

Whatever Happened to Joy



David Wilkerson February 1, 1983

The Holy Spirit yearns to bring God's people back to serving the Lord with joy and gladness. How grieved heaven must be to witness the wet blanket of despair and sadness that has fallen upon multitudes of believers. The Word of God commands:

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands...serve the Lord with gladness..." (Psalm 100:1–2).

"The hope of the righteous shall be gladness..." (Proverbs 10:28)

"Let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yea, let them exceedingly rejoice..." (Psalm 68:3).

"Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation..." (Isaiah 12:3).

"Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them..." (Psalm 5:11,12).

Jesus said to His disciples, **"...if you loved me, you would rejoice..."** (John 14:28). The Psalmist declared, "Happy is the people, whose God is the Lord..." (Psalm 144:15).

JOY means "pleasure, delight, exhilaration of spirit, excitement caused by hope." **REJOICE** means "joy in the highest degree, to be intensely glad." **HAPPINESS** means "fully contented, extensive pleasure."

How many Christians do you know today who are exhilarated, excited, intensely glad, fully contented, experiencing joy in the highest degree? Listen to the words of our Lord:

"...when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil...rejoice in that day; and leap for joy..." (Luke 6:22–23).

If Jesus had not said it, it would sound absolutely ridiculous — but there it is in black and white and ivine: "When you are rejected, persecuted, kicked about — jump up and down with excitement! Let it give you the highest degree of joy! Delight in it!"

When the Holy Spirit first began to deal with me on the matter of serving Him with joy and gladness, I had a difficult time facing the seriousness of the subject. I did not fully understand God's attitude. I wondered how important it could be compared to all the heartbreaking problems in the world today, such as drugs, alcohol, divorce, violence, and corruption. I never gave much thought to how much joy and gladness I had.

"So what?" I thought. "So I do not always experience happiness in my Christian walk. I get blue! The problems of life sometimes get me down. The future is so bleak it makes one feel depressed and fearful at times. The joy is there — I guess I just don't show it. I'm only human. God isn't worried about my down periods."

That is not good enough! **This matter of serving Him with joy, gladness, excitement, and exhilaration is taken**

most seriously by God.

Under the old covenant, we get a very clear picture of just how seriously God takes this matter of serving Him with a spirit of rejoicing. At Mount Ebal God pronounced a terrifying curse that involved six tragedies: slavery; hunger; thirst; nakedness; lack of all things; a yoke of iron upon the neck until destroyed!

And what terrible sin could Israel commit that would bring about such a horrible curse? A sin that could destroy them? First, of course, was disobedience to the Lord's commands. But also this:

"Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things..." (Deuteronomy 28:47–48).

You ask, "Is God really that severe about joy in these New Testament days of grace?" The answer is that God will not judge us on what we show on our faces, but by what He sees in our hearts. It is possible to have a drawn, tired face and still be overflowing with joy in the inner man. But it is difficult to hide the genuine joy of the Lord. Whenever the glory of God touches the soul, it affects the outward countenance. In Old Testament times, the anointing caused the face to shine!

The prophet Joel predicted a day would come when joy would wither in the house of God.

"Yea, joy and gladness is cut off from the house of God...joy is withered away from the sons of men..." (Joel 1:12, 16).

This drying up of the joy and gladness in believers is evident everywhere you look today! So many of God's people look sad and defeated, because they have lost the joy of the Lord. Many Christians seem just as lonely, blue and fearful as the unbeliever. It has become a disgraceful testimony to the world, and it is high time every Christian asked himself, How am I serving the Lord — with what attitude? Do I serve Him only through fear or obligation? Is it a half-hearted service? Have I taken Him for granted? Do I have that unspeakable joy or have my joy and gladness withered? Am I truly excited and full of ecstasy in knowing Him? Am I a worthy testimony to the lost that Christ can fill the heart with the highest degree of joy? Or have I become another depressed, worried Christian? Is there enough joy in my soul to overflow in my actions and my conversation, or have I become a murmurer and complainer like the children of Israel? How rarely do I smile anymore?

Let me give you some of the reasons why joy is withering.

