

Real Joy 5-16-03

Galatians 5:22; John 15:11; 1Peter 1:8,9; Nehemiah 8:10

I've titled this sermon 'Real Joy' to distinguish it from mere happiness. As I look through the Scriptures I see a difference in these two words. More than the word definitions themselves, I find the usage of these two words to be very different. Happy and blessed are often interchanged, but not joy and happiness. The word for joy is usually associated with a condition of the heart related to God, whereas happiness is based on circumstances. Joy is a gift of God. Happiness is the emotional result of His gifts. Joy is a deep abiding sense of overwhelming gratitude. Happiness is a momentary emotion. You may have come here with joy this morning but not be happy about your circumstances. You may have come happy but not possess real joy. Some of us may never have experienced real joy. Let me share with you how people in Scripture came to experience real joy.

God lives in joy (1Chronicles 16:27). To be in His presence is to experience fullness of joy (Psalms 16:11). The by-product of the Spirit of God in us is joy (Galatians 5:22). Jesus is more joyful than any person you have ever met, or will meet, because God poured joy upon Him. (Psalms 45:7). The wonderful truth for us to grab hold of this morning is that God desires His very own joy to be in us and for our joy to be complete (John 15:11)! Everyone of these expressions comes right out of Scripture. I encourage you to take the time to read the Word version of the sermon in which the text will pop up when you put your cursor on the text. Or, if you aren't into the techno world, grab a copy from out in front of the church during the week and look up all the references.

How did the people in Scripture find the joy that comes from the presence of God? First and foremost, they found it in salvation. When the load of guilt and shame was removed from their souls, they were filled with joy. Listen to these passages about the connection with joy and salvation: Matthew 13:44 (NIV) *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."* We have a hunger in our hearts to have our guilt load removed. We want to know we are at peace with our Maker, that judgment does not await us. Perhaps a better expression than guilt is 'conviction of sin'. Guilt can imply feelings of inferiority or lack of self-confidence. I'm not speaking of that. I'm referring to a revelation of God. Once you begin to understand who God is, to see Him at a distance in your mind, you begin to see your flaws. It's like walking closer to a mirror. From a distance you appear to be just fine, but the closer you get the more you can see the hairs out of place, the blemishes on the skin, and the wrinkled clothes. Jesus was always gentle with the sinner who saw in

Commented [notes1]: 27 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy in his dwelling place.

1 Chron 16:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalms 16:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, Gal 5:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. Psalms 45:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. John 15:11 (NIV)

the mirror that they were a mess. It was the hard hearted self-righteous ones He blasted. Those harsh words He spoke to them were a catalyst to get them to turn and take a look in the mirror. Without looking in the mirror we don't have a clue as to what the weight on our shoulders is. In fact, we can even convince ourselves that it isn't there. That doesn't change the nagging reality that our shoulders are slumped under the burden.

Whatever your condition, when the load is lifted, joy floods into the heart as the weight of sin comes off of you. There is joy in your heart and joy in heaven because a soul has been reclaimed and now has a glorious future. 1 Peter 1:8-9 (NIV) *8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* Also see Acts 16:34. Isaiah described it as drawing refreshing water out of the well of salvation (Isaiah 12:3). If you don't know this joy that comes from God, you can experience it right now by coming to Him and asking that the work of Jesus on the cross for your sins be applied to you. Ask for forgiveness, and He will gladly give it to you.

We can lose this joy that comes with salvation. David turned his back on God, and the joy vanished from His life. Whenever something is not right between God and us, we lose that sense of joy. That is the Spirit's warning system to us. It's that nagging light on our dashboard that says you better pull over before the problem gets worse. When David repented of his rebellion, he asked that God restore his joy (Psalms 51:12). When the people of Nehemiah's day heard the Word of God read and explained to them they wept before the Lord. They looked into the mirror and saw they were a mess. It broke their hearts. Then the Levites encouraged them to celebrate and let God's joy be their strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Understanding what is wrong is the beginning to restoration. It is a painful experience to see we are not what we thought we were. But it is the beginning of restoration if we are willing. That is a cause for great joy. Again, the sense of the burden of separation from God is being lifted. Christian brother or sister, have you lost the joy of the Lord?

