

December 19, 2007 Joy  
Psalm 148 Jeremiah 31:7-14

As we pray together, “Come Lord Jesus, fill us with your joy” I would like to share a couple of quotes about joy:

From Abraham Lincoln, “Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”

William Shakespeare, “Things won are done; joy’s soul lies in the doing.”

NBA Player and coach Phil Jackson, “Winning is important to me, but what brings me joy is the experience of being fully engaged in whatever I am doing.”

Oprah Winfrey, “I define joy as a sustained sense of well-being and internal peace – a connection to what matters.”

Mother Theresa, “Joy is prayer – Joy is strength – Joy is love – Joy is a net of love by which you catch souls.”

And Jesus from **John 15:11** “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

I think this is one of our deepest yearnings ... that we would be happy ... that we would know joy ... and that it would be complete ... that we could honestly and in a sustained way join with the chorus of creation that we heard in Psalm 148 and sing our praises to the Lord.

Yet, this yearning is both a blessing and a curse. It is what encourages us to go chasing and searching after happiness, which usually gets equated with what will give us pleasure. Take this parable of sorts as an example:

A big dog saw a little dog chasing its tail and asked, ‘Why are you chasing your tail so?’ Said the puppy, ‘I have mastered the philosophy; I have solved the problems of the universe, which no dog before me has rightly solved; I have learned that the best thing for a dog is happiness, and that happiness is my tail. Therefore I am chasing it; and when I catch it, I shall have happiness.’

Said the old dog, ‘My son, I, too, have paid attention to the problems of the universe in my weak way, and I have formed some opinions. I, too, have pledged that happiness is a fine thing for a dog, and that happiness is in my tail. But I have noticed that when I chase after it, it keeps

running away from me, but when I go about my business, it comes after me.' – C.L. James<sup>1</sup>

Often, happiness becomes for us: I will be happy when I earn this amount of money. I will be happy when I lose this many pounds. I will be happy when I become friends with that set of people. I will be happy if I get this particular gift for Christmas. I will be happy if everything goes as planned for the holidays. I will be happy if others recognize all I have done for them. I will be happy if I get my way.

And what happens as we chase our respective tails? Maybe we do earn the amount of money we wanted, but once we have it, suddenly it is not enough. Because now we can get the bigger house or newer car, which means more insurance, more furniture, more working, so then we really can be happy. Or things don't go as planned or prayed for, others don't respond to us as we think they should ... then happiness stays just outside our grasp as disappointment sets in.

Pastor Grace Imathiue, who grew up in Kenya, reflected upon the contrast of happiness and joy this way, "Now the world knows how to package happiness, but the world doesn't know much about joy. Joy. I'm not splitting hairs when I say joy is different from happiness. Happiness might be the pleasure of the moment, but joy—now, let me tell you about joy—joy is different.

Joy is about endurance. Enduring yesterday in the hope that tomorrow will be a better day. Oh, we prayed for rain. We endured the season without rain hoping, that the rain would come. Joy is about hope. Joy is about peace. Living in the peace in spite of the moment. ...

And then we went to Sunday school and learned about joy. And the Sunday school teacher tells us joy is J-O-Y. Jesus first. Others next. Yourself last. J for Jesus, O for others, Y for yourself. And in this community of the Meru tribe that was critical. Learning how to live in community. You see, joy is not just an individual pursuit. Joy is about community and the laughter and the peace and the endurance and the tying in together of family and community."<sup>2</sup>

Now we are discovering something deeper, something lasting, something that we aren't called to chase after, but a gift we are called to discover in each moment, a gift we already have, a gift that is fully exposed when it is shared. Joy Jesus gives and we center our life in giving thanks for it. A joy we have for others and the ways God has blessed them. And a joy we celebrate within ourselves that we are loved, claimed children of God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hewett, James S., Illustrated Unlimited (Tyndale House, 1988) p 283.

<sup>2</sup> "**Raining Joy** " Program #5016 First air date January 28, 2007,  
[http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/imathiue\\_5016.htm](http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/imathiue_5016.htm)

And as several of the quotes I read pointed toward, the best way to discover this joy Jesus fill us with, is in going about our business every day with intention, with purpose, with the hope and expectation of being a part of the new creation Jesus' birth began. To trust the promise the angels proclaimed into the shepherds ordinary lives, that Jesus came among us, giving us gifts: love, peace, joy, hope, grace, and faith, for us to use in every moment. That the source of these gifts are the same, but the way each of us participates in them will be unique to the person God made you to be. The joy the shepherds expressed looked different than that of Mary's or that of the angels or that of the wise men.

Just think for a moment about the last time you completely lost track of time, of yourself, of worries, of angers, and fears. The moments you were satisfied and didn't walk away wanting or demanding more. That even if it was hard work, you would go back and do it again or give more away. This is joy and it also reveals your calling.

We don't have to chase, we just need to look for where God is at work and let ourselves get lost doing that. It's not a feeling we can manufacture. It is not a ten-step program we can follow to a happier life. You cannot copy your neighbor's joy. It is not something you can buy or perfect or achieve. It cannot depend upon what your family or strangers do or don't do for you.

No, it looks like a dog wagging its tail from the sheer delight of having a Master, who comes to make His home with us, being satisfied with the bounty of this gift and wanting others to discover its lasting peace. So, we pray, Come Lord Jesus, fill us with your joy.