The Great Importance of Joy in the Life of a Believer

"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man (the Lord Jesus!). ***Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven."*** (Luke 6:22-23)

"Behold, I have given you authority … over all the power of the enemy and nothing will harm you. However, don't rejoice in this … but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Lk. 10:19-20)

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure in a field which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he went and sold all that he had and bought that field." (Mt. 13:44)

"I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (Jn. 15:11)

So the command of the Lord Jesus that we ***"Rejoice … and leap for joy"*** (Lk. 6:23) is very surprising! This command that we should always be very happy/full of joy is not marginal in Biblical teaching. The main problem is that we are searching for happiness in all the wrong places. The solution is to be overcome by the joy of a new reality – God!

Central to the teaching of the Lord Jesus is how people come to know and love God. ***"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then <u>in his joy</u> he went and sold all that he had and bought the field."*** (Mt. 13:44)

God's saving presence and sovereign reign are so valuable that once we discover this treasure – that the Lord Jesus is our Saviour and Lord – we count everything else as nothing compared to this. And how could it be different, for the Lord Jesus came into the world to bring good news! He calls us to Himself and to His Father. He calls us to His joy – not in health, wealth and prosperity. No! Joy in the Father and in His Son the Lord Jesus. Getting to know this God is more valuable than anything we could possess in this world. God is calling us to pursue our deepest and most lasting joy.

The most surprising thing is that the Lord Jesus says, ***"Rejoice … and leap for joy"*** in the context of pain and oppression. (Lk. 6:22-23) When Jesus says, "Rejoice", He hasn't forgotten the kind of world we live in. It is filled with suffering and persecution. ***"They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons … and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for My name's sake."*** (Lk. 21:12, 16-17) He said to His disciples, ***"If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you."*** (Jn. 15:20)

The joy that the Lord Jesus gives us is not superficial – the sort of joy you get from a funny joke. This joy you fight for by cutting off your hand (Mt. 5:30), selling all your possessions (Mt. 13:44) and carrying a cross with the Lord Jesus. (Mt. 10:38-39) It is a joy that sings songs with tears. There is a terrible danger for us as disciples that ***"the cares and riches and pleasures of life"*** (Lk. 8:14) will destroy our spiritual life. [I think this is one of the major problems of evangelical believers in the west and a reason why many are spiritually weak!] So in his/her "joy" the believer sells everything to cut the stranglehold of sin.

The Lord Jesus told us to be filled with joy in the midst of suffering and that joy should outlast the suffering. This joy is serious – the kind you fight to maintain by cutting off your hand! Not in reality but to demonstrate the seriousness of maintaining our joy. We must sing songs of joy with tears!

The Lord Jesus said, ***"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven".*** (Lk. 6:23) I think the essence of our reward is being in the presence of the Lord Jesus in the ages to come. But we can rejoice now because He said, ***"I won't leave you as orphans. I will come to you."*** (Jn. 14:18) and ***"I am with you always to the end of the age".*** (Mt. 28:20)

Jn. 17:13 says, ***"These things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy."*** We also read in Nehemiah 8:10, ***"The joy of the Lord is your strength".*** His joy is given us to enable us to be "strong".

Here are some steps to understanding this great joy:

1. God – the Father, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit – the One God, is the only being that has no beginning. So everything else and everybody else is dependent on Him for their existence and for their value because everything/everybody is of less value than Him.

Remember that Moses asked God what he should say to the people if they asked him God's name. God said, ***"I am who I am"***. So God doesn't get His character from anything or anyone. He can't be defined by anything outside Himself. He is, He always was and He always will be. The difference between God and us is incalculably great. ***"Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, like the dust on the scales."*** (Isaiah 40:15) So we say to ourselves, *"I am totally dependent on God and of much less value than He is."* This is the beginning of joy! Why? I wouldn't be bothered to go to an art gallery to see a painting by someone who could paint like me. I'm rubbish at painting! No, we get joy in seeing pictures painted by the great masters. We were made by God to get our deepest joys not by us being superior, but by enjoying God's superiority. God's superiority is absolute in every way so joy in this is greater than anything else we can imagine!

