

## Focus on Fullness of Joy

Have you ever been filled with joy? What would it feel like to have complete joy? Do you equate joy with being happy? With being satisfied? With having all that you could possibly want? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines joy:

1. a. the emotion evoked by well-being, success or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires, b. the expression or exhibition of such emotion
2. A state of happiness or felicity
3. A source or cause of delight.

Jesus referred to joy in the context of His relationship to His believers. In His discourse about the vine and the branches in John 15, He concludes with *“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”* Later on in His prayer for His followers in John 17, He tells the Father, *“But now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy made full in themselves.”* The writer of Hebrews tells us *Jesus. . . for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:2). It is hard to imagine that Jesus felt joy on the way to the cross. Can we possibly know what He meant by *My joy*?

Jesus may have given us a clue in His parable of the talents. In Matthew 25, He tells the story of three servants who were given the responsibility of watching over their master’s possessions while he was away. One was entrusted with five talents, one was entrusted with two, and the last was entrusted with one. Upon his return, the master discovered that the first two servants had not only taken good care of what he had given them, but had gained a profit on his behalf. To those two servants, he made the same statement, *“Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.”*

There have been many sermons delivered on the cowardly attitude of the third slave, who was afraid and buried the one talent, resulting in great displeasure of the master. In this parable, the master is Jesus and we are represented by those whose stewardship of the treasures was commended or condemned. The reward for the first two was more responsibility and entering into the joy of the master. The faithfulness of the first two servants not only brought joy to the master. It was his joy. A master is only a master if he has servants. The master had joy because his servants cared enough about him to take their assignment seriously and produce something for his sake.

This also may help us understand Hebrews 12:2. *The joy that set before Him* was the accomplishment of salvation for those who would believe in Him. We are the reason He came. We are His joy. Jesus not only has joy because of those who trust in Him, but He wants to share His joy with His followers: *that they may have My joy made full in themselves* (John 17:13).

The apostles Paul and John made similar statements when they said:

- *make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose* (Philippians 2:2)
- *even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You, too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me* (Philippians 2:17-18)
- *These things we write to you that your joy may be full* (1 John 1:4).

One of Paul's favorite expressions was "in Christ." Our joy will never be complete without being "in" Christ. Notice that Jesus said, *that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full*" (John 15:11), *"that they may have My joy made full in themselves"* (John 17:13) and *"enter into the joy of your master"* (Matthew 25:21, 23).

Jesus said, *"Abide in Me and I in you"* (John 15:4). It is only possible for us to have the fullness of joy that He describes when we abide in Him. We know that these are spiritual references, but it helps to think of entering *into the joy of the Master* and *abiding in Jesus* in physical terms.

Where do you live? Where is your home? This is the place where you abide. Inhabit, dwell, live and lodge are all synonyms of abide. Jesus says, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him"* (John 14:23). The NKJV translates the last part of this verse *"make Our home with him."*

When I return from a trip, I enter into my home. My home is the place where I abide. Joy is not just an emotion, a feeling, or a wish. It is a place of residence for the Christian. Abiding in Jesus is the place of joy.

If we understand joy as a spiritual "place," then it is somewhere we can "go to" and "leave from." David asked God to restore the joy of his salvation (Psalm 51:12). A person who has trusted Jesus as His Savior and Lord has a permanent home with Him that can never be lost. However, when focus is placed on anything other than abiding in Jesus, a Christian can temporarily forget that his residence is a place of joy. The remedy is to maintain or restore *a clean heart* (Psalm 51:10).

It is not always sin that robs our joy. It can be trials and circumstances. James tells us that remaining in Christ's joy is a choice. It is a decision of the will. *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing* (James 1:3-4).

Corrie ten Boom, a holocaust survivor, shared her story in her books, *The Hiding Place* and *Tramp for the Lord*. In *Tramp for the Lord*, she recounts visiting a prison in Ruanda, Africa, which was the dreariest, darkest prison she had ever seen. As she looked into the faces of the prisoners, all she saw was unhappiness, despair, hopelessness and

anger. She asked the Lord how she could possibly share the gospel with these men. He told her to tell them about His promise of joy, placing in her mind joy as part of the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22) and Nehemiah's statement, "*the joy of the Lord is my strength*" (Nehemiah 8:10).

So she told them of a time in Ravensbruck, a Nazi concentration camp, when she nearly gave in to despair. Roll call was such a degrading experience that even repeating a favorite scripture, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (Romans 8:35), no longer brought her comfort. On a day when she thought all hope was lost, a skylark started to sing in the sky. God then brought to her mind, *For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is [God's] mercy toward them that fear Him* (Psalms 103:11). Corrie said, "Every morning for the next three weeks, just at the time of roll call, the skylark appeared. In his sweet song I heard the call of God to turn my eyes away from the cruelty of men to the ocean of God's love."

When Corrie gave these men the opportunity to accept Christ as Savior, every one of them did so. The missionary who had interpreted for Corrie confessed she had thought the prison was too dark for the light of the gospel. After witnessing the salvation of these men, she said, "I have seen what the Holy Spirit can do. The joy of the Lord is available, even for such a place as this." Months later, Corrie received a letter from this missionary in which she said, "The fear is gone. The joy remains."

Do you live in this place of joy?

### **For further study:**

- In a psalm of thanksgiving, David said, *Splendor and majesty are before Him. Strength and joy are in His place* (1 Chronicles 16:27). Turn to 1 Chronicles 16 and read the entire prayer (verses 8-36). Make note of the many ways a follower of Christ can experience joy *in His place*.
- Read the book of Nehemiah. It is a remarkable account of a man who would not be deterred from experiencing the joy of knowing God and doing His will, no matter what the obstacles were. He could say, "*Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength*" (Nehemiah 8:10).
- David, a man after God's own heart, was able to say, "*In Your presence is fullness of joy*" (Psalm 16:11). Does *fullness of joy* sound familiar? See John 15:11 and John 17:13. Read the entire Psalm to see the context of this statement.
- When David did not "feel" the joy of his salvation, he asked God to restore it. Read Psalm 51, especially verse 12.
- How does John the Baptist describe the fulfillment of his joy? Read John 3:22-30, especially verse 29.
- Jesus told His disciples that no one would be able to steal their joy. Read John 16:19-24. Are you allowing anyone or anything to steal your joy?
- Paul describes the kingdom of God as *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17). Do you think that the "kingdom of God" is in the

future only or do you believe you reside in the kingdom of God today? If you are a believer, your permanent residence in the kingdom of God began the day you accepted Christ.

- Read Galatians 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit is a gift to each believer. Even if you don't "feel" love, joy and peace, it is yours. Is there something that you need to do to make the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life?

Focus on the fullness of joy that Jesus has promised. The price He paid for your fullness of joy was His sinless life and sacrificial death. Don't let Satan rob you of that incredible gift.

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