

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2:19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

When we observe the state of the mankind's behavior in relation to God and each other, the scramble by politicians to placate the loudest voices and cement their position and passing legislation in an endeavor to ease the conscience of many as they defy God's order and there are those who profess Christ who yet approve of this state of affairs – perhaps they have forgotten or never read Romans 1:32 and a companion verse Hebrews 10:31.

There is a reason that Jesus came and the accompanying poem based on John 1:10-12 encapsulates the reason. May it be a blessing to all who read it.

Why He Came

Why did He come,
This gracious Gift from God?
To lay His head on manger's hay.
And then earth's pathway trod.

Why did He come
And die upon a Tree?
To bear the sin of all the world
And to the Saviour be.

Why did He come?
His own would not receive.
Grace it was that saved me
The hour I first believed.

Why did He come?
He came with awful cost.
Because the Father loved the world,
He was sent to save the lost.

Why did He come
And lay such glory by?
To be so poor and give his life
For such as you and I.



From the Pulpit

Joy In the Gospel – A Christmas message

Linford Berry

Calvary Mennonite Fellowship

This morning's sermon is on "Joy in the Gospel" and as a basis for that we need to understand what the Gospel is, the Gospel is about Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins and so this Old Testament prophecy speaks marvellously to what was actually happening behind the Man that was hanging on the cross.

Isaiah 53:1-12 (ESV)

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ²For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted

righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

The foregoing is a sobering reminder to us from Isaiah about the nature of this gift, the cost of this gift, the struggle, suffering, and pain of this gift. And you know this time of year our world is all about celebration, all about joy, all about happiness, all about gifts and good feelings and experiences and this morning I want us to reflect a bit on the other side of Christmas.

I want you to think about what made Christmas possible, I want you to think about that from the divine perspective, God himself leaving the glories and riches and splendour of heaven and coming to this earth, coming to surrender to the torture, to the torments, to the limitations, to the dirt, to the tiredness, to the pain of this broken world.

Those whom He had made for himself would kill the Son of God.
That's the divine perspective.

I want you to think about the human perspective; I want you to think about what happened, what was going through the mind perhaps of Mary and Joseph as they made their way to Bethlehem, the shame of an unmarried woman with child, the rough bumpy unpleasant ride on that donkey.

Those of you who have been great with child know what I'm talking about.

Think about what must have been going through Joseph's mind as he contemplated what to do with this woman that he was betrothed to and how he would respond to the accusations and the innuendo and the rumours and how he would care for this child that wasn't his and think about what happened when they got to Bethlehem found that there was no room in the Inn and were relegated to sleeping in the barn giving birth to a child in very unsanitary not very comfortable kind of conditions and then running for their lives when they found out that Herod had discovered and was attempting to kill all of the children under 2 years of age.

Think about that side of Christmas!

Now think about yourself.

This is a happy time of year, they say, but for many of us this season of the year brings some struggle, some memories that aren't so pleasant. What are we going to do with that? Are we still going to find joy in life, in the Christian life?

You see we live in an era where it seems everybody is desperately trying to be happy I think this is probably uniquely an American phenomenon as well part of the Declaration of Independence that states that men are to be free to pursue life and liberty and to the pursuit of happiness.

(Editor's note: People around the world are trying desperately to be happy it is not a uniquely American phenomenon)

And so people today, see this pursuit of happiness as a right, this emotion of happiness is seen as a right that dare not be infringed upon, nobody had better get in the way of my happiness and so you deserve it, they say, you deserve to be happy, you have the right to be happy.

So go do whatever it takes to make you happy, go buy that new car, buy those new clothes, go on that dream vacation you cannot afford, get a new spouse or run around on your current spouse if they are not making you happy.

Whatever it takes to make you happy that's what you need to do, that's the message of our world and so people run from one experience to another, from one purchase to another, all the while we have one of the highest rates of depression and suicide this country has ever seen, especially in young people who historically were the least likely to suffer in these ways.

