

JOY!

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to the Word of God now from the passage we read in Psalm 4, Book of Psalms and Psalm 4, especially the words of verse 7.

You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. Of course, that is to be taken in the context and related closely also to the following verse, which speaks about the peace that David has as he finds his peace and security in the Lord.

We're just going to focus on the reference to joy in verse 7. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. Now, it's remarkable in many ways that David could speak about joy and experiencing joy in his heart in this context and in many other contexts, and especially as you find that in the Book of Psalms as he and others express their sense of joy even in difficult situations.

The world can't understand that. Only Christians can understand how it can be that this joy is experienced at times when he's even under attack by his enemies.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that Christians are never sad, and we must avoid giving any impression of a false joy or just simply putting on the appearance of joy.

[1 : 34] There is nothing wrong with sadness when we have reason to be sad. Or grief when we have reason to grieve. These things are themselves sometimes very much a necessary part of our spiritual development too.

But it doesn't mean that even in those circumstances we cannot know joy at that same time. And the saviour here is reminding us that the joy that he's expressing here, that God has put in his heart, is a joy that he experiences even there and then in the middle of his troubles.

Why is it that the world cannot understand this? That you can have joy in your heart even at times when in another sense or in circumstances you're also sad?

Well, because the world and we ourselves, before we came to know the Lord, we thought of this joy as something merely emotional, something that is no more than an emotion like feeling bad or something else that you might have in your feelings.

Now, that doesn't mean that emotion doesn't come into the matter of our spiritual joy. We mustn't think that it's really just the sort of thing that has no emotion in it at all.

[2 : 51] Otherwise, it wouldn't be joy. It's impossible to have joy without feeling joy, without knowing and experiencing that joy. But it's a lot more than a mere emotion.

Because the joy of the world is set upon things which are outward, things which will not last. And when they disappear, the joy disappears with it. But as we see, the joy of the Christian, the joy of the believer, is in the Lord himself and in the fact that God has done it.

So, it's not actually something that lacks the emotion of joy, or lacks emotion, but is far more than a mere emotion. Because joy actually, in the highest sense, as we learn from the likes of Paul's references in Galatians, they're the fruit of the Spirit.

Well, remember that joy is one of those elements of that fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. And it shows you that the joy that God places in your heart is a product of the Holy Spirit. It's something that belongs to your salvation, to your saved state, and to you as a Christian whose sin has been forgiven, who is right with God.

[4 : 08] That's the big difference between the joy of the world and the joy of the Christian. You have to ask the question, not just do you know joy, but what kind of joy do you have?

What kind of joy, what sort of thing is it that you speak of when you speak of joy in the Lord? Well, here is David, and his joy here is really the joy of the saved, but it's also joy that's experienced and here expressed by him in the midst of his troubles.

And that itself is, and we are reminded in prayer indeed, that this time of year through Christmas and New Year is a time of reflection that brings sadness to many of us as we remember experiences that have hurt us and loved ones taken from us and experiences that have caused us pain and maybe still do.

And yet in the midst of that, we can still say that we have the peace of Christ, an assurance from the Lord that brings us to know that solidness of joy that exists very much as a basis in our hearts for so many other things.

So the first thing we want to mention is that joy is a major element of the Christian life. Joy is a major element of the Christian life. And the first thing to say about that is that it is inseparable from grace, from the grace of God, from the saving grace of God.

[5 : 35] You know, it's what David is saying. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. He's talking about really, really joyous times at the taking in of a successful harvest when, of course, that was such a cause for celebration in Israel and joy rightly was entered into and expressed by the people.

But he's saying, you have put more joy in my heart than even that. And it's the fact that he speaks about God having done it that's so important for us. Where does this joy come from?

Where is its source? It is in God himself. You have put more joy in my heart. And when you think about Christian joy, that's one of the factors that makes it such a unique joy.

