



Commanded
to
JOY

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SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

Part One: THE WORD OF GOD AND THE JOY OF MAN 1

1. INTRODUCTION: COMMANDED TO JOY	1
2. THE INITIAL JOY: CREATION	1
3. THE GOD OF JOY	2
4. THE GIFT AND LOSS OF JOY	3
5. THINGS IN THE O.T. WHICH ARE CAUSES FOR JOY	4
6. THE PROPHETIC INTIMATIONS OF COMING JOY	4
7. JOY AT THE COMING OF SALVATION	6
8. THE FULFILLING OF SALVATION	8
9. THE JOY OF FULFILLED SALVATION	9
The Fruit of the Spirit	10
The Kingdom of Joy	10
The Joy of Faith	10
The Joy of Hope and Love	11
Joy in the Brotherly Context	11
Joy in the Truth	11
Joy in Prayer and Worship	12
Joy in Proclamation	12
10. THE JOY THAT IS PART OF SUFFERING: THE SUFFERING THAT IS PART OF JOY	12
11. THE JOY THAT IS ESCHATOLOGICAL	14

Part Two: THE JOY OF GOD AND MAN

1. GOD IS THE SOURCE OF TRUE LIFE & SO OF JOY	16
2. GOD SHOWS MAN THE PATH OF LIFE	17
3. GOD GIVES MAN TRUE LIFE, THE LIFE OF JOY	17
4. THE GOD OF JOY IS THE GOD OF SALVATION	19
5. 'WEEPING ENDURES FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMES IN THE MORNING'	20
6. THE MANTLE OF PRAISE: THANKFULNESS	21
7. JOY IS ALSO A MATTER OF ANTICIPATION	22
8. THE JOYING OF THE LORD	23
9. THE ULTIMATE JOY	24

PART ONE
THE WORD OF GOD
AND THE JOY OF MAN
‘Rejoice in the Lord always...’

1. INTRODUCTION: COMMANDED TO JOY

It seems strange that we should be commanded to joy! Joy, we generally think, is something which comes unbidden and spontaneously. This may often be so, but it is not always the case. Human beings are often negative, and tend towards the difficult and mournful in life. Those who believe in God have to be commanded to faith—‘Have faith in God!’—and likewise need to be commanded to see things as they truly are, and not as man so often misjudges them to be. This is not to say that there are not many reasons for sorrow, but joy should be the underlying state of all persons of faith.

2. THE INITIAL JOY: CREATION

Creation began in joy. It must have been as the angelic creatures affirmed their delight: ‘The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy!’ (Job 38:7). In Revelation 4:7-11 they perpetually show this gladness. God sees His creation is ‘very good’.

The word *good* (Hebrew *tob*) means ‘full of pleasure’, and relates to function. When it is said that it is not *good* for man to be alone, it means, ‘not appropriate or functional’ (cf. Eccles. 3:11).

Creation starts off from the point, ‘In thy presence is fulness of joy’ (Psalm 16:11), hence ‘all thy works praise thee,’ is a constant psalmic cry. Hence, ‘For thou, O Lord, hast made me glad at thy works: at the works of thy hands I will sing for joy,’ and ‘Sing aloud to God our strength: shout for joy to the God of Jacob’ (Psalms 92:4, 81:1). See also Psalms 96:11-13, 98:4-9.

The principle of creation contained in Genesis 1:31 is not only that God is satisfied with it, but that it is satisfying. This is seen in I Timothy 4:1-4, 6:17, Acts 14:17, 17:25, and I Corinthians 10:26, cf. Psalm 24:1. The message of these Scriptures is that everything created by God is good (full of pleasure, functional) and *to be enjoyed*. Hence every tree of Eden was ‘good for food and pleasant to the eyes’. This is why man should rejoice in creation; *there is nothing in true creation in which he may not rejoice*. All things are gifts from God and are true (good) gifts (James 1:17).

3. THE GOD OF JOY

In God’s presence is fulness of Joy (Psalm 16:11). Psalm 21:6 speaks of ‘the joy of thy presence’. Jude 24 speaks of men being ‘before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy’. This is certainly the picture we have in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, and the book of the Revelation. All celestial creatures are filled with joy. So are the redeemed. To be in God’s presence is a matter of endless joy.

Why then do men have such a dreary and grim view of God? Doubtless because of evil. An ‘evil eye’ sees only evil even where there is only good. Passages such as Titus 1:15, Isaiah 5:20, Psalm 18:25-26, and Matthew 6:22-23 show us that if there is perversity in us we will accordingly see all things perversely, and not as they really are.

If all things created by God are to be enjoyed then nothing He creates is unenjoyable. God then must be the source of all joy. That is why the Psalmist says, ‘Thou hast put joy in my heart’ (4:7). That is why a man may rejoice in the Lord (Psalm 35:9). This is ‘the joy of the Lord’ of which Jesus speaks as man’s ultimate experience of

God. ‘... God, my exceeding joy’ is what the Psalmist says (43:4). We will see that because of the salvation God gives there is great joy, but even without salvation God is the true source of joy, hence ‘the joy of the Lord is my strength’ (Neh. 8:10).

