

THE JOY OF THE LORD

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

There are many ways in which we can express the joy of the Lord. We don't have to walk around grinning from ear to ear or say, "Praise the Lord," every five minutes. If God's joy is in our heart it makes a huge difference in our;

outlook,

our attitude toward people,

our habits, even in our physical and mental health.

The farmer who enjoys his farming goes at his work in a very different way from the farmer who hates it. And the woman who enjoys her husband and her children is a lot more pleasant to live with than the one who detests her situation and feels sorry for herself.

When the Messiah was born, He was born to bring us joy.

Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people...

And when He began to proclaim His message, He called it a gospel which means 'good news'. It was understood that anybody who would reach out and take hold of this good news would have joy.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up and then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys the field.

People who begin to follow Jesus will find that they are not only given a cross to carry; they are also given unspeakable joy.

That my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full... I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and your joy no man will take from you.

And this joy is not just for two or three lucky people out of every hundred believers, it is to be the normal state of the believer in the midst of all the hassles of life.

If you have Jesus in your heart, you have joy.
If you don't have joy something's wrong.
And yet, how often, in spite of our earnestness,
our desire to be faithful
our attempts to pray,
the joy is missing. There is a heaviness in our hearts.

It gets so bad sometimes that our friends in the world, whom we should be comforting, come by to cheer us up.

"Look man, I don't understand your faith but does it have to make you so depressed all the time?"

We know something's missing. We know we ought to have that joy. One day as we walk down the road in pursuit of it, we are met by a man who seems to be able to read our mind.

"Good morning, friend, I can see that you're looking for joy. The lack of it is written on your face, I have just what you need. Come with me and believe my gospel of prosperity."

"Prosperity? Did Jesus preach a gospel of prosperity?", you say.

"Look, friend, the reason you're so down in the dumps all the time is because you're not prospering. Circumstances are against you. Consider all the things you lack! Why, you can't even afford to travel by Greyhound bus! Now, if you will believe my gospel circumstances will begin to smile on you and you won't travel by Greyhound anymore, you'll be going by jet, first-class; and those rags you have on will be replaced with purple and fine linen. You'll have joy in your heart."

"That will give me joy?", you ask.

"Of course!" answers the prosperity gospel man.

Just then you look through the door of this man's house and, behold, all the things he promises! People are well-dressed, eating wonderfully. The temperature's just right, there's no danger in sight. But as you look in their eyes you see no joy. They're vacant. And in your heart you can hear a voice which says, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world." So you hurry on.

"Hold it! Hold it!", says a large woman standing beneath a beautiful golden arch. "You're looking for joy, I can see it on your face. You've come to the right place."

"What do you have to offer me, ma'am?", you say.

"I offer you the celebrity gospel," she says.

"Celebrity gospel? Did Jesus preach such a thing?", you say.

"Listen, if you will believe my gospel," she says, "you will be known and admired and liked by many people. And isn't that what you've always wanted?"

"But did Jesus offer that kind of gospel? Is that the joy Jesus offers?", you ask.

"Oh, friend, you have a bad image of yourself," answers the celebrity gospel lady. "Now we have to build that up. Come, we will make you more important."

Just then you look through her beautiful golden arch and there you see people dressed up in the most outlandish costumes, standing on golden pedestals, every one with a smile frozen on his face. But their eyes are void of joy. And you hear a voice that says,

He that exalteth himself shall be abased but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

So you hurry on down the road.

You've hardly gone a hundred yards before you hear a voice that says,

"Over here, baby!"

There stands a man in front of the doorway of a building that looks like a Super Fitness Center.

"Hurry up, get in here! Don't you know those streets are dangerous? You can't handle it out there! You're too weak! No wonder you don't have any joy. I offer you the gospel of power. And if you will believe my gospel, you will bend destiny to your will, you will make things happen and nobody will push you around any more. Then you will have joy."

You look through the doorway and see the spiritual power-seekers learning their spiritual Kung-Fu. On their faces is determination. Their jaws are set. But their eyes reveal no joy. You hurry away and sigh with great relief as you realize how close you came to falling right into the trap which promises that if you have the power to push other people around you'll have joy.