It's a joy that has its origin in God. It's a created joy. As we said, it's a product of the Holy Spirit. It comes with your salvation. Galatians chapter 2, chapter 5, verse 22.

We mentioned already the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, all the other elements that are mentioned there together. But all of these together are the product.

[6 : 43] They are the fruit of the Spirit. They come when the Spirit comes into your heart, when the Spirit comes to live in you, when God comes into your life in that way. These are the elements that come with him.

Joy being one of the prominent ones when you come to know that acceptance of Christ. Remember Matthew chapter 13 where Jesus in teaching, and we'll have another verse from there later on, but in Matthew 13 and verse 44, you recall there how Jesus, as he spoke, referred to joy.

and what he says is that, if I can find Matthew 13, verse 44, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up.

Then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. As soon as he's come across this treasure which he did not have before, he knows that this is all he now needs and he can go and actually sell what he has so that he can find pleasure in his discovery.

He went and with joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. The joy that he has in that discovery, in that, in coming across that amazing treasure is something that he can say is now his riches accompanied by this joy and this joy is part of his great discovery and his new position.

[8 : 21] And of course, that's why we see joy as a necessary part of the Christian life. It's not just an important factor and a major element in the Christian life. It's a necessary one.

And it reminds us that we should never give the impression that joy is somehow or other something we can choose or not choose to express or to have or to speak about or to commend.

It's not something that's just tacked on to the Christian life at all. It's there in the heart. It's there as a product of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to this life that we have in Jesus.

John Piper in one of his books says the following, The aim of God in creating and redeeming us is the delight he himself enjoys in seeing his creatures delight in him.

Let me just read that again. The aim of God, not saying that this is the only part of the aim, but he's saying the aim of God in creating and redeeming us is the delight he himself enjoys in seeing his creatures delight in him.

[9 : 25] God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him. God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him.

Now that is not something that's conditioned by your circumstances because you can be satisfied in him even when you are really struggling in many ways.

You can still be satisfied in God and with God and with Christ. And he is glorified in that, Piper is saying. So it's inseparable from grace. It's a product of the Holy Spirit.

It comes into your soul as part of that fruit of the Spirit. And you always have to see it as conjoined to the grace of God. Second thing about it as a major element is it grows in our experience, but it

can also decrease.

Paul actually prayed for this joy and it's reminding us that if Paul had to pray for it or something he had to pray for, then we too surely should be making it an emphasis in our prayers as well.

[10:32] For example, in Romans chapter 14 and in verse 17, Paul speaks there.

He says, For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And then in the next chapter, chapter 15, in verse 13 of chapter 15, there's a remarkable verse there, which is a verse you could take where so many things are interwoven together wonderfully.

He says, May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Isn't that remarkable? That's what he wants to get to. The final part of the verse says, I want you to abound in hope and I'm praying for you that you will abound in hope.

But in order to get there, he's saying, I'm praying that this God of hope will fill you with joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

[11:44] You see, the way all of these things are so wonderfully connected together, it's the God of hope who's going to give them to abound in hope by the Holy Spirit but the way towards that is his filling of them with joy and peace in believing, in faith, so that by the power of the Spirit you may come to that.

In other words, this joy is something that once it's planted in your heart and created in your heart has the capacity to grow as you wait upon God, as God brings it to flourish in your heart.

Other things, of course, will be related to that like that verse we've read in Romans and remember something that 1 Thessalonians Paul there said rejoice always.

Slightly different word rejoice but closely connected with the word joy itself and what Paul is saying is rejoice always. Rejoice always.

Pray in the Holy Spirit. Rejoice always. In other words, we are to see rejoicing as not something that you have at the beginning of a year or an end of a year or in certain circumstances in life and you can just switch it off at other times or think of it as not relevant at other times.

[13:01] No, Paul is saying rejoice always. As Nehemiah said, the joy of the Lord is your strength. We cannot afford not to be strengthened step by step on the way through life.