If God Himself is the source of joy then He is also the God who has, or is, joy. Psalm 104:31 speaks of God rejoicing in His works, much the same as when He saw creation as ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31). In Deuteronomy 30:9 He ‘took delight in your fathers’ (cf. Jer. 32:41). In Zephaniah 3:17 it is said, ‘He will rejoice over thee with joy: he will rest in his love. He will joy over thee with singing.’ These are beautiful words, telling us of God’s delight in what He creates.

4. THE GIFT AND LOSS OF JOY

Obviously, since all creation came to be in joy, the primal couple experienced great joy. Joy was part of their nature. They must have gloried in the freedom of creation and in the lack of fear, guilt, and suffering. However, rebellion against God brought loss of joy with loss of innocence, and such was described as ‘death’ (Gen. 2:17, cf. 3:1-10). They feared now, not because they had to die but because they deserved to die. Romans 5:12-21 shows the tragedy into which they came. More terribly, Romans 1:18-32 shows the tragic state of man.

When we look at his state of alienation from God we see that he has denied his true creational self. No longer correlating with God as son to Father, creature to Creator, and subject to King, he cannot be himself. His loneliness, fear, disorientation, and the like cannot really be computed, so vast and varied are they, so far away from man’s original and truly joyful state. Man suffers griefs, sorrows, harshness, bitterness and fearful anger. He directs his hatred to God, to his fellow creatures, and to the creation. He knows little true joy. Passages such as Titus 3:1-3, Mark 7:20-23, Jeremiah 17:9, and Romans 3:9-18 show the anger and bitterness of man. Even so, God does not fail to give to man the things which can help him to have joy (Matt. 5:43-48, Acts 14:17, 17:25).

Man, because he is not thankful to God, does not see God’s love and care in His gifts, for he does not acknowledge all things as gifts from God. Hence he has little joy.

5. THINGS IN THE .OLD TESTAMENT WHICH ARE CAUSES OF JOY

The following are some of the things which are causes for joy:

- (i) God's creation. Psalm 104, especially vs. 33-34.
- (ii) God's law. Psalm 1:2, 19:8, and Psalm 119--in many verses.
- (iii) God's judgements. Psalm 48:11, 97:8, cf. 96:10-13.
- (iv) God's sovereignty. Psalm 97: 1.
- (v) The salvation of God. Psalm 21: 1, 9:14, Isaiah 25:9, Habakkuk 3: 17-19, Psalm 13:5, 51:12. See Isaiah 51:6, Psalm 35:9.
- (vi) The love and mercy of God. Psalm 13:5, 31:7, 90:14.
- (vii) The day God has made. Psalm 118:24.
- (viii) The words of the Lord which bring comfort. Jeremiah 15:16, Psalm 119:14, cf. Ezekiel 3:3, Job 23:12.
- (ix) Seeking the Lord. Psalm 40:16, 70:4.
- (x) The worship of God. Psalms 42:4, 81:1-4, 16:8f., 43:4, cf. Deuteronomy 12:6ff., I Kings 1:39f., Ezra 3:10-13.

The worship of God is a vast subject on its own. Man finds his true joy in worshipping God. Psalms of praise such as 144-150 make it clear that there was great joy in worship. Hence the people danced in their delight and gladness. The days of feasts were days of great joy. In worship man unites with God and hence knows His joy which thus becomes man's joy. Nehemiah 12:43 is a good example: 'And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.' II Chronicles 29:30 says, 'And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshipped.'

Israel then, for the reasons outlined above, ought to have been a continually joyous nation. Had it not been attracted to other gods, this would have been wholly the case.

6. THE PROPHETIC INTIMATIONS OF COMING JOY-

Israel was certainly in the doldrums because of its sin, idolatry and rebellion. Yet in exile God gave it great hope through the prophets. It was yet to experience joy on a level hitherto not known. Israel had

known the joys of covenant, and of God's renewing favour, e.g. Psalms 126:lff., 53:6, 51:8. Now it was to know the Messianic joys of the restored Kingdom.

This is a vast subject. Some of the promises seem local, related to Israel as a restored nation, whilst others seem far distant and eschatological, not only for Israel but for the nations of the world, and even including a new heaven and a new earth. Some excerpts show us the joy that it anticipated. For example in Isaiah 9:1-7 the promise of joy is not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles. Within it are these words:

'Thou hast multiplied the nation,
thou hast increased its joy:
they rejoice before Thee
as with joy at the harvest,
as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.'

Isaiah 49 is a great Messianic passage in which is verse 13:

'Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the Lord has comforted his people;
and will have compassion upon his afflicted.'

Isaiah 61:3 tells of God who will give Israel, 'the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.'

Isaiah 55 is a resonant song throughout, and promises (verse 12): 'For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands.'

Isaiah 56:6-7 offers joy to the Gentile as well as to Israel: 'And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the sabbath, and holds fast my covenant--these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.' This is an impressive promise.