I. We Have Grown Weary of the Way.

"Thou has been weary [bored] of me, O Israel...thou hast made me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities..." (Isaiah 43:22,24). [brackets mine]

The prophet Malachi grieved over the tragic condition of God's house in his day. God's people were bored, and the worship had become monotonous and mercenary — "Ye have said, Behold, what a weariness it is! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts..." (Malachi 1:13)

In other words, "My people have become bored with me. So they drag their feet in monotonous service at the altar." God's children were simply going through the motions. Their heart was no longer in it! They were dragging unwilling offerings to the altar — diseased, weak, lame sacrifices. The priests would do nothing without pay, not even shut the temple door or kindle the altar fire. They used the ministry to feather their own nests.

What a sad condition! Covetous ministers of the altar who were nothing but hirelings! The temple worship was a farce! How slowly they moved, how sad they looked! There was no life — no excitement — no joy or pleasure. The choirs, the musicians, and both priests and people were all playing a dangerous game of hypocrisy!

They were in a religious rut. They sang their half-hearted songs, gave their half-hearted offering, listened to a half-hearted word from a half-hearted minister — and rejoiced at the thought of getting it over with. They hurried to their last Amen and quickly fled the house of God.

These people were sad and bored because they had given in to a sense of futility and helplessness!

"Ye have said, it is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we

have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" (Malachi 3:14).

In our terminology, they were saying, "What's the use? What good is it to work so hard at pleasing God and doing right, when it doesn't seem to pay off? Why sacrifice, fast, and pray; why be so rigid and religious? It's useless — it's boring! Nothing changes. My prayers aren't answered...I'm still flooded with problems."

Since there was no life in God's house, and since the altars were so monotonous, the people simply gave up! They went through the motions only because they were afraid of God's wrath. They kept going to church because it was the thing to do. And they dreaded every minute of it.

What a picture of conditions today! From across the nation people write, telling me of the sad condition of their church. They tell of pastors without a burden, who can't preach. They complain of dead, dry worship services that are monotonous and boring. Their churches are dead. Yet they go through the motions! They drop a little money in the basket! The choir sings drearily on. The church functions and programs keep dragging on. But there is no joy — no excitement — no gladness. No shout of victory!

I believe one of the rarest things in the world today is a red-hot, joyful church with a man in the pulpit who has something worthwhile to say. So often I've heard this: "I've given up trying to find a church that really meets my need and that of my family. I get up every Sunday dreading the thought of sitting through another boring worship service. Where, oh where, can I find a church that is on fire?"

And of this you can be sure: wherever there is a church that has the joy and liberty of the Spirit — Satan will be busy trying to bring that church and its pastor under some kind of legalistic, mournful bondage. Satan would love to get to that church and kill the joy and happiness!

As important as the role of the church is — serving the Lord with joy and gladness is a personal responsibility!

"Let us not be weary in well doing..." (Galatians 6:9).

God will allow none of us to blame our loss of joy and gladness on a boring preacher or a poor church situation. It is our privilege and responsibility to get and maintain the joy of the Lord through our own personal dealings with Him. God will accept no excuses on this matter!

Paul had to stand alone on many occasions. Writing to Timothy, he said:

"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me..." (II Timothy 4:16, 17).

The Bible abounds with the glorious stories of those who maintained joy and gladness through all their trials — even when everyone else had given up! All Israel murmured and complained — except for two men of God, Joshua and Caleb. They never once wavered in their faith and joy, even though all others around them had given in to mournful despair.

When the leaders of all nations, along with the church leaders and congregations, were bowing down to King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image — Daniel and the three Hebrew children rejoiced in the Lord, immovable in faith! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego leaped for joy through the fiery furnace! Let everyone else cry the blues, saying, "You can't fight the system, you can't resist the spirit of the age." But not these young men! "As for us," they declared, "We will serve our God with trust, joy, and gladness!" There was no boredom or monotony for them!

Even today the Lord has a people who won't bend! They lift up their heads, through all tribulation and testing, and they glory in the Lord! They shine forth as beautiful examples of how the joy of the Lord is possible in any trial. They are the Lord's best testimonies of His faithfulness. God says of them, "They trust Me; that is why they have such joy and gladness."

Our joy and gladness must be the result of one great foundational truth: WE ARE UNDER HIS PROTECTIVE WINGS!

