

Joy in Jesus

M.W. Bassford
10-28-07

Introduction.

- A. As we continue to study our way through the fruit of the Spirit, the next item on the list is joy. As with many of these spiritual ideas, joy is an idea that is greatly misunderstood by the world around us, perhaps more misunderstood than any of the other fruit besides love. To people in the world, joy is synonymous with pleasure. They say, "If it feels good, it will make you happy, so if it feels good, do it." Obviously, Satan loves this idea of joy. It enables him to lure people into all sorts of sin in the belief that they will find joy there.
- B. The sad thing is, friends, that this idea of joy is almost entirely mistaken. Certainly, physical pleasure brings short-term happiness, but in the end, it always lets us down. The second hit of sin is never as good as the first, and as we become desensitized to its pleasures, we go to greater and greater lengths to try to achieve the same happiness it gave us at first. Ultimately, the flesh leads not to joy, but to sullen apathy.
- C. True joy can only be found in the subtler pleasures of the spirit. When we follow God's path of wisdom and righteousness, the joys that it produces don't diminish over time. Instead, Christianity leads us on to ever greater heights of happiness. It is impossible to find true joy without finding God first. The best example of this is Jesus. We might assume that Jesus lived a pretty grim life. After all, when it came to physical pleasure, Jesus was a poor, homeless wanderer who neither sinned nor tasted many of the legitimate earthly joys: no wife, no kids, no material prosperity, nothing. Worse still, He knew that this rootless life would end in His crucifixion and death. If just about any of us found ourselves in that position, we'd be pretty bummed.
- D. Yet that wasn't true for Jesus. Despite this apparently miserable existence, the Scripture records many occasions on which Jesus rejoiced. None of these are unique to the Son of God; indeed, every one of us can learn to take joy in these things too, and that's precisely what we should do. Once we learn to share in the joys of the spirit, nothing and no one can take those joys away from us. Let's learn from the example of our Master this morning. Let's see how we can imitate the joy that was found in Jesus.

I. Joy in Thanksgiving.

- A. Just like any of us will do, Jesus often expressed His joy in thanksgiving to God, and these moments of praise give us insight into what we also should be thankful for and joyful about. The first thing that they tell us is that Jesus found joy in **GOD'S BLESSINGS**. This is evident from the way He prayed in Matthew 15:36.
- B. This is a simple verse, but it hints at an entire way of thinking that Jesus possessed that we should seek to capture. Almost all of us are very, very good at taking things for granted. We think and act like we are entitled to all the material blessings we possess, and then, when any of those earthly blessings are taken away, we pitch a fit and blame God for being mean to us. That's backwards, friends. In reality, we are entitled to nothing. Every good thing that we have is a gift from God, given to us not because we have earned it, but because He loves us. Of all of these material gifts, the only promise that God makes us about them is that none of them will last. Sooner or later, every earthly blessing we have from Him will be withdrawn. That's the way that earthly life is. Why, then, do we get outraged when this inevitable thing happens to us?
- C. The point is, friends, that we need to train our hearts to be thankful, and a good way to develop this attitude is by imitating Jesus and thanking God for it. We don't have food because we grew it or bought it. We have food because God gave it to us. We don't have families and friends because we earned them. We have them because God blessed us with them. That means that every time we eat a meal, we need to thank God for it. Every time we spend a pleasant hour with our loved ones, we need to thank God for it. That's the way that Jesus thought, and only through this attitude of thanksgiving can we find true joy in earthly things.
- D. Likewise, Jesus was thankful and joyful for **ANSWERED PRAYER**. Look at His words before the tomb of Lazarus in John 11:41. This is another spiritual challenge that all of us have to deal with, and it comes from the same feeling of entitlement. When we want something from God, we're beating down the gates of heaven day and night, but when God answers our prayers, too often we toss off a perfunctory "Thank You" and just ignore our Father until the next time we want something. Friends, that's terribly ungrateful. As great as our needs are before God answers our prayer, that's how great our rejoicing should be after He answers it. It is a wonderful and amazing thing that the Creator of heaven and earth will listen to our insignificant concerns, and we need to train our hearts to feel just how wonderful it is. Let's be like Jesus and rejoice in answered prayer.

II. Joy in the Things of the Spirit.

- A. Just as Jesus found joy in thanking God for His goodness, He also found rejoicing in the things of the Spirit. We see evidence of this in the Scriptural record of Jesus' rejoicing in **GOD'S PLAN**. This incident appears in Luke 10:21. At first, this doesn't make sense. After all, why should Jesus care to whom God reveals His plan? Actually, Jesus is rejoicing because God set things up so that as many people as possible can come as close as

possible to God, and we should rejoice in that too. God didn't reveal His will to a select group of priests or philosophers, so that those people would be the gatekeepers between God and us. Instead, the gospel came to fishermen and taxmen and other nobodies in the world's eyes, and they had instructions to tell it to as many other nobodies as possible. That way, people could come directly to Jesus Himself, without interference from anybody else. That is amazing, and it's still something we should rejoice in today.

