

The Joy of the Lord

This may sound arrogant, but when I speak about joy I truly think I know what I'm talking about. I have received the joy that comes from knowing the Lord. I truly wish every Christian could experience this blessing.

This does not mean that I live a life with no troubles or issues that crop up and make my daily circumstances hard or down right miserable. This is real life, stuff happens and not all of it is pleasant.

For the Christian, joy comes from knowing that God is Sovereign, that He is with us, that He will provide for us and that He will protect us. Ultimately, joy comes from knowing that my time here is short compared to an eternity in heaven – which we can be absolutely sure of according to scripture. (but that's not what we're talking about. If you are not sure about that talk to me later).

My mother died in September of 2001. This was the first time I knew I had the joy of the Lord. Before she died, God had prepared me to know that I would be asked to speak at her funeral. At first, between God and me, I objected. It would be too hard. After she died, my brother, who had spoken at my Dad's funeral, said he was not interested in doing it again, and I just knew that was my opening and I was to do it.

First of all, it was easy. My Mom gave me such great material to work with. She was very prim and proper and I'm not. I was able to talk about some funny incidents – like the time this very prim and proper lady drove all the way home from West Virginia to Delaware with a marijuana plant in the car because she wanted to dry it and smell it

burning so she'd know if her kids were using it!! It never occurred to her that it was illegal for her, too!

Anyway, I was able to tell a couple of stories and to include the gospel. I was very sad that my Mother had died, but I was joyful that God had been so faithful to her in the years she was alone after my Dad died.

In our culture, we tend to confuse happiness and joy. John MacArthur, a radio Bible teacher and seminary president, says that, "Spiritual joy is not related to circumstances. It is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel of Christ is being produced in them by the Holy Spirit, because they receive and obey the Word of God, mixed with trials, and keep their focus on eternal glory." (repeat) Even when Christians are in the midst of trials and troubles, if we focus on God and His Word, we will receive joy through His Holy Spirit

I am well aware that I am privileged to spend so much time in God's Word. Because I teach it, I have to study it all the time. It is the source of all I do. However, it doesn't take 20 hours a week of Bible study to have the joy of the Lord. It takes a commitment to living according to God's Word. If we want to personally know the joy of the Lord, we need to do whatever it takes to know enough of His Word to live for Him and to keep our eyes focused on Him.

So, how do we start? If we want to have the joy of the Lord what must we do? According to John MacArthur, whom I quoted earlier, joy is the work of the Holy Spirit. How do we get the Holy Spirit? Only through faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ done on the Cross. This faith brings salvation.

In the Bible we find a couple of different thoughts about our joy in God's salvation. Habakkuk 3:18 says, "yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." In Psalm 51:12 the Psalmist says "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." This verse conveys the grief when the joy is lost and David is asking God to restore it. The important truth in these two verses is that God is the source of our salvation and therefore the source of our joy.

Faith is a gift from God. We cannot be saved by responding to the call of God on our lives if He does not first place in us this gift of faith. He is the God of our salvation because it comes from Him.

David says. "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation." Psalm 62:1

In Romans 1:16 Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is *the power of God for salvation* to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

Psalm 149:4 "For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; He adorns the humble with salvation. And Psalm 146:3 "Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation."

John MacArthur says that, "joy is produced by the Holy Spirit in people who have believed the Gospel (that is our salvation) as we receive and obey the Word of God."

In Isaiah 11, Isaiah has been condemning Israel because of her pride. But in chapter 12 he tells them that both Israel and Judah will be singing God's praises because He was going to restore them – save them from Assyria. Isaiah says in 12:3, "With joy

you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” What are the wells of salvation? I want to compare them to receiving salvation and obeying the Word of God!

Let’s compare that verse to John 4:14 where Jesus told the woman at the well that “whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” We see that Jesus carried this theme of the water wells beyond the political deliverance of Israel to the Spiritual salvation of those who would drink the water He was offering. According to Jesus, one of the wells is certainly eternal life, which is what faith in God leads to, eternal life with Him in heaven! We have to have the assurance of eternal life in order to drink from any of the other wells of Christianity. To receive the Holy Spirit who produces joy, this first step of salvation, faith and the assurance of eternal life is required.

Isaiah was giving Israel a more immediate promise. Without trying to over spiritualize the verse, let’s look at some of the “wells” of Christianity that the Bible points us to in relation to joy.