"Because thou has been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice..." (Psalm 63:7).

No wonder Paul could say, "I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulations." (II Corinthians 7:4)! How can anyone under God's protective wings allow their joy and gladness to wither? It is an affront to God, an insult to His faithfulness. And it is only because we no longer trust His protection and care that we allow despair and sadness to replace our joy and peace.

II. Joy is Lost When Fear Takes Root!

"There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love..." (I John 4:18).

The result of disobedience and hypocrisy is always fear. It is unforsaken sin that causes the people of God to tremble in His presence, and lose all joy and peace. Isaiah said, "The sinners in Zion [the church] are afraid; fearfulness hath seized the hypocrites..." (Isaiah 33:14) [brackets mine].

Luke tells us the unconverted are afraid, and their hearts fail them for fear — alarmed by the terrible things coming upon the earth (Luke 21:26). **But the fear that alarms the Christian is the direct result of harboring a secret sin!**

"If thou do that which is evil, be afraid..." (Romans 13:4).

When Adam sinned, he could no longer face God. He hid himself, clothing his body with sweat and tears! What a sad day when sin entered man's heart. Joy was lost!

Serving the Lord with joy and gladness is absolutely impossible if sin lies at the door of the heart. Paul warned,

"Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile..." (Romans 2:9).

No wonder so many are always depressed and sad! Show me a minister with unforsaken sin in his life, and I'll show you one of the saddest, most miserable man on earth. His sin destroys his joy! Show me any believer with disobedience in his life, and I'll show you a bundle of nerves — racked by guilt, condemnation, shame, and sorrow! Joyless! Sad!

Could it be we are bored and fearful — because we are being dishonest with God?

Another reason fear takes root is because of a present unresolved tribulation or sorrow.

Like David, there are numerous Christians who cry.

"...trouble and anguish have taken hold on me..." (Psalm 119:143).

How painful to watch a beautiful child suffer! How saddening to stand helplessly by while a loved one wastes away with cancer or some other dreadful disease! Or worse, to see them grow bitter toward God!

How unsettling to look into an uncertain future. One person needs a home; another desperately needs to sell one. Some are unemployed; others live in constant insecurity, wondering if they will be fired next.

Everywhere, there are problems. Health problems, concerns about business, houses, jobs, education — all conspiring to rob the people of God of their confidence in the Lord, and of their joy and gladness.

We are warned against failing to rejoice in times of suffering. We must not let our pain rob us of Christ's joy!

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy..." (I Peter 4:12–13).

Paul goes further: **"...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing..."** (II Corinthians 6:10).

And even more to the point: **"Wherein you greatly rejoice, although now for a season, if need be, you are in**

heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold...might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen...yet believe...ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory..." (1 Pet. 1:6–8).

This is strong stuff! It is written to those who are right now experiencing a season of grief and anguish! If need be...for a little while...grieve! Get it out of your system! But — you are being tested by this fiery trial. You cannot linger in sorrow! God's plan and desire for you is that His joy and gladness be your strength now.

"For the joy of the Lord is your strength..." (Nehemiah 8:10).

If you can simply trust God, believing He knows exactly what is happening and that He will bring glory out of it all — then joy returns!

Saints — we are all going into the furnace!

The Bible paints a bleak picture of the last days. We have seen nothing yet, compared to what is coming. The future, humanly speaking, is hopeless. Christ warned of violence, war, earthquakes everywhere, famines, pestilences, fearful sights and great signs from heaven. There will be persecution, betrayal, hatred, perplexity on all sides.

"Men's hearts failing them with fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken..." (Luke 21:26).

This trouble coming upon the earth is a trap! A snare! "For as a snare it shall come upon all them that dwell on the face of the earth..." It is in this snare, this beginning of sorrows, that many of God's people will be caught unprepared. They will fall as weaklings before the onslaught of trouble and sorrow!

If we have no joy — we have no strength! And believe me, brothers and sisters, we are going to need a lot of strength to withstand these evil days. That is why the Spirit of God is calling us to renew the joy of our salvation. III. Joy is Withering Because We Are Ignorant of the Glorious Liberty of the Children of God!

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty..." (II Corinthians 3:17).

