

Joy to the World! I bring you good tidings of great joy!

By Bob Young

I want to understand biblical joy, especially the reference to joy at the news of Jesus.
I want to see joy as a characteristic, a fruit of the spirit, not from circumstances but from the presence of the spirit within us, specifically God's Holy Spirit.
Why are we not joyful? What are the joy robbers in your life?
"Good Tidings of Great Joy"

We do not know joy.

We mostly know a way of rejoicing which is circumstantial.
Biblical joy is not dependent on the surroundings. Joy is related to happiness, but is different from happiness.

We are studying the birth of Jesus as the story is told in Luke. Luke says much about joy—joy in finding what is lost 15:5-7, in knowing that one's name is written in heaven 10:17,20. In the nativity narratives, joy has the sense of the Greek *soter* (salvation). Joy appears in the actions of Jesus, 13:17; 19:6. It is the mood of the people, 18:43; 19:37. The disciples return to Jerusalem with great joy after the ascension, 24:52.

This joy continues in the beginning of the church age, even when exposed to suffering.

Joy in suffering was uniquely developed in Judaism, Jas 1:2, ck || 1 Pet 1:6ff

Acts 5:41, joy at suffering

Unjust suffering is a gift (grace) from God (1 Pet 2:20).

Jesus, for the joy set before him, endured the cross.

Joy is a Christological concept, it is a future (eschatological) concept.

Joy is a command. Luke 6:22-23; 10:19-20.

Joy comes when we know Christ. Matt. 13:44

Joy comes from learning. John 15:11. "What a joyful sermon."

John Piper wrote a book, *The Danger Duty of Delight*.

His better known book, *Desiring God*, has the subtitle, *Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*.

Jesus demands that we rejoice and leap for joy.

How astonishing!

The command only makes sense because God has provided the reason or foundation for joy.

We are often surprised by joy.

C.S. Lewis:

If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

The demand that we be happy is not marginal or superfluous. Happy are those.... Today, people are trying to find their happiness in the wrong places. Jesus' solution to our love affair with sin is not only to tear out our sin-loving eyes, but to be mastered by joy—a new reality in God.

The relationship between joy and finding.

In his joy he goes and sells all he has, Matthew 13:44

The parable means that God's saving presence and sovereign reign are so valuable that when people see them for what they really are, they count everything as nothing compared to the vast fortune of being a part of the reign of God. This is the internal experience of conversion, lives genuinely changed. Much of true Christianity is joy-driven. No wonder the announcement of Jesus' birth was tidings of joy.

Jesus is good news, not bad news. He does not call us to willpower religion that is all duty and no delight. He does not call us to happiness religion which is mostly experience and little genuine enthusiasm (God in us). He calls us to himself—to relationship more than to religion. He call us to joy. Not a joy in things, but in God.

This joy comes by selling all. Do not overlook Jesus' description of what it means to come to the kingdom—to sell all. The demand is radical—renounce all to be a disciple.

The relationship between joy and self-denial.

C.S. Lewis:

The NT has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall find if we do so contains an appeal to desire.

In other words, we deny ourselves because beyond the experience of self-denial is great reward.

The relationship between joy and obedience.

Joy is not in Prosperity but in Obedience

Joy often appears in the context of pain and difficulty—Matt. 5; Luke 6:22-23.

Rejoice because we are counted worthy to suffer for him. We are so identified with him that what others think of him they think of us. What others do to him they do to us (John 15).

This is not just feeling chipper after a day at the stocks.

This is not joy-lite, superficial, marked by levity.

Joy is not jokes and slapstick in the Christian corporate life.

The aroma of suffering is missing from too many churches. Joy outlasts suffering. Joy is serious. This joy comes with scars, happy songs sung with tears.

The relationship between Joy and holiness.

Joy is the Root of holiness.

What destroys disciples is the "cares and riches" of this world. What strangles such vines the best is a superior pleasure. In his joy, the believer sells all. Joy cuts the stranglehold of sin.

Many Christians think stoicism is the antidote to sensuality, but it is not so. Stoicism is hopelessly weak and ineffective. Willpower mostly fails. If it wins, it only gives glory to the will, not to God. It produces legalists, not lovers. Listen to Jonathan Edwards:

We come with double forces against the wicked, to persuade them to a godly life.... The common argument is the profitableness of religion, but alas, the wicked man is not in pursuit of [moral] profit, 'tis pleasure he seeks. Now, then we will fight with them with their own weapons.

In other words, the pursuit of pleasure in God is not a compromise with the sexual world but is in fact the only power that can defeat the lusts of the age while producing lovers of God.

Take Aways

Seek "Joy for the Sake of Joy"

-1- Because of the SOURCE: Jesus purchases and provides our joy
Jesus offers himself to us, to die for our forgiveness, forgiveness of failures, even the failure to joy in him as we ought. Our joy has solid foundation.

-2a- Because of the RESULTS: our joy glorifies Jesus
Jesus' commitment to glorify the Father and the Son (John 17:1) indicates that his intention to sustain our joy in him is part of what it means for us to glorify the Father and the Son.

-2b- Because of the PERSONAL RESULTS: Joy has a Great Reward
Luke 6:23. The reward is fellowship with Jesus and God (John 17:3,24).
John 16:22; 15:11; 3:29; 14:18.

-3- Because of the POTENTIAL: there is no limit to the intensity of our joy in Jesus.
It is true that our passion or desire for joy can be misdirected toward wrong objects, objects that cannot provide true joy. Jonathan Edwards again:
We ought "to be endeavoring by all possible means to inflame their spiritual desires and to obtain more spiritual pleasures.... Our hungering and thirsting after God and Jesus Christ and after holiness can't be too great for the value of these things, for they are the things of infinite value.... Therefore endeavor to promote spiritual appetites laying yourself in the way of allurements.... There is no such thing as excess in our taking of this spiritual food. There is not such virtue as temperance in spiritual feastings.

Be encouraged that God made you to rejoice in him. Do not settle for any lesser joy. Fix your eyes on the all-satisfying treasure of Jesus Christ who loved us and gave his life a ransom for our everlasting joy.