So it is obvious there is a problem and many of us can point the finger at various things as the cause of the problem but the question is ought you to be happy, ought you to be abundantly happy, joyful?

Is there something wrong with the pursuit of happiness? I say not.

What is wrong is the pursuit of happiness for the wrong end and in the wrong way.

So how about you today on this a couple of days before Christmas that are supposed to be the happiest the most joyful time of the year, are you happy, are you joyful, do you want to be happy?

Does the desire to be happy motivate your financial decisions?

Does it motivate your relationship decisions?
Or don't you care about being happy?

Maybe, maybe you are more righteous than all of that, maybe you are one of those glum faced Christians whom people look at and say, if to be a Christian does that to you I don't want to be one!

Or maybe, maybe you put on a happy face but deep down inside you struggle with intense depression, you struggle and you think that nobody understands and that if you would tell somebody they would think that you aren't a very good Christian or maybe you are suffering with some very painful situations and issues in your life and happiness and joy seem like a long way off. Perhaps you look at what is happening in the world around you and you get depressed and discouraged, how can anybody be happy when conditions are the way they are.

Maybe Mary and Joseph were feeling that way some 2000+ years ago, maybe they were wondering where the joy was, where the happiness was.

Well whatever your situation, whatever your experience, whatever your feelings this morning I want to address the issue of joy and happiness in the life of the Christians.

Should Christians be happy joyful people? Absolutely!

The problem is not the happiness and the joy the problem is where do we look for that happiness, for that joy, in what do we trust when the happiness and joy seem to elude us, where do we go when we suffer pain and depression and agony of spirit and soul, when we struggle, what do we do with that?

Is there any joy in that?

Now first let me say that Jesus I believe indicated that his followers should expect to be happy, just read the first couple of verses of Matthew chapter 5, the Beatitudes, blessed are you, that word blessed really means happy, incredible happy, joyful, and throughout the Bible God's people are called to be joyful people.

Now you say well that's easy enough for people who have everything going well for them, whose relationships and occupations are successful, surely it is easy to be happy when you are financially secure, when everybody thinks well of you.

Now if you thought I was going to tell you that's the way the Christian life is you are going to be disappointed because actually the Bible says something different, the Bible says that the Christian life is not all that glorious, that it's full of pain and suffering and persecution and struggle, it is downright dangerous, it can be incredibly discouraging but even in that, even because of that there is joy, there is joy.

And so you can and must have joy even in the face of the greatest difficulties and discouragements you will ever face.

And you say well how is that possible?

Well the instructions to be happy, the instructions to be joyful found throughout the Bible call us over and over and over again to rejoice in our suffering, not rejoice in spite of our suffering but rejoice in our suffering.

But how do we do that?

Maybe you are thinking yeah but you don't understand how bad my life is if you understood you would not expect me to be joyful and happy.

Well let's get a little perspective here.

So you think you have it bad, and you might, you think you have some rough days as a Christian, I'm sure you do, I am not making fun of that at all but you don't know what rough is, you don't know what bad is till you're shipwrecked and washed up on an island and promptly bit by a poisonous snake. That's a bad day!

Or how about countless beatings, often near death, being lashed with 39 lashes 5 different times, 3 times beaten with rods, being stoned and left for dead, in near constant dangers from rivers, robbers, the sea, the wilderness and in constant danger from false brothers who would report you to the authorities and even danger from your own people who forget you when the going gets tough.

How about incredible economic hardship even though you work your fingers to the bone sewing tents, living in almost perpetual hunger and cold and exposure to the elements.

And then to top this all off the constant pressure and anxiety that comes with the responsibility to care for the souls of all the people in the many churches you have started. No, you don't have it bad compared to the Apostle Paul, you live on easy street compared to the Apostle Paul, you should never have any problem with joy now should you.

Well do you want me to rub it in some more?