Again Isaiah 61: 1-11 speaks of the joy of salvation which will come to Israel, but which will also be before the whole earth: 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and

as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.’ A similar promise is found in Isaiah 25:6-10:

‘On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” ‘

Israel is promised in Isaiah 60:15-16 that she shall be made ‘a joy from age to age’. In 66:10 and 14 Israel is again promised great joy of renewal and restoration, and this is the chapter which promises a renewal of the heavens and the earth. Similar promises of renewal in joy are found in Joel 2:21 and 23 and Zechariah 10:7. Zechariah 9:9 is the famous exhortation to joy because of the King who comes to Jerusalem.

The promises to such joy were well known to those in Israel. It is no wonder that high anticipation was present in Palestine at the time of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. It is no wonder that the heart-gladdening theme of the Kingdom of God was in the minds and on the lips of many in Israel.

7. JOY AT THE COMING OF SALVATION

The whole of the New Testament and its good news (or gospel) can be summed up in the words of the angel speaking to the shepherds: ‘Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord’ (Luke 2:10-11).

At the words the angelic host could not contain itself within heaven but burst out (Luke 2:13-14), ‘praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among men
with whom he is pleased.” ‘

From this point onwards it is joy, gladness, delight, glee, pleasure, ecstasy, happiness, merriment, festivity and the like. John the Baptist is saying, 'Thy God reigneth!' and so is Jesus. These are those whose feet are lovely upon the mountains, for they bring good tidings of good. Hence after his baptism Jesus takes one of the great prophetic sayings of Joy and applies it to himself:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to
preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the
captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'

(Luke 4:18-19, cf. Isaiah 61:1-2)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was certainly filled with joy. 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.' The magi 'rejoiced exceedingly with great joy' when the star led them to Jesus. So it is with others.

The joy is present without doubt. It is present in the person of Jesus. It is present when he does his wonderful works. He liberates those possessed by demons. He emancipates some who are bound by demonic sicknesses, and others who are gripped by illnesses and diseases. Some are released from years of guilt.

The word 'joy' is often on the lips of Jesus or is an experience described by the writers of the Gospels. Jesus speaks of the great joy a woman knows when a lost coin is found, a shepherd when a lost sheep is recovered, and a father when a lost son returns. In fact there is joy in heaven, and joy amongst the angels when a sinner repents.

The seventy disciples return with great joy after they proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, especially when they find demonic powers are subject to men and not men to them. Even so they are told to have their joy in the fact that their names are written in heaven, for this is the greatest cause for joy (Luke 10: 16-20).

Rejoicing is on the basis of suffering also. God's people are to rejoice when they are persecuted. 'Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for great is your reward in heaven.' The truth is that throughout the New Testament joy does not come without suffering, but that is a truth we must ultimately consider.

Many times in the Gospels there is praise for what Christ does. The

relief that Christ brings to people in all kinds of situations is enormous. It is not always explicitly spoken of as joy, but without doubt that is what it is. One special occasion was when Jesus healed the paralysed man let down on the bed in a house. Luke's account of the story tells us there were lawyers and scribes from everywhere. It seems they were quite hostile. Yet when the event is shown to be undeniably of God we are told they were filled with awe and praised God, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.' Doubtless joy was mingled with their awe.

Following this rich ministry, Jesus makes his entry into Jerusalem. It is then that the anticipatory joy is shown by the crowds. Luke 19:37-40 describes the event: 'As he was drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the multitude said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."'

Without doubt the people expect a great salvation, and in this they are not disappointed.

8. THE FULFILLING OF SALVATION

Zechariah had bid Jerusalem rejoice, 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass' (Zech. 9:9). Isaiah's message had been joyous also: 'Thy God reigneth!' The King was a man who had come to effect salvation as agent of the Father-King.

On the night of his betrayal Jesus spoke of joy. He said to his disciples, 'If you loved me you would rejoice because I say, "I go to the Father".' They did not understand that their joy lay in his going to the Father. After more words he said, 'These things have I spoken unto you, that *my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*' They were important words, showing that true joy was soon to be theirs. They were yet to suffer. '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 to joy... so you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and *no one will take 'your joy from you'* (John 14:28, 15:11, 16:20-22). On top of this Jesus bids them pray to the Father, '... ask, and you will receive,' that your joy may be full' (John 16:24).

Jesus then prays his high-priestly prayer in John 17. He says, '....these things I speak in this world *that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves'* (verse 13).

The Cross, for all its sufferings, was in the interests of joy. Hebrews 12:2 says of it, '...he for the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God'. The Cross was to bring 'the joy of thy salvation'. Apart from it there could be no such joy. Certainly the resurrection brought immediate joy, for John 20:20 says, 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord,' whilst Luke 24:41 says, '... they believed not for joy!'

Salvation had now come to the household of faith. Following the ascension we are told of the apostolic band, 'They returned to Jerusalem *with great joy*, and were continually in the temple blessing God' (Luke 24:52-53). -

9. THE JOY OF FULFILLED SALVATION

There is no doubt that from the moment of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost the new people of God were a people of joy. The old prophecy, 'With joy shall you draw water from the wells of salvation' (Isa. 12:3-6) was certainly the case in the book of Acts. Those newly become part of the people of God 'partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people.'

