

Joy – Read Phil 4.4-7, 1 Pet 1.3-9

There is a great deal of difference between happiness and joy. Happiness depends on things, situation and temperament. Joy is God's gift in whatever circumstances (Cf. Rom.14.17 and 15.13).

It is only in the presence of God that joy comes to its fullness. As the old catechism has it "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever". Joy in God here is an anticipation of heaven.

Joy and gladness are consistently related to the whole life of those who know the presence of God both in the Old Testament and the New. The Psalms are full of it: "I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart. I will enter His courts with praise" (based on Ps.100). Psalm 27.6 speaks of offering sacrifices of joy. Isaiah says of God's restoration of His people "You will go out with joy and be led forth in peace" (Is.55.12).

Job says (38.4-7) that when God created the world "the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy". And even the Fall, with all its dire results, cannot take away the joy of those who love and follow Jesus Christ, their Saviour (1 Pet.1.3—9).

There was joy at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2.8-10). It is one of the hallmarks of His presence with us (Gal.5.22). It is His promise even when we encounter hatred (Luke 6.22-3) and it was part of His prayer for us in John 17.13. He did, in fact, promise His followers a lot of trouble in this world (John 15.18-27) but with it He promised His presence and joy 15.11).

Paul experienced every persecution, hardship and trouble (1 Cor.11.23-7) but in it and through it all He rejoiced in the presence of Christ (2 Cor.7.4., Col.1.11 etc.) and James even tells us to rejoice when temptation besets us (1.2-3) because resisting it makes us strong. The Early Church suffered terrible and cruel persecution but never lost its note of joy (Acts 2.46-7). Perhaps it is not without significance that the most joyful Christians today are found in places where hardship and persecution persist. They are thrown hard upon Christ and they have much to teach us who have, comparatively, grown rich in things but poor in soul.

Questions

1. What are your greatest joys in life?
2. What has come home to you most strongly in today's study?
3. What is your favourite praise/joy hymn?
4. Paul says when we come to God in prayer or petition we are to come with "joyful and thankful prayer". Do we always remember this?
5. What makes you most joyful about life with Christ?
6. The book of Revelation speaks of heaven and of "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands" around God's throne in worship and praise. How do you feel about death in face of such a passage?