

## Joy In The Lord

### **An Attitude of Confidence and Hope**

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We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

So begins the second paragraph of America's Declaration of Independence. What Thomas Jefferson wrote in this sentence in 1776 has proven to be among the most significant and guiding principles of this nation.

Americans treasure their status as equals, and it seems especially in these last few decades. We have had all kinds of movements for equality, whether it is equal rights for women or equal rights for minorities; and now we have the equal rights for those of different sexual persuasions. Anyway it all comes down to these people relishing their equality in America.

Also we have rights that cannot be taken from us, at least as far as what is said there in the Declaration of Independence. That is what the word 'unalienable' means, or as we more often probably say today—'inalienable.' Both are fine and both mean the same thing. They mean "cannot be taken away."

Jefferson, as he goes through this sentence, ends it by enumerating a trio of these permanent rights that we have as Americans: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

So, by our Declaration, we have the right to live; meaning, we do not live or die at the whim of another which sometimes would occur in tyrannical nations ruled by some despot or even by a king. That is what they were trying to get away from, where it seemed like at any time the king could make a decision and their lives could be taken from them at his whim, at his decision.

Of course it says that we have a permanent right to liberty, meaning that we are perpetually free, that we do not serve at another person's whim like a slave. We have the ability to make choices on our own: what we are going to do, how we are going to work, how we are going to raise our families, how are we going to do whatever. We have the permanent, inalienable right as citizens of this country to do that.

But the most controversial rule of the three that Thomas Jefferson lists is the third: the right to pursue happiness. The reason why it is controversial is because a lot of people do not understand what Jefferson meant by that phrase. So what did Jefferson mean by “the pursuit of happiness”?

If you are Jay Leno or somebody like that and you were going to get a man-on-the-street interview, take your microphone out there, and you ask the common man or woman on the street what did Thomas Jefferson mean by this—that we have the right to pursue happiness—I would imagine that most would reply that it meant that we have the right to do whatever makes us happy, that would just take the plain sense of the words (“We have the right to pursue happiness”; “We have the right to go after whatever is going to give us pleasure”). So it is kind of taking it at face value and really just scratching the surface of it.

Because so many people think that this is what is meant—that it is the right to do whatever makes us happy, whatever gives us pleasure—we have Americans looking to the Declaration as their support for gay marriage, shady financial schemes, having 10,000-bulb Christmas light displays in their yard every year; because it makes them happy to ride with a motorcycle gang, or to abort millions of unborn children. All because this sort of thing gives them some sort of satisfaction, some sort of pleasure.

But this is not what Thomas Jefferson meant by “the pursuit of happiness.” He would not sully the tone of such an important document as America's Declaration of Independence with such a banal suggestion. That would probably be the basest thing to be enshrined as a right: to be able to do whatever just gives us a thrill. That is not what he meant at all.

The phrase “the pursuit of happiness” is actually a classical idea, meaning it comes from Greece and Rome. This classical idea was resurrected in the Enlightenment by men such as John Locke and Samuel Johnson. In reading their writings, Jefferson also began to appreciate this classical idea of the pursuit of happiness, and so he enshrined it in our Declaration of Independence.

Now probably, most of the men in the room who heard that phrase, being students of the Enlightenment and knowing some of these background issues that were going on—all of them pretty much having been classically trained—would have understood what he meant, and so they had no problem with the idea of “the pursuit of happiness.”

Some of them might have said, “Well, it should be the pursuit of property.” But they understood that the pursuit of happiness included the pursuit of property and that the pursuit of property was nothing more than money-grubbing or wealth-grubbing, and so they probably would not have thought that was a good idea to enshrine in the Declaration as an inalienable right of Americans. But they had a great deal of education and so they knew what this meant.

And even though it is a phrase of only four words, they knew that it actually meant something quite complicated. It was an idea that was very complex that had a lot behind it, a lot of thought, because they knew that its philosophical lineage can be traced back as far as Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. And that it came through the Stoics, the Skeptics, and the Epicureans; and then down through into Modern times through being resurrected in the Renaissance; and then really thought about in the Enlightenment period.

John Locke wrote (and this gives you a little bit of an idea about the complexity of this idea, the pursuit of happiness): “The highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness.”

