

& the joy of all people

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 November 2015

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] The foundation of Christian joy is profoundly deeper than things going well in life. Where does it come from?

Let me give you a bunch of suggestions. Number one, it's taught by Jesus. Luke 6, blessed are you when men hate you. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy because great is your rewarded heaven. You see, far as Jesus is concerned, troubles compound your interest in heaven, which goes on for eternity.

Second, it comes from the Holy Spirit. That is, joy doesn't come from your efforts. It doesn't come from your imagination. It doesn't come from your family upbringing. It doesn't come from your DNA. You're not wired a particular way.

It doesn't come from a psychiatrist. It doesn't come from your medication. The fruit of the Spirit is joy, Galatians 5.22. Third, it comes from belonging to the kingdom. Remember when Jesus sent the 72 disciples out as his witnesses in Luke chapter 10, and they had great success, and they came back filled with joy.

[1 : 08] They're like, man, it was fantastic. Things happened you wouldn't believe. And Jesus said, that's right. He said, I saw Satan fall like lightning.

I gave you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, and nothing's going to harm you. So, Jesus agreed. You were successful. However, he said, do not rejoice that the Spirit submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Fourthly, it comes from faith. That is, from believing God. Romans 15.13. Now, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, in trusting.

Fifthly, it comes from seeing and knowing Jesus, the Lord, as Lord. Philippians 4.4. Rejoice in the Lord always. Sixthly, it comes from fellow believers who work hard to help you focus on these sources of joy rather than deceitful circumstances.

2 Corinthians 1. We are workers with you for your joy. Seventhly, where does joy come from? Seventhly, it comes from the sanctifying effects of hard times.

[2 : 21] Romans 5.3. We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope.

Or, as we saw a few weeks ago, a number of weeks ago, James 1. Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

So the very foundation of Christian joy is that our names are written in heaven.

It's everything that we have as a gift from God. It's not good circumstances in life. And I want to dwell on that little bit for that bit. Number seven, for a bit, I think.

Because that's the situation for most of us is when things go bad, all of a sudden joy leaves. This is what this world needs so much.

[3 : 25] Christian joy and difficult times are not mutually exclusive. So I want to focus on Psalm 43 because we see the issue there and how to overcome the issue as well.

That is, how do we fight for joy when our circumstances aren't helping us get joy? Verse 1, Psalm 43.

Verse 1 describes what is going on in the psalmist's life. Verse 2 describes what's going on in his soul in response to the situation. Verse 1, What makes his situation painful is that he has enemies and they're oppressing him.

They are ungodly people. They are threatening his life or in some way making it just plain miserable. Verse 2 describes what's going on in his soul.

You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning oppressed by the enemy? Now, what is most striking about his soul is that it's divided.

[4 : 38] Part of his heart, it seems, is right now taking refuge in God. God has not let him go and he has not let God go. But he is perplexed as to why God would allow his enemies to get the upper hand on me.

When he says, why have you rejected me? He simply means, why have you turned your back on me and let the enemy make me miserable? Now, I think that's not an uncommon experience among many Christians.

A divided heart, a torn heart. I'm not saying that we should have the experience. I'm just saying that many Christians do. And so we are not as joy-filled as we might possibly be.

And so let's look at this man in Psalm 43 and the practical steps he takes against this divided heart and fighting for joy.

He begins the psalm by crying out to God. He's crying out against the circumstances and asking God to change them. It's not wrong to pray that God would rescue us from our enemies, whether they are people or natural disasters or disease or bad relationships or multitude of things.

[5 : 52] It's right and good to pray for deliverance and for rescue and for healing. And so he does that. But, but, the desire for vindication and rescue and healing can be just a purely natural desire.

Everybody wants to be vindicated and rescued and healed. There is nothing particularly Christian about that in and of itself. It doesn't take a spiritual work of God in a person's life to want their enemies to be defeated and to escape the mess that they're in.

And so while he prays for that, it isn't the main thing that he prays for. The other two things that the psalmist does here are not natural.

They are not something that anyone would do without the work of God in their lives. The first is in verse 3. That's an amazing prayer.

Notice that there is not a whiff here of praying for rescue from a tough situation because something far greater is at stake for this psalmist. There is a much more important victory to be won than a victory over disaster or cancer or bankruptcy or city traffic or property prices or Queensland State of Origin team.

[7 : 37] That's what the psalmist is fighting for right now here. His prayer takes him on four stages. First in verse 3, send forth your light and your truth.

Let them guide me. He confesses that he needs God to lead him. Why is that? Because he's in the dark. He knows he's in the dark because his heart is divided.

God is his refuge, but he feels forsaken. He feels rejected. And he knows that's not what God is like. He is praying for spiritual light, spiritual illumination.

