

JOY

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“You will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy”. John 16:22b

Psalm 100, 1 Peter 1:3-5, Luke 15:1-10

I've been thinking about joy lately because I've been writing a PhD proposal looking at joy in the writings of Karl Barth.

Some people think that the distinguishing mark of Christians is that we don't enjoy life.

The book unchristian which looks at perceptions of Christianity reports that two thirds of young people in America perceive Christianity as dull, flat and lifeless.

At one wedding rehearsal I was taking, the bride and her mother were talking about the reception.

They then turned to me and said: “I would've invited you to the wedding reception but I didn't think that you'd enjoy it. We'll be having fun.” I had to restrain myself from pretending to look shocked and say “fun – surely not!”

At another wedding I took, several people said to me later that they didn't expect to come to church and laugh!

Yet joy is central to Christianity.

Romans 14:17

For the Kingdom of God is a matter of ... living a life of goodness and peace and **joy** in the Holy Spirit.

Christianity should show people that the word God is a cheerful word!!

Joy comes from God's presence.

Joy comes from knowing God's love for us here and now.

and Joy comes from the hope that we have in Christ,



It's an essential part of the gospel, found in many passages of scripture, that God is "an object of desire, joy, pleasure, yearning and enjoyment".

As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you.

Psalms 16:11

"You will show me the path that leads to life;
your presence fills me with joy
and brings me pleasure forever"

God radiates joy. God's glory has been described as "his overflowing self-communicating joy" yet this isn't what people always understand about God.

In his book *Surprised by Joy*, CS Lewis writes of how before he became a Christian he was searching for a deep joy that he'd only caught glimpses of, and how it never occurred to him that this joy was to be found in God.

Yet the Christian message is good news, a message that when received brings great joy on earth and in heaven. At the first Christmas, the angels said to the shepherds:
"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

The good news of the Christian message is about far more than eternal life insurance. It's about the joy of knowing that God is for us. It's about the relationship of love that God desires to have with us and which we are to share with others. In Christ we, who cannot justify ourselves, have the joy of forgiveness granted to us. Joy comes from knowing God's righteousness and mercy, the boundless joy of knowing that Christ has been justified in our place, of knowing what we receive in his place, and of the hope we have in Christ.

I remember someone at school asking me why I looked so happy. The reason was that I knew for sure that God loved me. And I knew that that wasn't something that might change, because how we're to feel about ourselves is to be found in God, not in what we can achieve or accumulate.

Advertising campaigns may try and convince us that joy is to be found in our possessions, or comfort or luxury. (A German car manufacturer claims: "we don't just make cars. We make joy")

But the joy that God gives us is greater.

Psalms 4:6-7

"There are many who pray "Give us more blessings O Lord. Look on us with kindness!"
But the joy that you have given me is more than they will ever have with all their corn and wine."

In 2 Cor 6 Paul writes 4ff "We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. ... ¹⁰ **Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others.** We own nothing, and yet we have everything."

Joy is the appropriate response to receiving God's grace, mercy, patience and love, which can't be earned but can only be accepted. Because the basis for our joy is to be found in God's love for us, shown in Jesus Christ, joy in the lord can be found despite our immediate circumstances.

Having said that it's true that those of us who have a disposition like Eeyore sometimes need to look more positively at our circumstances.



A group of senior citizens were sitting around talking about their ailments: "My arms are so weak I can hardly hold this cup of coffee," said one. "Yes, I know. My cataracts are so bad I can't even see my coffee," replied another. "I can't turn my head because of the arthritis in my neck," said a third, to which several nodded weakly in agreement. "My blood pressure pills make me dizzy," another went on. "I guess that's the price we pay for getting old," winced an old man as he shook his head. Then there was a short moment of silence... "Well, it's not that bad," said one woman cheerfully. "At least we can all still drive!"

There's a difference between the happiness that comes from our immediate circumstances, or from putting a positive spin on our immediate circumstances and our inner core of joy.