We could see that when John Locke thought about the pursuit of happiness, he was talking about something that was in the mind. It was a perfection of

intellectual nature that he was talking about, and that this pursuit of the intellectual nature and the perfection of the intellectual nature came through this pursuit of happiness. There is a lot more to this quote that I could give you, but it goes on and on, because he is trying to explain what he means.

But I just want this one little sentence to give you an idea that when John Locke wrote about the pursuit of happiness, he was talking about a lifelong pursuit—a lifelong seeking—of the perfection of his intellect and of what would make a good man, a person that was beneficial to, not only himself, but to all of society.

Now we have to understand, taking this back to Greece, what this word ‘happiness’ comes from. Our word ‘happiness’ just means good chance, that it is something that just happened to us. But the Greek idea of happiness is a word that is pronounced ‘*eudemonia*.’ The word ‘demon’ comes from this word, but the ‘eu’ on the front is the word for ‘good.’ If we want to put it literally, this word is ‘good spirit.’ The Greeks did not think of the word ‘demon’ as meaning ‘an evil spirit,’ like we do now. They thought of it just as a spirit. They did not put a good or bad qualitative description on it. It had to come with this prefix ‘eu.’

So what the Greeks were saying, when they used this word, was that when you were happy you were in a good spirit. That is what we say when somebody is in good spirits; it usually means they are pretty happy, they are positive.

In Greek and Roman ethics (now we are getting into another specialized area), *eudemonia* is linked to the word *arete* and that means ‘virtue’ or ‘excellence.’ So this idea of ‘*eudemonia*’ or ‘a good spirit’ had to do in the concept of ethics, that it was among the virtues or one of the excellences of a person. So we have got to understand that we are talking about the way someone lives in society. That is what is important here.

So, in writing “the pursuit of happiness” as being one of our inalienable rights, Thomas Jefferson was thinking of this classical philosophical tradition in which happiness is not mere personal satisfaction and pleasure, but bound up in civic virtue. Remember, he was writing a document that was establishing not only our independence, but was the first step toward

establishing a government. And it later became a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

What he was saying here, in saying that we have an inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness, was giving a clue to every American citizen that would come after that they had the right that could not be taken away to use their abilities and their skills and their virtues to create a better society. That is the pursuit they were talking about.

It was a civic pursuit that valued things like courage and moderation and justice, not just going out and getting a thrill up one's leg for whatever thing makes them happy. He was pointing out that every man has a right to life, a right to liberty, and a right to use his God-given skills and abilities to create a society that he thinks is best for him and his own.

So, when you strip everything else away, he says we all have a right to get involved in the political process. We all have a right, as citizens, to make the most of our citizenry and make a better world through government, or through whatever pursuits we decide to take, that will make it a better place.

At that time (we are talking late 18th century here) it was a concept no one else in the world believed, only those who were full of these Enlightenment ideals. In that time governments were all from the top down. It was either a king or a despot or what have you. No one else in the country, except maybe a small coterie of aristocrats or an oligarchy of some sort, had the permission of the state to be involved in the governance of it.

But Thomas Jefferson and all the members of the Continental Congress were saying "No, we reject that idea. Everyone who is a born citizen of the United States of America has a right to be a part of its government, has a right to have his say known and then used to create a better world." It was something that King George would have pretty much gagged upon: That everyone in the country had the right to make the place better and to rule, if possible.

We used to say, "Everybody in the United States could be President, if he really wants to." That is kind of what Thomas Jefferson is saying. Everyone

who is born in the United States can get involved in the process of governing because he is a part of the government. The government is us, people—the citizens of the United States.

It is not an easy concept. Like I said, it is fairly complex.

So when people read the Declaration of Independence, and they do not have the enlightened and the classical background to understand this idea, they immediately glom onto the actual meaning of the words today and think that this word just means they have a right to pursue their jollies, whatever satisfies them, or whatever makes them happy. It is a miscomprehension of a very necessary idea in terms of the founding of this nation.

There is a parallel to this in our misunderstanding of the nature of joy. I went through all this introduction to get you to understand that we look at joy in the same way as the people of this nation look at the idea of the pursuit of happiness. We look at the word ‘joy’ and we see one thing, and we have our own modern definition of what this word means. But the Bible has an entire background—a whole catalog—of ideas that go into this one little word and make it much more than we think of in terms of joy.

