

“Joy in the Midst of Junk”

REVIEW

Suffering and tribulation for Christians is the rule rather than the exception. Jesus predicted and history has proven it. Christians are suffering around the world to unbelievable degrees. One mother who lost her eye to an ISIS bomb in Mosul said this...

Peter wrote to a displaced people suffering persecution from strangers. Perhaps they were not suffering to the same degree as these Iraqi Christians but they too exhibited great faith in their Savior and their wonderful salvation. Peter acknowledged their great joy and rejoicing at the wonder of their great salvation. Peter acknowledged their love and trust in the unseen Jesus expressed by great rejoicing with joy inexpressible and full of glory. Joy and its expression rejoicing is an integral aspect of genuine faith. So much so, that I felt motivated to devote a whole message to it.

Last week, I offered a definition or at least a description for joy.

True joy is an inner elation due to a positive event or the realization of God’s past, present and future working of all things together for our good and His glory that often results in some kind of external expression (rejoicing).

Some events trigger an involuntary internal emotional elation that expresses in an external expression. A raise, birth of a child, special recognition, unexpected windfall, interaction with a special person. Scripture indicates that meaningful connection with God enlightens the eyes and delights the heart. The joy triggering events are endless. They are interspersed with distressing events. Only a proper eternal perspective prevents distressing events from robbing us of our joy. If we expect the events of life to determine our level of joy we will be disappointed. A proper eternal perspective enables us to experience joy even in the midst of distressing life events. The exiled Christians reading Peter’s letter of encouragement experienced joy and rejoiced greatly while at the same time suffering distressing life events by focusing on the wonder of their inclusion into God’s family. Contemplation of their new relationship with Christ inspired joy inexpressible with words yet stirring great rejoicing in spite of distressing circumstances.

We mentioned that distress is as much a part of life as joy; rejoicing as much as grieving. The wonder is that through Christ, joy can temper or manage our grief. Knowing Christ enables a joy motivating perception. Without Christ, joy is mostly dependent on positive events. The key to joy is our ability to interpret life’s events through the lens of eternity. Life teaches us that an abundance of such events are not dependable.

Positive events trigger inner elation expressed by rejoicing. Negative events trigger inner distress expressed by grieving or crying. An eternal perspective enables inner elation in spite of negative or neutral events. What perspective enabled these displaced believers to rejoice in spite of distress? They recalled the wonder of their new birth (event). That new birth guaranteed an ongoing confidence in a future positive reality. That future reality included a secure inheritance as a dearly loved child of God.

Not until we realize life under the first birth can we fully appreciate the marvel of our new birth. Paul spelled it out quite clearly.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. Ephesians 2:1-3

remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2:12

But God caused us to be born again, made alive, raised up and seated with Christ so that so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Eph 2:7 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Eph 2:13 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household... Eph 2:19

It is like being born deaf and blind into abject and hopeless poverty as a slave to a ruthless master. Then all of a sudden we are given ears to hear and eyes to see and adopted by a loving king into the royal family with unlimited resources and everlasting health. How much joy do you think that would bring? New birth is a joyful event that brings us into a joyful state with the promise of a future joyful event that ushers us into and even more joyful state. That is the truth that enabled these persecuted pilgrims to rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. Like I asserted earlier, this inner relation we call joy based on a divinely caused event and an eternal perspective is central to Christianity. It is a true test of genuine faith. Because of the genuineness of their faith, these Christians greatly rejoiced even though they had not personally seen Jesus. They continually trusted and loved the unseen Jesus looking forward to the day when they would see Him at His return.

Old Testament frequently references joy and rejoicing. Let's explore some of the major passages related to joy. The term joy is used 182 times in the Bible. The terms rejoice or rejoicing 183 times. I will provide numerous selected passages presented under various categories for your enrichment in the "Digging Deeper" notes. I will take the rest of our time today sharing some of the insights on joy and rejoicing drawn from those passages.

What is it? Where do we get it? What triggers it? What perspective stirs it? Who modeled it? This will be an overview of the subject. The first thing that stood out was that...

Joy is the culture of heaven because it is the nature of the Trinity.

Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and joy are in His place. 1 Chron. 16:27

You will make known to me the path of life;

In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever. Psa 16:11

In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15:10

This doesn't say that the angels rejoice necessarily but that there is joy in their presence. Who is actually joyful is not specified. Believer in heaven, the Trinity? Joy is the nature of the Godhead just as love. God is love. God is joy.

Jesus expresses joy.

At that very time Jesus rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit... Luke 10:21

*These things I have spoken to you so that **My joy** may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. John 15:11*

*But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have **My joy** made full in themselves. John 17:13*

Jesus offered His joy to the disciples through the truths expressed in John 13-17.

The Father expresses joy.

The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. Zephaniah 3:17

For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you. Isaiah 62:5

The Holy Spirit expresses

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit

1 Thessalonians 1:6

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, Galatians 5:22

Perhaps the filling of the Spirit brings joy.