How about this, in spite of all these difficulties and depressing circumstances the Apostle Paul was by all accounts one of the most joyful characters in the Bible, he declares his joyfulness in almost every letter that he writes, in every situation that he finds himself in, he encourages and exhorts the churches that he is writing to to be joyful as well.

He mentions the words joy, rejoicing and enjoy well over 70 times in his letters.

So what is, what was the source of this amazing joy that the Apostle Paul experienced and encouraged others to have even in the face of incredible difficulty and pressure.

What should be the source of your joy in the comparatively easy and prosperous life that you enjoy?

The answer is we are to find our joy in the Gospel.

Turn with me to Romans chapter 5 and look at it in more detail and see where the Apostle Paul's joy and our joy must come from.

Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

So we see here 3 reasons for joy in the Christian life because of the Gospel. Number 1 we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, in verses 1 and 2.

The 2nd thing as a reason for joy in the Gospel is in verses 3 and 5 we rejoice in our suffering.

And the 3rd thing we see in verse 11 we rejoice in God himself through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now as we think about Christmas, as we think about both sides of Christmas, we see this pattern continuing throughout the Gospel where joy and rejoicing come from suffering, this is the path that God uses.

Yes we like to think about the incarnation, the joyful experience of the gifts, and yes we like to think about the resurrection or the other side of that experience but there is death that comes in the middle, this was a child born to die, we cannot have the resurrection without death, we cannot have life without death, we cannot have abundant joyful life without suffering and so we must find a way through this suffering.

What keeps us going even when things don't look good from an earthly perspective, where do we find our joy when the world around us is a mess when our own soul is a mess?

The answer is found in the hope that we have in God, the hope that we have in the future, the hope of the glory of God that will be revealed. He reveals this glory both in our ongoing salvation in this life and ultimately in the completed salvation of the next life and it says here in verse 1 that through faith we have become reconciled to God, we are at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

So the biggest hurdle has already been overcome, God has made a way for us to be reconciled to himself to be partakers of his glory.

If we have that level of peace why should unrest in our world or unrest in our soul trouble us?

You see that hope is founded not on how we feel or what we experience or what somebody does to us, that hope is founded upon the work of God and the glory of God, the reality that God has justified us and given us access to the power, the power supply of heaven, the Grace of God.

So even though we face incredible obstacles and adversity and even though the circumstances of this life seem to be working against us and even

though we may be struggling in our inner being we can have this quiet and sure confidence in the glory of God.

One old writer says this: “The reason that the hope of the future life exists and that we dare to exalt in it is this; because we rest on God’s favour as on a sure foundation for Paul’s meaning here in Romans 5 is that because the faithful are now pilgrims on the earth they yet by hope climb to the heavens so that they may quietly enjoy in their own bosoms the future inheritance, the hope of the glory of God has shone upon us through the Gospel which testifies that we shall be participants of the divine nature for when we shall see God face to face we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.”

Now that is clear this joy, this rejoicing, is not based on our ability it is on based on God’s glory. It is not based on our ability to perceive it correctly, it is not based on the quality of our faith, this joy, this rejoicing, is based on the object of our faith, it is based on the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, we have peace with God.

This is not something that we might have or something that we potentially have it is something that we have for sure if we have trusted him, if we have been justified then we have peace with God.

The verb tense here is the perfect tense which means that this peace with God is an ongoing and permanent action, we have had, we are having, we will have peace with God.

Now this does not always mean that we will actually recognise or feel this, there will be days, hours, and maybe weeks and months when we will not feel this way, in fact we often go through life ignorant or unaware of the riches that are ours in Christ. This does not change the reality of those riches, it doesn’t change the reality that those riches and that grace of God exists and is ours.

The Apostle Paul realised that we need to be reminded of these glorious things. In Ephesians chapter one he praised God which show us the reality of the riches that are ours in Christ, listen to how he praised God for the Ephesians and for us;

Ephesians 1:16-21: I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

We need to be reminded of this, this hope of the glory of God. The basis of our hope is the sureness, the steadfastness, the faithfulness of God. Our joy, our rejoicing are the result of something that is not fickle or fleeting, not dependent on human emotion or will but dependent upon and the result of the very glory of God himself which is unending and eternal.

