

Joy

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Date: 15 July 2018

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[0 : 00] Now could you turn with me to that passage that we read in Philippians chapter 4 and particularly the words in verse 4 there.

Philippians 4 verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice. Joy is something that's sadly lacking in modern life. Of course yes there's comedy and laughter but there doesn't seem to be any lasting joy.

As the poet Lord Byron said there's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away. By contrast and contrary to what many people might think the Bible is actually full of joy.

If you do a word search for joy or rejoice these words of course are related. There are over 400 instances in the Bible. Over 100 in the book of Psalms and over 100 in the New Testament.

And that's not counting all the other references to glad, happy, laughter and so on. In celebrating the birth of the Lord Jesus we often think of those lines of the angel.

[1 : 27] It's good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Luke chapter 2 verse 10. That's how the gospel is described.

Good news of great joy for all the people. And of course there's a hymn that kind of sums that up. Joy to the world the Lord is come.

Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room. And heaven and nature sing. Joy to the world. William Tyndale in his prologue to his English translation of the New Testament that was so influential.

Not only on the King James Version but even on every version ever since. He said in the prologue to the New Testament he said that Christianity is good, merry, glad and joyful tidings.

That makes a man's heart glad and makes him sing, dance and leap for joy. I wonder if you know that kind of joy this morning.

[2 : 34] Or are you weighed down by worries and troubles and fears and doubts? Perhaps once you did know that joy. But now you feel a wee bit like Robert Burns' famous lines.

Thou minds me, oh departed joys departed never to return. Well I believe we can only find this joy or re-find it in Jesus Christ.

Rejoice in the Lord always we're told here. And so I want to think with you first about the joy of Jesus himself.

Because if we're told to rejoice in the Lord, that must be saying something about him. It must be saying something about his joy. Because we can only find that joy and rejoicing really through relationship with him.

We quite often think of Jesus as described by Isaiah as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

[3 : 39] But that was because of his work as the sin bearer. That passage in Isaiah chapter 53 speaks of his great atoning work and taking the sins of the world upon himself.

It's not really speaking of himself in his own personality or character. We're told in Luke chapter 10 verse 21, He's thinking there of the fact that his disciples had come to know the truth.

And he's rejoicing in it. And it's interesting that in that passage we see the triune God. The three persons of the Trinity.

It's joy through the Holy Spirit. But Jesus is speaking to the Father. And so it's as if we're seeing this joyfulness of the triune God. As Jesus shares this joy with his Father.

And he's doing this through the work of the Holy Spirit. It's an amazing passage. And you know the expression that's used here, Full of joy, Literally means jumping for joy.

[5 : 08] Leaping for joy. That's what it really means. So it's not just some kind of passive, static sort of thing. It's some great, powerful joy that is expressed here.

And of course we've got to ask why was he joyful at this time? And it was his delight in his disciples' joy. Earlier in the passage they have returned from their mission And they're rejoicing that they've seen God's hand at work through them.

And of course he's expressing also delight in victory over evil. Because they were talking about how they had cast out evil spirits and so on.

And so the joy of the Lord Jesus is still of course expressed in these things. He delights in our joy. He delights in victory over evil.

But above all he was rejoicing in his disciples' salvation. He said to them, Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In verse 20.

[6 : 12] And Jesus rejoiced in the fact that the grace of God was expressed to the little people. The marginalized and the weak. It wasn't the rich and powerful and so on that came and flocked to hear him.

It was people like these, the fishermen and others, Who had responded to his call. And he was rejoicing in the fact of God's grace. He was rejoicing in the fact that he was Jesus rejoicing in the fact that he was rejoicing in the fact that he was rejoicing in the fact that he had done his life for his friends.

Jesus' joy is inextricably bound up with his love. It is because Jesus is love that he is also joy. There's no joy really apart from love.

You know that. When you've not been loving or not been loved, your joy disappears. There's this connection between love and joy.

Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*, which of course became very famous as a musical and a film and so on, But originally written by Victor Hugo, the French writer. He says, Life's greatest happiness is to be convinced we are loved.

[7 : 55] And that of course is what we see in the Lord Jesus. He is loved by his heavenly Father. He's secure in that love. And his heart is full of joy. He's full of joy.

And he is the real joy giver. He's the one who can give this lasting joy to us. Talking in his famous book, *The Lord of the Rings*, has a passage where one of the young hobbits called Pippin is expressing his marvel at Gandalf, the great wizard.

He says, And you know, that's exactly the kind of feeling we have about the Lord Jesus.

Yes, he was a man of sorrows. Yes, there was all this burden of the world's sin placed upon him. There was this tremendous work that he had to do.

There was that tremendous struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane. But constantly throughout the Gospels, we feel there's this great fountain of mirth, ready to set a kingdom laughing, as Tolkien put it, where it took us for.

[9 : 16] And of course, we know that in eternity, that fountain of joy, that fountain of mirth, will be expressed forever. There's also a forward-looking emphasis, as we think of the joy of Jesus himself.

In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2, we read, Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

So, it's not just that Jesus had joy, as he saw the work of the disciples going on, as he saw the good things involved in that.