When God gives us the joy of salvation, we are very excited to learn and KNOW for certain that we’re going to heaven. At the same time though, there is the conviction of sin. If we never see our sin, we will never see our need for a Savior or be set free from the bondage it creates in our lives. If we are going to know joy, we have to know repentance. Luke 15:7 tells us there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people with no need to repent! Acts 11:18 says **God has granted repentance that leads to life."**

Though we may still have to deal with the consequences of the sin we commit in this life, if we repent and turn from that sin to the Lord, then we are clean before Him

when we stand for judgment. This is powerful news that should bring us great joy! This is the hope that is set before us. In Hebrews 12:2 the Bible says, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus demonstrated great joy in the hope that was set before Him. This may have been the joy of providing the avenue for so many people’s salvation or His ultimate return to heaven and fellowship with God the Father after His crucifixion - even though he was first going to be put to a terrible, painful death for.

That is the hope of future joy. But there is also a here and now sense of joy after we repent. I think this is especially true of something that has been a long-standing stronghold of sin in our lives. There is a joy in the relief that it’s over. Though it may require some relationship repair, it is finally exposed. We no longer have to hide it.

You and I sin everyday, it’s who we are. There is no joy in sin, though there may be some temporary thrill or meeting an unhealthy need from it. There is true joy only in having it behind us.

Please spend a moment to take an inventory of the sin in your life today. Just between God, and us what do we need to repent of before the Lord? Sit quietly and ask the Holy Spirit to bring it to your attention. Guilt? Fear? Bitterness? Resentment? Self-centeredness? Greed? Gossip? Covetousness? Filthy language? Is there *someone* that we need to go to to reconcile with them?

It is good to recognize when we need to repent. We can admit our sin to God. Repent and then we can all rejoice with the angels!

The next “well” that I think we can make a Biblical case for drinking from is the well of thanksgiving. In Philippians 1, Paul prayed with joy as He thanked God for the Philippian believers. That whole book speaks of the joy he had in them as he was thanking God for them. He expresses it again in 1 Thessalonians 3:9, “For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God.” It sounds like he’s saying our joy is so great there isn’t enough thanks to give God for you!

I wanted to try to determine if thankful people became joyful or if joyful people were naturally thankful. They seem to go side by side and not one comes before the other. If you have joy, thankfulness will flow from that joy. It seems that men like Paul, people who have learned to be content in all circumstances, and thankful for whatever God has given them, are also joyful people.

This should be true for all those who have received salvation. Once you rejoice in salvation and begin to live by the Word of God, then joy will follow for those who want to please God. Psalm 107:22 says, “And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy.” and Psalm 97:12 says, “Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!”

If we look closely at what Paul says in Philippians 1, it is the people who are a source of joy for him. He is so happy to know that they are partnering with him in the Gospel. He is grateful for the help of people committed to the same Gospel that he’s committed to. They are providing for him as he travels. As Paul writes that letter, he’s in chains in prison. He can still express his joy for them and how they have joined and persevered with him.

Paul's joy was not determined by his circumstances, but by the gratitude He had for the people God had given to support, partner with, and encourage him. It is a source of joy for me when I see spiritual growth in those I am teaching. When the questions get more difficult for me to answer and the thinking behind the questions coming from a deeper level, it brings joy for me to see God at work.

Turn with me to 1 Chronicles 29:6. I want you to see the joy we can have in giving to God. For many of us this is a pretty shallow well!

In this passage God had let David know that his son, Solomon would be building the temple of God. David makes a list of what he has personally donated toward the work of building it. In verse 5 he asks, "Who then will offer willingly, consecrating himself today to the Lord?"

1Chronicles 29:6-22

(6) Then the leaders of fathers' houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. (7) They gave for the service of the house of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze and 100,000 talents of iron. (8) And whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, in the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. (9) Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly. (10) Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. (11) Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power

and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.

(12) Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

(13) And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. (14) "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you and of your own have we given you. (15) For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. (16) O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.

(17) I know, my God, that you test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.

(18) O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you.

(19) Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments, your testimonies, and your statutes, performing all, and that he may build the palace for which I have made provision."

(20) Then David said to all the assembly, "Bless the LORD your God." And all the assembly blessed the LORD, the God of their fathers, and bowed their heads and paid homage to the LORD and to the king.

(21) And they offered sacrifices to the LORD, and on the next day offered burnt offerings to the LORD, 1,000 bulls, 1,000 rams, and 1,000 lambs, with their drink offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel.

(22) And they ate and drank before the LORD on that day with great gladness.

This giving was done joyfully and willingly. They had consecrated themselves to the Lord. The money and goods were given for the work of the Lord, and David's testimony is that he knew it was all from God in the first place. They were just returning to God what was already His. And they were rejoicing to give it all!