Suddenly the road comes to an abrupt end at a stone wall. There's a small door in the wall. Beside the door stands a man who greets you by name and says,

"Welcome! We've been looking for you. The only one in all the world who can give you the joy you're looking for is on the other side of that door. But let me make clear to you He will not offer you prosperity, He does not promise to make you a celebrity, nor does He promise you power to dominate other people's lives. If you will come with Him you will have joy. But the joy He offers is never doctored with the allurements of this world; power, popularity, prosperity. It's the pure joy of simply knowing Jesus,"

You think it over and you decide to walk through the door. And the minute you step through that door you begin to learn four lessons:

1. The joy our hearts crave is the joy of believing in Jesus.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy.

All the things that the false prophets offer in addition to Jesus are as nothing compared with the joy of knowing Him. Do we not find as we look at our own experience that the most magnificent thrills and pleasures which the mind can conjure are as refuse compared with the surpassing worth, the unspeakable joy, of knowing Jesus, and being found in Him?

Those who think that you have to spice up the gospel of Jesus Christ by adding to it the allurements of this world are revealing to you the fact that they themselves have not yet come to know the joy that is found in sheer belief in Jesus. In His name, I promise every reader of these words

that if you, today, will put your life at the feet of Jesus and surrender it into His hands, you will have joy.

2. The joy our hearts crave is the joy of fellowship with the cross of Jesus, which often begins with sorrow but always ends with gladness of heart.

Ye now, therefore, have sorrow but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and your joy no one will take from you....

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.....

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's suffering.....

Most of us are in some way experiencing pain,

pain concerning your loved one,
pain over one of your children,
pain over your own failures.

Our message is not, "Stop having pain! Cheer up! What's the matter with you!" Our message is rather, "Let that very pain bring you into fellowship with Jesus on His cross, and your sorrow will be changed into joy."

So many people today are being deceived by a gospel which tells them to run from the pain. Thereby they are being cheated of the very thing that will bring them joy and make their lives fruitful. Don't run from your pain, but let that pain be the means by which you come into fellowship with Jesus and your sorrow will be turned into joy.

3. The joy our hearts crave is the joy of laboring in the Master's Vineyard.

My meat is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish his work, said Jesus.

And when He calls it His meat, what is that but His joy? When the laborers in the vineyard are finally hired from their idleness in the marketplace how happy they are. One of the reasons many of us are so discontented and so unsettled and cynical is because we are idle. Maybe we have

enough to pay our bills. Perhaps we have enough to buy groceries and things we want, but if we're idle we'll never have joy.

There are folks who are retired from their formal work, living on a pension or social security. Yet they get up every morning and fill the day with meaningful work. They're doing something. And there are so many who are young and relatively able-bodied, (though they make all kinds of excuses with their aches and pains), who aren't doing anything. They're not working, they're not applying themselves, and they wonder why their lives are so empty.

Pick up something to do. If you can't find a formal job, make sure at least you're looking for a job. Do something! You will never have joy ... never, until you're working in some way. Likewise, you've been called to a ministry. Don't just sit around and listen to the gospel and go to Bible studies! Take the truth that the Lord has given you and do something with it!

- Plant those seeds,
- Go out into that harvest,
- Pick some of those grapes,
- Go out there and do something or it will rot in your own heart.

4. The joy our hearts crave is the Joy of knowing that our Lord has prepared a place for us. The Father's house is waiting.

Rejoice not that spirits are subject to you but that your names are written in heaven.

What a relief comes when we begin to see that this life is not all there is. "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." But now we begin to see beyond this life and we begin to fix our hearts there.

"Grant we beseech thee," says the ancient collect, "that our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found ... that thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal."

There's no reason why every reader of these words can't take hold of joy. All we have to do is reach out and get it. But remember what kind of joy it is,

- it's the joy of believing in Jesus,
- the joy of having fellowship with Him in His suffering and His cross,
- the joy of labor with Him,
- the joy of knowing that because of Him the Father's house is waiting.

God help us in the midst of a world so full of twisted gospels to settle for nothing less than the real thing — the joy that is found unmixed and only in Jesus Himself.

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand, Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden pulpit which they had made for the purpose ... and Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and when he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their faces to the ground ...

And Nehemiah who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when 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 him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So the Levites stilled all the people saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

Nehemiah 8:1-12

It was a vast assembly in the square of a Jerusalem that was now but a ghost of the city it once had been. People who have spent their entire lives in exile and all their lives were told by their parents and grandparents what a magnificent place Jerusalem had been. Now they come back to this! It's Rosh Hashana and the congregation has gathered to hear the word of God. Ezra the scribe gets up on this wooden pulpit specially made for the occasion and opens the scroll containing the Torah and blesses the Lord God. Quite spontaneously everybody says, "Amen."