2. From eternity God has been totally joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity. It wasn't deficiency, defeat or discontent that prompted Him to create the world. God never acts out of need! He always acts out of fullness and self-determination. Acts 17:25 says, "***He is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to mankind life and breath and everything."*** We read again in Ps. 50:12, ***"If I were hungry, I would not tell you for the world and its fullness is Mine."*** God is saying, *"You don't supply any need of Mine. I am alive. I sustain and I deliver."* But He also says, ***"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."*** In effect God says, *"I love My Son, He has been with Me from eternity."* One day we will hear God say to us, ***"Enter into the joy of Your Master."*** (Mt. 25:23) God is saying, *"We (the Trinity) are a very happy God. Come and share in our happiness!!"*

3. God created us in His own image so we could know and enjoy Him and show the world His glory and beauty. We read in Isaiah 43:6-77 ***"Bringing My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, who I created for My glory."*** So we were created to display God's glory.

I was a biological scientist and there is amazing beauty and order in the physical world, but it is not conscious of this. We were created with hearts and minds. So we can know His glory in our minds and treasure His glory in our hearts. ***"The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."*** (Habakkuk 2:14) ***"Declare His glory among the nations, His marvellous works among all the peoples."*** (Ps. 96:3) ***"I will demonstrate My glory in your midst and they shall know that I am the Lord."*** (Ezekiel 28:22)

So the glory of God is the supreme joy of His people. We read in Jude 24, ***"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy …."*** So we were created to know God and to enjoy His glory and in this way display His supreme glory.

4. The Lord Jesus came into this world, lived a perfect life, died to bear the penalty of our sins, absorbed the wrath of God that hung over us and rose from the dead triumphant over death and Satan and all evil. As a result of this, all who receive the Lord Jesus as Saviour and Lord – as the great treasure of their lives – can be forgiven for His sake, counted as righteous in Christ and filled with His Spirit so they can enjoy God for ever!! Read Isaiah 53:4-6, 10 and Rom. 8:3, ***"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, couldn't do. By sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for our sin, He condemned sin in the flesh".***

Nothing is more crucial for humanity than escaping the wrath of God! The ultimate goal of the Cross is for us to enjoy the everlasting joy of God. ***"Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God."*** (1 Peter 3:18)

5. The enjoyment of God, above all else, is the deepest way for God's glory to be reflected back to Himself. We can do many good things. We can speak encouraging words as a means of achieving

many things, but we can't enjoy God **as a means** to anything. That isn't how joy works. I don't enjoy being with my wife so she will make my supper. I didn't enjoy playing football with my sons so they would do their homework. You don't enjoy a sunset so you can become a poet.

Joy comes to you. It rises spontaneously as a witness to what you treasure. More authentically than anything else, it reveals what your treasure is. ***"For where your treasure is, there your heart is also."*** (Mt. 6:21) Smiles, laughter etc. can be hypocritical, but there can never be hypocritical joy. God knew what He was doing when He created us to know and enjoy Him. He wants us to reflect and display His glory. Joy is the clearest witness to the **worth** of what we enjoy.

6. The enjoyment of God in Christ is the spring of all visible acts of self-denying. It is sacrificial love that shows others the worth of God in our lives. God can see in our hearts that we are enjoying Him. He wants His glory to be visible to others. That is why He made us so our enjoyment of Him overflows in invisible acts of love for others.

Paul says, ***"We want you to know brothers about the grace of God that has been given among the churches in Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part."*** (2 Corinthians 8:1-2)

Notice the steps:

- the grace of God is revealed
- joy abounds in that grace
- joy overflows in a wealth of generosity (in spite of their poverty)

This is the way God has made us. Joy in God overflows in self-denying acts of love. (Heb. 10:34, 11:24-26, 12:2, 13:13- 14) These acts of love bring glory to God, ***"Let your light shine before others, so they may see your good works and give glory to Your Father who is in heaven."*** (Mt. 5:16).

