

October 28, 2012

Living Out The Gospel In Real Life

Ask - That Your Joy May Be Full

John 16:23 – 33

John records that Jesus talks about joy or rejoicing sixteen times in his gospel; and most of them occur in His final discourse here in these chapters. Jesus knew that His disciples hearts were troubled; He knew that hard times were coming for them; He knew the desolation they would feel when they saw Him crucified and buried; and He knew that all this was ultimately for their joy. That is why He gives them a strong foundation of truth so that when the trouble came, they would not be shaken in their faith and let circumstances rob them of their joy. And truth, Jesus told them, is Me – I am the Way, the Life and the Truth. If our joy, our happiness, our delight is based on anything or anyone other than Christ we are bound to be disappointed, we are bound to be joyless. First of all we need to embrace the truth who is Jesus.

What about you this morning? Is your joy founded on The Truth? The Truth of who Jesus is and what He has done? Is it your experience that joy is inevitable, transcendent, continual, as we talked about last week? If not, it may be that you may never have come to the source of joy – you have not yet surrendered your life to Christ. And you can't experience this kind of joy. You only get it one place – in Christ. You've been trying to get your joy out of your circumstances – and they've turned on you. You've looked for joy in others and they've let you down. Joy doesn't seem inevitable for you – it's not transcendent or continual – something always happens to rob you of your joy. And Jesus is telling you this morning -'Come to Me, I am the source of joy – quit trying to manufacture your own'.

At the bottom of every pursuit of every human being is the desire to be happy – to be filled with joy. No one sets out in any endeavor to make themselves miserable. No one says, 'My goal is to be as unhappy as possible'. That isn't how we're built. We were built to pursue joy. Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician of the 17th century said it best: *All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.* That isn't a selfish thing, this doesn't contradict the canon of Scripture – God made man to experience joy to the full. John Ortberg put it this way: *Joy is at the heart of God's plan for human beings. The reason for this is worth pondering awhile: Joy is at the heart of God himself. We will never understand the significance of joy in human life until we understand its importance to God. I suspect that most of us seriously underestimate God's capacity for joy.*

Look at the record of Scripture. At the end of Job, God asks him: *"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?...When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?" Job 38:4,7* Joy was right at the center of God's creation. Isaiah tells us that God has great joy in His people: *For as a young man marries a virgin, So your sons will marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So your God will rejoice over you. Isaiah 62:5 'I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people...' Isaiah 65:19* The prophet Zephaniah gives us a picture of a God who is exuberant in His joy: *"The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy." Zephaniah 3:17*

Here in John Jesus has already told His disciples: *"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."* John 15:11 And He's just told them that behind the sorrow, behind the travail, behind the anguish joy is coming and no one can take it away. *"Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.* John 16:22 The Bible teaches that the desire to be happy is God-given. In fact it tells us that you and I were made for joy. Joy is our birthright. We were created for it. And when we lost it, Jesus came to bring it back again. From start to finish, Jesus is all about joy. He came – that our joy might be full. That means He wants our joy to be perfect joy, complete in every particular. Every other joy is lacking fullness. The birth of a new baby – comes with a bill. A happy graduation – comes with anxiety over finding a job. The only joy that comes full and complete is the joy we find in Christ. I believe that joy in God is not optional icing on the cake of Christianity. When you think it through, joy in God is an essential part of saving faith. Augustine said it best: *'He is happy who possesses God.'*

I know some of you might be tempted to think, if you're not already, that this seems, well, a bit selfish. I mean, the chief end of man is to glorify God – and it seems like we're not doing that if we focus on our joy. But if you say that, you miss the point of what Jesus was telling His disciples completely. He wasn't saying that joy is whatever makes you happy. **He was saying that what makes you truly happy can only be found in Him.** He wasn't saying that whatever you enjoy is good – He was saying that I'm the good that brings joy. And it is when we enjoy all the good that is Jesus that God is most glorified in us. So you might say, our joy and God's glory rise and fall together. I'll paraphrase John Piper here: God is most glorified in us when we are most joyful in Him. This is the point Jesus was making in the parable of the man who found the treasure hidden in the field – and for joy, it says, sold everything he had and bought the field. Jesus, Hebrews tells us, *'...for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame...'* Hebrews 12:2

