

Delight in the Lord, Who Is Our Exceeding Joy

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I received a text at about 8:45 this morning from Sam, saying that Amy's water broke – good luck with the service. They are at the hospital to deliver baby Joshua (#9!), and I have the privilege of delivering an impromptu sermon (2 Tim. 4:2).

Six months ago, I was reading Philippians and felt like it was the first time I noticed a certain truth. Paul was in prison for preaching the Gospel, and he told the Philippians that it would be better by far if he were martyred because he would be with the Lord. "To die is gain!" (Phil. 1:21). But look at what motivated him to desire to stay on earth:

Philippians 1:25

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith...

Joy in the faith is so much of an apostolic priority that it motivated Paul to desire more fruitful ministry with them.

I'm concerned that sometimes we may think that we can't pursue joy and pleasure. "That's what sinners do. Christianity is serious, somber business. Christianity is about self-denial." Yes – for the sake of greater joy!

The God of Joy

Let's lay the foundation for joy in the very nature of the Triune God. I contend that God is the most joyful Being in existence. He is also the most grieved, seeing every sin and injustice on the planet, every day and night without rest. Yet He does whatever He pleases and delights in bringing justice. Mostly, He delights in Himself!

Before Creation, all that existed was God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, raging in love for each other with joy in each other.

Proverbs 8 personifies God's Wisdom, and I believe it spiritually signifies Christ, who is the Wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:30

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God...

Colossians 2:2-3

...God's mystery, which is Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Proverbs 8, therefore, reveals that before Creation, God the Father daily delighted in God the Son, who was rejoicing before Him always – what a picture of the perfectly joyful Triune God!

Proverbs 8

³⁰then I was beside him, like a master workman,
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
³¹rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man.

Not only did the Father delight in the rejoicing Son, but they rejoiced in Creation and delighted in Man, who who was created in God's joyful Image.

God rejoices in us and rejoices in doing good to us.

Jeremiah 32:41

I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

God offers, invites, and directs us to joy in His presence.

Psalms 16:11

You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalms 36:7-9

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
⁸They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights [see Jn. 7:37-39].
⁹For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light.

Psalms 5:11

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult [feel and show elation and jubilation] in you.

Psalms 4:7

You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound.

Can unbelievers see – from our lives – that the one true God gives more joy than earthly pleasures?

The problem with sin is not that we seek pleasure, but that we misdirect our desire to fleeting rip-offs instead of the eternal pleasures and fullness of joy in the presence of the Lord (Ps. 16:11, 4:7). Pray that when you face temptation, the Spirit will remind you that the sinful offer is only a rip-off of what you really want: joy in the Lord and the good He gives to enjoy.

Psalm 43:4

Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God my exceeding joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.

The psalmist called God his “exceeding joy.” Is God the exceeding joy of our hearts? He can be.

Commanded Joy

Joy and delight are the proper responses to relationship with the Creator God, and so it is not merely offered, but commanded. The fact that delighting and rejoicing in God are commanded means that, if we are not delighting in God and finding our deepest satisfaction in Him, then we are sinning, showing that our hearts are not believing His infinite worth and receiving the joy of His Spirit.

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in Yahweh,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 2:11

Serve Yahweh with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.

Psalm 32:11

Be glad in Yahweh, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord

Philippians 3:1

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord...

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brothers, rejoice....

A Joyful Response to the Revelation of God

An online concordance search for “joy,” “glad,” and “rejoice” would yield pages upon pages of results, because Biblical saints expressed their experience of faith, their praise, and their exhortations in terms of joy. This is especially true in the Psalm, which kicks off with the theme of delight:

Psalm 1:2

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
²but his delight is in the law [*torah*, teaching, instruction] of Yahweh,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

See *also* Psalm 111:2, 119:14, 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 92, 143, 174.

During the stretch of wicked kings, the people of God lost the words of God (perhaps the book of Deuteronomy or the entire Law of Moses). During the reforms of Josiah, it was found again (2 Ki. 22), and

Jeremiah rejoiced:

Jeremiah 15:16

Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart,
for I am called by your name,
O Yahweh, God of hosts.

A Joyful Response to the Gospel

It was prophesied that the Gospel would bring delight, and it would be received with rejoicing.

Isaiah 52:7-8

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings *good news of happiness*,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”
⁸The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they *sing for joy*;
for eye to eye they see
the return of Yahweh to Zion.

Isaiah 55:2

“Come, everyone who thirsts, [see Jn. 7:37-39 and Rev. 22:17]
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and *delight yourselves in rich food* [see Jn. 6:35-58].

