

Joy That Gathers

Hebrews 12:1-3

October 26, 2025

Joy in the Christian life embodies a gathering power that furthers God's mission in the world. The missional nature of this joy expresses itself through a seeking and finding activity that naturally gathers people together into a community of joy.

I. The Missional Character of the Joy Set Before Jesus

The "*joy set before him*" was to establish God's kingdom on earth and provide people a flourishing life with God. When Jesus began his ministry he announced, "*the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news!*" Mk. 1:15. The many healings and miracles Jesus performed pointed to the in-breaking of God's kingdom through his person and ministry. Jesus taught about this seeking and finding joy in the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son, Luke 15.

This missional joy that was set before Jesus involved enduring the cross. For the way into God's kingdom is through the forgiveness of sins. But the chief end of the joy set before Jesus had an even higher purpose. It was to glorify God. He "*sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*" which is the place of supreme glory. The chief purpose behind what Jesus did was for the Son to glorify the Father and the Father to glorify the Son. This missional joy Jesus had, is the same missional joy we are now called to take up.

II. The "Look" of Missional Joy

Missional joy has a distinctive look to it. The chief end is to glorify God. Humanity's "chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully enjoy him forever" — the Westminster Confession.

Joy is distorted and marred in sin when it does not glorify God. When joy finds its glory in itself, it is pride. When joy finds its glory in success and fame and fortune, it is idolatry. When joy finds its glory in taking advantage of people for one's own personal benefit, it is deception. When joy finds its glory in belittling others, it is jealousy and envy. When joy finds its glory in amassing material wealth, it is greed. When joy finds its glory in getting even with people, it is vengeful hatred. Joy has a certain "look" to it, and that look can be perverse.

But when joy finds its glory in God, it celebrates the goodness and beauty and wonder of God. Joy that looks to glorify God and enjoy him is what constitutes holiness for the Christian and is the norm, not the exception, for life with God in his kingdom. When the Holy Spirit lives in us we are made holy to the Lord, set apart for his holy purposes, and saturated with the joy of the Lord.

III. Characteristics of Missional Joy

- Missional joy propels followers of Jesus Christ forward in reaching out to others. We are so filled with joy that we want to share the good news of Jesus Christ with

others. This joy we have expresses itself in a seeking and finding action that accepts people as they are and wants them to know and experience the wonder, beauty, and glory of God.

- Missional joy has a story to tell, the story of God's redemption. It begins with God's great love for us, and how God's desire is for everyone to know a beautiful, inspiring, hope filled life with him. Then it goes on to tell how God brought all this to fulfillment in his Son who died on the cross to defeat sin and death, and how through the forgiveness of sins Jesus opens the way to a flourishing life with God. It goes on to tell of our great need for a Savior from sin and how our joy is fulfilled in surrendering our lives to this Savior and putting sin out of our lives through confession and repentance. And it tells how our future destiny of a resurrected life on a new earth flooded with the goodness of God's is a sure thing and that nothing in life and nothing in death can take this away.
- Missional joy is magnetic, and has a drawing power that gathers people together into a community of joy. Joy is contagious and builds community. When you have joy, you share it. And that means we get together with others. A space is created when we do this where the joy we have can come to expression with others, and a community of joy is brought about.

Whenever the church engages in ministry, it is a place where joy comes to expression and where others are invited to share in the joy we have. Our ministries, no matter what they are focused on, are first and foremost communities of joy. Why? It's because all ministry in the name of Jesus Christ celebrates the goodness and beauty and wonder of God who has redeemed us and called us into his joyful service. All ministry is directed to the glory of God, and therefore infused with joy.

What we discover is that missional living is joyful living. Joy is central to this task of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and essential to the success of the church's mission of bringing glory to God and inviting people into a flourishing life with God in his kingdom.

In the Christian life, we are awakened to and surprised by the overflowing bounty and excessive goodness, beauty, and wonder of God's great love for us in Jesus Christ. That goodness of God, overwhelms us with God's missional joy so that we too are caught up into this joyful seeking and finding activity that has as its goal the glory of God.