And then as he begins to read the law of God, a very strange thing happens. Down toward the front of the assembly a huge hulk of a man begins to sob like a baby. Ezra keeps on reading. A woman way back to-

ward the rear of the assembly cries as if her heart is breaking. Ezra continues to read and the people drink in the word. Men who hadn't cried since they were little children find their faces and their beards wet with tears. Everywhere you look, you see weeping.

What does this mean? It means that the Spirit of the living God has moved upon this assembly and given it the gift of deep, genuine, broken, heartfelt repentance. Finally, Ezra stops reading. The word of God has done its work. Their hearts have been broken, and now they're ready for the comfort of God. Ezra says, *"Do not mourn and weep, this day is holy unto the Lord. Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet wine and send portions to those for whom nothing has been prepared, and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

Gradually the weeping subsides and in its place comes a joy such as they had never experienced before: the joy of the Lord. And they rise up, go their way, and eat and drink and send portions to people who have nothing. The same Spirit that had moved them to weep now moves them with a joy that they were meant to have when man was first created. A joy that will now be their strength as they rebuild the ruined city and revive the wasted nation.

The joy of the Lord is your strength....

The joy of the Lord is a very strange thing. Invariably it comes to us by means of the gift of weeping. The weeping may not be on our faces but it will surely be in our hearts. When we are visited, truly, by the joy of the Lord and not by some cheap counterfeit, the first evidence of the coming of the joy of the Lord is that the heart of stone begins to break and all the hardness and all the indifference and all the bitterness and all the arrogance crumbles. We begin to see ourselves as in the sight of the living God, and as we do all the flesh-strength that seemed to hold us together in the past drains away, and we have no choice but to break, to weep. Then we are visited by the joy of the Lord.

What is it that causes these people to weep as Ezra reads the word? As they're listening to Ezra read the word of God they know that they haven't been obeying it. They have fallen far short. They're so far from God! They've wronged Him in so many ways! There's no choice for them but to just break inside their hearts. And the minute they begin to admit that they have been wrong, (no longer defending themselves, no longer trying to give excuses for themselves), God comes in with joy that becomes their strength against all the failure and all the disobedience and all the unbelief which has plagued their lives in the past.

Now exactly the same thing happens to us. The joy of the Lord is our strength against all the things which have defeated us and made a mockery of our intentions to walk with God. But the joy of the Lord does not come into our hearts initially by means of singing and dancing; it comes rather by means of weeping.

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

He that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him.

If you ask God to give you joy and find that soon He takes you through a valley of tears, do not suppose that He's playing some weird trick on you. He's answering your prayer, bringing you to your heart's desire by means of the only possible way you will ever have it.

The joy of the Lord is our strength against despair.

No doubt there are some of us who are living in despair right now. By despair I mean your soul is numb, your heart is dry, you just see no hope, nothing to look forward to, nothing to live for.

Now the strange thing about despair is that when it gets hold of your heart you can't cry. Oh, you can shed crocodile tears to get sympathy, you can weep little tears of self-pity. But the deep brokenhearted cry of repentance is impossible to you. When Judas finally realized what he had done to His Master there was no weeping. Judas could not weep. He had closed and locked his door against the joy of the Lord, and found himself in the prison of despair. There seemed open to him only one last desperate step, and Judas took it without one tear.

Compare this with what happens to Peter when he wakes up and realizes what he has done in denying his Lord.

Peter went out and wept bitterly.

And as Peter wept he was beginning already to taste the joy of the Lord which would flood his being three days later.

When the joy of the Lord visits our despair we suddenly realize that our numbness and our dryness of soul are simply unbelief in the face of a God who has given us everything He has, laid down the life of His Only Begotten. When we see how we have hurt God, broken His heart, we begin to break. And as we offer to Him the sacrifice of a broken heart joy

comes to us as we've never known it. And that joy becomes our strength against ever having to fall back into despair again.

The joy of the Lord is our strength against vanity.

We are living in vanity when we are building our lives on a foundation which has no more substance than air.

- Pinning our hopes,
- Drawing our satisfaction,
- Laying up our treasure,

in such a way that one good storm will take it all down the drain. When we're living in vanity, it's impossible to weep for anything except our own petty disappointments. But to weep for what we have done, for the fact that we've wasted our lives, seems to be impossible.

When the joy of the Lord begins to visit those of us who are living in vanity, and we open the door of our heart to it, we suddenly see,

- how we've been throwing our lives away,
all the people we've been hurting,
- all the people we've been letting down,
and all the damage we've been doing.