And conjoined with that is this joy. So it's not just something that we ought to have and do have through the Holy Spirit. It's something that we need to seek and increase of and pray for and increase of.

Something that we ought to actually see more and more is growing in our experience because there's the other side to it. As I said, it grows and it has that capacity and God's blessing makes it to grow but it also can decrease.

It's something that can wane. It's something that can diminish. Remember how David, and I suppose the classic example of it in many ways, is again in David in the Psalm, Psalm 51, where of course he's expressing his sorrow and repentance for the sin that he has committed against God and seeking God's washing of him.

but then he comes in verses 8 and 12 to speak about joy. Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

[14:19] Restore to me the joy of your salvation. That's something that we can lose in the sense of not having it at the level in our hearts that we ought to have it at or had previously that joy.

Remember, it's not a feeling. It's not just feeling sad. You can be feeling sad as I said at the beginning and still have this joy. What David is saying is my sin has caused that I've lost my joy. My joy in the Lord has trickled away. I need to have it restored. I need to get back to where I was. That's what he's saying. Lord, restore.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation. So tonight if your joy has diminished, you have to remember that the only way of getting it back is exactly as it was where you got it in the first place. It came from God and it's restored by God. You cannot reproduce it yourself. Yes, you have to apply certain things that the Bible tells you.

[15:26] You need to follow out in your life just like David himself expressed sorrow for his sin, repentance, and the distance that had come between himself and God, which happens in our experience, for whatever reasons.

Here is David bringing the matter to God in prayer and repentance and saying, Lord, restore to me, please, the joy of your salvation and then I will teach transgressors your ways.

He's not in a fit state to do that while he's there praying to the Lord. He's lost that joy that he had, but he's asking the Lord to restore it, not just for his own personal enjoyment of it.

He's asking the Lord to do that so that again he will go and teach others the ways of the Lord. So it's something that grows but can also decrease in our experience very often by our own neglect.

Thirdly, joy as a major element is connected to other elements. I'm just going to mention this in passing. Galatians 5 again, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.

[16:31] You can see peace here in verse 8, actually peace which fits in with what David is saying in terms of his sense of security and his safety in the Lord in peace.

I will both lie down and sleep for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. There's a man who's going to put his head down and he's going to have a sound sleep, although he knows his enemies are all around him and they're actually seeking after him and telling lies about him and all the rest of it that he mentions.

But he's saying, I have you, Lord, so I can safely put my head down and receive this sleep for you alone, make me dwell in safety.

that sense of peace and that joy as they're tied together really come from a growing appreciation of our security in Christ. And a growing appreciation, as Paul said elsewhere, that neither death nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, shall separate us, can possibly separate us, from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus, O Lord.

And the more that really fills our mind, the more equipped we are to actually face the issues of life and even of death and still realize I can rejoice in the Lord.

[17:49] And the Lord has given me more joy in my heart than anything they knew of or know of in the world. That's the verse that we mentioned again in 15, 15 of Romans, the God of hope.

And the way joy and peace together leads again to increasing and abounding in hope. So it's connected to other elements of God's salvation. But I want to actually just make a point here as well.

I came across this in one of the commentaries. And that is that joy is not something we should pursue for itself. It's not something we should pursue for itself.

Let me just read to you from Alexander McLaren who wrote a commentary in the whole Bible. He was a Baptist minister at the same time as Spurgeon in England and London.

Alexander McLaren was a minister in Manchester and he ministered there to a large congregation for over 45 years. So he wrote this commentary and in his commentary on this verse he says, to pursue joy is to lose it.

[19:04] The only way to get it is to follow steadily the path of duty without thinking of joy. And then like sleep it comes most surely unsought.

And we being in the way joy is sure to meet us. In other words you go about your Christian life he's saying and you don't wake up every morning and say now where can I get joy to do?