To most today, even in the church, joy is just an emotion, a feeling of wellbeing, a greater happiness, happiness squared, or something a little more than regular happiness. But we could even say that it is a fullness of pleasure, that it is what we feel when everything is going right—we feel wonderful joy; or something really good happens and it just fills us with this feeling of immense pleasure.

But I spent the entirety of my last sermon trying to come to a cogent definition of biblical joy, and I found it very difficult. And I do not know if you came away from the sermon thinking, “What did he say? What was the definition?” It is like “the pursuit of happiness.” It is not something that you can get into just a sound bite. You cannot put into the 140 characters of Twitter very well. It is a little bit more involved than we think of.

And even though the word ‘joy’ is only three letters long, the ideas behind it are voluminous. It takes a lot of the Bible to explain this understanding of joy. You will see, when we go through some of the scriptures we are going

to go through later on, that joy is everywhere in the Bible and all these ideas feed into it.

This is what I ended with the last time: “Joy is the pure elation of spirit that revels in the awareness of knowing God and knowing that His plan, which includes us so prominently, will culminate in our eternal salvation, and glory with Him in His Kingdom.” That is actually quite an involved meaning. It is several things all at once. It includes a bit of a feeling, but it is an elation of spirit. It is not necessarily, like I stated above, a thrill up one’s leg. It is not quite the same as pleasure.

But we also see in this definition that it is an awareness, a perception; and it is based on knowledge (knowledge of God, knowledge of what He has done for us, and knowledge of where we are going), and hope that we are going to get there, and faith in God that He is going to get us there. There are a lot of things involved in this one idea of joy.

Now I expanded this by saying that joy is fundamentally an attitude toward life that views and accepts matters as they are, meaning, we could be placed in whatever situation and we accept them in joy because God is involved: God is involved with us, He is involved in the situations that He puts us in. So joy is a perception of reality (and I mean that in its fullest sense)—what is truly going on beyond what we can see with our eyes, because there is a whole world happening that we cannot see.

It is like Daniel in the lion’s den. All he could see was lions and the fact that he could not get out of the pit. That was what he could see with his eyes. But what he knew—what he had the knowledge of and what gave him the amount of joy that he had in the situation—was that he knew that he was surrounded by angels, that God was going to bring him through this; and even if He allowed the lions to rend him into pieces and eat him until there was nothing left but a few bones, that was God’s will and he had an eternal crown waiting for him.

He saw reality. He had a perception of reality that allowed him to rise above the circumstance that he was in and take a certain amount of pleasure that God was with him. I know that would be very difficult to do. But Daniel was an exceptional man—a man of great faith.

So joy is a confident, contented, expectant way of looking at life that is deeply rooted in faith and hope in keen awareness of and trust in the sovereign God, knowing that He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and we have His example to follow, in whatever circumstance we find ourselves.

In any situation, joy is a profound gladness in seeing God standing above all events that are going on and having ultimate control of all things. And not only that He is there and He has control, but that He is going to bring them to the proper conclusion and they are going to follow His will. So we can have joy in that. We can be satisfied. We can be content. We can even be happy.

How many times did Paul and Peter talk about having joy in trials, or joy in suffering? We do not think of it that way. We think that is impossible. They are preparing you for crucifixion upside down and you feel joy. How can that be possible?

But these apostles knew that it was God's will, and that if He wanted to save him, he would be saved. If not, there are great things ahead—he could rest from his labors. What is really going on is God is working and he could trust God, and he had hope in the resurrection from the dead.

But being so human we tend to not think that way. We tend to scream and cry and feel like “Woe is me!” But these men had learned over a lifetime to have joy in such situations because they saw God beyond it. They saw Him there with them.

I stated that they had spent a lifetime learning these things. That is something we need to remember in terms of joy, that joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It is not something that comes naturally to a human being. If it did come naturally, it would not be a fruit of the Spirit because a fruit of the Spirit, by definition, is something that is grown under the presence of God's Spirit in us, at work, and us working with it. And so joy, the kind of joy that God is talking about in Scripture, is something beyond our human joy. It cannot be a mere emotional reaction to something good happening. That is not the joy that we are talking about.