Our immediate circumstances may not bring us obvious joy. We may've had a really hard week, or have difficulties at work or financial worries or health worries. We may be grieving a loss. We aren't to trivialize these things, or pretend they don't matter, but we are to lift them to God in prayer, and be reminded of our greater circumstance, of the presence of God with us, of the love which is ours in Christ, and of the sure and certain hope we have.

Karl Barth, writing to a prisoner who was in the depths of despair, wrote:

"Hold unshakably fast to one thing. God loves you now even as the one you now are ... God has appointed himself to be your friend, and appointed you to be his friend."

While we live in a world of broken-ness, there will be times when we can lose sight of our joy, and we need to ask God to restore the joy which we had. We live in a hurting world, yet we can rejoice and give thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, because the revelation that God is for us is a message of joy, and the source of our joy.

Jesus began his public ministry with a reading from Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bring comfort to the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners.

This is a message of joy, which goes on to talk about

comforting all who mourn,
giving them a crown of beauty

instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.

Sometimes we need to choose to return to this joy.
We need to choose to remind ourselves of God's love,
We are to let ourselves be comforted, strengthened and encouraged by God. We are not to be anxious, but to take our worries to God in prayer.

Joy comes not only from present happiness, but also from anticipated happiness. The reading from 1 Peter talks about the hope that we have in Christ;

a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. ⁶In this hope you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

As we live in a broken world, where our own broken-ness and the broken-ness of others brings sadness, our hope reminds us of the time when we'll be reconciled to Christ, and when we'll be fully whole, (Isaiah 35: 1) where we will be "crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and we will be filled with joy and gladness"

Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

Before I went to St John's to train to become a priest, I'd thought of church services as being a time, when, even if we're feeling sad for whatever reason, we're reminded of God's love for us in Christ, reminded that we can come to God in our sadness and our happiness, reminded of God's comfort and hope, and reminded of God's victory over all that makes us sad. But at St Johns, our Wednesday morning services were fairly joyless occasions, with just enough religion to make us miserable. I've seen happier funerals. When I left, two of my friends sang me a song: "without you my life's going to be, forever Wednesday morning". Somehow in the services there, the college had lost sight of the understanding that the Christian message is good news which makes us glad! And so we should rejoice!

God does not want us to be unwilling servants, only belonging to him and serving him and giving him praise begrudgingly, but wants us to belong to him as children, voluntarily and joyfully.

I think that this is part of what is meant by entering the kingdom as a little child.



One of the joys of being an aunty is to see the natural joy and delight that children have (Ollie socks)

We give glory to God when we respond in joy.

We are to be joyful in life and death because we belong to Christ who has redeemed us, whose Holy Spirit assures us of eternal life, removing anxiety about death, making us willing and ready to serve Christ.

1 Peter 1:8-9 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Joy is a response to the joy radiating from God, which leads to thanksgiving, gratitude, and being a joyful witness to the joy that God gives.

Without joy, we don't bear true witness to God but as we rejoice, our joy attracts others.

As we share our joy for others, and as they come to know God's joy for themselves, there is great rejoicing in heaven and on earth.



This is a picture of God as a woman cleaning the house, looking for a lost coin (obviously coins were more valuable back then!) When the lost coin is found there is great rejoicing.

One of the greatest joys that I have as a Christian is seeing others come to know God's joy.

Let's seek to share that joy with others, so that we and all heaven may rejoice.

Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Lord, our God,
In your dear Son, our Savior Jesus Christ,
you have given us yourself
so that we might belong wholly to you.

This concerns us all, although no one of us has earned it.
What remains then for us but to be amazed,
to rejoice, to be thankful,
to hold fast to that which you have done for us?
May this joy may become a reality among us now.

Help us now and always to hold unshakably fast to the fact that you love us now and always,
and that nothing need ever separate us from your love which is ours in Christ Jesus our Saviour.
Amen