How can I increase my joy today? What he's saying is in your service of Christ when you take pleasure in serving him when you take pleasure in other things to do with being a Christian when you take pleasure in all that the Lord gives you as opportunities open for you to know him every day and to serve him every day joy he says them comes along with that it follows on in the train of these other things so we mustn't in a daily way sort of just say my biggest concern today is to know joy my biggest concern is to serve Christ to do the things that he requires of me and then to leave the joy to him to fill my heart from a sense of satisfaction in being his that's what he's saying don't pursue it for itself because it will come as you actually serve him and take delight in his ways and finally joy is a major element inseparable from grace growing but also capable of decreasing connected to other elements but of course finally perfected in heaven it's perfected in heaven and that's one of the things that our hope is set upon how often you find in the New

Testament especially also in the Psalms of course a reference to the way that there is abundant pleasures and joys at God's right hand and where the passage we looked at last Sabbath in Jude where you find the next verses the end of Jude the doxology as it's called where you find Jude actually saying in regard to God to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you in his presence with exceeding great joy to the only God our saviour be majesty dominion power and so on but what he's saying presenting us in his presence with great joy with exceeding great joy with joy that you cannot describe as really what it amounts to that's what you're anticipating isn't it that's

what you're anticipating in faith and in hope entering into the joy of your Lord as Jesus put it an unspoiled joy imagine what it's going to be like as far as you can to have a joy that's never interrupted to have a joy that's never interfered with by your own sin or by your own failure by your need to repent and come back to God to have it restored a constant state of being in the presence of God filled with joy and never losing it that's heaven that's the joy that awaits the redeemed people of God you have the beginnings of that in your heart already you have it there as a product of the spirit as a fruit of the spirit as part of that and it will not actually end until it flows into that great ocean of heaven and eternity an eternity of joy what a future you have what a prospect you have tonight thinking of joy in an unending uninterrupted unspoiled glorious bliss of heaven joy being with

[23 : 07] Christ joy finding yourself perfectly like Christ joy knowing your father as you've never known him before joy in realizing this is never going to end joy in realizing nothing is going to come in to spoil it for you that's your Christian joy relish it be thankful for it ask for its increase and as you do so remember it is God who puts that joy in your heart and if you lose it only he can restore it but he can and will when you come to him and secondly joy is not just a major element of the Christian life but we mentioned something of this at the beginning joy this Christian joy is very different to the world joy you see verse 7 as we said he's comparing it there with the joy when their grain and wine abound those people who don't know this joy they have joys they have pleasures they have things which give them gladness but he said you have put more joy in my heart than everything that they have that gives them pleasure even the highest joys in a worldly sense than the least joy you have as a

Christian and that fits into the world in which we live doesn't it not just the way that you're surrounded by the opposite of this Christian joy the spiritual joy but the way that you know that there's such a lot of opposition to the life you live and that Satan is set on spoiling your joy as well as those who surround you in unbelief and an antagonism to the gospel that they themselves cause you at times that your joy is interrupted even if you still know it as the joy of the Lord in your heart so often we think of the hedonism of this present world that's really a word from the New Testament it's a word that means sensual pleasures and that's in many ways what the world has always lived for but no more so than in our generation because as you know around you and as you look out and as you listen to what's being said by the world and as you see the products of the world whether it's in what's written or what's spoken or what you view a lot of it has to do with this hedonistic lifestyle just living for sensual pleasures the gods of illicit love of sex of all of those things that God is saying are worldly and ungodly that's the pleasure of the world the pleasure of sin and the Christian joy is so very different to that because all of that worldly joy is very much set on your outward circumstances on the things you have on the pleasures of the flesh on the things that you can identify and see whereas the joy of the Christian is very much a joy that's to do with what is inward rather than what you see outwardly and what is spiritual rather than physical that's where the great difference is and as we said the world's pleasure the world's joy lasts only as long as the root of it lasts and when that shrivels up and dies the joy dies with it but your Christian joy is absolutely different because the root of it will never shrivel up you're rooted in the Holy Spirit himself in the salvation that's in