A fruit of the Spirit is produced over time. A fruit is *grown*. It starts as a seedling, it sprouts, it puts on a stem, it gets bigger; it takes in light and air and water and whatever minerals from the soil, and eventually it gets big enough to begin to put out a flower. The flower goes through a process and pretty soon you are having a little bit of fruit. But even the fruit, once it gets out there, takes time to ripen. So you will find, as most of you know, that there are long periods of time before a fruit is actually produced. Like in an apple tree—if we talk about when a seed goes into the ground to the time an apple is actually produced—it can be years.

Or we could talk about a nut like a pecan or a walnut or whatever. Sometimes it could be 10 or 15 years before you get your first nut from it.

But even if you are talking about a season, an apple tree will put out its blooms in, say, March or April, and you are not getting any fruit from that until late in the summer. It takes a while. Fruit has to grow. It grows over time.

Just as we have to grow in such virtues as love and faith and patience and goodness (we did not have those things when we were first converted; we might have had little ideas of what they were, but we surely did not show them and certainly not for very long; we went into sin quite easily rather than showing the fruits of the Spirit), in the same way we have to grow in joy.

And we should recognize that just as the love of God has a physical human counterpart, there are several different human loves that we can all manifest at one time or another. But the love of God is different; it is more than that. Even as we can express certain amounts of pleasure and joy in our human lives, the godly joy that we are talking about here is something greater. They are similar: Human love and human joy are similar to godly love and godly joy. But the godly virtues are rare and nobler and—this is important—they are more attitudinal than emotional in nature.

We know that the love of God does not have to be accompanied by affection. The love of God can be done without emotion at all. It could be done coldly. Now it is not the best kind (it should be done with some sort of feeling or fervor or whatever) but it could be done that way. You could do something

out of love for a person without feeling any kind of emotion, but it is better if you do—more involved that way.

It is the same with joy. You can actually show godly joy without being emotional about it. You do not have to be singing and dancing and rejoicing. You can feel contentment, like Daniel. I am sure he was not in the lion's den kicking up his heels and saying "Nah, nah, nah, you stupid lions." He was not doing any of that stuff. He was feeling joy, probably on his knees in a corner praying somewhere. Even though he was probably asking God's protection and help and he was being very fervent about it, underneath it all was a joy in God's presence with him.

So we are going to look at various scriptures to give us an idea of the kinds of things the Bible indicates Christians should have joy in. We will go to a few scriptures, as we begin, to show you human joy and see the great expanse of human joy as well just so we get kind of a touchstone in our trying to understand godly joy.

We will very quickly see that if we find our joy only in a new set of wheels, or hoity-toity cuisine, or fancy clothes, or a trip to Disney World, or our stamp collection, or whatever it is that we find any kind of human joy in, we have really not developed the joy that is the fruit of the Spirit. That is something altogether different. If you want to put it simply—if you want to put it all in one nice, easy, tweetable sentence—*our joy must be in God*.

As we go through this little bit of a survey, we are going to start in Ezekiel 36. Probably kind of a strange place to do so. But it mentions a joy that is evident in this world. It has been evident since the time of the Garden of Eden, I am sure. It probably was evident especially in Genesis 4 in the account of Cain and Abel. It is a joy that we do not want to follow.

This is a prophecy that concerns the possession of the land of Israel. Despite the nations—particularly Edom (he mentions Edom specifically)—conquering and plundering the land of Israel, he is prophesying that the land will eventually be returned to Israel and that it will produce abundantly. It is the last part of verse 5 that we are most concerned with, but I want to read the whole thing so we get the flow.

**Ezekiel 36:1-5** “And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: “Because the enemy has said of you, ‘Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession,’ therefore prophesy, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Because they made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you are taken up by the lips of talkers and slandered by the people ”— ‘therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, the hills, the rivers, the valleys, the desolate wastes, and the cities that have been forsaken, which became plunder and mockery to the rest of the nations all around—therefore thus says the Lord God: “Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with whole-hearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country.” ’

You see ‘joy’ there in the last sentence. So what has happened to Israel? It has been completely overthrown. The nations have decided, either led by or instigated by the people of Edom, that they are going to plunder this land and take what they can from this land, and it says here that they did this with “whole-hearted joy.” Now, clearly, this is not godly joy.

