

## On The Value Of Joy

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**Given 14-May-16; Sermon #1322c**

I wonder if you ever noticed that in Galatians 5:22, in the listing of the fruit of the Spirit, that joy is the second fruit listed? We sometimes wonder in a sermon whether God may have listed a series of either good or bad things in a determined order.

In this thought, in a series of bad things that the first listed is the worst of all things listed. Conversely, in a list of good things, the first listed is the greatest or the best of all that is listed. If that thought is so—and I am not claiming it is—that puts joy at a pretty exclusive height; in fact, right after love, which the apostle Paul states as the greatest of all virtues. Does that make joy the second greatest?

We may feel our life is not filled with joy because we are so troubled. It is a troubling world, and we just heard a sermonette on that subject ["Will God Shorten the Day of the Tribulation?"]. That in turn makes us feel as though we are a failure in our relationship with God and the use of His Holy Spirit. In fact, it may really depress us!

There is no doubt at this particular time in history this world is particularly difficult to live in, and as we just heard, it is even going to get worse. Is there joy in that?

Much of the cause of this sadness or depression that we might feel is not that we are in imminent danger of losing our life because of violence because that aspect of what is prophesied for the end time church hasn't begun yet. The violence is elsewhere and we fear its arrival, but it is still probably quite a distance away.

Any lack of joy is largely emotional because life is simply very difficult. Before the availability of electronic media, news traveled very slowly and any worries that may have impinged upon the joys of life arose from local circumstances within the community.

Today, every hour on the hour, even in small towns or in some large cities that have a radio or a television station that have all the news all the time, news impinges upon one's joy, and it can be an almost every-minute occurrence. All you have to do is tune in KFWB in Los Angeles, driving down the freeway, and it is one sad story after another, and there you are, right in its midst.

I think at least part of the craze for almost constant entertainment has occurred to somehow deaden the pains of disappointment, depression, illnesses both mental and physical, joblessness, and the general feeling that nothing is ever going to work out without great tension.

Solomon devoted about one-half of Ecclesiastes 2 to explain how he tried to find meaning in life through self-seeking pleasure. He spared no expense attempting to find joy in building homes and gardens, music, drinking, and sex, and came to the conclusion that laughter is madness. How about that?

He came to the conclusion that there is no lasting meaning in the pursuit of pleasure. It is interesting that the Proverbs, also written by Solomon, note that laughter and pleasure often hide grief and sorrow, and Proverbs pictures fools laughing on the road to destruction. That is a pretty hard book. But, boy, they had a good time didn't they? Right up until they fell into the Lake of Fire. They had spent their lives on meaningless folly. Let me assure you that Solomon's search was not a drunken debauch. God made sure he always kept his mind so the true meaning didn't slip past him.

"Joy" in all its forms appears 205 times in the Scriptures. Paul expressed himself in a combination of words that he was sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Peter speaks of unspeakable joy. If at all possible, we like to have a firm grip of our understanding of biblical terminology. However, "joy" is a term that is almost impossible to do this with. In the Old Testament, at least six different words are translated into the one English term "joy."

However, in the Greek New Testament, only one Greek term dominates. It is in *Strong's Concordance* #5479. With this wide variety of sources for that word, it seems best to define "joy" by what it is not rather than what it precisely is.

English author C.S. Lewis said the term must be sharply distinguished from both happiness and pleasure. Why? Because it is not precisely either one. *Strong's Concordance* defines it as "cheerfulness; calm delight." Interestingly, both "grace" and "joy" share similar roots. This gets more interesting.

Biblically, "grace" is a gifting from God. If that sense is followed to give understanding regarding joy's biblical meaning, then joy focuses on something God *gives* rather than what men chase after and thus produce.

Happiness and pleasure clearly appear as something mankind chase after and produce, as Solomon experimented with in Ecclesiastes 2. This is why researchers arrive at the conclusion that the biblical joy must not be associated with either happiness or pleasure.

Thus, the biblical joy is a God-given sense of satisfaction, an overall sense of well-being that all is well despite the difficulties of life. Again, C.S. Lewis defined it as, "An unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." Think on that a while.

Laughter and happiness are often linked in people's minds. If one is laughing, then things must be going well for that person. Right? Wrong, because the motivation for laughter might well be something evil. People do laugh at evil. It encourages them, because laughter may come from someone else's suffering.

Is laughter good if caused by sarcastically putting another down? Not at all. Is laughter righteous because we witness seeing somebody who has been riding high finally "getting his," as we might say? Again, it is laughter based on something evil.

Here are three things I've learned from my study:

- 1) It is rather sharply defined as a calm cheerfulness, a positive upbeat hope-filled attitude. It doesn't mean you are roaring with laughter.
- 2) It does not spring from anything earthly. In other words, its presence in one's life does not depend on anything material. This does not mean material things are of no value, but the biblical joy is not from them.
- 3) Biblical joy is inseparable from godly love and is impossible to have without that love. In other words, biblical joy arises from the relationship with God. It comes from being in His presence in a relationship. Therefore, it is the quality of the relationship with God that determines whether we will have the joy to bear the difficulties of living His way of life in the face of confronting the difficulties of life in Satan's world as we approach the return of Christ.

As far as we know, nothing so destructively evil and of this intensity has ever happened before, as Matthew 24 tells us. Let's not cast away our cheerful confidence because God has assured us that with His help we can overcome what He permits.