



## *"Joy"*

*The joy of the Lord is your strength.* This particular reference is taken from the Book of Nehemiah (8.10), but there are many other scripture citations about "joy" that we could have chosen for our theme. For example:

Psalm 105.43 *So God led forth his people with gladness, his chosen with shouts of joy*

Galations 5.22 *...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*

Luke 10.17 *The seventy returned with joy*

Romans 15.13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of Holy Spirit*

1 Thessalonians 2.19-20 *For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy!*

In fact, my concordance lists approximately 200 references to the word "joy."

What all this means is that you do not have to look very hard to find joy referenced in the scripture. The experience of joy is one of the characteristic elements in the faith as described in the Bible. In the OT,

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there are 13 different Hebrew roots used to express some aspect of joy or joyful participation in the faith of Israel.

And from the Bible's perspective, there is a difference between "everyday happiness" and lasting, abiding, "Godly joy." Happiness is fleeting, based on all kinds of circumstances. Godly joy, on the other hand, is the abiding belief that God is nearby, not far off. Godly joy is confident in the knowledge that our faith in Jesus Christ will see us through this life and into the next.

Today, let's consider the phrase, "*The joy of the Lord...*"

Now when I hear this phrase, I realize the complexity and the great possibilities in understanding its implications for my life.

There are at least 3 ways I try to interpret the phrase *the joy of the Lord*. Perhaps you will have others as well.

**First and foremost**, *the joy of the Lord* can be understood as those things which please God. In other words, what is the Lord's joy? What makes God/Christ joyful? The answers come fairly clearly in scripture - in these 200 references that I mentioned as well as the overall pattern of Jesus' life and thus his expectations of his followers.

I suppose if you wanted to express what makes God joyful in its most basic essence, the summary of the law is a good place to begin. This summary is found in both Testaments:

Deut 6.5 *...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might...*

This is so foundational to the faith that it continues with

*these words shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (6.6-9).*

So yes, loving God with all your heart, soul, and might is the basic essence of pleasing God; the basic essence what makes God joyful.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he quoted Deuteronomy and then tacks on a second, *and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these* (Mark 12.31, Luke 10.27).

You might be saying to yourself, "Bishop, loving God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength (BCP, p351) is one thing, but my neighbor; well, that's a bit much, don't you think?".

Well, don't complain to me about it, I've got these same neighbors. Clearly and without dispute, God and Jesus' joy is based on these very things.

So, the joy of the Lord appropriately is understood as those things which make the Lord joyful. And the joy of the Lord begins with love of God and love of neighbor. Without these two foundational principles of the Judeo-Christian tradition, there is no real Godly joy.

**Secondly**, the *joy of the Lord* can also be understood this way: "The joy that I have because of my personal faith in God keeps me going. The joy of my faith is my motivation, my strength. My faith gives me great comfort, great peace, great joy in believing, therefore I abound in hope" (to paraphrase Romans 15.13).

**Thirdly**, the *joy of Lord* can be understood in this way: "The traits and actions that make God joyful are the same things that make me joyful. I have strived to integrate these traits and actions in my life so that the Lord's joy is indeed my joy."

Having said all of this, I now want to give you the opportunity to discuss how you understand the phrase "the joy of the Lord."

To that end, on your tables/on the screen you have a few questions and a bible passage in which to frame your conversation.

## Questions for Discussion

### *Joy*

1. There are three understandings of how the phrase "the joy of the Lord" might be understood. Share what comes to mind for you when you hear the phrase, "the joy of the Lord."

**Next, read John 15.1-11**, noting in particular verse 11 where Jesus says, *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."*

2. Taking the scope of Jesus' ministry and teaching, what do you think is Jesus' joy?

3. What specific traits and actions would say embody "the joy of the Lord?"

4. What might you do, personally and in your church corporately, to embody and exercise these traits and actions?

John 15.1-11 (NRSV)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.

<sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

<sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

<sup>4</sup> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

<sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

<sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

<sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

<sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.