If we think about what is being talked about here, this is not joy at all. We are talking about a joy in destruction, a joy in plunder, a joy in enslaving and killing people, just taking everything from the land. But it is called ‘joy’, and it is not joy at all. It is definitely a human joy. It is an emotional joy. But it revels in getting for the self. They thought “Aha, we’ve got it made. This is our country. We’re going to rape it for all its worth. We’re going to put all this money in our pockets. We’re going to get rid of those terrible Israelites. Good times, happy times ahead.”

So what is being described here is not joy at all, as we would think of it. This is pleasure in sin: People feeling wonderful that they are able to get what they want through sin. Definitely not godly joy.

When the word ‘joy’ is in the Bible, you really have to think about it. And this is probably the worst that it gets: the idea that one can be happy over the circumstances of other people that work out to your benefit.

Let us go back to Genesis 31 and see another kind of joy, but on the other end of the spectrum. This is when Jacob is fleeing from Laban. He is trying to get his family out of Laban’s grasp. He is fleeing back toward the land of Israel. He has got all of these flocks and all of his sons (except one of them). He is trying to hightail it across to the land of Israel (or what would be the land of Israel later on) and Laban catches him. Even though Laban had started three days’ late, he took off in his fastest chariot, or fastest stallions, and he and his guys come up and they overtake Jacob’s family before they get into the land. They are in Gilead right before they are about to cross into the land.

**Genesis 31:25-28** So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob: “What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives taken with the sword? Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in so doing.”

Let us give Laban the benefit of the doubt. With Laban you can never trust anything that comes out of his mouth. He would have probably not done this. He would have probably said “Hey Jacob! Let’s renegotiate. I’ve got a deal for you. If you stay with me seven more years, I’ll give you three-quarters of all the wealth that you produce in that time.” And he would probably not have done what he said he would have done here, where he would have had a big feast. They would have taken the fatted calf, had a big chowdown, hired some local musicians and have a big dance, and everybody would have a wonderful time. They would be singing around the campfire and it all would be well. Well, we know the kind of person Laban was.

But this kind of happiness, this feeling of great pleasure of having joy in one's family—even if it is an occasion where it is a going-away party like this would have been—is the kind of human joy that is the best kind of human joy: the joy of family, the joy of just good times and happiness where no sin is involved, where you are just having a wonderful time with your fellow man making memories that bring a smile every time you think about them. So these are real joys—human joys—going all the way down the spectrum, from the joy in sin to a good joy in one's family and a joy in the relationships that we have with one another.

But all of this—this whole spectrum that I have talked about in these two passages—are joys without reference to God. They are purely human joys. God may or may not have had anything to do with the second one, and He certainly does not have anything to do with the first. But these are joys that just about anybody could have, whether they know God or not. And we can say with certainty that God's Spirit does not produce these kind of joys, especially not the first one.

Since it can be shown that people have the second kind of joy all on their own without any reference to God, we know that kind of joy is not produced by God's Spirit either. So we can say with certainty that these kinds of joys rise nowhere near the level of joy that Paul is speaking about when he talks about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. That is another kind of joy altogether. Let us start talking about that kind of joy.

Let us go to the parables in Matthew 13. This is Christ's explanation of the Parable of the Sower. This is an interesting kind of joy. We are getting on the edge of the godly joy of Galatians 5:22. I do not know if it is quite there yet, but it is getting there; it is an inkling of it.

**Matthew 13:18-21** Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word

and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Like I said, this is an interesting kind of joy because this joy is a good thing. It is of hearing the Word of God and receiving it. But we find out in verse 21, it dies quickly; it does not last. It is just momentary; it is fleeting.

Many people do experience a thrill, a feeling of great pleasure—an ‘Aha’ moment—when God’s Word suddenly begins to make sense and all the pieces start seeming to fall together, and they feel “Oh man, I’ve been rewarded with my searching all this time. I’m finally understanding what this means.” They are so happy about it.

I am not willing to call this mere human joy; I do not think it is. I think such people receive a little inkling of the wonders of God and the wonders of His truth. I think they get like a snapshot of the incredible potential that we have and how all the pieces begin to fit together. But I think we have to say that it is actually just a foretaste of true joy, and the proof of it is in the fact that it goes away so fast.