Typical of this new joy is the lame man who is healed, who was 'walking and leaping, and praising God'. Whilst there was a holy fear abroad, there was also a holy joy. Threats of persecution did not alter this. Even when punished, the apostles 'left the presence of the Council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name [of Jesus].'

Something of this general joy is described in Acts 8:7-8, 'For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a

loud voice; and many who were paralysed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.’ To be released from demonic powers and the grip of guilt was certainly a cause for joy. The book of Acts then is an account of many who came into the joy of salvation. That joy was increased for those who proclaimed the good news. Acts 13:52 speaks of the matter: ‘And the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit,’ i.e. when they had proclaimed the gospel and had been persecuted for doing so! In Acts 15:1-3 Paul and Barnabas bring ‘great joy to all the brethren’ as they tell of the conversion of the Gentiles to Christ.

The Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace--amongst many other things. When we ask how this joy comes we see it is the result of the gospel. In Psalm 51 David had cried, ‘Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.’ Love comes from love, and joy from the liberation of that love. So likewise peace comes from the gospel. Joy is a fruit of the word of truth. The Spirit brings the word and with the word the joy. Joy comes from being brought back to the truth of true human living unencumbered by guilt, the penalty, the pollution and power of sin. It is restoration to the Father through the Cross. True and natural joy now comes to the pardoned spirit. One lives naturally, without the foreign elements of sin and guilt. This is the true joy of salvation.

The Kingdom of Joy

Paul says ‘The Kingdom of God is not [matters of] eating and drinking, but righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17). The Father reigns in the Kingdom. His family is filled with joy in His presence. Evil powers may still contest the Kingdom but the King truly reigns and will not be moved. Hence the peace and the joy. It is the joy which comes from mutual love within the family. John can say, ‘Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and these things we write to you that your joy may be full,’ i.e. that when we all have that fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the brethren, then it is a matter of joy.

The Joy of Faith

In Romans 15:13 Paul prays that his readers may be filled with all

joy and peace *in believing*. In Philippians 1:25 he speaks of ‘joy in the faith’. This must mean that joy came with believing the word of the gospel. It goes on being a steady joy with the same assurance of forgiveness, justification and cleansing. Just as we have all things by faith, so we have joy also. This of course is the joy of the Lord which is given to us through the gospel. I Peter 1:8 shows this clearly: ‘Jesus Christ, whom not having seen you *love*, whom not seeing you believe and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.’ Love and faith cause the most incredible joy. It is because of the gospel, as verse 6 shows: ‘... through faith for a salvation . . . in this you rejoice’. Note in II Corinthians 1:24 that Paul says, ‘Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.’ Paul works so that they may have joy, knowing this will be a fruit of their life in faith.

The Joy of Hope and Love

In Romans 5:2 Paul says, ‘... we rejoice in the hope of sharing the glory of God.’ Indeed *all* hope is a source of joy for it anticipates justification (Gal. 5:5), resurrection, sonship, glorification, and the like. It anticipates a great inheritance, both of God and His creation. Paul adds (Rom. 5:5) that this hope does not disappoint us because it is based upon the love of God already experienced. So hope and love--with faith--form a triadic source of joy. The triad is known within the ministry of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, Rom. 5:5, 14:17, Gal. 5:22). Romans 15:13 is explicit enough: the God of hope fills us with all joy and peace in believing. This in turn increases hope so that faith and joy must increase accordingly.

Joy in the Brotherly Context

Philippians 2:1-10 relates to the ministry of serving. Joy comes from esteeming others better than oneself (i.e. putting them before one), and in being interested in their matters (**cf. Rom. 15: 1-3**). Romans 12:15 calls for rejoicing and weeping in sympathy with the brethren. II Corinthians 7:13 shows the principle of rejoicing with those who have joy.

Joy in the Truth

Paul says that love rejoices in the right, or in that which is true

(I Cor. 13:6). This is over and against some who rejoice to see Others go wrong or do wrong. Perhaps they feel threatened where people live in the truth. The Apostle John expressed himself as rejoicing when his children followed the truth. III John 3-4 has it, 'For I greatly rejoiced when some of the brethren arrived and testified to the truth of your life, as indeed you do follow the truth. No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth.' See also II John 4.

Joy in Prayer and Worship

In Philippians 1:3 Paul talks of 'making prayer with joy'. All prayer is by the Spirit and so joy would accompany it. In Philippians 4:4-7 Paul is speaking of prayer in the context of rejoicing. In the Old Testament we saw that worship was generally a matter of joy, sometimes to the point of ecstasy. There is every reason to believe it is the same in the New Testament, especially when it is in the Spirit: '... addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and make melody in your hearts to the Lord, always and for • everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Father.' This is lively and joyous worship (Ephes. 5: 19-20).

Joy in Proclamation

Paul says, 'Woe is me if I preach not the gospel!' He could mean, 'I will suffer some chastisement from God for failing in this duty,' but probably he means he will be missing out on the joy of the proclamation when normally he would see men and women come into joy through the tidings of great joy. In any case--like John--he sees his converts as a source of joy. I Thessalonians 2:20; 'For you are our glory and joy.' No matter *how* the gospel is preached--i.e. for what motive--the knowledge that it is being preached gives Paul joy (Phil. 1:18).