We see that we've been breaking God's heart. And we turn around and we offer to Him the sacrifice of a broken heart. Then the joy of the Lord becomes our strength against vanity.

When Jesus told Zacchaeus to come down out of the tree, Zacchaeus was living in vanity. But the fact that he climbed that tree was already indicative of a change. Zacchaeus scrambled down out of that tree and received Jesus joyfully. And the fact that this joy was the joy of the Lord is evident in that it was the kind of joy which brings about a heart-change. There was no outward weeping, but before dinner is over Zacchaeus stands up and says,

Half my goods I give to the poor. And if I've defrauded anybody I'm going to restore fourfold.

He doesn't just say, "I'm saved,"

and go right on doing the same evil he'd done before. This heart-change means that Zacchaeus was weeping in his heart for what he had been and what he had done. And he made the change with the joy of the Lord.

The joy of the Lord is our strength against a fruitless life.

*By this my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit
and so prove to be my disciples....*

*I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be full.*

It's amazing how we can go for years and years without ever batting an eyelash over the fact that we have produced absolutely nothing with our lives for anybody else. It doesn't even bother us that we send people away empty again and again. Then one day we wake up and recognize this. We want to be useful, to truly serve, only to come up against a second shock. We discover that we have nothing to offer. People come to us for help and we find that we have nothing to give them, our cupboards are bare.

When you finally get to the place where you start going next door to your neighbor, (who happens to be the Heavenly Father), and pound on His door and cry out for bread,

*Somebody has come in the middle of the night and
I have nothing to set before him, give me something!*

When you're doing this, then you're approaching the joy of the Lord. You won't be pounding on that door very long before it will open and into your heart will flow the joy of the living God which will be your strength to feed the hungry with the living bread of the true and living God.

*For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law.
Then he said to them. "Go your way, eat the fat and drink the
sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is pre-
pared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved,
for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

May it be that joy that comes into our hearts afresh, even if it has to come to us as it came to them by means of weeping;

brokenness,

repentance, that we may rise up out of our despair,

and out of our vanity,

and out of our fruitless lives,

and out of our temptations

and do the will of our Father with hearts that are filled to overflowing
with no other joy but His.

THE DAILY EXCHANGE

*For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man
perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*

I Corinthians 4:16

A problem that almost every one of us has is that our grasp of spiritual truth with our heads is far beyond what we have turned into substance in our lives. We grasp the theology, we understand marvelous truths, but we're not living them. For instance, we can talk about the joy of the Lord, we can write books about it, read books about it, and even taste it when the assembly gathers from time to time. But it's quite another thing to have the joy of the Lord as a constant burning flame in our hearts

when we get up for another rainy day,
when our husband or our wife has disappointed us again,
when our best friend keeps letting us down,
 our house is broken into,
 or we have to work at a job where there's corruption
 on every side of us,

- and still to have in our hearts the joy of the Lord.

There were no doubt a lot of people in the apostle Paul's day who had just as much insight as Paul did and who had a grasp of scripture which was as good, if not better, than his. But there was one thing that Paul had which made him effective when many other people failed, and that was that Paul somehow managed to translate his insight into living so that he was the embodiment of everything he taught. How did he do it? Listen to him:

*For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man is
wasting away, our inward man is being renewed every day.*

Paul's body is getting older and he's being hassled on all sides by many problems. He has aches and pains. Yet every day this inner man comes up fresh, new, unsullied, clean and bright, burning with the joy of the Lord in the midst of chaos. You can't sink him.

His outer man is looked upon as an imposter,
 but his inner man is true.

His outer man is unknown by the world,
 his inner man is well-known by God.

His outer man is dying,
his inner man is always alive.

His outer man is being punished,
his inner man cannot be killed.

His outer man is sorrowful,
his inner man is always rejoicing.

His outer man is poor,
his inner man is making many rich.

His outer man has nothing,
his inner man possess all things.

And when Paul talks about being renewed, day-by-day, I believe he's talking about something specific in his relationship with Jesus. **Every day Paul breaks conformity with this world again, and he's renewed in the spirit of his mind.**

One of the best ways to understand this miracle of daily renewal is to think of it as an exchange in which we bring our old man (the old Adam) to Jesus, and lay it at the foot of the cross, and in exchange for it we get the new man.