Jesus says this person has no root in himself. There is nothing undergirding it. It is just a momentary flash of joy, and then it goes away. And, as He says here, trial and tribulation and persecution just scare it out of the person. So it is plain that the joy is not really any kind of fruit of God’s Spirit at work. If it were a fruit of God’s Spirit, then it would be enduring, it would last (it would last forever actually). But this is just a little bit, a little taste of true joy.

Maybe it is a way that God works with these people to give them a little incentive that if you continue on with this, you can have this—this kind of joy, this kind of pleasure in God’s Word—in its fullness. But it says that as soon as the sun comes out, this one gets withered because there is no root. It is very sad.

So real joy is the kind that is developed and it is developed over years of experience with God, and it would be strong enough to endure persecution. That is, true joy would be strong enough to endure persecution or any kind of trial. But this kind of joy cannot. It is not really up to snuff as true godly joy;

just a taste, just an inkling of it. But we are getting little closer now to the joy that we are talking about. We see that a person can have an idea of this joy immediately upon conversion, but it has to be developed from there.

Let us go to Psalm 4. This is a psalm of David. In this psalm, David has been in some distress and it seems that the distress is not coming from his normal enemies. Normally we think David is having some problems—he is fighting the Philistines or he is having some trouble like that. But the background of this psalm seems to be that his enemies, the ones that were causing him this distress, were actually Israelites.

They were the leaders of Israel who were not accepting his divine appointment as king. They were working against him. They were thinking that he was just a man—and he was (he was just a man). But they were kind of pooh-poohing the idea that he had God's backing, and so they were kind of like the opposition party in Congress or in Parliament. They were the ones that were heckling them and trying their best to undermine what he was trying to do because they thought that they knew better.

And so his enemies here that were causing him all this trial and distress were actually his fellow Israelites who had not accepted who he was, that he was the Lord's anointed. By standing in the way of him, they were standing in the way of what God was trying to do. They were standing in the way of God's work at the time, which was to establish a kingdom under David. So he is complaining to God about this.

David is trying to convince these opponents of his that if they would just follow his lead, if they would just back off for a little while and let him do the work that he needs to do, then good will follow; that God had set him here for good and that if they would just let him work, everything would work out just fine. They need to just lay low for a while and let him work.

The last section is where David turns to God and makes this statement:

**Psalm 4:6-8** There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" [They were essentially scoffing at him saying: "How can you turn this situation around? Why are you so special that you think you can bring good to this nation which has been down for

such a long time?” So he says:] Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart [notice ‘joy’ is not in this verse in the English, the word is ‘gladness’], more than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

This is a little difficult to get, just from the way it is written here. But it is really an interesting idea and gets us well on our way to understanding what godly joy is.

What David says here, at the end of verse 6 and the beginning of verse 7, is that God has put joy in his heart that is greater than any kind of human, earthly gladness.

How does that come in? Well, “the season that their grain and wine increased” is talking about prosperity. It is talking about the bringing in the harvest, seeing all the productivity of the land and all of the wealth that represents. And people who want to make it in this world, at the time especially, would look at this harvest and say, “We’re in the money, we’re in the money” and they would be very happy.

What did they do during their harvest? They had a big harvest festival, everybody got together (obviously the Feast of Tabernacles, in the fall), and they had a wonderful time. God told them to rejoice. They can tip up the corks on their bottles and sing and dance and all the things that they did at these harvest festivals. What better time in all of the year than that! They have lots of money. They have all the singing and dancing and good food and the fellowship. That is the height of human joy.

And David says, “God, You put in my heart something that is way beyond that.” What is that? It is that God has lifted the light of His countenance upon him. That was what made him joyous. That made David’s heart sing; that God would look at him in specific, in particular, and be so willing to help him, as having chosen him for this wonderful purpose of restoring Israel to prominence through his family. He said, “These opponents of mine in Israel,



they can't get me down. Even though they're trying so hard to undermine me, I know that God has lifted the light of His countenance upon me even in this dark time." And so he has more joy than they know.

They cannot understand that kind of joy, a joy that endures through any kind of trial, through any kind of opposition because God's eyes are shining on him; that he, we could say, is the apple of God's eye; that nothing is going to happen to him because God has chosen him to do a job and that job is going to get done.

We can begin to see very easily with this image that godly joy is not a sudden and quickly passing feeling of pleasure, but a "gladness in [the] heart" (as it is phrased here in the New King James) that endures all circumstances and provides peace and contentment and expectation of good because of God, that God is there.