That is where we find our joy!

In fact this is the definition of faith, go to Romans chapter 4 we see this description of Abraham and his faith in verses 18 through 22 it says Abraham 18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” Romans 4:18-22

So if your hope is in anything or anyone else other than Jesus Christ you are not going to have, you cannot have joy, but if your hope is in God, the sure promises of God, the glorious work of God and the glorious riches of grace and power of God then you can have joy even in the face of incredible difficulty.

Abraham nearly 100 years old trusted that God was right that God knew what He was talking about when He said “your offspring will be like the sand of the sea, like the stars in the heavens.” And it says he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body was nearly dead, but that did not deter him because his trust, his faith, his confidence was not in himself but in God.

So when we find ourselves in discouraging situations and our joy is not full we need to be reminded, we need to remind ourselves, of the reality that is ours in Christ and the glory that awaits us.

What are some ways we can do this, how do we do this?

Well we must read his word the revelation of the glory of God, that’s what this is, the stories of the faith of God’s people like Abraham and the stories of the difficulties of circumstances like the Apostle Paul like we have already recounted, we read that and say, whoa, I don’t have it so bad after all!

We find hope in the glory of God when we read his word.

We must be in prayer not so much asking God to remove the discouragement, to remove the suffering, as asking for God to reveal to us his glory and give us grace to deal with whatever He has given us.

We must worship God through the giving of praise and thanksgiving this act of praising God, even in spite of or in the face of great suffering, this praising God reminds us of who He is and what He has done and it keeps us from being self-centred.

The act of giving to God even when we think we ought to be hoarding our resources for our own protection, that stepping out in faith and saying God I’m willing to give even though I don’t know how you will provide, to trust him cultivates within us the faith that Abraham had and the faith that we must have if we are going to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

The 2nd thing that we find here is that we must rejoice in our suffering. You see this passage here in Romans 5 doesn’t stop with the reminder of the future glory that awaits us but the glory of God and joy in the Christian life doesn’t revolve around and escape this mentality that says, just get me

out of here! No, joy in the Christian life comes not only in spite of difficult circumstances but because of suffering and difficult circumstances.

We know that peace with God does not necessarily bring peace on earth, we know that, we know that peace with God does not necessarily bring ease and enjoyment of life, it does not necessarily bring freedom from illness and sickness, the actual conditions of life especially for believers in the midst of a hostile society are not necessarily easy or pleasant and yet we have cause to rejoice in our suffering.

In fact these things are necessary for us, Jesus himself said remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master, if they persecuted me they will also persecute you.

So suffering in the Christian life is not optional, it is necessary.

Listen to this from Acts 14.

Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing that he was dead but when the disciples gathered around him he rose up and entered the city. And on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derby.

Do you get that? They just stoned him, they dragged him outside and left him for dead and what did he do? he goes back in.

Now listen to what Paul says about this, When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, they went back again, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

And you would say that perhaps Paul was a glutton for punishment wasn't he! No, he understood something about the nature of suffering; he understood that the way God's kingdom works is by joy in suffering, by glory in suffering, that good things come out of bad things, that life comes out of death.

The reason we rejoice in our sufferings is because we know that God uses these things for our sanctification, for our spiritual growth, growth in Christ likeness.

You want to be like Christ? that means suffering, you look at Christ's life it means suffering.

And it says here in Romans 5 suffering produces in us that kind of character that only God can produce and this kind of character is not produced with our suffering, there are no short cuts in the Christian life, none. You show me a great man or woman of God, you show me a joyful confident faithful Christian and I will show you a person who has suffered.

