

Inexpressible Joy

1 Peter 1:8

Intro

It seems that our society has been so much obsessed with happiness and its pursuit. According to *Psychology Today*, in 2008, over 4,000 books were published on happiness—up from 50 in 2000. (Source: Julia Baird, "Positively Downbeat," *Newsweek*, Sept. 25, 2009)

The pursuit and obsession of happiness has reached a peak in terms of the greatest numbers in history diligently chasing after it. It is an innate drive found in every human being's nature. It does not matter what race we are, whether we are well-educated or not, skilled, or unskilled, male or female, tall or short, healthy or sick, wealthy, or poor. Everyone wants to be happy and seeks it in varying ways and intensities.

People pursue happiness through entertainment. Some seek it in athletic endeavors, hobbies, travel, dancing, fashion, home improvements, wealth, status, food, alcohol, drugs and through sexual appetites. These all fail except for a brief period of satisfaction and sense of well-being.

You see, happiness is based on temporary circumstances on what happens around you but joy is based on a state of mind and being – it's what's on the inside.

Joy

The word translated "joy" (Greek: chara) refers to the joy of God working in and through the believer. As a matter of fact do you know what the shortest verse in the Bible is? You say I know that its "*Jesus wept.*" Jesus wept is the shortest verse in English, but in the Greek New Testament the shortest verse is found in 1 Thess. 5:16 which says "*Rejoice always.*"

Rejoice and joy have the same meaning.

The Bible mentions "joy" or "rejoicing" 330 times. But it only mentions "happiness" 26 times. Happiness depends upon what happens to you. So if all the circumstances are right in your life, then you can be happy. But joy comes from inside.

Bob Dylan

In an interview in AARP magazine, singer and poet Bob Dylan talked about his new music, life on the road, and true happiness. Towards the end of the interview Dylan said, "OK, a lot of people say there is no happiness in this life and certainly there's no permanent happiness ... I'm not exactly sure what happiness even means, to tell you the truth. I don't know if I personally could define it." When the interviewer asked if Dylan has touched and held happiness, Dylan replied, "We all do at certain points, but it's like water—it slips through your hands. As long as there's suffering, you can only be so happy. How can a person be happy if he has misfortune?" (Source: Robert Love, "Bob Dylan Does the American Standards His Way," AARP The Magazine, Jan. 22, 2015).

I want to tell you the difference between joy and happiness. You are not happy all the time because happiness depends on what happens. The Bible doesn't tell us to rejoice in circumstances it tells us to **rejoice in the Lord.**

Happiness comes from outside circumstances, but Joy comes from within. Happiness meets surface needs but Joy meets our deepest needs.

Happiness is like a thermometer, it registers conditions.
Joy is like a thermostat, it regulates conditions.

Now happiness many times evaporates in suffering, but Joy frequently intensifies in times of suffering. Look with me what the Apostle Paul says in Philippians.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4).

You need do understand that Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison chained and not knowing the outcome of his prosecution. Yet, he rejoices! Why?

Because he believes in a great God who has absolute power and control over his life.

Because he is in the safest place, in Christ’s hands (John 10:28)

Because he knows where he is going – to heaven.

Because he knows the real joy giver – the Lord!

Notice what Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord” not in your circumstances.

JOY is always used to refer to joy that is based on spiritual factors. It is not a slap-happy silliness that is the result of positive circumstances or just positive thinking, but in the deep-founded joy of God.

1 Peter 1:8 says, *“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”*

Inexpressible literally means ‘higher than speech.’ Those who live in personal communion with Christ experience a joy so divine that they cannot communicate it - humanly speaking, because such joy is beyond the reach of human words and expression. It is a transcendent joy!

Spiritual joy transcends circumstances. In John 16:20, Jesus informed His disciples that they would weep and be sorrowful, but that their sorrow would *“be turned into joy.”* He illustrated the overriding power of joy with the example of childbirth, *“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.”* (John 16:21). A woman has pain and apprehension in giving birth to a child, but that same incident also brings joy when the child is born.