- B. Similarly, Jesus rejoiced in **OBEDIENCE**. This shows up in John 15:10-11. This isn't quite as clear as the first three, but it's still pretty plain. Jesus here is telling His apostles that if they keep God's commandments, His joy will remain in them. The implication, then, is that Jesus' obedience to God is what produced joy in Him. Friends, that's exactly the way that it should be. Living righteously shouldn't be this dull, dreary, miserable existence for us. Instead, it should be a joyful one, because it is a joyful thing to do what's right. People aren't designed to do evil and sin. Instead, we are designed for doing God's will, and when we obey Him, not only does that obedience have a number of joyful consequences, we also have joy because we please Him.
- C. In a particularly important subset of obedience, we see that Jesus also had joy in **SAVING THE LOST**. He makes this quite obvious in the parable He tells in Luke 15:4-6. Just as He often is in Scripture, Jesus is plainly the shepherd here, and He describes Himself as rejoicing once He returns home with the one sheep that was lost. Brethren, Jesus still rejoices today every time a soul is saved, and we should learn to do the same. The decision to obey the gospel is the single most important choice that a human being can make, and when they make that choice, their entire world changes. They are taken from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. If we should rejoice in anything, brethren, we should rejoice in that! Sadly, though, all too many brethren aren't joyful about saving others. They are apathetic instead, and their apathy shows up in their unwillingness to reach out to the lost. They aren't interested in the process because they don't care about the outcome. That should never be true of any Christian. Let's be better than that. Let's rejoice in the salvation of others, and let's show how important it is to us by working to teach the truth.
- D. Last, in the realm of the spiritual things we experience on earth, Jesus rejoiced in **OTHERS' FAITH**. He rejoiced when others believed; He rejoiced when the faith of others was strengthened, no matter what it took. Consider, for instance, the words of Jesus at the death of Lazarus in John 11:14-15. Remember, folks: Lazarus was Jesus' friend. His sisters were Jesus' friends. Jesus was so moved by this event that He wept at Lazarus' tomb, which is the only time in Scripture that Jesus is described as weeping. And yet, Jesus says that He is glad that Lazarus died, because what would happen next would strengthen the faith of the apostles.
- E. We need to apply this perspective both to our lives and to the lives of others. God is far wiser than we are, and He understands that sometimes what is best for us is not what is pleasant for us. There are times when suffering and trial combine to teach us important spiritual lessons we wouldn't have learned in any other way. This will happen to all of us; it will happen to all of those around us. When it does happen, we need to adopt the attitude of Jesus. We need to grieve for the circumstances, but rejoice in the faith they produce.

III. Joy in the Spiritual Future.

- A. Jesus, though, took joy not just in the things of the spiritual present, but in the spiritual future as well. We see this in the joy with which He contemplated His **RESURRECTION**. This becomes apparent from Acts 2:25-27. In this text, David prophetically describes the attitude that Jesus would have as He approached His crucifixion. He rejoiced in the hope of His faith, because He knew that even when He died, the Father would not allow Him to remain dead. It's pretty obvious why this recognition would evoke joy, and yet, how many of us react with joy to the thought of our own deaths? Dying is a scary thought to nearly everyone, and in fact, Hebrews 2 describes men as enslaved to the fear of death. Thankfully, friends, that is a slavery from which Jesus has freed us. I don't know whether I will ever die or not. I don't know whether any of us will ever die or not. But I do know this: If any of us who are faithful to the Lord pass from this life, He will not forget us. Just as sure as the sun rises in the east, the Lord will return to claim those who fall asleep in Him. I don't imagine that death is a fun, pleasant experience, but it is not the end for the Christian, and in that, we should rejoice.
- B. Even more than that, though, we should be like Jesus in our rejoicing for what lies beyond the resurrection: the joy of **HEAVEN**. Once again, this is something we learn about through another inspired writer, not from Jesus Himself. This appears in Hebrews 12:2. This tells us why it is that Jesus was able to go through the ridicule and pain of His arrest, trial, and crucifixion—because He had His eyes fixed beyond those bitter hours, on a time when He would be reunited with His Father in heaven. To Jesus, it was worth being crucified to please God and to see Him again. This ought to be our perspective too. Indeed, the joy of heaven ought to be the primary joy of our lives. What we're in now, friends, isn't really life. This is just a dream before we wake to the life that is really ours as Christians, a life that is so beautiful and wonderful that we can't even imagine it. That's the life that we'll have in heaven. Remember what it was like to be a little kid on Christmas Eve? How you couldn't sleep for anticipation of what was going to come? All the years we spend on earth are just Christmas Eve, except that what comes next won't be a letdown. Our home isn't here. It's with God. Let's be like Jesus, then, and spend our days in joyful anticipation of the joy of heaven.

Conclusion. None of these joys can be yours unless you become a child of God.