And so the Apostle Paul tells us that this suffering we endure will bring about character, this endurance produces character and ultimately it says produces hope in God. Now we are back to the hope of the glory of God again, this suffering, this unpleasant circumstances, this opposition brings us to God, it drives us to God.

As we have already learnt this hope will not let us down, it will not disappoint, this hope does not put us to shame, verse 5, because it is grounded in the undeniable and unfailing love of God.

Not only do we rejoice in our suffering because what it does for us but we also rejoice in our suffering because it overflows to benefit others, in the midst of suffering God's love is poured out, here it says God's love is poured out in the midst of suffering, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, and this love then overflows for the benefit of others in much the same way that Christ's sufferings benefit us. So in 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 the Apostle Paul writes "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

So we suffer and we trust in God and rejoice in our sufferings so that we can minister to others who are suffering. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, see there it is coming all away from God through Christ to us to others, for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so you will also share in our comfort.

So we see that suffering and affliction are necessary and good not only for our joy, for the joy in our individual Christians lives, but also for the joy in ministry to others, this is especially true in Christian service in ministry, you won't be able to effectively minister to others unless you have experienced joy in suffering you won't be able to build up a church without suffering, Jesus didn't, the Apostle Paul didn't, and you won't.

So you want to be successful in contributing to the life of your congregation then count it all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing.

So don't shy from the suffering, from the struggle, don't just try to escape it, see the purpose of God in it, count it all joy but the only way you will be able to do this the only way you will be able to survive this is if your hope is ultimately and finally fully in Jesus Christ.

If you are looking elsewhere for your joy you will be destroyed.

And let us also remind ourselves suffering and self-denial for the sake of success in selfish or worldly terms is never going to bring you joy either.

We can see many Christians today who are suffering and they think they are suffering for Christ so they kind of grin and bear it because they know they are supposed to but they have no real joy because their heart and affections are not set firmly on Christ, they don't value Christ above all else.

You know I used to read these verses about suffering and joy and I used to think, wow, that takes some pretty supernatural people there must be some other kind of joy like not actual happy kind of joy like this "yeah I'm happy." No! It is actual real joy, happiness even in the face of suffering because we see what is beyond it, we see that good things, right things come because of suffering, we value Christ above all else and He suffered and He has made a way for us to suffer well, to suffer with joy.

So how about us, how are we doing when things go the way we think they shouldn't? How are we doing when people wrong us, do we rest in the grace of God, do we experience joy in God, do we keep loving people out of our suffering or do we forget the grace of God, do we overflow with complaining and become self-absorbed and critical instead of loving.

It's a good test for us to find out where our hope really is.

Are we like the Christians written about in the letter to the Hebrews where it says "recall the former days when after you were enlightened you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated, for you had compassion on those in prison and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward."

You see if you have a better possession, if you have a more sure hope then you can endure anything with joy. But if this life is all you've got and if your money is all you've got and if your relationships are all you've got and they are taken away there is no joy there is nothing but despair and heartache.

These Hebrew Christians knew what was really valuable what was really important and it wasn't their property or their reputation or the kinds of friends they had or the numbers of people in their church or the size of the church building. No, they had a better possession one that never fails that is never destroyed, that is Jesus Christ.

And that leads us to our final point: Rejoicing in God through Jesus Christ. Not only do we rejoice in the gifts that God gives us through peace with himself, not only do we rejoice because of the glory, the hope of the glory of God, and not only do we rejoice because of our sufferings but now we rejoice in God Himself, in the Giver himself. You see before we were saved we found our joy elsewhere now we exult whenever we remember him.

What has produced this marvellous change, what has produced this change so that we can now be glad in God, rejoice in God? Well it is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, it says here we rejoice, verse 11, in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation. It is the work of Christ that has produced this joy and again this work of Christ was fraught with all kinds of suffering.

Verses 6 through 10 in Romans 5 are the message of the Gospel in a nutshell, here is how it works very upside down, the godly dies for the ungodly so that the ungodly can be godly, the rich become poor so the poor become rich, the sinless Son of God becomes sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God.