When I was in a cult, the joy of the Lord slowly drained from my life. The more I walked in disobedience to the Holy Spirit the more weight I felt. People even commented that I did not smile like I once did. Hear the Apostle Paul's warning to the Galatians. Galatians 4:15-16 (NIV) *15 What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?* The Galatians had rejected Paul because his words brought conviction. They were once filled with joy and obedient to the Holy Spirit, but they began to listen to someone who drew them away from the truth. That

Commented [notes6]: 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.
Acts 16:34 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.
Isaiah 12:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Psalms 51:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."
Neh 8:10 (NIV)

made them have animosity to the one who presented the truth. The result was a loss of joy. Hardening your heart to the Holy Spirit always causes a loss of joy to God's children. How is your joy? If it is not so vibrant, it may be time to walk up to the mirror and get things right, to pray with David, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation."

God's word brings joy into our lives. If you are not letting God speak to you through his word then you are missing out on greater joy. Psalms 119:111 (NIV) *Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.* Jeremiah 15:16 (NIV) *When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.* Psalms 19:8 (NIV) *The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.*

God's word can fill your heart with joy because it will come alive as you read it. The Lord, Himself, will speak to you through it. There is great joy in knowing that God is real, alive, concerned about you individually. When the disciples found out that Jesus was truly raised from the dead, the Scriptures say they could hardly believe for the overwhelming joy (Luke 24:41). As the Word of God speaks to you personally, you are filled with joy at the realization that it is true. I can't explain that experience to you. You have to read the Word with an open heart and mind and you will experience this joy of realizing He is alive (Matthew 28:8)! Joy is not the expectation of the things God promises us in the future. That is hope and faith. Joy is His presence in us right now. The Living Word brings a realization of that.

Remember, from the introduction, this joy I'm talking about is not based on circumstances. The Scripture tell us a number of times of joy in the face of pain and loss. 2 Corinthians 7:4 (NIV) *I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.* Imagine that, *in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds!* That is joy that can only come from Jesus. 2 Corinthians 8:2 (NIV) *Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.* You'd almost think this Paul guy was off his rocker. Writing from prison he says to always be rejoicing in the Lord (Philippians 4:4). This guy is wacko, or he has found what Jesus said to be absolutely true. In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas are chased out of town and the next verse says they were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52). They had joy that was greater than outward circumstances.

I want to share with you a true story that Max Lucado tells about joy being beyond circumstances. You can only explain this if the man Christ Jesus is God who wants to share His joy with you.

"I have everything I need for joy!" Robert Reed said. His hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He can't bathe himself. He can't feed himself. He can't brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put

Commented [notes10]: 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?"

Luke 24:41 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Matt 28:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

2 Cor 8:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 13:52 (NIV)

on his underwear. Strips of Velcro hold his shirts together. His speech drags like a worn out audiocassette. Robert has cerebral palsy.

The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school or attending Abilene Christian University, from which he graduated with a degree in Latin. Having cerebral palsy didn't keep him from teaching at St. Louis Junior College or from venturing overseas on five mission trips.

And Robert's disease didn't prevent him from becoming a missionary in Portugal. He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972. There he rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language. Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years he led seventy people to the Lord, one of whom became his wife, Rosa.

I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him in his wheelchair onto the platform. I watched them lay a Bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers force open the pages. And I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, "I have everything I need for joy." His shirts are held together by Velcro, but his life is held together by joy. From Max Lucado

You may be happy, but do you have joy? Happiness is fleeting. Joy is abiding when you abide in Christ. "No man can steal it from you", Jesus said (John 16:22). If your life isn't held together by joy, come to the cross this morning and find Jesus' own joy. If you've let it slip through disobedience to His Spirit that lives in you, come to the mirror. See what's wrong. Get it right, and the joy will return. A man and woman will be up here on the front pews to pray with you if you need to pray with someone. Don't live without joy to see you through the difficulties of life. It comes from living in His presence. He longs to share it with you!

Let's stand together and sing He is Lord. The second time through sing He's our joy.

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--

²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.
Jude 1:24-25 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.
John 16:22 (NIV)