

Joyful Attitudes

Introduction. In this trouble-filled world it may sound strange to some but it really is possible for Christians to live with an inner sense of joy. When I say that I am not talking about merely pretending to be happy. People can act happy even when they are living in despair. Some of the funniest and most successful comedians are the saddest people.

One notable place in the New Testament which speaks of true, lasting joy over a dozen times is the book of Philippians. When Paul wrote Philippians there were many outward reasons why Paul could have been miserable: He recently had been the target of an assassination conspiracy, he was a prisoner chained to a guard, his public preaching had been curtailed, he had to stand trial for his life, his Jewish countrymen despised and hated him as a traitor, and finally, some preachers envied him and tried to make his imprisonment worse.

However, in spite of his disappointments, discomforts, and dangers, Paul showed us that he had joy that could not be quenched. The reason this is so practical for us is because Philippians helps us to understand how we can grow toward joy and happiness too. But before we talk about attitudes that make lasting joy possible, we need to discuss four robbers of joy.

I. ***Four Robbers Of Joy***

A. Distressing circumstances.

1. A lot in life cannot be controlled, and this means that the person whose happiness depends on ideal circumstances will be unhappy.
2. When Nehemiah tried to build the walls of Jerusalem, the people were discouraged because of the opposition and the rubble (Nehemiah 4:7-10).

B. Other people.

1. We have all experienced depression and unhappiness because of what other people are, say, and do.
2. Moses was so unhappy with the murmuring of the Israelites that he wanted God to kill him (Numbers 11:4-15).

C. Material possessions.

1. It is ironic that not only are we often robbed of joy by what we do not have, but often what we get robs us of the joy we expected it to bring.
2. Solomon had more possessions to keep him busy than any of us could ever have, but they did not satisfy him (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11).

D. Worry over the future.

1. Who among us has not worried about how our health or wealth will play out toward the end of our lives?

2. When Elijah heard that Ahab and Jezebel wanted to kill him, he was discouraged and worried over the future (1 Kings 19:10).

II. **Four Attitudes Of Joy**

A. Joy in spite of circumstances.

1. Paul's attitude was to put Christ first (Philippians 1:21).
Circumstances could not rob Paul of joy because he was not living to enjoy circumstances but to serve Christ.
 - a) That is why he did not think of himself as a "prisoner of Rome" but as a "prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:1).
 - b) That is why he did not think of self as facing civil trial but as being "set for defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17).
2. If you are wondering what was important to Paul, then consider chapter 1.
 - a) He was concerned about the fellowship of the gospel (vss. 1-11).
 - b) He was concerned about the furtherance of the gospel (vss. 12-26).
 - c) He was concerned about the faith of the gospel (vss. 27-30).
3. Because he was living for Christ, Paul could look at bad circumstances not as devastating losses, but as avenues to magnify Christ. This can work for us too if we change our attitude from hating bad circumstances to using them to honor Christ.

B. Joy in spite of people.

1. There is a great contrast between chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 teaches us we need put Christ first. Chapter 2 teaches us to put others second.
2. Chapter 2 gives us four examples of people who did put others before themselves.
 - a) Jesus (vss. 1-11).
 - b) Paul (vss. 12-18).
 - c) Timothy (vss. 19-20).
 - d) Epaphroditus (vss. 25-30).
3. As you think about putting others before yourself, think also about why or how others rob you of joy. Is not one of the main reasons we are robbed of joy by others is because they prevent us from getting our own way?
4. What would happen if we developed a Christ-like submissive mind that seeks to serve others instead of expecting others to serve us? We will have joy from serving instead of unhappiness from not being served.

C. Joy in spite of possessions.

1. In chapter 3 Paul uses the word "things" several times and reminds us that although many "mind earthly things," we ought be

- spiritually-minded and focus on heavenly priorities (Philippians 3:1, 7-8, 13, 15-16, 19, 21).
2. No amount of money is going to help us in the day of judgment (Proverbs 11:4; 16:16; James 5:1-3). So why do we waste our lives working for riches?
 3. If you will look at possessions from heaven's viewpoint, then you will rightly use them as tools to serve the Lord (2 Corinthians 9:10-11; 1 Timothy 6:17-18).
- D. Joy in spite of worry.
1. The answer to anxiety is prayer (Philippians 4:6-7). Prayer enables us to develop a trusting attitude and allows us to possess "the peace of God."
 2. True peace is not found in positive thinking, in the absence of conflict, or in good feelings. It comes from knowing that God is in control.
 3. This peace is only for those who are already at peace with God through justification by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1). It acts as a sentry to guard our hearts and thoughts from all anxiety and despair, and thereby allowing us to have joy.

Conclusion. If we cultivate a devoted attitude toward Christ, a submissive attitude toward others, a spiritual attitude toward possessions, and a trusting attitude toward the future we have gone a long way on road to kind joy God wants us have. We are meant to enjoy our salvation, not just endure it.

But the one factor that can offset all of this is the consciousness of unforgiven sin. If you are aware that God condemns you, then you cannot possibly have the joy we have been talking about. The good news is you do not have to live with that guilt and condemnation. Joy is the byproduct of obedience, so take the opportunity to obey now (Acts 16:34).