He's praying that God would rescue him, not from his enemies, but from a far more dangerous situation.

And that is a darkness that causes the world to look much more attractive than it is. And causes the greatness and the splendor and the majesty of God to bit by bit dimly fade away.

[8 : 41] The second stage of his prayer is that by this light and truth, God would lead him to his holy dwelling. Second half of verse 3, The altar is the place where the blood of the animal sacrifice was sprinkled to make atonement for the people and God forgave their sins.

In other words, the light of God here, the guiding of God, takes him to the truth of his sinfulness, takes him to the place of atonement and forgiveness.

For the Christian, for us, this side of the cross, Jesus Christ crucified, risen and standing before the throne of God, he is our altar. That's the place where we go.

The light of the gospel leads us to Christ, to the altar, to the cross. And there our hearts are further enlightened to see our sin and our wonderful forgiveness that we have in him.

The security that we have in him. Then the third stage of the prayer is that this light and truth, having seen his sinfulness and his forgiveness by God, would lead him to God as his exceeding joy.

[10 : 03] Verse 4, To God my joy and my delight. The final goal of life is not forgiveness.

The final goal of life is not even God's good gifts. It's not vindication by another human being.

The final goal of life is God himself experienced as your exceeding joy. That's the goal of life.

Every joy that does not have God as the central gladness of the joy is a hollow joy and it will burst like a bubble in the end.

Isn't this amazing? Here is a man threatened by enemies, feeling danger from his adversaries, and yet he knows that the ultimate battle in his life is not the defeat of his enemies.

[11:07] It's not the escaping from natural catastrophe. It's not the healing from cancer. The ultimate battle is, Will God be my exceeding joy?

Will God be the gladness at the heart of all of my joys? Samuel Rutherford was a Scottish minister who was born about 1600.

He became the Presbyterian pastor at Anworth in Scotland in 1627. When the Anglicans gained power over the Scottish church, Rutherford was imprisoned for two years in Aberdeen for nonconformity.

So it's not the highest point of Anglican church history. But he survived, which was a miracle, to preach again and to serve on the council that wrote the famous Westminster Confession, which says that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

But while he was in prison, he wrote letters, about 220 letters preserved from his two years in prison, and the spirit of those letters is radiant with glory and the all-sufficiency of Christ.

[12:34] On his way to prison in Aberdeen, he wrote this, I go to my king's palace in Aberdeen.

And king, capital K, means Jesus' palace in Aberdeen. Tongue, pen, and wit cannot express my joy.

And that joy overflowed. One person said of Rutherford in prison for those two years that he was impatient of earth, he was intolerant of his sin, he was wrapped with a continual contemplation of one unseen face, the face of Christ, finding his happiness in Christ's returning smile on him.

That was his experience in prison, Sal, for two years. His joy flowed out of his absorption in Jesus. The final stage of this psalmist's prayer is that this light and truth would lead him to express this joy that he feels in God.

Verse 4, at the end of it, I will praise you with a harp, O God, my God. C.S. Lewis says in his book on the Psalms, We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses, but it completes the enjoyment.

[14:11] It is its appointed consummation. That is, praising God for his glory is the goal.

Joyful praise of God. And so it's not wrong to say that we were made for God. It's not wrong to say we were made for joy. It's not wrong to say we were made to worship.

But it's more fully true to say we were made to enjoy God with overflowing joyful worship.

That's the ultimate goal of life, which is why it sits there in our mission statement. We exist for the joy of all people as they find it in Christ.

Now, friends, it is true that our hearts are often sluggish. We do not feel the depth or the intensity of affections and joy that are appropriate for God and his cause. And so if right now you're stuck in a rut of joylessness as a Christian, let me give you a few aids to rekindle joy in your soul.

[15:28] That is, I want these things to help you to fight for joy in your life. The context of these aids is that joy is a fruit of the work of the Spirit.

Romans 15, 13 says, May the God of hope fill you with joy, with all joy and peace, as you trust him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So the first aid to joy is that the Holy Spirit uses the word of God to create joy in our hearts. Again, a little bit earlier in Romans 15, verses 4 and 5, we see that God gives encouragement and endurance through the Scriptures.

That is, God is the source, and the Scriptures are the means where he delivers that encouragement and that endurance. And the same truth applies for joy.

In Romans 15, 13, it speaks of the God of hope filling us with joy as we trust what he has revealed about his glory.

[16:37] So you have no hope, because joy is a work of the Holy Spirit, you have no hope of getting Christian joy in your life if your face is not planned in the Scriptures reminding you of the glory of God.

No hope whatsoever. Secondly, confess the sin of joylessness, or the sin causing joylessness. In Psalm 32, King David had no joy while he failed to deal with the sin in his life.