10. THE JOY THAT IS PART OF SUFFERING: THE SUFFERING THAT IS PART OF JOY

Only he has joy who is grateful for life as it comes to him. Doubtless he will need wisdom to see that human life cannot come

‘ without. suffering because evil powers operate in creation, man is sinful, and God must judge and punish. Through these various channels come suffering. However, God also suffers--even though we may not understand this statement we have just made. Without the suffering of the Triune God at the Cross we would not understand God’s love.

The New Testament leads us to see that joy is linked with suffering. In the Gospels Christ is a joyous person, yet he has to be this in the midst of many trials. He has his own joy, i.e. ‘my joy’ (John 17:13). In Luke 10:13-16 he castigates the cities who have rejected him. Yet in this context he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:21) and gave thanks to God for how it was! His joy, too, related to his thanksgiving. Yet at the same point he had suffered rejection of his message. In Matthew 5:11-12 he tells his disciples to rejoice and leap for joy at persecution.

In Acts 5:41 the disciples who have been persecuted by the Jewish Council were ‘... rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name.’ In 13:48-52 another apostolic band, being persecuted, is ‘filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit’. The converts at Thessalonica ‘received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit’. Paul can say, ‘I rejoice in my sufferings’ (Col. 1:24) and enunciate the principle, ‘... as sorrowful yet always rejoicing’ (II Cor. 6: 10).

We are not expected merely to have stoical joy when there is suffering. Suffering is valuable, as Paul tells us so powerfully in II Corinthians 1:3-7 and 4: 16f. When we suffer we can understand the sufferings of others and help them. Insofar as joy is concerned, purposeful suffering can generate joy. In Colossians 1:24 Paul sees his sufferings on behalf of others. He fills up what is lacking in Christ’s body, the church. In James 1:2-4, as in Romans 5:3-5, suffering produces endurance and character. In both cases those receiving suffering have joy. I Peter 4:13 is a beautiful verse: ‘But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.’ Verse 14 then shows that the-suffering comes when we are reproached because of Christ. In one sense then it is no suffering! Sharing Christ’s sufferings (Phil. 3:10) gives fulness to the affinity we already have with him. One comes to know him more.

The paradigm for joyful suffering is found in the Epistle to the Philippians. Paul is in prison, awaiting judgement for death. Yet this

Epistle speaks more about joy than any other. In 2:17-18 Paul shows that his death should be the cause of joy for writer and readers alike: 'Even if I am to be poured out as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.' It is in this Epistle that Paul commands us to be joyful. Revelation 14:13, although it does not mention joy, does mention blessedness which is always a mixture of serenity, happiness and purposeful life: 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.;" "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!"'

The pattern of Hebrews 12:2 shows that Christ endured suffering for the goal of joy beyond it. This is the same principle as in John 16:21: 'When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world.' It reminds us of the Psalm 30:5: 'Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning.'

Suffering then is no counter to joy. Indeed it may be the very indicator which tells us we are in the will and life of the Lord. Being in this place our gratitude can grow, and hence our joy. The Spirit gives understanding and wisdom where anger would blind us irrationally to what God is about in His will. An old statement made by a saint of God is, 'Joy is the flag that flies over the castle to show that the King is in residence.'

11. THE JOY THAT IS ESCHATOLOGICAL

We have seen in the O.T. prophecies that times of bliss are promised to the people of God. This bliss is known to some degree in suffering on earth, but its fulness is known beyond the suffering. In Matthew 25:34 the 'blessed of my Father' are to enter the Kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. In 25:21 a similar truth is stated: '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.' This links with Revelation 14:13, which we have seen.

Revelation 7:16-17 tells us simply, 'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching

heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’ Revelation 21:3-4 gives a similar picture: ‘Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.’

Yet that joy is partly experienced in this life. I Peter 1:8 speaks of ‘joy unutterable and full of glory’. Right now we have the joy, together with some of the eschatological glory, as a rich foretaste of what is to come. If thanksgiving and joy are mixed then we understand why there is such joy in heaven. In the Revelation the thanksgivings are given joyously and thunderously. They are given for

- (a) creation,
- (b) redemption,
- (c) the very nature of God, and
- (d) for God’s just judgements and His Vindication of His own righteousness:

Creation started with joy. Evil rebellion and man’s rejection of God brought sorrow and suffering. The richness of God’s sovereignty ensures that the ultimate of history shall be joy, gladness, blessedness, tranquillity and eternal purposefulness for all the creation. There is no joy of life unless life can be fulfilled. God ensures this will be so, so that present joy has in it all the elements of what is anticipated, and fulfilment does not bring the creation to static boredom, but takes it on to further action in the new aeons that abound in the plan of God.

PART TWO

THE JOY OF GOD AND MAN

We commenced our study by saying that joy is commanded, i.e. ‘Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice!’ If commanded then joy must be part of man’s essential nature. Man is made for joy. He should, therefore, be joyful. The man who is not joyful must be less than a man. He must to some extent be dehumanized, made less than fully man.