Isaiah 58:14

then you shall take delight in Yahweh...

Malachi prophesied that after the coming of John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah, then Yahweh Himself would suddenly come into the temple, and He is called the One in whom we delight.

Malachi 3:1

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says Yahweh of hosts.¹

Romans 15:10 quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 (MT) about the nations rejoicing at the coming of Christ:

¹ ESV Study Bible note: “...speaks in poetic parallelism, in which two lines express the same idea in different words. Therefore, the Lord whom you seek is the same person as the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, and thus this coming “messenger of the covenant” is the same divine being as “the Lord,” who also is desired and will come. Then in the following verses, the ministry described in vv. 2–4 also indicates the divine nature of this coming Lord. The NT confirms this interpretation by its identification of John the Baptist as the promised messenger of v. 1a, who prepares the way for the Lord who is predicted in v. 1b (see Matt. 11:10–14 par.).

Romans 15:10

... "Rejoice, O nations, with his people."

Consider also that we are commanded to love God, and love "rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6).

Christmas Did Indeed Bring Joy to the World

Prophesied to John the Baptist's dad:

Luke 1:14-15

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵for he will be great before the Lord....

The wise men:

Matthew 2:10

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

John the Baptist, filled with the Spirit from the womb (Lk. 1:15), rejoiced at the presence of the Lord in Mary's womb!

Luke 1:43-44

[John the Baptist's mother said:] "And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."

Mary worshiped joyfully:

Luke 1:47

... "My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

The angel evangelized the shepherds:

Luke 2:10-11

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The Gospel is good news of great joy to the world!

Jesus' Joy

It was prophesied that the Christ would delight in the fear of Yahweh. *Do we think of such reverence as delightful?*

Isaiah 11:3

And his delight shall be in the fear of Yahweh...

Jesus delighted to become a Man and do the Father's will:

Psalms 40:7-8

Then I said, "Behold, I have come;

in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
8I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.”

Delighting to do His Father's will means that Jesus died for the sake of joy!

My interpretation of the Parable of the Hidden Treasure goes against popular teaching, and I do it knowing that teachers will be judged more strictly (Jas. 3:1) because I am so convinced – joyfully convinced.

Matthew 13:44

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The popular interpretation is that the man is every disciple, and we are called to sell all that we have to gain Christ, who is the treasure. I do believe that Christ is the greatest treasure, and we are called to renounce everything to make Him everything (Lk. 14:26-33). But I believe that can only be the secondary implication of this passage.

Jesus taught us how to interpret parables by explaining to His disciples the hidden meaning behind the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds. Both of those parables were allegories, in which each major element represented another element. For example, in the Parable of the Soils, the preeminent Sower was the Son of Man (cf. Mt. 13:37), and the seeds represented the word of the Kingdom. The types of ground were hearts of the hearers. The birds of the heavens signified Satan. Thorns and thistles signified the cares of the this age, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things (Mt. 13.; Mk. 4:13-20, Lk. 8:11-15). In the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds (Mt. 13:36-43), the Sower was the Son of Man, the field was the world, in which the Son of Man sowed good seed (sons of the Kingdom), but the devil sowed weeds (sons of the evil one), which both grew until the harvest (the end of the age), reaped by angels.

Many commentators and teachers are adamant that parables are not allegories, but simple stories with obvious and simple meanings. This contradicts the purpose of the parables (to conceal meaning and harden hearts, Mk. 4:11-12, Mt. 11:25) and the explanations of Jesus Christ. Therefore, I have confidence to interpret the Parable of Hidden Treasure as follows. Every aspect is confirmed by additional Scriptures.

The preeminent Man is Jesus Christ, the King who is bringing His Kingdom on earth (cf. Lk. 17:21).

The field is the world (just as in Mt. 13:38).

The treasure is the Church, hidden in the world.

Exodus 19:5-6

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation....

See also Dt. 7:6, 14:2, 26:18, Ps. 135:4, Mal. 3:17.

This promise is applied to the new covenant Church, true Israel made up of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, in 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Titus 2:14.

Disciples do not buy Jesus, but **Jesus did indeed buy the Church**. Redemption means to buy back. God created and therefore owns all things. Man rebelled and sold themselves to be slaves of sin and devil who tempts us to it, the god of this age (cf. 2 Tim. 2:6). But by His blood, Christ bought us back:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

...You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price....

1 Corinthians 7:23

You were bought with a price....

