

## Joy In Our Time

### The Source of the Right Approach

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 05-Feb-11; Sermon #1031c

I'm going to be picking up on the theme that I was speaking on last week in the commentary when I commented on joy in our time as very being very difficult to achieve. I used the opening sentence from Charles Dickens' book *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." I also used the other opening sentence, "Life is difficult," from *The Road Less Traveled* by M. Scott Peck. Both of those statements apply to us today, but for far different reasons than the authors' originally intended because of our being called of God.

There is no doubt that our world view is a great deal different from most people in this world because of what God has revealed to us, and what God has revealed to us in some ways makes this much more difficult to handle emotionally than the way others see things. Our world view is not all that easily adjusted to because the entire Western world—or, as it is called in some news outlets; the way that the media calls it—the democracies of the West. Most of these democracies of the West are in reality made up of Israelitish people. And because of sin, this whole Western world is in the process of crashing into political and economic oblivion. It may not happen tomorrow; I'm sure it will not. But it is in process and it is coming.

What makes joy so difficult is, first of all, the overwhelming fact of the tremendous amount of sin and the oppressive burden of immorality being committed by so many, by a citizenry oblivious to the cause of the problem. To the citizenry, it's always someone else—like the government—that is causing these things. That's one good reason. The second is because of the timing of what is going on. That is, that we are indeed in the prophesied time of the end, and the Bible gives very little hope that we will see any national repentance. Jeremiah and Ezekiel clearly show this. It was so bad when Jeremiah was preaching that God eventually told Jeremiah to stop praying for those people living in Judah at that time.

I do not know whether we have reached that point yet, but I want you to recall three statements that I made regarding biblical joy. The first one is that it is neither laughter nor hilarity, but a calm cheerfulness. We'll put that in different words. It is a positive, upbeat, hope-filled attitude. The second thing is it does not spring from anything earthly. I'll put that in different words. In other words, its presence in one's life does not depend on anything material. This does not mean that material things are of no value, but the biblical joy's source is not from them. The third thing is that this joy—this is probably the most important one—is inseparable from godly love, and this joy is impossible without godly love. Again, I'll reshape the words a bit: If one does not truly love God, and therefore does not keep God's commandments—remember, that's what Jesus said: "If you love Me, keep My commandments."—one will not receive this love from God, and therefore will not have the joy, either.

It is the quality of the relationship with God that determines whether we will have the joy to bear what is going on in this world. What I have said is that it's very possible for us to have it, and if we do, it will help us to negotiate these horrific times that we are living in.

Jesus was a man of sorrow. We heard that in David's sermonette today ["Life Doesn't Work on a Balance Sheet"]. He was also acquainted with grief. He had both because He also had joy and peace

in living life. So you see, these things are not inseparable. Sorrow and joy can actually go together. Paul also stated that he was sorrowful and yet always rejoicing. And Peter spoke of joy unspeakable and full of glory. And yet each of these three men had to negotiate very difficult lives plotted out for them by God—and each of them was martyred.

How did they manage to accomplish this? Well, the answer seems almost trite and simplistic, but it is true because the Bible shows that it is. Hebrews 10:35 says this:

**Hebrews 10:35-39** Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith [there is the answer]; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

That appears at the very end of Chapter 10 of Hebrews, and the beginning of Chapter 11 then goes on to give us understanding that, though love is the greatest of all godly characteristics produced by God's spirit in man, it is faith that is the foundation of all godly characteristics. Faith stands under and give support and motivation through what is produced. The difference between the true Christian and all others who merely call themselves "Christian" is that he not only believes God exists, he also believes what God says, and therefore does what God says. Big difference. That person will produce joy.

Did you notice in verse 35 that Paul says that faith can be cast away? This happens when a person does not use what God says, and he thus figuratively casts his knowledge and understanding of God aside in his thoughts and actions as unimportant to his present circumstance.

It is difficult for a Christian to negotiate the untracked wilderness of his pilgrimage. "Untracked" because he's never gone this way before. But he accomplishes it by literally living in the present, never allowing the reality of the hope of the future and it's immeasurable value to all concerned to slip away from his mind. He is guided by the reality of that hope to press forward in faith because God gave him that vision, that is, of God's spiritual Promised Land. This is what drove those whose great names from the past are listed in Hebrews 11, of whom Paul says the world is not worthy. They lived by faith.

For us, this is the best of times because of what we have been given in terms of our calling, and that is the revelation of God and the gifts that He has given to enable us to negotiate our path. But it's also the worst of times because it is the end time, and this time is unique in the history of mankind. Nothing so destructively evil and of this intensity has ever happened before. But let us not cast away our cheerful confidence because God has assured us that with His help we can do it. So like the Israelites of old, let us take our stand and see the salvation of our God.