The true paradigm of man is Jesus Christ. He was called a man of sorrows yet he never lacked joy. He delighted to do the Father’s will. He attracted great crowds, and by his liberating life and acts he brought great joy to them. Children followed him, and children do not follow sorrowful and gloomy persons. Joy--as we see in Jesus--is part of true humanity. We desire then to see the God of joy and discover how man can become a creature of joy. The materials we will use to shape up our patterns will be those we have already discovered in the Scriptures.

1. GOD IS THE SOURCE OF TRUE LIFE AND SO OF JOY

When Paul said, ‘Let God be true and every man a liar,’ he meant that whenever an indictment is brought against God then man who brings it must be the liar. God is true. Man can rest upon that fact. Man will find his joy in trusting God. Hence Romans 15:13 says we will have all joy (and peace) *in believing*. Jeremiah 9:23-24 shows that man may glory in God, and so be free in joy:

‘Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in all the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lords” ‘

God then is true and so man may be a creature of joy.

2. GOD SHOWS MAN THE PATH OF LIFE

Man's joy is in living. The life he lives must be the life given by God or it is not true functional life. The Psalmist says, 'Thou dost show me the paths of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.' Man, without the way of life, is a trackless person and lost. He must forever be making his own decisions about what he will do and be. Jeremiah 10:23 says, 'I know O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.' Man is bewildered without direction. Proverbs 20:24 says, 'A man's steps are ordered by the Lord; how then can man understand his way?' It means 'A man cannot understand his way until he lets the Lord guide him.' There is no true joy in trying to find one's own way, especially when 'There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.' Without God man is a trackless wanderer.

When a man is truly walking the path of life his joy is in God.

3. GOD GIVES MAN TRUE LIFE, THE LIFE OF JOY

In Psalm 87:7 the singer says, 'All my springs are in you.' He means, 'All my sources are in you.' God is the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13). Man too is a fountain flowing (Prov. 4:23), but his source is God. The beautiful things of God which we saw in Jeremiah 9:23-24 flow into man, and issue from him. In the New Testament this life becomes a spate (John 7:37-39).

Let us look at the form this life takes. It is first of all *created life*. We saw in I Timothy 4:4, 6:17, Acts 14:15 and 17:25 that God has given man all things richly to enjoy. Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 says, 'There... knowledge and joy.'

Also in Ecclesiastes 3:10-13 the same writer speaks of the whole of life which keeps man in perpetual action and interest:

'I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put

eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; also that it is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.'

When the Psalmist speaks of 'the paths of life' (Psalm 16:11) he means the variety of life which God once breathed into man (Gen. 2:7). This must include his relationship with God and his love for God. Hence worship and love are part of that life. Passages such as Psalm 42:1-3, 63:1-8 and 84:1-7 show the delight man has in fellowship with God. Psalm 116:1 says simply, 'I love the Lord!' In fact loving God with all one's heart, soul and mind, and loving God's creature, man, constitutes the whole of life.

The loss of such life is the loss of joy. Acts 7:41 shows there is a kind of fierce joy in making idols--'the works of one's hands'--and Romans 1:22-32 shows that making idols leads to all kinds of delusive living. In fact one is dead whilst one lives, for true life is absent.' Those who make idols become like them (Psalm 115:8). The idolater 'feeds on ashes and a deluded mind leads him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a life in my right hand?"' (Isaiah 44:20). This is *accidie*.

Accidie is the affliction bringing listlessness and torpor. It is an apathy which sees nothing in anything, or if it does cannot respond to it. It is in fact the opposite to life. Man dulls down to pointlessness and purposelessness. Nihilism can be a dynamic opposition to life, but *accidie* can raise no spirit of anger, no powerful thrust to anarchy in protest to life's fashioned uselessness.

The life that God gives is a contingent one. Without Him it would be pointless. At the same time it is *a life of goal*. Genesis 1:28ff. speaks of man's usefulness in this world and his need to fill the world up and control it. Other goals are also given, but they cannot be understood apart from the truth of *eternal life*. It was this eternal life that the young ruler sought, though not with enough thrust and motivation. It was this eternal life that the Philippian gaoler sought and received (Acts 16:30-34). It brought joy to his people.

Eternal life is something the new true person in Christ receives 'in this life, and its goals are realised in the life to come. Man who knows he is in eternal life has his joy in God increased. In fact he rejoices in the hope of sharing the glory of God (Rom. 5:2). He looks forward

to resurrection, the glorification of his body and self, and an inheritance of all things. Joy then is always poised on the wings of the future, though it resides in the present. Joy, as we say, is a matter of life. That life is first the life of God in all its marvellous variety, and then the life of man who relates to that life by the union of creation, and the union of reconciliation which is salvation. By faith a man lives in God and knows joy.

