



## Joy

**Mon, March 29, 2021 - Light!**

Most of us have had one of those times when things were really difficult and it seemed like the world was closing in on us. Eventually, however, something happened that was like a new day dawning. It was like light was coming again, and it gave us renewal and restoration. If you have had one of those experiences, you may have an understanding of what joy is. And while joy may be difficult to describe, it's not difficult to receive if you look to the right place.

**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. For those who lived in a land of deep shadows--light! sunbursts of light! You repopulated the nation, you expanded its joy. Oh, they're so glad in your presence! Festival joy! The joy of a great celebration, sharing rich gifts and warm greetings. The abuse of oppressors and cruelty of tyrants--all their whips and cudgels and curses--is gone, done away with, a deliverance as surprising and sudden as Gideon's old victory over Midian. The boots of all those invading troops, along with their shirts soaked with innocent blood, will be piled in a heap and burned, a fire that will burn for days! For a child has been born--for us! The gift of a son--for us! He'll take over the running of the world. His names will be: Amazing Counselor, Strong God, Eternal Father, Prince of Wholeness. His ruling authority will grow, and there'll be no limits to the wholeness he brings. He'll rule from the historic David throne over that promised kingdom. He'll put that kingdom on a firm footing and keep it going with fair dealing and right living, beginning now and lasting always. The zeal of God-of-the-Angel-Armies will do all this. (Isaiah 9:2-7, MSG)**

Usually we hear this passage from Isaiah at Christmas time. And while it's appropriate then, it's also appropriate for the week before Easter. That's because it's a Scripture about Jesus, and it's a reminder of what He was sent to do for us and what He has done for us. It's a passage about the joy that comes through Jesus. Joy can make a difference in your life no matter what you experience. Joy is not happiness (which is dependent on our circumstances). Instead, joy is an experience of contentment, confidence and hope that only comes through connection and proximity to Jesus. How could you benefit from an infusion of real joy? What will you do to allow the joy of Jesus to permeate your life today?

*Joy is the echo of God's life in us. (Abbot Columba Marmion)*

**Tue, Mar 30 - A Different Response**

Few of us use the word “happy” to describe our response to difficulty. None of us likes pain, difficulty, or trouble. Our response to trouble is usually one of complaining or worse. There is, however, a different response.

**We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance.** (Romans 5:3, NLT)

Problems and trials are a consequence of living in a fallen, sinful world. None of us will escape them, no matter how hard we try. But when we have a relationship with Christ, He can use our difficulties to benefit us. The Apostle Paul didn't rejoice because of the troubles he faced; instead he rejoiced because he knew the results of those troubles because of his relationship with and trust in God. Difficulties can help us to develop endurance--the ability to keep going regardless of what we face. How could you benefit from having endurance--especially when you are dealing with troubles? How can endurance help grow your faith in God? Can you thank God today for any trials you may be experiencing? Thank Him that He is with you and is working in you for your good no matter what comes your way.

*One of the most interesting and remarkable things Christians learn is that laughter does not exclude weeping. Christian joy is not an escape from sorrow. Pain and hardship still come, but they are unable to drive out the happiness of the redeemed.* (Eugene Peterson)

### **Wed, Mar. 31 - The Source of Joy**

When you are preparing for a great, long-awaited vacation, besides frantic activity you probably eagerly anticipate what is soon to come. And then when the vacation arrives, you probably enjoy it. And later, after you're back to real life you probably think back to that great experience and enjoy it again. In all, there's a future, present, and past dimension to the vacation. You don't have to work up the good feeling about it; that's just a natural product of that good thing.

**It seemed like a dream, too good to be true, when God returned Zion's exiles. We laughed, we sang, we couldn't believe our good fortune. We were the talk of the nations--“God was wonderful to them!” God was wonderful to us; we are one happy people. And now, God, do it again--bring rains to our drought-stricken lives so those who planted their crops in despair will shout “Yes!” at the harvest, so those who went off with heavy hearts will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.** (Psalm 126:1-6, MSG)

While great vacations come and go, they may help us understand the reality of joy in our Christian journey. If we spend time thinking about it, we can recall countless ways God has helped, blessed, encouraged, forgiven, rescued, and restored us and countless other people throughout our history--not only in our lifetimes but in the history of humanity. But beyond the past, as we interact with God and join Him in His work in the world, we experience something in the present--joy--that doesn't come apart from

our activity with Him. And as we continue following the Lord, we anticipate and expect that He will do as He has always done: help, bless, encourage, forgive, rescue, restore, and more for our future. So while joy may be difficult to define or describe, we have no doubt to its source: God. And it comes to His people as we live in relationship and fellowship with Him. Today, would you spend some time thinking about your journey with Christ? Would you consider the past, present, and future aspects of joy and how you could experience them as you grow in your relationship and fellowship with the Lord?