The cause of all this joy is knowledge that God is watching, that God is aware. He not only is aware of us, He is on our side. If He is on our side, nothing is going to happen that is outside of His will (as a matter of fact, nothing happens that is outside of His will at all), but especially to those of His children. Some things He just allows to happen because they do not affect His will or His plan in any way.

But with us, *everything* happens because of His will. There are reasons for it because He has His eye on us, and He is working on us and bringing us to a place that He knows and that He has revealed to us, and we are working with Him together on that project. So He is pulling for us, He is helping us, He is giving us what we need, and we can feel a great gladness of heart that He is on our side.

Psalm 43 chronicles an episode in which the psalmist (it does not say that it was David; it is a psalm without a superscription) had to be reminded about the fact that he was a child of God. It seems, in what was going on around him and all the circumstances, that he had forgotten his place before God. He was getting a "Woe is me" self-pity about him, thinking that all of these circumstances that he was going through were just too much. So he has to be reminded that that is not the case. Let us read the whole psalm. He says:

**Psalm 43:1-5** Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For You are the God of my strength; why do You cast me off? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.

Here we have a psalm that shows the whole situation and how he got through it. In the first verse, he complains about an ungodly nation and deceitful and unjust men, and those were his enemies. Then, in the second verse, he complains that God had forsaken him: “Why have You left me? Why have You left me in this strait where I can’t see the way out?”

But then he remembers God and His truth. That is what verse 3 is all about: “Send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill.”

He is saying, “My perspective was all wrong. I was looking at the enemy and thinking everything was so dire. But then something made me think about God and His truth and the light that guides me.” That led him to God’s throne. That is what the altar is, the Mercy Seat, where all these things are aspects or spiritual analogs of the way God is in heaven.

And so he was brought back before God. He was made to remember that he was in God’s sight and that all his hope was in God, and then, you know what he calls Him? He says he was brought before God, “my exceeding joy.” That made everything better. Because he remembered he was a son of God, and that if he was under the light of God’s countenance, this ungodly nation and deceitful and unjust men are just nothing.

“Let’s get things in perspective here” is what God had taught him. “You’re looking at these men and they are puny men. They sin. They have no

strength in comparison to Me,” says God. “So let’s get all this worked out. Put your mind back on what’s important here,” which is God and His plan, “and everything is going to go great.”

He realizes that his joy is in God Himself, and that is where his hope and his strength lie—in God. Not in anything that he could bring to bear against these evil men. And so, despite his troubles, despite the fact that God was going to have to reveal to him how to get out of this trial, he could go through it in joy because God was there, God was working, and he just needed to be a bit patient.

In James 1, there is a New Testament counterpart to this. This has been gone over quite a bit, so I am sure you know the meaning of this. But I want to go over it, just in case.

**James 1:2-4** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Our trials, whatever they are (and people have trials that run from money problems to health problems and through all kinds of different things), it cannot be denied that they cause us trouble, they cause us pain, they make us fall on our knees before God, they ratchet up the stress meter, and we often do not see a way out. Trials do not feel good; they make us fearful, they cause us a lot of sleepless nights. And where do we turn?

But James here urges us to look on them with joy. Most people would say, “Cart that man off to the loony bin and make sure he’s strapped in one of those nice white coats first.” Because we do not want to look at our trials at all; we just want to forget them, we want to put them down, we want to do something. But to actually go through them with joy is almost unspeakable. “Why should I look on them with joy? They’re totally negative.”

But his meaning here is the same here as the psalmist of Psalm 43. We can look at a trial with joy because a trial, to a Christian, means God is working.

He is there. He lets nothing happen to us that we cannot overcome. He is using it to make us grow, to help us produce character, to make us more like His Son.

So a trial is a sign from God that He is aware of us and that He is working with us and doing whatever He can to mold us into the image of His Son. That is why we should have joy—because God is there. He is with us and accompanying us on the way to spiritual maturity. He is helping us along the path toward the Kingdom of God. He is helping us over those rocks and those stumbling blocks that appear frequently along the way. That is why we can have joy—because we are holding His hand as we go through, and we just had forgotten.