4.THE GOD OF JOY IS THE GOD OF SALVATION

Salvation is that which retrieves man from his lost state into which he has come through rebellion and sin. Man in sin is a sad man. He is a guilty man. Guilt makes him hate both God and himself. It makes him hate others. In seeking--in a general sense--to justify himself in life, he is compelled by guilt. In this state he is aware of others who are justifying themselves. Man's taste for true life is defective. Since he is not in true life he must seek another life--that of the idols, that of sensuality of mind and body. He must overplay the gifts of creation or underplay them in his rage. Man becomes soaked in his angers, his resentments, his hatred. God does not meet his need. Man is so easily his rival. Hence he lives in gloom, in self-saving endeavour, in self-projecting desire. True joy is not his. His sensual experiences, his mental brilliance, his inventive discoveries never satisfy him.

It is from this state God wishes to deliver him. He could leave man to his own devices, but He does not. He sends His Son to show man's true life by the way in which he--the Son--lives it. Surprisingly enough it is a life lived (and died) wholly for others. Here is where. true joy resides--in the service of God and man. He gives his life a ransom for many and rescues them from their anger, bitterness and guilt. They are brought out into the brilliance of new life.

This is why Paul resolves to know nothing (and no one) but Christ and him crucified. He sees the word of the Cross as the power of God for salvation, and indeed for all life (I Cor. 1: 17--2:5). He says, 'God forbid that I should glory [boast, have joy] save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which I have been crucified unto the world and the world unto me.' He means that his joy is in the Cross, for this is the revelation of the nature of God. It is the source of all salvation.

Man through the Cross is brought into true life which is at the same time deliverance from sin, Satan, evil powers, the world, the flesh, conscience, law and the penalty of wrath.

5. 'WEeping ENDURES FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMES IN THE MORNING'

The night of sin--the night of weeping--is finished by the Cross. Joy comes in the morning. Joy is known in liberty. Knowing the truth sets a man free (John 8:32-36). To have a lightened conscience is to have an inflow of joy. One is no longer angry with God. One is liberated from the compulsive worship of idols. One is glad to be alive. One enjoys not only the truth of eternal life, but the joys of created life--food, drink, clothing, sleep, sensual joys, relationships, talents, gifts, hobbies and earthly goals. Accidie is banished. Reality makes life vivid. The spectre of wrath and judgement is banished. Man is in the free flow of joy. This is the fruit of the gospel and the Spirit.

Joy of the future is now established. All man's life is in God, and all his goals are in God. The liberation of man is for joy. He will never know the bars of a future prison though he may be imprisoned now. for his faith. If he dies, he dies. But he dies only to live. His works do follow him. Nothing of present life is wasted. Each deed is invested in the future.

It is impossible to describe the joy of the redeemed person. He has all the joys of creation restored to him. Then he has the added 'plus' of grace. He sees God in a new way. His guilt made him angry with God. Grace makes him see the rightness of guilt, the deserved anguish of sin in his spirit, and now the heady release from it, all due to the unconditional love of God. No wonder he calls it 'the joy of thy salvation'.

Due to release, his senses are sensitive to the realities of life. Due to grace, his lightened heart sings. Words may describe his new liberation but it is 'better felt than tel't.' We saw that Isaiah **61:1-2** describes the work of Messiah in liberation. So then, the verses that follow show the change:

‘... to comfort all who mourn...
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint
spirit...’

Another Scripture:

‘Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;
thou hast loosed my sackcloth, and girded me with
gladness.

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to thee for ever.’

(Psalm 30:11-12)

We can really sum this up by saying that a light heart makes a glad spirit, that man is restored to what he was as a created creature, one who lives in all God’s delights. Yet as the hymn-writer put it:

‘In Him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessing than their father lost.’

6. THE MANTLE OF PRAISE: THANKFULNESS

Karl Barth once said, ‘Joy is really the simplest form of gratitude.’ He also said, ‘To be joyful means to look for opportunities for gratitude’ (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Pan 4, p.376. T.& T. Clark, 1978). The key then to the practice of joy is gratitude. This works in many ways. Only a man who is in joy is alert to God’s goodness: only he who is alert to God’s goodness knows God’s joy. In terms of Psalm 87:7 this man says, ‘All my springs are in you.’ He knows his life is in God. He knows God! He knows God is love. He loves God!

This man can understand the New Testament when it tells him to give thanks to God for all things, and to give God thanks in everything. He knows that many things are not good, but he knows God is working those things for his good. When he is tempted to be angry at bad happenings, or to extend his sense of (offended) justice, he knows better. He praises God where he would have cursed man. Instead of seating home all dreadful happenings to the Deity, he sees in them the sense of God.

This thankful and joyful man also needs to share his gratitude with others. He cries, ‘Rejoice with me.’ It may be for the recovery of a lost coin, a lost sheep or a lost son. He cannot be silent about God’s

goodness. It is something he must share. Others have to rejoice with him. He may or may not know that the angels in heaven, or the Father, are also rejoicing. Joy is a contagious thing. It heals, it renews. Anger is 'also infectious. It calls others to be angry with it, but it does not heal.