Few Christians have the knowledge of the truth about liberty and the life–freeing sacrifice at Calvary! They have never allowed the Cross to set them free from all fear and bondage. We cannot rejoice and be exceedingly glad in our relationship with the Lord when we have a poor or limited knowledge of what happened at the Cross.

Paul saw the glorious revelation of a liberating Cross! It meant freedom to him:

"Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty...Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage..." (Galatians 5:1, 13).

It is not only what we have been saved out of that causes rejoicing — it is what we are brought into!

"Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God..." (Romans 8:21).

Liberty means "Freedom or release from slavery". It means power to choose, independence from all oppressive powers! In Isaiah we read that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Christ, "proclaiming liberty to all captives...liberty to them that are bruised" (Isaiah 61:1).

No longer does Satan control our will! No longer can we say, "I just can't help it!" No! We are free to forsake every besetting sin! All bondage, after repentance, is self–inflicted.

Joy is gone because we do not fully accept Christ's full and free grace! It feels more holy to go on repenting and confessing...repenting and confessing...working and slaving to prove our love for Him! We seem to forget that once we have confessed our sins, "...he is faithful and just to forgive them and cleanse us from all unrighteousness..." (1 John 1:9).

We simply cannot grasp the truth that God is not angry with His repentant children. We just can't believe that "the Lord taketh pleasure in his children...so let the saints be joyful in glory..." (Psalm 149:4, 5).

Yes, there is a time to repent. But there is also a time to rejoice in forgiveness! This is clearly demonstrated at Ezra's Water-gate! That's right — Water-gate! Ezra and Nehemiah took on the task of rebuilding Jerusalem and restoring law and obedience in Israel. Jerusalem lay in ruins, its gates burned with fire, and its walls decayed and crumbling.

The people had become lawless, disobedient, and wicked. The wealthy were charging high interest and bringing the nation under bondage and debt. Worst of all they were intermingling with idol worshipers, marrying heathen wives.

God was about to revive Zion. A spirit of sorrow and true heart repentance would soon be poured out on the people.

"And all the people gathered themselves together as one man, into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel..."

And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood...and he opened the book...and when he did the people stood up...So they read the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading..." (Nehemiah 8:1-8)

The Word of God went forth, the people gladly heard — they understood! They repented! The Scriptures record, "The people wept when they heard the words of the law..." (Nehemiah 8:9)

They mourned for their sins! They wept over their backslidings! They grieved and sorrowed to repentance. And even though there would still be other times to weep, and though there was still much the Holy Spirit must do to bring them to a place of complete obedience — in their hearts they had truly repented, and were willing to go all the way with God. They longed for holiness and purity.

After Repentance — It Is Time To Rejoice and be Glad!

Nehemiah and Ezra stood before those weeping, mourning children of God and proclaimed a day of joy and gladness:

"This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep...neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength..." (Nehemiah 8:9-10).

No more depression! No more grief! No more guilt or condemnation! They had truly repented. Now it was time to sing, rejoice, and be strong in joy. Now was the

time to accept forgiveness and be exceedingly happy:

"And the people went their way...to make great mirth [happiness], because they had understood the words declared unto them..." (Nehemiah 8:12) [brackets mine].

Our joy and happiness must also come from understanding God's message of freedom. You need not understand all the doctrines of atonement, reconciliation, propitiation, grace, sanctification, etc. All you need to know in order to live joyfully unto the Lord is this one foundational truth:

God Was Completely Satisfied With Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross!

You don't need to explain it, or fully comprehend it. But you must understand that it was sufficient. It was all that was needed! God now willingly — joyfully — forgives all who repent. We are reconciled! Christ made peace! He took away God's wrath against repented sin.

To not rejoice in Christ's forgiveness is to doubt His full payment of our sins! That is a worse sin. Let the Spirit give you an understanding of this truth — we are called to liberty. God wants us to have an abundance of joy.

A joy that is full and complete. Pressed down and running over!

God's Word makes it perfectly clear that He yearns to be enjoyed by His saints —

"That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves..." (John 17:13).

"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away..." (Isaiah 35:10).

Please — do not despise the grace of God! Accept your forgiveness. Don't try to invent new things to repent. It's time to enjoy what Christ has done for us. REJOICE!

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