Get your mind round that one time if you can!

Now this is in contrast to what our natural human capabilities are we don't tend to do it like this, we might suffer it says and die for another but only if we think the other person's worth dying for, but God shows his great love towards us while we were his enemies He died for us, while we were under his righteous condemnation of wrath He sent his only Son to die for us, to purchase our redemption, to reconcile us to himself.

God would have been perfectly just to allow us to suffer his wrath which is the consequence of our sin but He loved us and he gave himself for us.

So in essence we are not ultimately saved from our sin, although we are, it's a big part of salvation, we are not even saved from ourselves although that too is a part of our salvation, ultimately we are saved from God, we are saved from the wrath of God and God saves us from himself through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This is the only way that we can be reconciled to a perfect holy and just God, no one else could do this because no one else was perfect, only God himself can save us from himself.

And so we rejoice in God.

God himself is the source of every good thing including our joy, we delight in God who has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

But there is one more word I want you to notice here in this last verse, one word that is the key I believe to our joy and that is the word Lord. We rejoice in our God through our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Greek word here is *kyrios* which means he to whom a person or thing belongs about which he has the power of deciding, Master, Lord, the Owner, one who has control of the person, the Master, the Sovereign, the Prince, the Chief.

That is who we are talking about, this word basically means owner, slave master, and by calling him Lord, by acknowledging him as Lord we belong to him, we obey him, we are his servants his slaves, He owns us, He controls us, He is sovereign over us, He can do with us as He sees best.

Are you ready to make that kind of declaration?

Are you ready to surrender to that kind of person?

Only, only if you understand that God is glorious, that God is holy and loving and just and merciful, that He has purchased your redemption, then you must trust in Christ who will do everything for the good even the suffering in your life, even the struggle in your soul, even the broken relationships and persecution and hardships.

If He is Lord, if He is Master you can experience joy in those things.

This is so important to understand, we are dependent on him – completely. All the benefits of salvation including our joy in God are dependent on God himself and joy will only be experienced by those who surrender to his Lordship.

If we do our own thing, if we go our own way we will not experience the joy of the Gospel, we will not experience the joy in God himself instead we will face his wrath, his judgement.

Psalm 32 read earlier reminds us how this is, “Many are the sorrows of the wicked but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.”

So sometimes maybe the reason why you are not experiencing joy why you are experiencing sorrow sometimes it might be because you are not trusting in the Lord, maybe you have brought these things on yourself through your sinful actions, choices.

You must repent, you must come to Christ and surrender, to repent, to confess. As long as we are holding out for our own interests we will not be experiencing his joy.

As long as we are calling any of the shots we cannot expect that He will provide these benefits for us.

When we are reconciled to God through trusting confidence in Christ Jesus then and only then can we enjoy all the blessings that flow from God and this only happens through the person and work of Jesus Christ who is our Master.

So are you delighting in God, do you experience joy in God? Well you cannot delight in him, you cannot experience joy in him when you are fighting against him.

Perhaps you are not yet reconciled to him, if that is the case I urge you, I beg of you, believe, trust, repent, confess, put your confidence in the only One who can bring you true joy.

Maybe you are reconciled to God and you just forgot the benefits, the grace, the joy, maybe you need to be reminded of what is ours in Christ.

Maybe you are not experiencing the joy in God and in your suffering because you have forgotten what He has done.

I will leave this encouragement with you from Philippians 4:4-7:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.”



JOY IN JESUS.

Christmas is the season of joy. It is special, because it reminds us of the earthly beginning of the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation. The angel’s message, “I bring you good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10), rings as loudly today as it ever did. Just as the shepherds sat in the darkness tending their sheep, so we have lived in the darkness of sin until the truth of Jesus, the Saviour dawned upon us. The shepherds had religion. They were believers who had no need to be convinced of a God or moral values, but they needed someone to lighten their hearts with peace. They needed the personal assurance of a living presence in their hearts, they knew of the long awaited promises of a kingdom where righteousness would reign and men would live in peace and they ached for their fulfillment.

