

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS ... JOY

Selected Scriptures

Introduction:

Joy – not a word we hear as much as we once did. I was thinking back to some of the old choruses we used sing when I was a child.

- Joy, Joy, Joy, with joy my heart is ringing...
- I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart...
- The joy of the Lord is my strength...
- There is joy in serving Jesus...
- Joy is a flag flown high from the castle of my heart...

We may not sing those choruses much anymore, yet joy is something we all desire. But do we really understand joy? What is it? Where does it come from?

A couple of weeks ago, we stopped at McDonalds for a snack on our way home from town. As I was finishing up my soft drink, I was looking over the logos and writing on the cup. There I saw a small slogan that said, "Joy – it comes with every bite." Is that what joy is – having a Big Mac and fries? I couldn't help but chuckle, but at the same time it was rather sad, because that is a very low view of what constitutes joy.

Oftentimes joy is a hard thing to get a grip on, because so often life hits us in our most vulnerable areas. It is hard to think about joy when life is falling apart. Many of you can testify to that.

When a young couple watch their son slowly fade away, body overcome by leukemia until he dies in their arms, they were not thinking about joy. When a marriage of 50 or 60 years is torn apart by death or dementia or disease, it is hard to think about joy. When you are watching your house burn to the ground taking with it all of your earthly possessions, it's hard to be thinking of joy.

Yet the Apostle Paul, in Galatians 5:22 lists joy as the second key ingredient in the life of a Spirit-filled believer. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy..."

For the next few moment, I want us to focus our thoughts on joy, looking at it in these three ideas:

1. The Definition of Joy
2. The Source of Joy
3. The Result of Joy

The Definition of Joy

What is joy? First, the dictionary definition, then we will look at the Biblical concept of Joy.

- A. Dictionary definition (Funk and Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary)
1. A strong feeling of happiness; gladness; delight
 2. A state of contentment or satisfaction
 3. Anything that causes delight or gladness.

So, it seems that according to the dictionary joy is that which makes you feel good:

- A promotion at work
- The eager anticipation of the birth of your first child
- A friend accepts Christ as Saviour after years of prayer and witnessing.

You know the feeling – excitement, satisfaction, delight – JOY!

But what happens when:

- That new position turns out to demand more that you can give?
- That child is born with a serious illness or physical defect?
- Your friend imitates the Christian life for a while but then abandons it all and goes back to his old lifestyle?

Then where are your feelings of inner contentment and joy? It seems obvious that the dictionary definition of joy has a flaw in it. So how does the Bible talk about joy?

- B. Biblical definition

Let me read a few verses from the NT regarding joy:

Rom. 14:17 – "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

When Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch in Pisidia, preaching, we read:

Acts 13:49-52 – “And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

It doesn't take more than a cursory reading to see that joy in the Bible is not tied exclusively to circumstances. If that were so, then our joy would be nothing but an emotional rollercoaster ride. It would be impossible to have the continual abiding joy that is suggested by the fruit of the Spirit.

The apostles in that Acts passage were filled with joy, even when they were facing intense opposition and persecution. Later on, when Paul wrote to the Philippian believers he said, “...I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” (*Philippians 4:11 ESV*) I understand this to suggest that he had a deep down joy and satisfaction that could not be unseated by the ups and downs of life.

What about Jesus? He told his disciples, “*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*” (*John 15:11 ESV*) Those words were spoken the night he was betrayed by Judas and arrested. He knew that he was headed for Gethsemane and the cross where he would suffer unbearable agony and pain. Clearly his joy was not centered in his circumstances, but in his relationship with his heavenly Father.

“...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (*Hebrews 12:2 ESV*)

So it would seem clear that biblical joy is a state of inner satisfaction and contentment that is not determined by—or swayed by—outward circumstances. It is the continual joy that is deep down inside our being, untouched by the outer currents of life. Like the old chorus said, I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart.

The Source of Joy

So then, if joy is not a product of our circumstances, then where does true joy come from? What is the source of true, inner lasting joy?

Well, as we have seen, Paul said that joy is a spiritual fruit. It is the natural result of walking in and with the Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy...” (*Gal. 5:22*)

Earlier I read some verses or passages that spoke of joy. All of them linked joy with the Holy Spirit.

Rom. 14:17 – “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 13:52 – “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Then in *John 15:11* Jesus told his disciples, “*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*” What things had he spoken to them about? He had just finished giving them the promise that He would send the Holy Spirit, who would be with them and in them and would encourage and comfort and empower them. He wanted them to have the joy he had.

So, essentially, the source of joy is the Holy Spirit. But more specifically, I want to point out a couple of distinct sources of joy for the believer that are revealed in the Scripture. Both of these far transcend the temporal circumstances of life.

A. Our salvation

In *Psalm 51*, the psalmist David says, “*Restore to me the joy of your salvation.*” There is joy in being saved.

But I would like to turn to *Luke 10* for a moment. The context – Jesus has sent a group of 72 disciples in pairs, to cities and towns around the Galilee. He gave them authority to preach and teach and power over evil spirits and diseases. They came back all excited – look at verse 17. Now notice Jesus' response to them.

Read vv. 18-20. He says, don't base your joy on some exciting event or circumstance, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

You see circumstances change. If you look back to the previous chapter, in 9:37-42 you will find that not long before this, some of those very disciples had found themselves unable to deal with the evil spirits. Things aren't always going to go your way. But your salvation is constant.

Are you saved? Have your sins been forgiven? Is your name written in heaven? That is to be the source of your joy.

B. Faith and hope

There is another source of joy that Pater talks about. Turn with me to 1 Peter 1:3-9 – read verses, and discuss briefly

- The hope of an inheritance that is eternal
- The hope of seeing Jesus
- Believing in Jesus and believing that you will see him

Read v. 8 again – you rejoice with inexpressible joy. Why? Because you know what is ahead.

The Result of Joy

So, what happens when we yield ourselves to the control of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the fruit of joy begins to be produced in our lives? How does it affect us? I would like to mention two things taken from two verses, one in the Old Testament and one in the New.

A. Strength

In Nehemiah 8 we have the account of Ezra gathering the people together to read to them from the Law. There was some consternation as the people began to recognize their sinful state. We read,

*“And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for **the joy of the LORD is your strength.**”” (Nehemiah 8:9-10 ESV)*

When we are faced with sin, confronted with sorrow and difficulty, when you feel you can't go on, you will. You will find strength to go on because of a deep-seated, unshakable sense of contentment and satisfaction—joy. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

B. Victory over circumstances

In 2 Corinthians 8 we find a very interesting testimony regarding the believers in Macedonia. The churches there were facing incredible trials—persecution and intense poverty. Yet they were setting the example in giving generously to send aid to the church in Jerusalem, where there was a terrible famine taking place. Listen to what Paul says:

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will,” (2 Corinthians 8:1-3 ESV)

They were living above and beyond their circumstances. They were living in victory over their circumstances. Why? Because of their abundance of joy. Joy that was not a product of their circumstances, but of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Conclusion:

Yes it is hard to be joyful when life seems to be falling apart. However there is a big difference between happiness and true deep-seated joy. The Bible speaks very little about happiness but a great deal about joy. Our problem is that we often confuse the two. Happiness fluctuates greatly depending on our circumstances.

But when we are under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit, his abundant joy can carry us through even tragedy or discouragement. Then we can stand with Nehemiah and confidently proclaim, “The joy of the Lord is my strength.”