And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:52

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb.

For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. Luke 1:44

The Trinity experiences the opposite emotion distress or grief. Most likely

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30

Jesus shared that He was sorrowful to the point of death.

Joy permeates the heavens because it is the nature of the Trinity.

Nature expresses joy to the Creator

Let the heavens (space) be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all it contains; let the field exult, and all that is in it.

Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy before the LORD, for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness. Psalm 96:11-13

Nature expressed joy in anticipation of Jesus setting everything right. Paul indicates in Romans 8 that Creation groans now waiting for future renewal.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

One day Creation will break out into song at the return of Jesus.

"For you will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Isaiah 55:12

Generally joy is triggered by the experience or contemplation of a pleasant event. That event may be in the past, present or future. Joy comes from a realization of God's masterful orchestration of all of life's events according to His glorious plan. These are just a few of those past, present and future events.

David joyfully observed the willing offering of the people to God.

Now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You. 1 Chron. 29:17

Paul experienced joy at the Corinthians sacrificial giving. 2 Cor 8:1-5

Victory and achievement triggered joyful celebration.

Judah returned with Jehoshaphat with joy at their victory over the enemy.

Israel joyfully celebrated the dedication of the completed wall.

The seventy followers of Jesus returned with joy after a powerful victory.

Jesus however reminded them that the greatest cause for joy was that their names were recorded in heaven not the ability to cast out demons. Luke 10:17-21

Joyful celebration of forgiveness

Nehemiah reminded the people grieving over their sin to stop grieving and take time to celebrate forgiveness.

Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." Neh. 8:10

Joyful celebration of the Lord's works

For You, O LORD, have made me glad by what You have done, I will sing for joy at the works of Your hands. Ps 92:4

Joyful celebration of deliverance

So the ransomed of the LORD will return and come with joyful shouting to Zion, and everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah 51:11

strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. Col. 1:11-12

The contemplation of future reward or benefit triggers joy.

This is a big one. This enables us to consider most any negative event in a positive light realizing that God is up to something GOOD.

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. "Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. Luke 6:22-23

Jesus did it.

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who 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 12:1-2

*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 1:2-4*

*For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, **knowing** that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Hebrews 10:34*

The believers in our present Peter study rejoiced in distress by contemplating their past birth, present confidence and future inheritance. Paul's letter to the Philippians is a whole study in maintaining the Joy of the Lord while managing the junk of this world. There is example after example of Paul turning a negative experience or event into a cause for celebration. He was in prison. He faced possible execution. People were doing things to cause him distress. He went without adequate resources. Yet he prayed with joy, maintained hope and called us to rejoice in the Always by keeping a focus on Jesus. He shared the secret of contentment. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Joy is found through dynamic relationship with GOD.

You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever. Psalm 16:11

Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, "All my springs of joy are in you." Psalm 87:7

And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:48-52

the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:16-19

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

God fills you with joy and peace though faith triggered by Holy Spirit empowered hope.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Gal 5:22-24

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 1 Thes. 1:6-7

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. Jude 1:24-25

Joy is found in the Word

I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart. Psalm 119:111

Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts. Jeremiah 15:16

"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. John 15:8-11

"But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. John 17:13

These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. 1 John 1:4

like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. 1 Peter 2:2-3

Joy is experience in relationship with PEOPLE.

God uses people to bring us joy. Of course people can also bring us grief. We must never demand people to be the source of our joy. We can desire it but if we expect it, they will disappoint us every time. The Bible has numerous examples of people caused joy. Here are just a few.

Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction. 2 Cor. 7:4

For this reason we have been comforted. And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 2 Cor. 7:13

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Philip. 2:2

But 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. Philip. 2:17-18

Receive him (Ephraim) then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; Philip. 2:29

For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy. 1 Thes. 2:19-20

For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? 1 Thes. 3:9-10

For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. Philemon 1:7

I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. 3 John 1:4

I urge you to take the time to reflect on the passages in the digging deeper notes. The point of all this is the fact that joy should be a regular part of your life. It seems to me that this internal elation triggered by regular reflection of God's past, present and future work in your life should be the norm not the exception. We have become so negative about life. This joy is possible regardless of the negative events surrounding us or even assailing us.

It is the byproduct of being directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit as much as love, peace, longsuffering etc.
It is a gift of the Holy Spirit.
It is the work of God.
It is the central feature of the kingdom of God.
It brings strength.
It restores the bones.

As God triggers it in us we can trigger it in others. Do people consider you a joyful person or a negative person? Paul turned every negative into a joyful positive. In His presence is fullness of joy; In His right hand there are pleasures forever. Let us enter into His presence this morning. Let us seek His face. The more we enter His presence the more we experience His joy. Jesus said My joy I give to you.

Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS. Again I say REJOICE!