It is in this context we need to see this last part of Jesus' final discourse. He's told them that He's going away, but He's coming back and when they see Him they'll have joy. And then He says: *"In that day you will not question Me about anything."* John 16:23a What these guys had at this point were a lot of questions: "What do you mean 'You're going away?'" "Where are you going?" "When are you coming back?" "What do you mean, 'A little while and you won't see Me, and a little while and you will see Me?'" I imagine these guys had some anxiety and very little joy right then. And essentially Jesus was telling them, 'You've got questions now – but very soon all your questions will be answered'. What Jesus was referring to was the day of Pentecost which at that point was a little less than two months away. And when the Holy Spirit was poured out on these disciples, there was a lot of preaching, but no questioning.

And then Jesus begins to talk about the **conduit of this joy**. He's given them the **foundation of joy** – truth – the truth that joy is not about happy circumstances but knowing the One who controls the circumstances. The joy that is not about pursuing personal goals but pursuing the person of Christ. The joy that is not found in avoiding sorrow and anguish and pain, but in seeing the face of Christ in the midst of those things. And then He begins to talk about how that joy is realized – prayer: *Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.* John 16:23b-24 Don't miss the connection: **Ask – so that** your joy may be made full. **Pray – so that** your joy will be made full. The clear implication is that prayer is the conduit of joy. And you might be scratching your head right now and saying, 'But I thought prayer was about God's glory – aren't we supposed to pray for things that bring Him glory – not just things that make us happy?'

And I would answer that by saying that God's glory and our joy are inextricably linked. That is, the pursuit of our real joy is always embedded in God's glory. I believe the Bible teaches us that God's glory is magnified by making sinners happy in Him. We are never more joyful than when we glorify God in our lives. In God's ineffable wisdom, our highest happiness rests in His greatest glory. And so prayer becomes the pursuit of His glory and our joy. In John 14 we learned that prayer is the pursuit of God's glory – that is we pray about everything with His glory in view. *Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* John 14:6 Here we learn that **prayer is the pursuit of our joy: ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.** If the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, then the chief means to that end is prayer. And therefore the chief posture of Christians is to kneel before God in prayer. If you are pursuing the glory of God and the fullness of your own joy – you will above all be a person of prayer.

Prayer glorifies God because prayer is an admission that we can do nothing. I like the way John Piper defines prayer: *'Prayer is the translation into a thousand different words of a single sentence: 'Apart from Me [Christ] you can do nothing.'* The problem is that we think that we can do some things. Like we can do the small stuff – we'll just save the big stuff for God. If you say that your God is way too small. Think about it. I've heard people that say just that: 'I don't bother God with the small stuff'. But what issue in your life would God consider big? Remember – He's the Sovereign of the Universe, Ancient of Days, Lord of Hosts – to Him, **everything** else is small. And the point is, that prayer acknowledges our helplessness and dependence upon Him for **everything**. One of the functions of **prayer is that it humbles us as needy and exalts God as wealthy.**

Prayer also glorifies God because it is a recognition of who He is. When the woman at the well in chapter four was puzzled at Jesus' request for a drink – He told her: *If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.'* She didn't know Him, so she didn't ask. The big reason we fail to pray is that we don't really know Him. Prayerless Christians are like a bus driver trying to push his big Greyhound bus out of the ditch by himself because he doesn't know Clark Kent is on the bus. If you knew – you would ask!