But there was a joy set before him. There was going to be a completion of joy. Because, of course, in this world, it is a veil of tears. In this world, we know that there is suffering.

In this world, we know that the Lord Jesus Christ was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as he carried the burden of sin, the sin of the world. But yet, he's looking forward to the absolute perfection of the joy set before him.

[10 : 32] And it's in that way that he endured the cross. And that's going to have a lesson for us, as we think about the joy that we ought to have in response to Jesus. C.S. Lewis put it this way, joy is the serious business of heaven.

It's not a marvelous expression. We don't think of joy as a business. But he says, joy is the serious business of heaven. He says, this is what heaven is going to be all about. This is what eternal life is going to be all about.

The joy of knowing that we are loved and loved eternally by God. We can be absolutely assured that at the center of the universe, there is the throne of God.

And at the center of the throne, there is the Lamb, who is also the Lion. And at the center of his heart, there is joy unspeakable and full of glory. So there's the joy of Jesus himself. We're told to rejoice in the Lord. But then we are told to rejoice. So what about the joy of those who trust in Jesus?

[11 : 38] C.S. Lewis famously entitled his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, a quote from a poem by Wordsworth.

And interestingly enough, it became kind of ironic because he had written the book and it was to be published, but he met a woman called Joy Davidman, whom eventually he married.

And so again, he was surprised by joy. But what Lewis was referring to in this book was that throughout his life, he had experienced stabs of joy that sort of seemed to point to something greater than themselves, whether it was through reading literature or through nature or whatever it was, but he couldn't ever sort of get to the source of it or kind of recapture it.

And he couldn't explain this in his atheism at that time. He didn't believe in God at that time. But it was as if this was a message from heaven that he couldn't really explain.

It was only when he became a Christian that he understood the source of all joy in Jesus Christ.

People have this false idea that to become a Christian means that you'll have to be miserable.

[12 : 55] You'll have to give up everything that makes you happy. And the idea that Christians are just wet blankets and kill joys. The 19th century evangelist Dwight L. Moody said, If a man is dying for want of bread and you give him bread, is that to make him gloomy?

That is what Christ is to the soul, the bread of life. You will never have true pleasure or peace or joy or comfort until you have found Christ.

And we need to have that note in our Christianity that the whole purpose of it is that it is good news of great joy. It is to make us happy.

It is to make us ultimately fulfilled and joyful. Jesus' desire is for us that we will know real joy. In John 15 verses 11 to 13 he said, I've told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

As we noticed already, the key to this is in his love. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that he laid down his life for his friends.

[14 : 10] It's because he's laid down his life for us whom he calls his friends that we have this tremendous source of joy. In John chapter 17 verse 13 we're told that he wants his followers to have the full measure of my joy within them.

That's his desire. And as we may struggle through life, as we may struggle with problems and challenges and difficulties, remember that Jesus' desire is that we would have his full measure of joy within us.

In 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 7 to 8, I'm quoting here from the authorized version, we read, Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love, in whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Jesus' desire is to give us this lasting joy. In John chapter 16 verse 22, we read, Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.

He's speaking here to the disciples and they were grieving because Jesus was speaking about going away. They didn't understand. They were feeling sad. They were feeling disillusioned. They didn't know what to think. And he says, I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.

[15 : 39] And that joy is not just for this life, but it's joy forever. But the amazing thing about joy in the Bible and particularly in the New Testament is that it is so often stress in the midst of trouble and distress.

This is one of the remarkable things about joy in the New Testament. It's often spoken in the context of trouble and suffering. In Luke chapter 6 verse 22, Jesus says, Blessed are you. When? When you're successful? When you're rich? No, he says, Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day, he says, and leap for joy. Skip for joy it is because great is your reward in heaven for that is how their fathers treated the prophet.

And this seems just astonishing to us and the apostles obviously got the same emphasis from Jesus about talking about rejoicing and suffering or persecution.

[16:55] How can that be? In Acts chapter 5 verse 41, the apostles left the Sanhedrin after they'd been beaten, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering.

Again, it's astonishing. How could they rejoice? Romans chapter 5 verse 3, Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance.

So we're beginning to see a kind of thread here that although we may think of suffering and trouble as very negative, there's something positive in it.

As Jesus speaks of being blessed because people hate you or people persecute you, it's because of the Son of Man. It's not because you're a particularly nasty or difficult person.

It's simply because you trust in the Lord Jesus. And that's a great cause for rejoicing. It's an indication that we are trusting in Him if people reject us because of our relationship with Him.

[18:06] And the apostles, they counted, they thought it tremendous that they were counted worthy of suffering and disgrace for the name. They viewed it as a kind of badge of honor that they were being rejected and hated because they loved Jesus.

And in that passage in Romans chapter 5, again there's a positive emphasis. We know that suffering produces perseverance. So, Paul was encouraging the Christians then to realize that though they may suffer, yet their attitude to suffering would produce a positive harvest in their lives if they approached it with this attitude that through this they were being made stronger in the faith as they trusted in Jesus Christ and they even rejoiced in their suffering.

And there's so many passages in the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 6, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, Paul says. In chapter 7, verse 4, I have great confidence in you, I take great pride in you, I am greatly encouraged in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.