It's hard for us to give up something that we think is ours- we worked for it, we earned it, somehow we think we deserve it. But, if we acknowledge that all we have has come from God in the first place, it's a lot easier to part with it. These people were joyful to give back to the Lord! God had given them all that they had straight from the hands of the Egyptians when He led them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. If you go back and read the accounts of the Exodus in Exodus 12:36 you'll see that "the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have whatever they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians." Now, the Israelites were returning the plunder to build the temple of God.

In Malachi 3, God challenges us to test Him by tithing (giving 1/10). He says that if we tithe, he will open the windows of heaven and pour down for us a blessing until there is no more need. He says that if we do we will be a land of delight!

From these two passages (1 Chronicles 29 and Malachi 3) we know that giving is a blessing for the giver. Paul tells us, too, in Philippians 4 that he's rejoicing in the Lord

because of the way that church had given for his needs. So giving is a joy if you're the giver or the receiver! Are you and I stingy or are givers?

Another one of the wells of joy is the help of God. Psalm 63:7 says, "For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy." Then, Psalm 92:4 says, "For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy."

This one shouldn't take a whole lot of explanation. Think of a time when you really believed that God came to your rescue, that He helped you in a bad situation or someone you thought needed to be punished got punished but you had nothing to do with it! Maybe for you He reconciled a relationship or healed someone of an illness.

I know of a pastor who had a particularly difficult teenaged girl in his flock. The parents had been in the church for a long time and really believed that their daughter was not capable of being hard for others to get along with. Every event was an opportunity for dramatics for this girl, either tears or injury at almost everything she was involved in. She was an immature attention getter. The parents were relentless on the pastor because he corrected her behavior (though he was clearly in the right). This went on for about two and half years and out of no where the father lost his job and had to leave the area for his dream job. He certainly did not see this as discipline because of where God led him. BUT, I saw it as God's mercy on that Pastor. God had clearly brought about the help – the change - that would relieve a burden from the whole flock!

The truth is that if we think God hasn't done one of these things in our lives, we're not paying attention. He's at work in every good thing. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change

like shifting shadows. James 1:17 Everything good that happens is from God! We're not to claim ownership of it. What could be greater than thinking like Paul when He teaches us, "if God is for us who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) When God works for us then He will win every time, there is no greater power than His!

In fact, Paul often talked about how much God's work in the faith of *others* brought *him* joy. Does God use what happens in the lives of others to bring us some joy? Again, in His letter to the Philippians, sometimes referred to as the book of joy, Paul opens the letter telling them about his joy because of their partnership with him. Then in 1:25 he tells them that he knows he will remain (after telling them he'd rather die and be with Christ but for their sakes he knows he will live) "and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith." It was a joy for Paul to watch them grow, but their own progress in the faith would be joy for them.

In Acts 13:52 after preaching to Gentiles and seeing them rejoice and glorify God, and the Word of God spread as more and more people were hearing and responding to the Good News about Jesus Christ, Luke, who wrote the book, tells us, (52) "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

I think that this should be an encouragement for us. We are often very afraid to speak to others about Christ, we're afraid of rejection so we just never try. Well, these men had been successful at first. God had sent them to some Gentiles with prepared hearts who went away new believers, praising God and glorifying Him. But, there were others who rejected them and they left them joyful over what God had done in the others.

They had actually just shaken the dust from their sandals and left town because the Jews were not happy with the response they were getting to their teaching - but they are joyful because people were coming to know the Lord Jesus!

2 Corinthians 1:24 “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.”

1 Thessalonians 3:7-9 “for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God.”

Let me point out to you that Paul was not working for the joy of the perfectly righteous Christian. In the next verse he says, “1 Thessalonians 3:10 “as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?” Things were lacking in their faith but he was working for their joy as well as his own.

How many of you are parents? Who still has kids at home? Who has young married kids? Is there one of us who does not absolutely rejoice in our heart when we see or hear some godly thing come out of their mouths?

3 John 1:4 “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” John was talking about spiritual children but we know it’s true for any child we have any relationship with!

Seeing spiritual growth in others (and ourselves) goes hand in hand with the joy that comes from obedience. We always like to say that obedience brings blessing. Well, the Bible confirms it.

Proverbs 10:28, “The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish.”

Psalm 97:11, “Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.”

Ecclesiastes 2:26, “For to the one who pleases Him, God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.” Take a minute to think of those who we are close enough to spiritually, to rejoice in their growth.

As we grow in our understanding of God and our faith in Him as trustworthy to lead us only into good, we will obey His word more and more. Obedience is another ‘well’ that we’re to draw from in order to know joy in the Lord. When God so consistently shows us His faithfulness in answering prayer and keeping His promises to us – we want to do what He wants us to do. We know that it pleases God and we certainly love to please Him, but it also brings *us* joy because God will bless us with joy because of our obedience.