A prayerless Christian is like a person living in a house wall-papered with Microsoft stock certificates and living off welfare because they can't read. *If you knew the gift of God and who it is that speaks to you – you would ask. **You would ask!*** The implication is that those who do ask – those who pray – those who spend time asking – are those who recognize who Jesus is, and see that God is a great giver, wise and compassionate and loving and powerful beyond measure – and therefore prayer glorifies God and glorifies His Son. **So when we live for the glory of God, we become people of prayer.**

Prayer is the conduit, the pipeline of our joy. *'Ask and you will receive – that your joy may be full'.* That is an invitation to pursue our pleasure in prayer. Pursue joy! PRAY! This is not saying that prayer is about gratifying our lusts or fulfilling our fantasies or even simply asking for things. Joy producing prayer is that prayer that is lined up with God's will. Again in John 14 Jesus says, *Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* John 14:6 This gives prayer a totally God-centered context. Jesus says that the aim of prayer here is that God, the Giver, is glorified in Christ, the Mediator and so the **whatever** puts boundaries on our prayers. If we try to stretch the **whatever**, we deny that the glory of God is the aim of prayer. Why is that? It's because we can all pray prayers that do not glorify God; and if He answered them He would be dishonored – not honored. I remember a song Janis Joplin used to sing where she was praying to God for a Mercedes Benz and a color TV. The aim of that prayer had nothing to do with God's glory. Any prayer that does not imply, 'Hallowed be Thy Name' is not prayer at all but an attempt to gratify our lusts or fulfill our fantasies.

If we do not understand that our real joy is wrapped up in God's glory, we simply won't pray. And prayerless Christians are not only joyless Christians, they are shallow Christians. Prayer is not only an admission that we can do nothing, and a recognition of who God is, prayer brings us into a deeper, more intimate relationship with Jesus. When Jesus told the disciples that they would weep and lament at His going away – He also told them that they would rejoice at His coming back: *I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice.* **The content of their joy was His presence.** No Christian will have full joy without a daily, vital relationship with Jesus Christ. John later writes in his first letter: *I am writing this so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ; I am writing this so that our joy may be full'.* Fellowship with Jesus is essential to fullness of joy. You might say that prayer is the nerve center of our fellowship with Jesus. He told us in chapter 15: *If you abide in Me and I in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you.* John 15:7 And when His words abide in us, we hear as it were, the very thoughts of Christ, and out of that hearing comes the language of prayer that rises to the throne of God and brings Him glory and fill us with joy.

It may be that if we are not experiencing that inevitable, transcendent, continual joy there is a lack in our prayer life. If the pump of joy runs dry it may be that the pipeline of prayer does not run deep enough. Prayer is the pursuit of joy in fellowship with Jesus and the pursuit of His glory by treating Him as the unending well of hope. It is in prayer that we admit our poverty and His prosperity – our bankruptcy and His bounty – our misery and His mercy. **Prayer glorifies God precisely because we are pursuing everything we desire in Him and not in ourselves.** *Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.*

Jesus continues to press the priority of prayer on His disciples: *These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father.* John 16:25 In other words, up to now, they haven't really understood clearly what is going on. They haven't really understood the will of the Father. They haven't grasped that their joy is wrapped up in Jesus' crucifixion and death. They still cling to the hope that somehow He'll get out of this and reveal Himself as the conquering Messiah. He's been using **paroimia** – speech or discourse in which a thing is illustrated by the use of similes and comparisons – He's been using allegory and metaphors. But there is an hour coming when, through the Holy Spirit, the plain truth of things will be disclosed.

He says: *In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf;* John 16:26 In other words, the day is coming when you will pray to the Father and I won't be the one praying the prayers that you should pray. You see, for three and a half years Jesus had modeled the kind of praying that His disciples would be engaged in when He left. And He's telling them, 'When I'm gone, you will pray to the Father just like I did. In fact, your prayers will be to the Father, in My name'. Praying in Jesus' name is not a quickly mumbled tagline at the end of our prayers. **Praying in Jesus' name means that we are asking God the Father to act upon our prayers because we come in the name of His beloved Son.** Saying 'In Jesus' Name' at the end of your prayer is not some magical incantation. It means that we are coming in the name of His Son, praying according to His will for things that will honor and glorify Him.