We need that kingdom of righteousness and peace, also. Our unspeakable joy (1 Peter 1:8) is that we no longer have to wait with aching hearts to experience it. Jesus brought it. He has done great things for us. Because of Him, we have peace. Jesus is everything to us. Isaiah described him in almost poetic terms, Isaiah 9:6-7 “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this”

Seeking to portray the glory of the vision God had given him of the eternal Son, Isaiah used contrasting terms: a child and an everlasting Father, a counsellor and a mighty God, the throne of David which had been won by conquest and a Prince of peace. Christian experience has taught us that Jesus is all that Isaiah described. We cherish the childlike way He counsels us. His peace is our most guarded possession. In the midst of a violent, unsettled world, His kingdom of peace is rest for our souls. And, on the other hand, as the almighty, conquering God, He provides purpose in life and victory over sin. The increase of His kingdom is our joy and keenest interest.

One thing our heart longs for is the security of knowing where the boundaries are. Jesus provides that for us. The government is upon His shoulder. Government provides structure. He carries the weight of defining what is true and what is false. His simple, profound teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, reach down into our hearts and satisfy our inner cry for truth. That government will never end. As life’s circumstances unfold, His truth unfolds with them. He never ceases to show us the right way. Is it not marvellous that even in the heart of the unbeliever and rebellious a basic knowledge of right and wrong always remains at the core of one’s being? Accepting Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life is joy. The more profoundly we accept it, the greater our joy.

Christmas marks the start of the earthly story of salvation, which is its own reason for joy. For His children, it is but the beginning. Jesus means

increasing joy at every stage of the journey. The first is the joy of believing. The shepherds believed Jesus was special and went on their way telling everyone they met that He had been born. The joy of believing in the gospel message is the first-fruits of the Christian. “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Romans 15:13). When we receive the tremendous gift of forgiveness by faith, we cannot but praise Jesus for His unspeakable sacrifice of giving all to win our salvation.

Then follows the joy of experiencing His grace in our lives. “And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Faith in Jesus has done a work in our hearts beyond what we could have been able to accomplish on our own. Knowing Him has changed our interests and aspirations. Habits that once gripped us are now odious. While we must exert ourselves to cooperate with Him, we do so willingly. As we have obeyed His voice, we have been able to work together with Him in the kingdom. A backward look gives us the quiet joy of seeing we have gained a lot of altitude since us first believed.

One aspect of grace is growth in knowledge and understanding. Jesus once told His disciples, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). He was telling them and us that He is not interested in mute obedience. He wants a friendly relationship with us in whom we understand and share in His vision and understanding. He wants us to grow in knowledge of the way, as Paul so amply states in his various epistles, especially to the Colossians. Fellowship and joy come with understanding. Because of Jesus, we can experience the joys of the family of God. Here we fellowship in prayer and song. Here we watch over one another. Here we find spiritual companionship and brotherhood. Here we experience Jesus’ governance in chastening every son He receives, ever bettering us and preparing us for our long home.

Finally, Jesus reserves the sublime joy for the end of the road. When He finally gathers all His children from the ends of the earth, restores and renews them with their new body and new name, they will enter into the greatest of all joys. There they will see Him as He is in the fullness of His

glory. With all traces of the sin nature eternally erased, with a mind unhindered by human limitations, they will have fullness of joy forevermore (Ps. 16:11). Many, coveting the true joys of Christmas but lacking the fruit of salvation, find substitutes. Decorations, music, gifts, food and drink, and, in short, materialism become the focus in a vain attempt to assuage the inner need. Unless we proceed to partake of the fruit of Jesus' salvation, our joy is shallow and even vain. If we lack joy in Jesus, let us never see it in tinsel and frivolity. Rather, let us bow at His feet in full submission, and we may joyfully worship him in truth.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).