As we serve God and obey His commands we grow in righteousness. The one who is living righteously will recognize and dislike their own sin. The righteous person *wants* to do what is right! . As we serve God and obey His commands it will culminate in joy in the Lord and Thanksgiving to Him. Psalm 97:12 Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!

Our joy is in Him, in His love for us, so that He left us His word. Without His instruction it would be hard to obey!

Deuteronomy 30:16 puts it all together, “If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.” That’s the blessing.

Now, this does not mean that obedience to the Lord will be easy or always have a great earthly outcome. Hebrews 12:2, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus endured the cross, which was a definite act of obedience, for the joy set before him. It was not a happy event but by being obedient He brought joy to all those who would believe in Him.

It’s the joy that’s set before *us* that I want to look at as our last “well”. That is the joy that comes from the hope we have in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

“In that day” speaks of the day when Christ will return and set up His Kingdom, the new heaven and the new earth. Listen to these verses as they compare what we have here as followers of Christ contrasted to what we will have “in that day.” Luke 6:20-23:

(20) And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

(21) "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

(22) "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!

(23) Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

While we are here we can expect to suffer and to be poor (spiritually if not materially) to some degree. If we're following the Lord, we will work for and be content with whatever He gives us. We may even go hungry. We'll shed tears here. Some of those will be in repentance and some of those will be tears of sympathy for others.

People may hate us and exclude you and me from social gatherings and spurn our names as evil. Doesn't Jesus make it clear in these verses that life will not be easy? There are many different things that we can go through and be affected by that will be down right hard. BUT, look at what He promises if we're faithful to Him through those times.

If we live in poverty for Him we will inherit the Kingdom of God in heaven. We'll be with God, in close communion and fellowship with Him and other brothers and sisters who will be with us. If we're hungry here we can rest in knowing that we will be satisfied in heaven. Though we are sad here we will laugh there. If people hate us here we have the hope of knowing that in heaven we have a reward that is great. Jesus says we are to rejoice in that reward. We'll leap for joy when He returns.

So, ultimately, our joy is not to be based on what we have or experience here. Certainly there are things that happen on earth that bring us happiness. Lasting joy comes through our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is brokered through the Holy Spirit and should be based on what is to come – not what is now.

I am afraid that this joy is rare among most Christians because we tend to only think and live in the here and now of life. We can barely see to next week or next month we've gotten so busy and distracted. Looking to a time when we will leave this earth is

not something we even like to think about. It is truly a step of Christian faith to be able to think about Christ's Second Coming – a time when He will rule and there will be perfect peace on the new earth.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 describes what it will be like for those who are still here when Jesus returns. (13) But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, (standard metaphor for death in the days this was written.) that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. (14) For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (15) For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

These are encouraging words. In fact they should produce joy in us. It would be way-cool if we were to be here and actually hear the loud command with the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet call and rise to meet Jesus in the air! Can you imagine the fear – but also the joy! But, even if we are among the dead in Christ, meaning that we died as believers with Christ in us, then what joy we'll have to be the first to rise with Him as we will all go in to the kingdom of God together. 1 Corinthians 15:51 - 52 make it sound like all of this will happen quite quickly, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep

but we will be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must be clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

Paul tells us in the letter to the Thessalonians that it is God’s will for us through Christ that we would be joyful always (1 Thessalonians 5:16 – 18). I hope that somewhere in this lesson you’ve seen that it is actually possible to be joyful regardless of what our circumstances are here. But, it does require faith.

We have to trust God with our salvation, no amount of good works or church attendance or even a baptism will get us into heaven. Trust Jesus with your life if you want to be joyful. If he convicts us of sin, we have to be humble enough to admit it, confess it as sin, and ask God to forgive us!

If we can then give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18) and give to God and give to others cheerfully with the goal of glorifying God and pointing others to Him, we will know a certain level of joy. That joy will come from obedience and - partly because of our own obedience – others will grow in faith, knowledge, and understanding of the person, character, and love of God. We will see more and more of how God helps us and how He is at work in our lives. When we do these things, we *will* have joy!

Salvation through faith, repentance, thankfulness, giving, acknowledging the help of God, the spiritual growth of others, obedience to God’s Word, and the hope of the second coming of Christ. As we look at these truths, straight from the Bible, can we see the areas that we need to work on so that we might experience a greater level of the joy that comes from the Lord? The Bible says that the joy of the Lord is strength (Nehemiah 8:10)! That strength is the kind that helps us to stand firm in the face of opposition or

persecution or just plain old yucky circumstances because of our stance in this world for Jesus Christ.