And again, ***"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."*** (Mt. 5:11- 12) The world must hear the Gospel proclaimed and it must see the glory of God flowing in many streams of radical, sacrificial deeds of love. The enjoyment of God is the source of all those streams.

7. The only joy that reflects the worth of God and overflows in God-glorifying love is rooted in a true knowledge of God. God-glorifying joy flows from the deep mystery of what we don't know about God into the reality of what we do know about Him. If our knowledge is small or distorted, our understanding of what God is like will be distorted and joy based on this will be a poor echo of God's true excellence.

In Nehemiah 8 Ezra had read the Word of God to the people and the Levites explained it to them. Then we read, ***"And all the people went to eat and drink and send portions*** (i.e. share with others in need) ***and to celebrate with great joy because they had understood the words that were declared to them."*** This is the context of Nehemiah 8:10, ***"And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*** Probably all of us have tasted our hearts burning with joy when the Word of God was opened to us. (Lk. 24:32)

Twice the Lord Jesus said He taught His disciples for the sake of their joy. ***"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full"*** (Jn. 15:11) and "***These things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves."*** (Jn. 17:13)

If our joy is going to reflect the glory of God, then it must flow from true knowledge of how glorious God is. To truly enjoy God, we must know Him. The Lord Jesus is honoured by us knowing Him and treasuring Him for who He really is. He is a real person. Our feelings about Him don't make Him what He is. Our joy displays His glory when it is a reflection of seeing Him for who He really is. ***"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face-to-face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."*** (1 Cor. 13:12). His Son, His book (the Bible) and His world are the revelation of God's glory through which He has made the knowledge of Himself possible.

I don't know if you have ever climbed mountains. You get to the top of a mountain. You see a truly glorious view and you are thrilled. But you can see a much higher mountain. You realise you have only seen a fraction. So you start climbing a higher peak. You have climbed. You have started to explore great mountain ranges like the Himalayas! You will discover that joy in what you know of God is intensified by the expectation that there is so much more to see. The mystery of what you don't know gets its God-glorifying power from what you do know.

8. So the right knowledge of God and of His ways is the servant of God-glorifying joy as well as God-glorifying love for people. Those who are ignorant of God and believe falsehoods about God rarely have great friendships or camaraderie.

So often statements are made like, *"Jesus isn't God"* or *"God, if he exists, is unjust"* or *"Jesus didn't die for our sins"* and so on. You will hear many such statements. Perhaps some of your friends will say such things. If your friends really believe such a thing it will ultimately destroy them. So sharing life-giving statements that lead to everlasting joy won't kill your friendship, but sustain it.

Friendships grow through shared vision and shared joy in that vision. It is true that there is a risk that when you share what you see in God, some will turn away and say, *"I don't see it"* or *"I don't like it."* That is when you need courtesy and tolerance but there won't be real friendship. Friendship depends on believing the same Gospel. The joy of God-glorifying friendship is joy in a common vision of God.

9. We must never minimise the Bible teaching on the nature of God and the work of God done by the Lord Jesus. We must embrace it and cherish it and build our friendships and our churches on it.

10. May our churches become pillars of truth and joy and love displaying the glory of God and the supremacy of the Lord Jesus in all things. This is the reason why we are created.

I am in my 70s! I'm not upset about getting older. If what I have written is true, I am daily getting nearer to seeing the face of the Lord Jesus and hearing His voice say, ***"Enter into the joy of Your Master."*** This sense of age and nearness to the final 'river crossing' colours how I think about my three children and my seven grandchildren. I feel like pleading, **"Don't waste your life on experiments. There are proven paths. They are marked out in the Bible. They are understandable. They are precious. They are hard and they are very joyful."**

Search the Scriptures for these paths. When you find them, walk on them with humble faith and courage setting your face like a flint towards the Cross – **your** Cross and **your** empty tomb. Then, for the joy that is before you, may a lifetime of sacrifice in the path of love seem a very light burden.