Revelation 5:9-10

...you [the Lamb] were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

Jesus is the Man who sold all that He had, *laying down His very life to buy the world!*

Jesus did not purchase only the Church; Jesus redeemed the whole world, even sinners and heretics who deny Him!

1 John 2:2

He is the propitiation [wrath-satisfying, atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

2 Peter 2:1

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

Purchasing the whole field was the Man's way to gain the treasure. Redeeming the whole world was the way for Jesus to gain a Bride among the elect who would repent and believe obediently.

Jesus sold all that He had, gave His life, *for the joy set before Him.*

Hebrews 12:2

looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus died for the joy of returning to the joy in God's presence (Ps. 16:11, which closes a song about the death and resurrection of Christ)² with the glory He had before the beginning of the world because of the Father's love (Jn. 17:24).

Jesus also died for the joy of gaining a treasure, a Bride, a partner in bringing the Kingdom of God to earth.

He taught about *God's joy* when one sinner repents and comes to God through Christ.

Luke 15:6-7, 9-10

...“Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.... ⁹...”Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.” ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Luke 15:23-24

And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴For this my son was dead,

² See my “Psalm 16: The Resurrection of Christ” (NewLifeEquip.com/?p=761) for teaching on Psalm 16 and its interpretation in Acts 2 and 13.

and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

A Disciple's Joy

Jesus promised His resurrection would bring His disciple's joy that could not be taken away.

John 16:20

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but *your sorrow will turn into joy*. ²¹When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, *for joy that a human being has been born into the world*. ²²So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and *your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you*.

The reports of the disciples' reaction to the resurrection emphasize joy:

Matthew 28:8

So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Luke 24:40-41

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

Luke 24:51-53

While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Jesus closed His vital, last-night teaching about the Vine and the branches with this:

John 15:11

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

The path to the fullest joy now and in eternity is being a disciple who abides in Christ and in His words, obeying and bearing fruit for God's glory.

Jesus bid us to pray to the Father in His Name for the sake of full joy:

John 16:24

Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Jesus let His disciples here His last-night prayer for the sake of full joy:

John 17:13

But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

As the Church advanced the Kingdom, it resulted in great joy:

Acts 8:5-8

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ [v. 12: good news

about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ].⁶And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.⁷For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.⁸So there was much joy in that city.

Acts 13:48-49, 52

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.⁴⁹And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. ...⁵²And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Paul ministered for the sake of the Church's joy:³

2 Corinthians 1:24

Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you *for your joy*, for you stand firm in your faith.

Paul prayed for the Church with joy:⁴

Philippians 1:4

always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy

Paul prayed that the Church would have joy:

Colossians 1:11

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience *with joy*...

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy:

Galatians 5:22

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy....

When we receive the rule of God in our hearts, it manifests as joy:

Romans 14:17

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Even in suffering, we can and must be abounding in our joy in the Lord, which circumstances cannot take away (Jn. 16:22).

2 Corinthians 7:4

I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.

³ The apostle John wrote His epistles for the sake of joy (1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 1:12).

⁴ He also found joy in the obedient Church (Phil. 2:2, 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:19-20, 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:4; Philemon 1:7, cf. Heb. 13:17). So also, John (3 Jn. 1:4).

2 Corinthians 6:10

sorrowful, yet always rejoicing

James 1:2-4

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

Hebrews 10:34

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

The Promised Reward of Eternal Joy

Not only do we experience joy now from the presence of the Lord in our spirit and our sense of His pleasure in our obedience, but Jesus even motivated us with the future reward of more joy:

Matthew 25:21

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

Matthew 25:23

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

We will see God! We will be like Him, transformed wholly into His Image, saturated and radiating His glory. We will feel His joy in every ounce of our beings! This is the Perfection we long for! There may be no greater motivation for faithfulness! *Great joy!*

Jude 1:24

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*, ²⁵to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

1 Peter 1:8-9

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and *rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory*, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Our Joy, Glory to God

We are created to glorify God. Jonathan Edwards taught that God is not glorified by merely knowing His worth (as demons do) as much as delighting in it (as disciples do). C. S. Lewis taught that praise is the natural overflow of our delight, and our delight is incomplete until we have expressed our praise. I've been praising my iPhone 4S to friends because I delight in the fact that it's the best phone ever and is just plain fun to use. It would quench my delight if I wasn't able to talk about it. How much more should I delight in my infinitely worthy God and Savior and then praise Him in my closet and among the nations!

Along with praying that all of these Scriptures get in our hearts, I am praying for us these Psalms:

Psalm 85:6

Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?

Psalm 90:14

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.