The greatest example of joy is Jesus. Although Isaiah 53:3 says that Jesus was *“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”*

But Hebrews 12:2 says that Christ endured the cross *“who for the joy set before him endured the cross.”* Jesus had a deep joy that it didn't deter Him from paying the penalty for the sins of everyone who ever lived. He never lost the overriding joy in His life while anticipating the cross. He knew the outcome.

And He can offer that kind of satisfying joy to His followers.

In John 15:11 Jesus says, *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*

Let me say something: trials are meaningless, pointless, and suffering is senseless unless there is some good purpose for them.

God has a goal in mind. God knows what the good purpose is. The first is that suffering is inevitable.

James 1:2, does not say, *“Count it all joy, my brethren, if you face trials of many kinds.”* He says, *“Count it all joy **when** you face trials of many kinds.”*

What does that mean? It means trials are not optional. Suffering is a normal part of the process that God uses to bring us to glory. We must not ignore the inevitability of that suffering.

Remember the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament, in 1 Thess. 5:16 Paul says, “*Rejoice always.*”

The Apostle Paul recognized the existence of negative human emotions like sorrow and distress. However he also knew believers must transcend their sorrows with a continual focus on true joy; they must be as he wrote of himself, “*sorrowful yet always rejoicing*” (2 Cor. 6:10).

Such a focus is possible because biblical joy comes from the Holy Spirit, not merely from a superficial emotional response to positive circumstances. Christian joy constantly flows from what the believer continually knows to be true about God and about their eternal, saving relationship to Him – regardless of circumstances.

Supernatural joy is from the Holy Spirit; thus Paul listed it as an aspect of spiritual fruit.

Also I like what Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 4:16-18,

“*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*”

There is our joy! It’s focused on the eternal and the eternal is in us and that’s why we have this deep joy.

The psalmist says, “*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*” (Psalm 16:11).

You say, “I would like to have that joy. How can I do it?” You don't try to do it on your own because the Holy Spirit produces it. “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy...*” (Gal. 5:22). If you are filled with the Spirit, He will automatically produce it in you supernatural joy.

Conclusion

A third-century man by the name of Cyprian was anticipating death, he wrote these last words to a friend: “It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians. . . and I am one of them.” (Source: “A Letter of Cyprian to Donatus” *Moments with The Devotional Masters*, Upper Room, 1961).

“They have found a joy and wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life.” Wow!

Illustration of Dr. Robert Kalley

Around 1832 a Scottish doctor by the name of Robert Kalley was an atheist treating a very poor woman dying of cancer. Her triumphant faith in the midst of so much misery and pain impressed the young doctor more than he cared to admit. She bore her trials of pain and poverty not merely with calmness, but with joy! The room where she lay may have lacked even the barest necessities, but to the doctor when he made his frequent visits, it had an out of this world quality, something which his scientific mind could not explain. The risen Lord was making His presence and His glory a reality to His humble servant in the death throes of a wasting disease. Her witness shook the very foundations of Dr. Kalley’s unbelief. Could there be a God? ‘Read the Book’, she urged him; ‘it’s

all in the Book!’ Could Christ and his claims be true? He began to search the Scriptures diligently in an endeavour to discover the secret of her victory and joy over the ravages of disease, the destitution of poverty and ultimately, of death itself. (Source: *The Wolf of Scotland*, by William B. Forsyth, Evangelical Press, 1988, pg. 19).

Through her powerful witness Kalley eventually came to faith in Christ and became the first evangelical to take the Gospel to Portuguese soil, Madeira Island and eventually to Brazil, in the years 1838 to 1875. How the joy of a dying woman witnessed powerfully to a world shaper.

Remember, spiritual joy transcends life’s circumstances and situations. Therefore, no event or circumstance in the Christian life, apart from sin, can diminish the Lord’s true joy.

It’s truly a joy unspeakable and full of glory! (1 Peter 1:8).