are two things I want you to learn out of this text. You see, God tells us that in the holiest, best days of Jerusalem there will be boys and girls playing in the streets. He tells us this, and He does not say that it is wrong. Let us see what we can make of this.

1. God thinks about boys and girls.

Learn for one thing that God thinks about boys and girls and notices what they do. He does not only tell us about the men and women of Jerusalem. He makes mention of the “boys and girls.” He tells us it will be a good time when there are many of them, and that it will be a good time when they play in the streets.

Some folks do not care to see children, and say that there are too many of them in the world. These folks are not like God. The great God in heaven loves children. He knows that there will be no men and women by and by, if there are no children now. He says in Psalm 127:5, Happy is the man who has his quiver full of children.

Folks who do not like boys and girls, and are cross with them, ought to remember that they were once children themselves.¹

There is much about children in the Bible. Read the histories of Ishmael, Isaac, Benjamin, Moses, Samuel, and Abijah. Read the Proverbs of Solomon, and see how often that wise man spoke of children. Read the Gospels, and see how Jesus Christ noticed little infants, and took them in His arms and blessed them (Mar 10:16). Read the epistles of the Apostle Paul and see how he speaks of children. These things were written for our learning.

Dear children, remember all this and do not forget it. You are never too young or too little for God to take notice of you. You are never too young or too little to begin thinking of God. Are you old enough to be naughty? Then be sure that you are old enough to be good. Are you old enough to talk? Then be sure that you are old enough to say your prayers. Are you old enough to learn bad words? Then be sure that you are old enough to learn texts.² Are you old enough to know and love your mother? Then be sure that you are old enough to know and love Jesus—Who died to save [sinners just like you].

Boys and girls, remember this first great lesson: God takes notice of you. Mind that you take notice of God.

2. God allows boys and girls to play.

Learn another thing from our text: God allows boys and girls to play. He does not tell us that the streets of Jerusalem shall be full of boys and girls sitting still and silent and idle. He tells us that the boys and girls shall be playing, and He teaches us that playing is not wrong.

Some good people seem to think that children should never play at all. They tell us that all games are sinful, and that boys and girls should always look very grave and never laugh or be merry. They make a great mistake when they say this. God tells us that in the good times of Jerusalem boys and girls shall play in the streets. Then play, in moderation, cannot be wrong.

Play suits the age of boys and girls. They cannot be always learning lessons or working. Their minds are not strong enough for this. They are not like old people. They must have some time every day for rest and exercise.

Play helps children to grow healthy and strong. Their bodies will never be well if they are sitting still or standing from morning to night. They need all their

¹ Our author himself was a father of five children. His booklet *The Duties of Parents* has also been published by Chapel Library.

² **texts** — Scripture verses from the Bible.

limbs to be exercised while young if they are to be healthy men and women when they are old. It is natural to a child to play. The boy or girl who does not like play is generally not well.

Play teaches children to bear and forbear, and to put up with disappointments. They cannot always win the game and have their own way. Play makes them active and keen-witted and ready for anything. They cannot succeed in games of skill unless they keep awake. The great Duke of Wellington used to say that he learned to win the Battle of Waterloo (in 1815) when he was in the playing fields of Eton College.

Play makes boys and girls learn better when it is over. They come back to lessons sharper, quicker, and more clever than if they sat reading and writing all day long. Brains and nerves and mind are all better for play.

Play of any kind is better than idleness. “Satan always finds some work for idle hands to do.” If boys and girls do not have some nice games to take to after school, they are quite sure to get into mischief.

Dear children, you see that I am a friend to your playing. I am not ashamed of being so, because I see that God approves of it. God allows us to do anything except sin; and play in moderation is not sinful.

3. Four Bits of Advice

I shall now finish my sermon with four bits of advice to boys and girls, which I hope they will think about and not forget:

1. *In all your play, remember the eye and ear of God.* He sees and hears everything. Dear children, say nothing you would not like God to hear. Do nothing you would not like God to see.

2. *In all your play, keep your temper.* Be kind, cheerful, unselfish, and good-natured—even when you lose the game. Dear children, never fly into a passion.³ Whatever you play at, keep your temper.

3. *Do not neglect work because of play.* Let all your play help you to learn better, and to be a better boy or girl, both at school and home. It is quite true that “all work and no play makes a dull boy.” But I believe it is no less true, that all play and no work makes a stupid, useless man!

4. In the last place, *never forget, even in your play, that all true happiness comes from Christ.* If you want to be happy, boys and girls, love Christ and make

³ **passion** – tantrum, sinful anger.

Him your chief Friend. Christ is the giver of light hearts and peaceful minds. *The happiest child is the child who loves Christ most.*

*There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified
Who died to save us all.*

*We do not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us,
He hung and suffered there.*

*He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to Heaven,
Saved by His precious Blood.*

*There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of Heaven, and let us in.*

*Oh, dearly, dearly has He loved,
And we must love Him too,
And trust in His redeeming Blood,
And try His works to do.⁴*



⁴ *Hymns for Little Children*, Cecil F. Alexander, 1848.