When we pray, in Jesus' name, we are coming to the Father clothed in the righteous robes of His Son and He always hears His Son. On our own, we have no merit, no standing, no authority – but His Son does. Our names have no standing in heaven, but His name does. This is not a matter of saying the right words, but a realization and understanding that our prayers are heard in heaven because the Father loves the Son and loves all those who love Him too. And because we love Him and have believed in His Son, we are given audience in the throne room. That's what Jesus tells us: *for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.* John 16:27

And then Jesus tells them plainly what is going to happen: *"I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father."* John 16:28 I like how Dick Foth summarizes the gospel here: **I left My place, I came to this place, I'll take your place, and then we'll go to My place.** And it seems like the disciples get it: *"His disciples said, Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God.* John 16:29-30 But Jesus knows that they don't get it: *Jesus answered them, Do you now believe? "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.* John 16:31-32

In other words, I know you don't really get it – in fact you all will desert Me – but this is precisely why I am telling you these things. *These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."* John 16:33 In other words, 'There is an hour coming when you'll have trouble – not peace – but be of good cheer – I'm still in control'. Jesus is telling them that the only place to experience real, tangible peace, and **therefore real joy**, is in Him. **In Me you may have peace.** You won't get it in your circumstances – you won't find it in your relationships – you can't get it out of a bottle – the only place to find joy and peace is in Me.

And strangely enough, Jesus links peace with its antithesis – trouble. Peace and tribulation. He says, 'You are going to have trouble – there is going to be tribulation in your life. The word is **thlipsis** and it conveys the idea of pressure that results in oppression, affliction, distress, tribulation. It describes circumstances and situations that are anything but peaceful. And Jesus says that the only way through that pressure, the only way to have peace is to find yourself in Him. If Jesus wants us to have peace, why doesn't He just remove all the trouble? Because He knows that **tribulation births prayer, and prayer brings peace.** John Mason, a pastor in the eighteenth century put it this way: **Sin quenches prayer, affliction quickens it. And a hard heart cannot pray; a broken heart is made up of prayer.** In other words, Jesus knows that we need some stimulus to pray. Tribulation, trouble, pressure, reduces us to prayer – and it is through prayer that we discover the peace, and therefore the joy, that is in Jesus. Prayer is not so much about answers as it is about a relationship. It is prayer that brings us into fellowship with Christ.

John Paton, who brought the gospel to the cannibals of the South Sea island of Tanna, was once surrounded by raging natives who kept urging each other to strike the first blow. He wrote this in his journal: **"My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus; I saw Him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realized that I was immortal till my Master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice of Heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was vibrating waiting to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth. He rules all Nature, animate and inanimate, and restrains even the Savage of the South Seas."**

If it is true that at the bottom of our every desire, our every longing, our every pursuit is the goal of joy, the goal of making ourselves happy, then doesn't it make sense that we would pursue prayer – the very conduit of joy and happiness? If God's glory and our joy are so closely linked, shouldn't prayer be our highest priority? You and I don't pray because we don't really believe that, but I want to encourage and exhort us this morning to believe just that. **Ask, pray, pursue God in prayer – that your joy may be full.**

Our gracious Father in Heaven,

We know You are the God who is joy, and You sent Your Son that He might bring us joy. Yet too often we do not feel filled with that joy You came to bring. Forgive us Father for pursuing everything but You – forgive us for trusting in other things, other people, other circumstances to give us what only You can. Forgive us Father for not trusting You enough to ask. But we ask this morning – give us eyes to see and hearts to understand that You are the well-spring of joy and all our longings are satisfied in You. Grant that we would see the joy the world would offer as lies and dreams and vanity. Let us pursue our happiness in Your favor. Fill us Holy Spirit from the well of ever increasing joy till we overflow, so that we delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people we pray in the precious, joy-filling name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.