Christ it's an inward joy in your heart that you know is anchored there in the rock that is Jesus and that's not going to move it's not going to change but that doesn't mean it's a joy although it's inward joy and it is something that is based upon God himself the unseen Christ is in heaven that doesn't mean that you keep it in that is something that's kept to yourself because one of the great things about this joy is that it is communicative that's something in a way that you cannot keep to yourself because others notice it and others can even speak about it when God changed the captivity of Zion or the fortunes of Zion Psalm 126 we were like those that dream our mouth was filled with laughter our tongue with singing then the heathen said the pagan said the Lord has done great things for them see they heard it they took note of this great joy in God's people having their captivity restored having a time of revival a time of joyous celebration of God again revealing himself to them delivering them from their enemies they heard it and they took note of it and they said the Lord has done their God has done great things for them we can't avoid seeing this your joy your joy it it has an out flowing to it it something you could say is almost contagious as you experience it and as it comes into your heart the more you have it the more it flows out it as an illustration of a fountain set in a marketplace and that fountain begins to overflow

in the marketplace and its waters then make their way through where people are standing and they're walking through it and they can't avoid knowing that that water has come from this gushing fountain that's how it is with your heart when it's filled with joy when you're actually rejoicing in [29 : 00] Christ people notice it people actually take note and say the Lord has done great things Nehemiah when they had finished the wall and when they were dedicating the wall that they had finished Nehemiah chapter 12 and the various ways in which that's described and all the different activities that Nehemiah set up as a worshipping celebration it wasn't just a celebration it was a worshipful celebration they worshipped the Lord and in the worship of the Lord they had this very obvious and wonderful joy and this is what Nehemiah wrote in chapter 12 verse 43 and they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced but God had made them rejoice with great joy the women and children also rejoiced and I really like this last sentence and the joy of

Jerusalem was heard far away the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away it was something that people took note of miles away something significant was happening in Jerusalem something that was worthy of note something that communicated itself the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away friends in this new year what could be more wonderful than that this would be true of us as a people that our joy was heard far away that people recognized that we really did live out and know the joy of the Lord that our Christian walk and our Christian witness would be marked as much as anything else by this joy a joy that God himself places in our hearts you have given me more joy than even they when corn and wine abound with them may the joy that we experience be heard far away in this coming year let's pray

Lord help us we pray to constantly bear in mind that the joy you give to your people is a spiritual joy that you have created in their hearts we thank you for that joy this evening we thank you for its quality and we thank you for every way that it reveals yourself to us Lord we know that we didn't have it before we met with you before you took us to know yourself and that whatever joys we experienced in the course of this world and in the ways of the world and did not include this spiritual joy of your salvation we thank you that we now possess it and that in our hearts we know that movement of your spirit that brings us to use all our faculties in experiencing and we seek to in transmitting this great joy Lord we pray to help us to rejoice help us to express our joy help us to commend the joy of your salvation to those around us to a world that's so full of sadness Lord our God we pray for them and ask as you did for us that you would create joy in their hearts too by turning them to yourself and that even those of them who this evening are planning further strategies against your gospel and against your day and against your people against your church that they will come to be turned out of that way and into the ways of joy hear us we pray now for Jesus sake amen let's sing in conclusion from psalm 32 psalm 32 that's on page 38 and verses 7 to 11 a psalm that ends on a note of great joy verse 7 you are my hiding place oh lord my true security you keep me safe in troubled days you circle me with joyful praise when you have set me free 7 to the end of the psalm psalm 32 you are my hiding place oh lord my true security you keep me safe in troubled days you circle me with joyful praise when you have set me free

I will instruct you by my word and guide you in my way my counsel I will give to you but I will give your path and watch you day by day do not be like the horse or mule which cannot understand stand they must be hard and kept in check as blitz and bridal turn their neck to cope with you command hand the wicked wolves will much increase but those who trust the [36 : 03] Lord his covenant mercy will surround you righteous let your joy abound and praise the Lord your God you