But also acknowledge that joylessness is dishonoring to God, denies his love, his control over your lives. Joylessness in the Christian is functional atheism.

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who rejected the existence of and the value of objective truth, he was a major critic of religion, and especially Christianity, once said about Christians that he

would be inclined to believe in a redeemer, and the Christian redeemer, if the redeemed looked a little bit more redeemed.

He thought, he actually said, that if what Christians believe was true, what they say is true, deserving of hell, rescued by the Lord Jesus, completely free grace, eternity in his presence, he said, if that was true, that is the best news imaginable, your whole life is conformed to that news, he said, but based on the faces of the Christians that I see, it's clearly not true.

[18 : 19] And so, I want to encourage you to acknowledge the coldness of your heart. Don't, don't say it doesn't matter how you feel.

Don't get stuck in a rut and say, just don't have any joy there, but that's okay, I'll get to heaven eventually. Third aid to joy is to trust God. Romans 15, 13 speaks of God, filling us with joy and peace as we trust him.

Consider the amazing statement of Romans 8, 28, in all things, God works for good of those who love him. He is at work in all the circumstances of life to bring about good for those who love him. And that is a source of joy, even in difficulty. A fourth aid to joy is to take the long view in life. The Bible consistently affirms that the focal point of our joy should be our hope of the eternal inheritance that we have in Jesus.

The fifth aid to joy, according to 1 Thessalonians 5, is to give thanks in all circumstances. Not necessarily thankful for all circumstances, but certainly in the midst of every circumstance.

[19 : 29] Be thankful that God is working in this circumstance. Be thankful for his past deliverances. Thankful that God will not burden you beyond what you can bear, and his grace is sufficient for you to bear it.

Give thanks. Thanks. And so, I want to say, with the work of the Spirit in your life, the choice is yours. We can be joyless.

We can be joyful. We can go through life bored, glum, complaining, or we can rejoice in the Lord, in our names being written in heaven, in the hope of an eternal inheritance.

Joy, despite the circumstances of life, is both the duty and the privilege of the Christian. Joyfulness is to experience the power of the Holy Spirit within us in every circumstance.

And let me tell you, it declares to a watching world that needs joy. It declares that our God reigns, and that Jesus is magnificent.

[20 : 39] So friends, St. Paul's exists to know Jesus, to treasure Jesus, to represent Jesus for God's glory, and the joy of all people. Your joy, my joy, joy of Chatswood and beyond.

That's why we exist. I want to encourage you to participate in joy right now by giving. We are going to pledge our giving for the next year, plus also for our project, just to give you up to speed.

Parish Council set a 5% increase in our budget. This is not disconnected from joy, by the way. May you experience the joy of giving.

Parish Council has set a target of \$10,000 a week next year as general offertory, and also to raise \$28,000 today for three student ministers.

James, who's been a free gift to us, all year, the guy needs to be fed. And so, we're looking to feed James and Victor, who's in the Chinese congregation, who's Cantonese speaker, and also David, who will be coming, who's a Mandarin speaker.

[22 : 01] \$28,000 today. Let me tell you, as we do every year, Staff and Parish Council lead the process. And they pledge to me before today. Now, I want you to bear in mind, as Nick said before, \$10,000 is what we raised last year on this day.

And so, \$28,000 was like, you know, wow. And I just remember saying, well, look, whatever we get would be fantastic.

You know, not expecting what God might do amongst us, and that's my lack of faith there. Staff and Parish Council pledged just short of \$5,000.

It's just Staff and Parish Council, just short of \$5,000 before today. That's 50% of what we're looking for. And they gave \$18,300.

Nearly twice as much as what we received last year. \$18,300 for the project. So, Jimmy, more Maccas next year, buddy. After the morning service this morning, I had a look at the pledge cards, and our two morning services plus Staff and Parish Council have so far pledged \$9,300 a week of our \$10,000 target.

[23 : 33] And we are just \$430 short. \$430 short of \$45,000.

Now, you might be sitting there going, oh, fantastic. The heavy lifting's done. I want to say to you, I want to encourage you to join in the joy of what God has been doing with us as a church and where he's taken us to this point.

\$9,300, we have not pledged that much since 2011. Since 2011.

And I don't ever recall hitting \$28,000, let alone currently just short of \$45,000. The money is not going to be wasted, clearly.

I said to some people this morning, we are very close, potentially God willing, the beginning of 2017, to employ a full-time Chinese pastor on this rate.

[24 : 52] So, praise God. And I want to encourage you to participate with us in that process and still give generously tonight, knowing that God has been overwhelmingly generous to us in himself, but also this day already.

Praise God. Thank you.