

LIFE OF JOY

Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 13:31-33 & 44-52.

If one of our main tasks as a church is to make disciples, I suggest that one of the effective means by which God does this is by the joy evident in the lives of Christ's people. Paul listed joy as one of the fruits of the Spirit. The call to rejoice comes through the New Testament something like seventy times. From John 15:11 we hear Christ's desire for his joy to be in us and for that joy to be complete, and in Matthew 13:44 we hear Jesus say that the joy of living each day within God's realm is worth getting rid of everything else to have it.

Do we come across as a particularly joyous people or do we cling to our grumbles and grouches? Are we too preoccupied with declining numbers to see where God is creating, healing, challenging, renewing lives today? Are we immobilized by fear of what people might say, by fear of failure, by fear of rejection, by fear of change? Are we overwhelmed by what we call the state of the world, news items telling of terrible things going on in the world? Have we simply adopted a defeatist attitude? People everywhere are seeking happiness for themselves and their children: "I just want him/her to be happy".

In Christ, by God's Spirit, there is a joy that goes beyond superficial happiness: joy in the very depths of our souls. Have we experienced, amid all the pleasures of life, this depth of joy: the joy that remains whatever our circumstances, the joy that goes beyond youthful exuberance, the joy that is linked to assurance, contentment and peace with God? A joy that is not dependent upon success? Let's pray for true joy to be evident in our congregational life and in our own individual lives.

- What are some of the ways people try to get happiness for themselves and their loved ones?
- How is it that joy in Christ and sorrow at the state of the world can both be part of a Christian's life?
- Are we too staid and inhibited in our churches to let the joy of Christ shine through?
- How does joy manifest itself in the life of a Christian?

Romans 8:26-39

Paul's Anguish Over Israel

⁹ I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit -
² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

God's Sovereign Choice

⁶ It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.
⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.
⁹ For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."
¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac.
¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." ¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy. ¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. ¹⁹ One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"
²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?
²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As he says in Hosea:
"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;
and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"
²⁶ and, "In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,'
there they will be called 'children of the living God.'"
²⁷ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:
"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.
²⁸ For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality."
²⁹ It is just as Isaiah said previously:
"Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah."

Israel's Unbelief

³⁰ What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. ³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written:
"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall,
and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame."

TURN PAGE FOR NEXT READING

Matthew 13:31-33 & 44-52

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

³¹ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷ “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

⁵² He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”