So we can move forward with an attitude of joy, and that attitude of joy will generate hope and endurance to get us through the trial, and then on to good, godly growth and character. That is why we have joy in trial because it is a sign that God is there working with us.

Let us see another example back in John 16. This is in Jesus' sermon to His disciples before His arrest. Jesus contrasts sorrow, pain, anguish, and loss with joy that He can give.

**John 16:19-22** Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

He uses the illustration of a mother in childbirth as an example of this contrast between sorrow, pain, and joy. His main point, if you did not catch it, is not in the feeling. His main point is actually about time and duration.

The pain and sorrow of childbirth, even though is sharp and excruciating, is fleeting (it lasts for mere hours) as compared to the joy that a mother would have in her child for the rest of her life. Not just the fact that he had been born that day, but her joy continues in her children (even though they climb up a tree and fall and break their arms, or they do not listen: do not finish their meals or whatever it is). There is just a joy that a mother has in her children, and it lasts forever as long as things go well with the child; and sometimes even when they do not go well with the child, the mother still has a great deal of joy in her child.

What He is saying here is that the anguish and sorrow and pain of Christ's arrest and beating and crucifixion was going to be a pain that would last a day or two or three. But when they saw Christ resurrected and alive again as God, with all that power that the Father had given to Him and placed in His hands to use, there would be a joy that they could not suppress. And, remember the time element, it was a joy that they would have forever. Not just through their lives as human beings, but this was going to be a joy that would last throughout eternity as disciples and eventually as the Bride of Christ. And this joy was inalienable. Jesus says this joy will not be taken from you.

That is the difference between human joy and godly joy. Godly joy is a joy that lasts forever, a joy that revels in the idea that God is with us and that He is alive and He is working with us. He is going to bring us into His Kingdom, and we are going to be with Him forever and nothing can change that except us. And if we are in sync with God, if we are working with Him, then we are going to be there in His Kingdom. We have His unshakeable promise that He is going to bring us into His Family. That is really something to be happy about and have at last, through all the trials that we have to go through.

**John 15:9-11** As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

We do not know exactly what He meant by “These things I have spoken to you.” It could mean what He said in the first few verses that we read; it could mean what He said throughout the entire evening that He had given them this sermon; or it could mean all the things that He had spoken throughout His entire ministry. We do not know for sure.

But, however we take it, the essence of His words suggest that our knowledge of the truth and what God has revealed to us should fill us with joy, a joy insuppressible, a joy inexpressible, a joy that will last forever because we now know what God is doing—He has chosen us, and He is helping us along the way to get there, and that we have God’s love with us all the time. If we just continue in that love by obedience to God, if we take these words to heart and we treasure them and we use them, then God’s love will continue with us and we can rejoice in His presence in us and with us all the time throughout our lives, whatever the situation. As the Bible says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” And that is a wonderful cause for joy.

Let us go to Matthew 25, in the Parable of the Talents. Jesus had given this parable in which He says that a man travels to a far country and he gives his servants talents.

**Matthew 25:16** Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.

**Matthew 25:19-22** After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, “Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.” His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”

Our lives can sometimes seem like a trail of tears. Even if we have a difficult time because of our personalities or because of our experiences in expressing joy, we have this to look forward to, if nothing else. Just knowing that Jesus Christ will be there to welcome us into His joy should bring us at least some amount of true joy now, to know that this is what awaits us at the end of this

life. If we endure like this servant who had received these talents—if we endure, if we grow, if we make lemonade out of lemons—we are guaranteed entrance into God’s own joy—His joy. Not our joy that mimics Him and comes far short of what real joy is. This is the joy that God Himself has in us and in the truth and in His Kingdom and in all that He does. This is, like I said, truly inexpressible joy beyond wonder.

What kind of joy does God have? As David writes in Psalm 16:11, there is fullness of joy in His presence. We have been promised that reward for eternity because the Bride of Christ is going to be in His presence always and forever.

Colossians 1 contains a prayer that Paul prayed for the Colossians, and we could say for all of those that he ministered to. And of course, it is a prayer for us.

**Colossians 1:9-13** For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

So all the ingredients for true godly joy have been given to us already. We have the truth. We have redemption. We have the promises of God. We have His Spirit in us. And we are already considered to be part of His Family, already in His Kingdom. All we need to do now is to continue in God’s love and endure to the end. And we can do that, no matter what happens, with joy.