Isn't that astonishing? And in chapter 8, out of the most severe trial, he's speaking here of the giving of some Christians, out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

So in the midst of trouble and trial, yet they were expressing their generosity in what they were giving for the work of the Lord. And in James chapter 1, verse 2, showing that it wasn't just the Apostle Paul who spoke this way, but James also said, Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

[20:00] So how can we make sense of this? It just seems counterintuitive to us. Well, it tells us, first of all, that joy is not incompatible with facing all sorts of difficulties, opposition, and heartache.

It's not the kind of idea of joy or happiness that the world around us has, that you have that when everything is going well, and then when everything is going bad, you're down.

For the Christian, the two can be compatible, that in the midst of trouble and struggle, you can be rejoicing inwardly knowing who you are, what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you, knowing that this trouble is not the end of the world, knowing that the Lord will work all things together for good to you.

And indeed, if the world saw more of that in us as Christians, wouldn't it be revolutionary? It's a privilege to know Christians who display this kind of joy in the midst of suffering.

Corrie ten Boom, who was a Dutch woman who was sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp in the Second World War for helping Jews, there, her beloved sister, Betsy, died.

[21:26] But Corrie said, joy runs deeper than despair. So even in the midst of that horror and the midst of her loss, she knew that joy that runs deeper than despair.

What's the secret? In 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 13, Peter says, but rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

There's this mysterious kind of reference in the New Testament to the fact that when Christians are suffering, they are sort of joined together with Christ and his suffering.

Because we are united to Christ, it's not, of course, that our suffering in any way atones for sin or our sin or anything like that. But it's that we know a fellowship with Jesus in his suffering.

If he could be joyful in the midst of his suffering, then we too can have that amazing joy that he displayed.

[22:37] G.K. Chesterton once said, joy is the gigantic secret of the Christian. The coming of Jesus into the world was announced as good news of great joy.

Tyndale's good, merry, glad, and joyful tidings. In Psalm 102, sorry, Psalm 100, verse 2, which we're going to sing in a minute, it says, Worship the Lord with gladness.

But it's more striking in the old Scottish Psalter version, Him serve with mirth his praise forth tell. Isn't that a note in our Christian experience that so often is missing this joyfulness?

And we read too of the joy of someone coming to know salvation. In Acts chapter 16, verse 34, the jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them.

He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God, he and his old family. That transformation of life. One minute, he was about to commit suicide, he was about to take his own life because they thought the prisoners had escaped.

[23 : 47] But then when he came to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and he received it, he was filled with joy. It's great to see that transformation.

But of course it's a transformation that continues in the Christian's experience. Yes, we may have ups and downs, we may have troughs, as well as great heights and great mountaintop experiences, but that joy should be something underlying everything.

in Luke chapter 15 verse 7, Jesus speaks of joy in heaven. There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

The great joy of someone coming to know the Lord, turning from sin and trusting in him. And again, that should be something that is stirred up within every one of us when we hear of someone coming to faith, whether in this country or in our own congregation or in another part of the world altogether. It's a tremendous source of joy. There's joy in heaven, so there should be joy on earth as well. In Psalm 16 verse 11, which we sung from, you have made known to me the path of life.

[25 : 04] You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. That's an amazing expression, isn't it? Eternal pleasures at your right hand.

This is something the world doesn't know anything about, the fact that this is what is set before Christians, eternal pleasures at God's right hand. We don't know all the mystery of that, but we know that we have this promise.

We'll be filled with joy in his presence. In Jude chapter 24 verse 25, we have the famous doxology to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God our Saviour, be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages now and forever.

To be without fault and with great joy in the presence of God. That's what the Lord Jesus Christ has achieved for us. Is it any wonder that Paul says in this verse that we've begun with, rejoice in the Lord always.

I will say it again, rejoice. So, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

[26 : 36] Do we know this reality that Peter spoke of? Though you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy.

If we know the Lord Jesus Christ, we know the source of joy and we ought to day by day focus upon what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and is doing for us as we face the trials and struggles of life, so that we will have that joy in our experience.

And so we look to him to do that, because it's not something that human nature can achieve. Fallen human nature curses and swears in the midst of difficulty and trouble and struggle, but redeemed human nature through Jesus Christ can rejoice in the midst of suffering and give a tremendous testimony to the saving power and transforming power of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, we have to confess that so often we struggle, so often we don't have that joy in our experience, that we know ought to be there because of the great things you've done for us.

Oh Lord, forgive us for this, and renew our focus upon Jesus, and enable us to show forth that joy, that happiness, that gladness because of Jesus, because of who he is, because of what he's done.

[28 : 17] Lord, enable us to see how incongruous it is that we who know such amazing good news should go around with long faces, should go around moaning and complaining.

Oh Lord, forgive us. Fill us with your joy, fill us with your love, and may we show forth that joy and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ to the world around us.

We ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Now we sing to God's praise, Psalm 100.

We're singing the whole of this psalm. Again, we sing Psalms. Shout to the Lord with joy, all who to earth belong. Adore the Lord with joyful heart, and come to him in song.
To God's praise.