

INTRODUCTION

We live in a spiritually depraved and fallen world. In the midst of such a fallen world God wants the believer to view the world realistically, yet biblically through a Christian worldview. The Scriptures never paint the believer's life as a trouble-free life. In fact, in most cases, the opposite is true. Jesus said:

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (Jhn. 16:33b).

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” (Matt. 10:16; cf. Lke. 10:3)

[In His High Priestly prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed to the Father]: “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” (Jhn. 17:14)

Paul wrote to Timothy:

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (2 Tim. 3:12)

And as we have been reminded recently in our Sunday night series, we are engaged in a spiritual battle of cosmic proportion against the combined spiritual forces of Satan and this present evil world-system. This system is totally anti-God, anti-Christ, and therefore anti-Christian. In fact, John reminds us that the “whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 Jhn. 5:19).

The purpose of even mentioning this is to remind us once again that the joy the Bible speaks of and describes is not the absence of adversity. The joy that Paul writes about in his letter to the Philippians is more than pie-in-the-sky. It isn't discovered through the power of positive thinking. You don't learn it from some self-help book. It isn't some kind of spiritual euphoria. And it certainly isn't training yourself to get some sort of twisted or perverted pleasure out of pain or suffering.

As I mentioned last week, the joy the Bible speaks of and describes means that if we can trust God with our eternal souls and eternal destiny, then we can trust Him with anything else. As believers, we can have the settled peace that no matter what happens in life, we can fully trust God Who is in control of our lives and even in control of the events of our lives—and all for our good and ultimately for His glory!

Let's take a deeper and closer look as to how the Scriptures describe such joy.

SPIRITUAL JOY IS A LEGACY OF CHRIST

Just as He left us His peace in John 14, He also left us His joy in John 15.

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (Jhn. 15:11)

Jesus desires that His joy becomes our joy consistently and abundantly! That was the apostle John's desire when he said, "And these things I write to you that your joy may be full [filled full]" (1 Jhn. 1:4)

JOY IS CHARACTERISTIC OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17)

JOY IS A FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22)

JOY IS THE RESULT AS WE RECEIVE AND OBEY GOD'S WORD

These things we write to you that your joy may be full. (1 Jhn. 1:4)
I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth (3 Jhn. 4)

JOY IS DEEPENED THROUGH TRIALS

In 2 Corinthians 8:2, when Paul spoke of the churches of Macedonia (Philippi being one of them), he said that in a great trial of affliction they also experienced an abundance of joy.

James said, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (Jas. 1:3). But of course, this isn't automatic. Our response to trials determines the results: "But [you] let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing" (Jas. 1:4). When we understand that God uses trials to produce *patience or perseverance*, and to *perfect* or mature us, we begin to see trials from a divine and eternal perspective.

JOY IS ONE OF THE GRAND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD HIMSELF

They were depressing circumstances and difficult times when Nehemiah and the people returned to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. When the walls were completed and worship resumed, Nehemiah said to the people, "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). What a testimony, even to the nations!

Someone once said:

"There is deep delight in all [God] does.
There is enthusiasm in everything He undertakes.
There is sweet satisfaction in all He enterprises."

JOY IS A DIVINE DIMENSION OF LIVING NOT SHACKLED BY CIRCUMSTANCES

JOY IS AN INWARD PEACE AND SUFFICIENCY THAT IS NOT AFFECTED BY OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES

JOY IS A “HOLY OPTIMISM” THAT KEEPS US GOING IN SPITE OF DIFFICULTIES

JOY WAS THE DYNAMIC OF THE EARLY CHURCH (Acts 8:8; 15:3)

According to Acts chapter 8, through the preaching of Philip the deacon, multitudes in Samaria came to personally know and follow Christ. And Luke writes: “And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:8). After Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary trip and described the conversion of the Gentiles to those believers in Phoenicia and Samaria, Luke writes: “and they caused great joy to all the brethren” (Acts 15:3).

JOY IS MADE COMPLETE WHEN WE SET OUR HOPE ON HEAVEN

In reference to Christ and His return, Peter wrote:

Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. (1 Pet. 1:8).

CONCLUSION

Because we sometimes throw words around without even thinking about them or without even knowing their meaning, I don’t want any of us to miss the true meaning and the depth of Christian joy. We must see it beyond the abstract so that as believers we may experience it in reality. It’s more than an emotion. It goes beyond happiness. As we have already been reminded, it’s not the absence of adversity.

The point is this: I would never wish to give you a false impression of the Christian life. So allow me to share with you the words of Martyn Lloyd-Jones from his book, *Life In Christ: Studies in 1 John*:

Joy is something very deep and profound, something that affects the whole and entire personality. In other words it comes to this; there is only one thing that can give true joy and that is contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He satisfies my mind; He satisfies my emotions; He satisfies my every desire. He and His great salvation include the whole personality and nothing less, and in Him I am complete. Joy, in other words, is the response and the reaction of the soul to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in Christ: Studies in 1 John*, Crossway Books, 2002, 30).

As I mentioned last week: God wants to give us His joy, but His joy is attached to something—or actually to Someone. First-and-foremost God desires to give us Himself. When God provided salvation for man, God *Himself* came to earth in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. God’s Son gave *Himself* on the cross for our sins. You cannot receive the benefits of the cross, until you receive the One who died on the cross. When you do, not only will you receive the blessing and joy of sins forgiven, you will receive all the other blessings attached to a personal God and Savior. JOY SPRINGS FROM THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN A PERSON’S LIFE.

And when it comes to the believer's overall walk with the Lord, when doubt or despair set in, the results can be gloom and pessimism, apathy and fatigue. What was once a joy becomes a chore. Rather than see the opportunities, all one sees are the obstacles. It has a way of neutralizing and paralyzing all that we do at home, at work, in the church, or even when on vacation.

In his book *Spirit Controlled Temperament*, Tim La Haye writes:

This fruit of the Spirit [joy] is woefully lacking in many Christians today, which keeps them from being fruitful in the matter of winning people to Christ, because the world must see some evidence of what Jesus Christ can do in the life of the believer today in order to be attracted to Him.

So what must we do as believers if we have lost the joy of the Lord? We must do just exactly what King David did according to Psalm 51. Due to David's terrible sin with Bathsheba, he cried out to God for forgiveness and then said, "Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation" (Ps. 51:12a). JOY SPRINGS FROM THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN.