

A Key to Joy  
March 23, 2014

Jesus wants you to know the joy of His salvation. This joy is based in one of the greatest spiritual truths that is taught in the Bible. Once you fully grasp this truth you will experience the joy Jesus wants for you. This truth lays the foundation for that experience.

I want you to use your imagination with me this morning. I want you to imagine that you have committed a crime. That may be hard for you to do, but it is important that you try to see yourself having done this. We won't get into motives for why you did it. Neither is it important what crime it was. What we are going to focus on are the consequences of the crime. Just pretend that you have committed a crime. This was a bad crime, a crime for which the only penalty, if found guilty, is death.

You were arrested, charged with the crime, and are out of jail on bail until the trial. Even if you plead "not guilty", you will be found guilty. The amount of evidence that will be presented in your case will leave no doubt that you are guilty.

You are out of jail on bail while awaiting trial. You are living your normal life but have the upcoming trial and conviction hanging over you. You decide to try your best to be a better person. You think that maybe the judge will be lenient if you change your ways. You change your language. You start speaking respectfully to others. You start helping others, even doing volunteer work in the community. You do the best job you can do at everything you do. And people start to notice. They compliment you for the changes.

The day of court finally arrives and the trial is underway. All the evidence is laid out about the crime you committed. It is obvious that you are guilty. The judge asks if you have anything to say. You tell the judge how sorry you are for the crime you committed. You tell the judge how you have changed. For the last few months you have been a new person. You tell of your volunteer work you have been doing. Others corroborate this.

The judge listens to all of that, and tells you he is glad you have decided to be a better person. But the law is specific for the crime you committed. He cannot reduce the sentence. He declares you guilty and sentences you to execution by lethal injection. They lead you away in handcuffs to await your execution.

I wanted you to imagine yourself in this story because this story parallels the situation of human being on the planet. Look at the facts as the Bible presents them.

**Facts in Evidence:**

**Now - Every person is a sinner.** (Romans 3:10-18, 23)

**Later,** (on the day of judgment - Matthew 12:36; 2 Peter 3:7; 1 John 4:17)

- **Every person will stand trial before God.** (Romans 14:12; Hebrews 4:13)

- **Each will be declared guilty of sin against God.**

- **Each will be condemned (sentenced) to hell.** (2 Thessalonians 2:12)

Everyone now living is in-between now and later. Every person will give an accounting to God for his or her life choices.

Some people know this and are trying to change, trying to show God they are sorry and want to change. They are working at improving themselves. They are even making progress. They hope to show God how they have changed on judgment day. But it is a waste of time. No amount of self-improvement can make up for the sins you are already guilty of. Let me illustrate with a true story.

In **February, 1974, Susan LaFevre was arrested** in Saginaw, Michigan for selling drugs. One year later, she was sentenced to prison for 10-20 years. After serving one year of that sentence she **escaped from prison. This was in February, 1976.** Thirty two years later, in **April 2008, U.S. marshals arrested her** in Carmel Valley, California. She had then been married for 25 years and had a husband and three children. She was a respected member of the community.

But she was still guilty of her original crime and of escaping prison. So she was taken back to Michigan and put back in jail. Even though she had lived as a good citizen, crime free, for 32 years she still had to face the penalty for her previous crimes.

In the same way, every person is guilty of past sins. If you could live without committing any sin for the rest of your life, it would not make up for the sins you are already guilty of. You are still guilty of sin no matter how much you believe in God. You are still guilty of sin, no matter how good your behavior. You are still guilty of sin, no matter how kind you are towards others. You are still guilty of sin no matter how religious you become. You are still guilty of sin. And when you stand before God and have to account for your sinful life you will be found guilty and sentenced to hell.

Now go back with me to our imagined story. You are in prison, awaiting execution. The day of your execution has arrived. The guards walk down to get you and lead you away. They strap you onto a table. A doctor injects you with drugs that put you sleep, then stop your breathing and heart.

The drugs work. Your heart does stop beating. After a full minute of no heart beat you are declared legally dead. You have died. You have ceased to live.

And then five minutes later, something remarkable happens. Your heart starts beating again. You regain consciousness. Everyone is amazed, and perplexed. No one quite knows what your status is.

They lock you back up and seek input from the judge. The judge rules that you were sentenced to die and die you did. So you are now free to go. So they let you out of prison.

The law demanded you die. The law condemned you to death. And it was carried out. You died. You paid the penalty for your crime. Now you are free to start over. Now you can live without any past crime hanging over your head.

This last imagined part of our story is a parallel of the Christian experience. Every Christian was living a normal life sinful life, between numbers 1 and 2 (above). Maybe you were trying to please God, or maybe you were not. It did not matter. Every Christian was living a normal life but would have stood trial before God, been found

guilty of sin, and sentenced to hell. But something happened during the course of your life.

You heard of a Savior, Jesus, who died as the penalty for your sin. You chose to believe in Him, identify yourself with Him in baptism, and follow Him obediently with your life.

What you may not know, and this is the point of today's sermon, what you may not know is that **something changed in your legal status when you became a Christian.** Something happened in a legal sense when you put your faith in Jesus. Look at how Paul describes it.

**Galatians 2:19-20 (NIV)** For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

"Through the law I died..." What this means is that the Law demanded his death for sin. He is guilty, under the Law of Moses, under God's commands. He is guilty of sin worthy of death. But he did not die physically. He has the same body as before he became a follower of Jesus.

Jesus died. Jesus died in Paul's place. Jesus died in our place. He stood in our place and died for our sins. Yet, what does Paul write? "I died." "I was crucified with Christ."

When you believed God and trusted in Jesus as your Savior, God marked you as dead with Christ. Since Jesus died on your behalf, God marked you as dead with Jesus, even though you did not physically die. In the eyes of God, in the eyes of the Law, you are listed as having died. In the record books in heaven, you are listed as dead, just as if you had physically died on the cross. If anyone wants to know your status, they can go to God and it is listed in the record books. You died on the cross with Jesus.

Through the law you died. You have been crucified with Christ. Through the law you died.

And since the Law of Moses demanded your death and you did die in God's eyes with Christ, you are no longer under the Law of Moses. That is what he says. "Through the law I died... to... the law."

A change in your legal status came about when you put your faith in Jesus.  
**There was also a change in the authority over you.**

**The Law of Moses demanded your death. That death was carried out in Jesus, for you. Upon your faith in this death of Jesus for you, the Holy Spirit came to live in you. You are now a temple of the Holy Spirit. You now live under Jesus' authority, made real by the Holy Spirit.**

"I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." That's what he says. "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." The old him died on the cross with Jesus. God made him, you, me, a new person in Christ. You have the same physical body. But you are a new, reborn, spiritual person, and under a new authority.

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Can you grasp it, Christian? You died with Christ on the cross. You died to the Law and are alive to the Spirit. By the Holy Spirit Christ Jesus lives in you.

Since you died your sins no longer hang over you like a death sentence. Believe that you died with Christ on the cross. Believe and know the joy of your salvation.

The old you could not please God, no matter what you did. You were living on borrowed time, awaiting judgment and condemnation. **The new you pleases God completely by your faith in Jesus.**

**Now, you can joyfully serve the Lord Jesus Christ.** Live in the joy of your salvation by faith in Him. Joyfully serve Him. Joyfully live in obedience to Him. Joyfully love others as He has loved you.

Christian, your life is a very strange one. You were crucified with Christ, never-the-less you live! Tell that to unbelievers and they will look at you as if you are crazy. They walk away scratching their heads. They don't understand. Indeed, they cannot.

But now you understand. You understand why you can be joyful like Jesus wants you to be. You were crucified with Christ. Never-the-less you live.