'To the man who pleases Him, God gives joy.' Nothing pleases God more than the praise and gratitude of His creatures, so that praise increases the joy. In praise man is more and more discovering the nature of God, and deepening his union with his Creator-Father. Thus his own life--so to speak--is being intensified. Man thus --consciously or unconsciously--explores the elements of creation, grace, forgiveness, justification, sanctification and ultimate glorification. He constantly ranges himself over these great matters and finds more and more material for praise, more and more elements for rejoicing. Even his temporary failures and defects call upon grace for effective healing and again he is away in praise. This is why he agrees with the Old Testament writer: 'God is my exceeding joy.'

7. JOY IS ALSO A MATTER OF ANTICIPATION

For what God has done, man is in joy. For what God is about to do, and will ultimately do, man is also in joy. What then is God *about to do*? The answer is that He is always *about to do good*. He is doing good in the meantime. His good is also in the future. That is why man can always be sure of his own true identity. He is linked not only with God, but the God who is always doing good, and doing him (man) good. What seems not to be good--that for which man is always praising God--that will be seen to have been good for man also. Hence joy is perpetually based on the nature of God; hence man is always in anticipation of it.

What God is about to do is always based on the promises and prophecies He has given. Man has been promised the opportunity to serve God and others in this life. In this too is his joy. He never lacks opportunities to serve. Service is a preventative against ennui, accidie and boredom. His constant interest in others brings him joy. 'To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!' (Prov. 15:23) Just as apt and joyful is an act in season. Worship too is always happening to man in the present time. He

can never anticipate the sudden surprisings of joy in new and different acts of worship. He moves from point to point of experience, moment to moment of acts. Yet his eyes are always fixed on the ultimate. He feels free in the present time because he is not forced to work in order to survive or to please God. He works because he loves to do this. His work is not compulsive, except of course it be the compulsion (ie. impulsion) of love. Thus he moves from joy to joy in his experiences and actions. Even so it is the ultimate which draws him on. This we have seen in our first section, where hope and joy are linked together.

Man is in anticipation of unfettered worship of God. This worship will also be unfettered praise. He will not have to fight the mists which evil are always bringing before his eyes. He will not have to fight in faith to believe the unchanging but dynamic goodness of God. He will not always be hoping. The Reality will come to him as incontrovertible truth. Then he will know the utmost heights of joy.

This worship will also be service (Rev. 7:15). Service is joy. Man will be a kingdom of priests. He will have a kingly priesthood and a priestly kingship. He will serve God and the creation in holiness and purity. Somehow his love will have full scope. He will see God--his exceeding Joy--face to face, and in His presence will find joys, and know the pleasures that are in His right hand for evermore. This is what is known as eternal life. This is also what it means to be 'shown the paths (or ways) of life'. This is the joy that God has set eternally for man.

8. THE JOYING OF THE LORD

God is the God of all true joy. He delights in our delight of Him. For His part He has created and chosen us as His object of joy. Man is the 'apple of His eye'. Israel is called that for '... he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye' (Deut. 32: 10). God says, '...he who touches you [Israel] touches the apple of my eye' (Zech. 2:8). David is bold to pray, 'Keep me as the apple of thy eye, hide me in the shadow of thy wings' (Psalm 17:8)

God keeps speaking of Israel as His delight. He calls them His 'special possession'. It is true that they incline towards idols, and that they profane Him, and this is a serious matter. At the same time He

delights in them. He tells them He will love them freely, and in Zephaniah 3:17 the matter is put superbly: ‘The Lord, your God, is in your midst, he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.’

No less in the New Testament is God’s love expressed. Firstly we see that His love is for all men, without discrimination. Matthew 5:44-45 makes this clear: ‘But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.’ Yet He has a special joy in His people. His love for His Covenant people, His true elect is such that He loves His Son for dying for them (John 10:17). That He loves His Son is clear: that He should love His Son for dying for His people shows His great love for His people. True, such love is not deserved, but then no love is deserved or it is not free and unconditional love.

It is highly probable in Ephesians 1:18 that when Paul speaks of ‘the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints’ that he means literally what he says, namely that God’s inheritance is the riches of the saints. To Him they are glorious! He has accepted them in the Beloved, His own Son. As in the Song of Solomon the bridegroom delights over the bride, so God delights over His people. He ‘joys over them with singing’!

When He saw His creation completed He agreed that ‘it was very good’. All that He creates is a delight to Him; otherwise He would not be wrathful when unholy men suppress its truth (creational reality) in acts of wickedness. So He delights in His creation and His people. Evidently all is a constant source of joy to Him who is Himself innately joyous.

9. THE ULTIMATE JOY

We have seen--from many angles--the ultimate joy God has prepared-for His creation. Paul says, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for them that love him’ (I Cor. 2:9). He has given us intimations so that we with joy anticipate that joy. That is why our

hearts are filled 'with joy unspeakable, and full of glory'. We have seen in the prophecies that incredible peace will come to the earth, that wars shall cease in all the world, and that the lion shall lie down with the lamb.

We have seen that there will be a new heaven and new earth, and that mankind will become a race of priests and kings to God and creation. Hence one of the most beautiful of all doxologies and benedictions is that which seals for us the truth that God has our joy in mind. It is also a fitting climax to any study on joy:

'Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.' (Jude 24-25)

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