TIME - GOD'S GIFT

For He says, In the time of favour (of an assured welcome) I have listened to *and* heeded your call, and I have helped you on the day of deliverance (the day of salvation). Behold, now is truly the time for a gracious welcome *and* acceptance [of you from God]; behold, now is the day of salvation! 2 Corinthians 6:2 ^(Amplified)

The many mysteries connected with the concept of time make it difficult to define. We know that time is of limited duration, a finite quantity that will terminate sometime in the future when time shall be no more. Time became measurable when God created the world and made the sun to rule the day and the moon the night. Days and nights went by with remarkable regularity as the world rotated on its axis, and years went by as the earth moved in its orbit around the sun once in 365 days.

The Babylonians are credited with making divisions of the days into smaller units: hours, minutes, and seconds. Sundials and hourglasses were used to measure these units of time in early days, and these, in turn, were followed by clocks and watches. Our preoccupation with these timekeeping devices may sometimes give us the impression that they are somehow affecting time as their hands move forward, when actually all they do is measure its inexorable passing.

For each of us, God's gift of time consists of the span from our birth to our death, which, according to the psalmist, may amount to threescore years and ten or possibly fourscore. Experience teaches us that this can be more or less. We can think of time as being a brief interlude that passes within a timeless eternity. Of this relatively short period, we are allotted an even shorter period of time during which we live our lives here on earth. What we do with this little bit of time at our disposal is the concern of this lesson. Time is God's gift to mankind. Life is God's gift given to the individual for a brief period during the time that God has allotted for the world to stand. Only God knows when time shall end and man will be called to judgment.

Alleged prophets who have predicted a specific time for our Lord's return have all proved to be false. The arrogance of those who would claim to have received such knowledge is hard to understand, considering that Jesus told His disciples that He Himself did not know the day and the hour. Christians throughout the centuries have assumed that Christ's return was imminent. We are admonished in God's Word to live in a state of preparedness because His coming will be unexpected and could take place at any time. Whatever the duration of time will be, we know that it is finite. The dimension of eternity is not within the scope of human intelligence and understanding. To live in a state of timelessness is not within the range of man's imagination.

We have ample instruction in God's Word about what we are to do with our time. We describe our use of or appreciation for time in different ways. We say we use it or spend it, waste it, cherish it, enjoy it, or even "kill" it, which would not be much different from wasting it. For each person, life and time are closely related; when life ceases, time as we know it has come to an end for the individual.

How do we properly use the time allotted to us? Solomon, the author of our text, lists a number of activities common to man. He does not particularly recommend any of the activities he lists, although he does mention the importance of keeping the commandments (Ecclesiastes 8:5). For advice on the Christian's proper use of time we would look to New Testament teachings on fruit bearing. The admonitions to good works in the Bi-

ble do not necessarily mention the element of time, but some do. “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” 2 Timothy 4:2-3. We have no promise for the future and the opportunities of the past are gone, so the time and the season is now.

I was once trying to teach a little four year-old about telling time. One morning we were looking at the clock and I asked him, “What is the time?” He quickly answered, “Now.” His time telling skills were limited, but his concept of time was good. He would always be right with that answer. Now is the only time we ever have. God controls time and circumstance. We expect the swift and the strong to win in the contests of life, but God looks on the heart and blesses His children according to grace. He is more interested in humility, obedience, and commitment than in personal ability and talent. Our success in our spiritual and material endeavors will depend as much on our attitude as on our ability. God is standing by ready to make up for our shortcomings if we will ask. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” Matthew 7:7.

The time that God grants us on earth is the only time we will have to prepare ourselves for eternity. To disregard God’s words, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” 2 Corinthians 6:2, will have eternal consequences. All our actions and decisions have consequences – may we choose wisely directed by God’s word through the Holy Spirit in the coming year or whatever time God has allotted to us.

FAITH IN GOD
INCLUDES
FAITH IN HIS TIMING

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