

CHRISTIAN JOY

Reading Lesson: Jn. 15:7-11 and Ps. 16:11

Introduction

The world in which we live is filled with unrest and unhappiness. People feel largely dissatisfied and unfulfilled. This is understandable among unsaved people, but many professed Christians seem to experience these same feelings of unhappiness, even disillusionment - with life in general, and with their spiritual life in particular. In this lesson, we want to examine the root cause for these feelings, and rediscover the source of full and lasting joy.

Understanding Joy

More and more, it seems that people are addicted to fun, entertainment and thrill-seeking. These are only a cheap substitute for real joy, for they do not fully satisfy and they do not last. Sooner or later, those who depend on such things to keep them happy find that the new has worn off, the pizzazz has fizzled, and the "awesomeness" has become a fading memory. When this happens, they find themselves back in the same old rut of disappointment and gloom. Their mistake is in having looked to external sources, rather than internally. True joy does not come from outside a person, but rather from the inside.

The Source

The presence of Jesus is the source of true joy. Consider the following points, concerning the advent of Christ, when the Word (Jesus) was made flesh and began to dwell among us (Jn. 1:14):

- Even before He was born, His presence brought joy (Lu. 1:44)
- The glad news from the angel that Jesus (Immanuel - God with us) had arrived was the cause of great joy (Lu. 2:10-11)
- After seeing Him first-hand, the shepherds went away praising God (Lu. 2:16-17,20)
- The sight of His star, guiding the wise men to Him, brought exceeding great joy (Mt. 2:9-10)

Just as His physical presence in the world produced joy back then, His spiritual presence brings joy today.

Salvation

To experience true joy, a person must repent and believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ. When he does, the Holy Spirit comes and takes up His abode inside - and from that moment on, he has a well of living water inside him, springing up unto everlasting life (Jn. 4:14). This well is not seasonal, but continuously flowing; and the life it brings is not temporary but eternal. I Pet. 1:8 says that this believing (unto salvation) brings joy: "...yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory..." Indeed, of all the fruit (products, outflow) of the Spirit, joy is second on the list, preceded only by love (Gal. 5:22-23).

Christian Joy

So if joy comes from Jesus, and saved people have Jesus in their heart through the Holy Spirit, why are not all Christians joyful? The answer to this question is found in our reading lesson.

Jesus, himself, in our reading lesson (Jn. 15:11) said He was telling us these things so that His joy would remain in us and be full. What things did He tell us? In verse seven, He told us to "abide in me and my words;" and in verse ten, he said "abide in my love." So, for Christians to have full and lasting joy, we must stay close to Jesus (remain in His presence, abide in Him). When we fail to do so, our joy lessens in degree and duration.

Potholes in the Path of Joy

Transgressions

Satan is a thief (Jn. 10:10) and he loves to rob Christians of their joy. By enticing them to yield to temptation and transgress God's laws, he is able to steal their joy. After sinning with Bathsheba, David prayed "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation..." (Ps. 51:12) He did so because his sin had robbed him of his Christian joy. Sin throws up a veil in the life of a Christian, which separates him from the presence of the Lord. (Is. 59:2) Unfortunately, many unhappy Christians are in that condition because of unforgiven sin in their lives.

Unholy Alliances

Sometimes Christians do not intend to sin, but they associate with people and things of the world that end up influencing them away from God. James wrote, "...know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." (4:4) It would be better to be friendless, and enjoy the blessings and joy of the Lord.

Negativism

Some people choose (yes, it is a choice!) to view everything with a critical or negative outlook. They always expect the worst of outcomes and suspect the worst in others. Having lost their joy, they seem determined to inflict their misery on everyone else. Their impact is one of discouragement and despair. But Rom. 14:19 says we should "...follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify (build up/encourage) another..."

Lost Focus

Still other Christians simply get so involved with the busyness of life (sometimes, even church-related activities), that they leave no time to enter into their closet, and thereby, into the presence of Jesus. Like Martha in Lu. 10:38-42, they become burdened with all the obligations and struggles of life, and soon their focus is no longer on Jesus (like Mary's was). Soon they find themselves frustrated and critical of others, just like Martha had become. Apparently, Mary on the other hand, was quite content and happy, sitting and learning at Jesus' feet. Jesus told Martha, "...one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." One thing is needful for all Christians: we need to make a conscious effort to enter into, and abide in, the presence of Jesus, where there is fullness of joy.

The Impact on Worship

The loss of joy in an individual is, by itself, a serious thing, but that is not the extent of the impact. When Christians lose their joy, it becomes more difficult for them to worship and praise God in the Church. Services that could otherwise be vibrant and spiritual, with Christ uplifted and glorified, may instead become cold and joyless. This is not how it should be! The description of the early church is very different: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people." (Acts 2:46-47)

Restoration

Thankfully, I Jn. 1:9 tells us that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We are also instructed to "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you." (Ja. 4:8) When this happens, that close relationship with Jesus is restored, along with the ability to once again enjoy our salvation.

The Realm of Possibility

Full (degree) and lasting (duration) joy is something that every Christian can experience. (Note: we do not value and pursue joy simply for our own pleasure; it is not about us being happy. Rather, we desire to have fullness of joy so that we may be a more effective witness and show forth the goodness of God.)

This is possible in spite of what may be going on around us in life. Remember Paul and Silas? After being beaten with many stripes and thrown into the town jail, they were able to sing praises unto God. How was this possible? Before Acts 16:25 mentions their singing, it says they prayed - they invoked the presence of Him whose name they had been preaching. There, in that jail cell, they were surrounded by the presence of Jesus, and that brought them joy - joy that was not based on their physical condition or surroundings, but on their closeness, devotion and faith in God.

So when the doctor calls with a bad report, the boss says the company is cutting back, the furnace is blowing cold air, and the kids are screaming - we can call on Jesus for help, speaking that name that is above every name, and feel Him surround us with His presence. Right then and there, we will experience peace that surpasses understanding and joy that defies description.

Conclusion

The mark of a mature Christian is a close, consistent and joyous walk with God. Our reading lesson instructs us to abide (stay/remain) in Him and His Word, not just visit with Him on Sundays. Let us make that kind of relationship with God our all-out goal as Christians, so that like Paul, we may say: "none of these things move me...so that I might finish my course with joy..." (Acts 20:24)