

The Joy of the Lord

Part 1

Introduction

When I was young, I thought God was very serious. But as I have grown older, I have become more and more aware that He is a joyful God. Not only is His heart filled with joy, He wants us to experience that same quality in our heart.

There are nearly 500 references to some form of joy or rejoicing in Scripture and this doesn't include synonyms. Many of these words express exceeding gladness, boasting, exulting, shouting, and even jumping for joy. Obviously, God wants us to be joyful--and to express it.

Before we go further, let's make an important distinction. When we talk about joy, we don't necessarily mean happiness. Happiness is an emotional response to a certain set of circumstances; joy is a response to the Lord that He puts in our hearts.

Our Study

Characteristics of Joy

What does the Bible tell us about joy?

The Scripture: Nehemiah 8:10

"The joy of the Lord is your strength."

1. What does this scripture tell us about joy? _____

How can joy be our strength? Have you ever experienced it as such? _____

The Scripture: Psalm 30:5

"For His (the Lord's) anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime: weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning."

2. How long does weeping (lack of joy - anger) remain? _____

The Scripture: John 15:10, 11

"If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

3. How can our joy be made complete? _____

The Scripture: Psalm 16:11

"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."

4. Where do we find joy? _____

Isn't that simple and beautiful? Joy is found in the Lord's presence. It obviously follows then that if we want to experience joy, we need to spend time where that joy can be found - in the Lord's presence, in prayer, in praise and worship.

The Relationship Between Joy And Pain

The Lord's joy is found in some strange places. The Early Christians rejoiced when they suffered for their faith.

The Scripture: Acts 13:50-52

"The Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecutions against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went on to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

5. What did the Jews do? _____

6. What did Paul and Barnabas do? _____

7. What was their mood? _____

The Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 1:6

"You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit."

8. How was the message received? _____

9. Who gave them the joy? _____

The Scripture: Hebrews 10:34

"You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions."

10. How did they accept the confiscation of their property? _____

11. How were they able to do this? _____

The Scripture: Acts 5:40, 41

"[Gamaliel's] speech persuaded them. [The Sadducees] called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."

12. What happened to the apostles? _____

13. How did they respond? _____

14. Why? _____

The Scripture: Matthew 5:11, 12

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kind of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

15. Jesus tells us to rejoice when _____

16. Why? _____

The Scripture: James 1:2

"Consider it pure joy, ... whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of our faith develops perseverance."

17. James says to count it pure joy when _____

18. Why? _____

The Scripture: Galatians 5:22, 23 in The Amplified Bible

"But the fruit of the (Holy) Spirit [the work which His presence within accomplishes] -- is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper), (forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness; (meekness, humility) gentleness, self-control (self-restraint, continence). Against such things there is no law [that can bring a charge.]"

19. List the fruit of the Spirit. _____

20. What additional fact does verse 22 give us? _____

The Scripture: John 15:10, 11

"I have told you this [if you obey My commands, you will remain in My love] so that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be complete."

21. How can our joy be complete? _____

It has been said that in the Early Church, joy was considered the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian. How would we fare if others judged our Christianity by the amount of joy we experience?

Sometimes we are aware of the joy we have. I remember how as a younger Christian when circumstances seemed very black to me, I would look deep down inside me to see if I could discover any trace of joy.

Surprisingly enough, I could usually find it -- a little bubbling spring buried deeply under the debris of self-pity and anxiety I had allowed to cover it.

Hindrances to Joy

Because joy is a characteristic in short supply in many lives and because it is a fruit God wants to produce in us, let's spend some time looking at the greatest symptom of unbelief or lack of faith -- grumbling and complaining.

Complaining to or about God goes all the way back to the Fall when Adam blamed God for giving Eve to him. Following each scripture, tell the reason for the people's complaints.

The Scripture: Exodus 15:22-24

"Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses saying, 'What are we to drink?'"

22. Why did the people grumble? _____

The Scripture: Numbers 22:4-6

"The rabble with them (the Israelites) began to crave other food and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost -- also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna.'"

23. The reason for their grumbling: _____

The Scripture: Mark 14:3-5

"While He (Jesus) was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on His head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, 'Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.' And they rebuked her harshly."

24. The reason for their grumbling: _____

The Scripture: Luke 5:29, 30

"Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to His disciples, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'"

25. The reason for their grumbling: _____

In the second part of this study, we will try to understand the relationship between our grumbling and complaining and our lack of joy.

The Answers

1. It is our strength
2. It is temporary
3. By obeying the Father's commands
4. In the Lord's presence
5. They stirred up persecutions against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region
6. They went on to Iconium
7. They were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit
8. With joy, in spite of severe suffering
9. The Holy Spirit
10. Joyfully
11. Because they knew they had better and lasting possessions
12. They were flogged and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus
13. They rejoiced
14. Because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace in Jesus' name
15. People insult us, persecute us and falsely say all kind of evil against us because of Him
16. Because our reward in heaven is great
17. We face trials
18. Because the testing of our faith develops perseverance
19. Love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness, benevolence), fruitfulness; meekness, humility, gentleness, self-control, (self-restraint, continence).
20. His presence within us accomplishes the work.
21. By obeying Jesus' commands and thus choosing to remain in His love
22. Because they couldn't drink the water
23. They had only manna to eat
24. The woman had poured the very expensive perfume over Jesus' head
25. Jesus was eating with tax collectors and sinner.

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