The Gift of God that attracts and wins

We can never hope to be much used by God if we are not habitually living in the ***"Joy of the Lord"***. The 'Good News' of those famous shepherds was Joy! Joy to the whole world (not to any particular religious group)! Joy comes from a deep knowledge that we are loved, accepted and being made worthy no matter what we are going through.

We may have had a long and wonderful experience of God's goodness towards us and yet, if we lack the joy of the Lord, we will have little influence in drawing people to the Lord Jesus. We may be diligent in Bible study and yet if we are not filled with ***"All joy and peace in believing"*** (Rom. 15:13), our witness to the power of the Lord Jesus in our lives will lack that attractiveness which was one of the most notable characteristics of the spread of the Gospel in Acts.

We are not likely to go wrong if we follow the example of the apostles in this matter of joy. We read how when Philip went to Samaria and preached about the Lord Jesus to the people there, the whole city was moved under the power of his message. (Acts 8:4-8) A wonderful awakening followed. And what was the effect of the saving grace of God? ***"There was great joy in that city!"*** Again in Acts 13 when Paul and Barnabas had preached in Antioch in Pisidia, there was a great response, many came to faith and the result was, ***"The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."*** (Acts 13:52)

Joy is the very means God has chosen for strengthening our character and establishing our hearts. A heart filled with ***"the joy of the Lord"*** is a heart that will best resist the temptations that bombard us. It is when our emotions are unsatisfied and our spiritual energies are paralysed that temptations seem to grow in their fascinating power over us. Then it is that worldliness overcomes us. But if our hearts are filled with ***"Joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory"*** (1 Pet. 1:8) then at once the spell of such influences is broken and it is no longer a hard or painful struggle to resist. So ***"The joy of the Lord is our strength"*** (Neh. 8:10). It equips us with endurance; it satisfies us and it gives us rest.

In addition, there is a power in this joy to win others to the Lord Jesus. Some may go out with their arguments and evidences and debate with others, but they usually fail to convince them. But many times the deep reality of a soul-satisfying joy in our hearts has succeeded in winning someone to God. There is a persuasive power in this joy that has a wonderful influence over people whose hearts are aching and longing to know the secret of rest. So we can see the importance of living ***"in the joy of the Lord"***.

Firstly it has a bearing on our own personal holiness, for seeking to be like the Lord Jesus is being intimately connected with Him in His joy. Though He was a Man of Sorrows, let us never forget that springing up within the Lord's human heart there was a well of unspeakable peace and joy that nothing could quench until that great cry of joy – ***"It is finished!"*** (Jn. 19:30)

Secondly it has a bearing on our conduct in relation to all the trials and difficulties that we constantly face. It gives us the power to endure; to bear the burden patiently and to overcome. It gives us the ability to withstand that nothing else can give!

Thirdly our joy has an effect on the minds and convictions of the people around us. It is the power that does more to attract and persuade the thoughtless and careless than anything else. This is because ***"the joy of the Lord"***, when seen in in our lives, appeals at once to others. They see in it the potential to meet the needs and longings of every human heart.

The Lord Jesus said, ***"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full."*** (Jn. 15:11) Two kinds of joy are mentioned here – His joy and our joy. Our joy is natural and is common to all human beings. It is just one of the emotions that we feel. The Lord Jesus doesn't ignore that joy. He doesn't condemn it. He didn't come to destroy it for that would

make us unnatural! He has come to ennoble every part of our being including the natural part. He does this by bringing us into union with Himself.

So His purpose is, ***"That my joy might remain in you"***. Think how pure and undefiled was the joy of the Lord Jesus! It is when our natural ability to be joyful is possessed by His joy that we reach ***"fullness of joy"*** – (***"that your joy may be full"***). Naturally we can never reach anywhere near that stage of fullness unless the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with His joy. The desire of the Lord Jesus is that His joy might ***"remain in us"***. All other earthly joys come and go. But His joy is full and abiding – a joy that can be known and experienced constantly here on earth where everything else is perpetually changing. The Lord's gift of joy is the opposite of this changing joy. His joy is an inner spring of calm but soul-filling gladness that bubbles up silently and continuously irrespective of the outward environment.

Again the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, ***"Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full"***. (Jn. 16:24) He wants us to have fullness of joy and this is a gift that is given in answer to prayer. We read in Jn. 17:13, ***"… I say these things … so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them"***.

Perhaps we will often pass through sorrows, but even in the midst of sorrow, joy will continually well up within us. Speaking of his experience in 2 Cor. 6:10, Paul describes himself as ***"Sorrowful yet always rejoicing"***.

In Deut. 12:18 we read, ***"You shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all that you undertake"***. So joy is not an emotion that comes and goes perhaps like 'being happy'. Joy runs through every circumstance in our lives. This is what is needed in our ministry! The people around us need to see how very practical the spiritual blessings of the Gospel are – how they fit us for endurance and courage in the hard trials and difficulties of daily life. To be able to bear with patience, with joy and hopefulness the opposition of people and the disappointments and setbacks we experience. This power can only be found in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Then we can rise above our circumstances and rejoice in the Lord who is ***"The same yesterday, today and for ever"***.

So let us make this year a year of **"militant joy"** in our hearts and lives.