*Joy is not a requirement of Christian discipleship, it is a consequence. It is not what we have to acquire in order to experience life in Christ; it is what comes to us when we are walking in the way of faith and obedience. (Eugene Peterson)*

### **Thur, Apr 1 - Traveling Companions**

For many of us, there have been times in our lives when things got so bad that everything seemed hopeless. It may have seemed that wherever we turned things looked bleak and discouraging. Usually, however, when things look hopeless there's a strong possibility we are focusing in the wrong place--at our trouble. But there's a better place to focus.

**Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. The Scriptures give us patience and encouragement so that we can have hope.**

**...I pray that the God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace while you trust in him. Then your hope will overflow by the power of the Holy Spirit.**  
(Romans 15:4, 13, NCV)

In a hopeless situation we may try to get encouragement from friends, try to forget through substances, or try to cope through activities. Or we can become so withdrawn that don't want anything to do with everyday activities or life in general. But none of these are good solutions if we want to have hope for the future.

The God who created the universe specializes in giving hope in what may seem to be hopelessness. This hope comes as we receive patience and encouragement from Him through His Word, the Scriptures. Hope also comes as we trust in God to fill us with joy and peace. Through His Word and His Spirit, hope will overflow in our lives, along with peace and joy, its traveling companions. Do you need this? God wants to give it to you, but won't come if you are focused in the wrong place. How is your focus? What will you do today to focus on our unlimited God and His Word that can fill you with hope in your journey?

*Hope fills the afflicted soul with such inward joy and consolation, that it can laugh while tears are in the eye, sigh and sing all in a breath; it is called "The rejoicing of hope."*  
(William Gurnall)

### **Fri, Apr 2 - What's Good About Good Friday?**

(adapted from James Emery White)

The amazing thing about Good Friday is that it was--and *is*--part of the "good" declared by God at creation. **"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good"** (Genesis 1:31, NIV). The fall was not good; sin, disobedience, and suffering are not good. But God's purpose in creation and the redemptive drama that followed were--and *are*--good.

Some would slam God for placing such a burden on human life--since He created us and gave us free will He knew the suffering we would experience. What is less noticed is how God always knew of Good Friday. Even in creation, the cross loomed large. Yes, there would be suffering, but none more so than for God Himself.

C.S. Lewis writes:

"God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that He may love and perfect them. He creates the universe, already foreseeing--or should we say 'seeing'? there are no tenses in God--the buzzing cloud of flies about the cross, the flayed back pressed against the uneven stake, the nails driven through the mesial nerves, the repeated incipient suffocation as the body droops, the repeated torture of back and arms as it is time after time, for breath's sake, hitched up. If I may dare the biological image, God is a 'host' who deliberately creates His own parasites; causes us to be that we may exploit and 'take advantage of' Him. Herein is love. This is the diagram of Love Himself, the inventor of all loves."

What an ultimate "good" this must have been; declared at creation, consummated on Golgotha. But it wasn't a good designed for God. There is no good to be added, or deficit to be addressed, in His being.

It was a good for *us*.

Many books portrayed the heart of God toward us as a lover pursuing the beloved, a fairy tale where God is the prince and we are the maiden. "Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden," begins Soren Kierkegaard, who first fashioned the popular analogy.

"The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents. And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden. How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist--no one dared resist him. But would she love him?

"She would say she loved him, or course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind? Would she be happy at his side? How could he know? If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, an equal. He wanted her to forget that he

was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross the gulf between them. For it's only in love that the unequal can be made equal."

Yes, this is the heart of God, and He is on just such a mission.

But the deeper truth lies in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*. We are not a beautiful maiden. There is nothing becoming in us whatsoever. Instead, we are desperately criminal, and the only rescue grace would bring would demand storming the prison in which we are rightfully held. This is precisely what He did. ***"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"*** (Romans 5:8-9, NIV).

And that's an even better story. And it's the one story the world does not already have, and most needs to hear.