And one of the best descriptions in the Bible of what Jesus will do for each of us, even as He did it for Paul is found in Isaiah 61. Usually when we read this passage we think of it as a description of our ministry, and it is that. But we can't begin to minister in this manner to other people until this first becomes, daily, **Jesus' ministry to us.**

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Jesus to give us,

- good news,
- to bind up our wounds,
- to preach deliverance to us,
- to set us free from captivity,
- and to comfort us in our mourning.

When He begins to do this, the exchange takes place:

He gives us beauty for ashes,

the oil of joy for mourning,

the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness, so that we might be trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that we might be able to go forth and build the old wastes, and raise up the former desolations, and repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

There cannot be a more accurate description of the situation in which every one of us finds himself or herself. Our wasted city, and its wasted suburbs are the result of the desolation of generations of evil that are now beginning to bear fruit. If we are going to live in the midst of this death and survive, (spiritually as well as physically) and bring it some healing and do some building we ourselves will have to be renewed every day by God. There will have to be an exchange in which we bring the old man, all the evil that is in us, and in its place receive something fresh from God every day

To appoint to them that mourn in Zion....

I do not see how we can look out over the town where we live, and observe what is really taking place in human hearts, and not mourn. How can we look into our own hearts and face the truth about the ugly, evil, twisted, warped, weird thoughts that go through our heads, and not mourn? When we begin to see, with the eyes that God gives us, we no longer go around criticizing, we find ourselves unable to do anything but mourn. We begin to weep. It is with this frame of mind that we have to approach the Throne of our God every single day.

To give unto them beauty for ashes....

We bring the ashes of our self-lust, the ashes of our self-righteousness, the ashes of our good intentions which so seldom materialize, the ashes of our own bigotry, our deceitfulness, our bitterness, our compromise, and we lay them at His feet. Only when we are willing to lay our ashes at His feet, instead of what we think to be our own righteousness, is He able then to give us beauty. He gives us His beauty, the beauty of His presence, of His holiness which is clean and pure and unsullied and unailing.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

If I don't see the beauty of the Lord every single day in His temple, my vision is warped. Pretty soon all I see is ugliness everywhere I look. And I'm overwhelmed by that ugliness. But that's not necessary, there's no reason why we shouldn't have the beauty of the Lord refreshing our vision every single day. Don't be content until, in your prayer life, (and you won't survive with out one), you are bringing those ashes and laying them down at the feet of the Lord every day and receiving for those ashes the beauty of His presence.

With His own hand Jesus will begin to clothe your mind and spirit with His beauty. And you may not yet be dancing for joy, but at least you will know now that you have this much: you have, for your ashes, the beauty of the Lord coming into your heart.

The oil of joy for mourning....

Don't be afraid to mourn before the Lord. Don't be afraid to bring your weeping to Him. We've done most of our crying and weeping in total secret. Nobody has any idea how much mourning has been going on in your heart while your face has been smiling. But now we bring this to the Lord and He transforms our mourning of self-pity into the mourning of repentance. Now I begin to weep; not because everybody has let me down, but seeing now with the eyes God has given me, I start to weep because I have let others down — especially have I disappointed my Heavenly Father. I begin to weep because I see that I am part of this unclean city, and its unclean suburbs.

*O God, I'm a man of unclean lips, says Isaiah
and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.*

And as I bring my mourning to Him, He takes my weeping of repentance into His heart and it's gone. And in its place He puts into my heart His joy. He anoints me with the oil of joy.

There's no reason why this cannot be our portion every day. The only reason we don't experience this every single day is because of our half-bakedness, our unbelief, our lukewarmness. If this is our desire we can have it. It's only because we've settled for walking day after day under a cloud of gloom. If I will bring my weeping to Him. He'll transform it into joy. If I will go to Him in the morning and say,

"Lord, I will not be able to get through this day and do one constructive thing unless my heart is filled with your joy instead of my tears,"

He'll do it. He absolutely will do it. He's only waiting for us to ask Him.

The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness....

We are not being told that we are to pretend to praise God when our hearts are heavy, as so many people today are telling us to do. As if we are supposed to go through the motions of praise while our hearts are breaking. That's not what we're being told to do here. What we are being told to do is to bring our spirit of heaviness to Him, to admit that it's there. Don't pretend anything, don't be jumping for joy saying, "Praise the Lord", trying to work yourself up into something. Bring to Him what's really in your heart. If it's the spirit of heaviness, that's what you bring Him. And when you bring the spirit of heaviness before Him, Jesus reaches down with His own hand and clothes you in the garment of praise.

Why should I be walking around pretending to be full of praise while my heart is heavy as lead, when I can have the real thing?

I can bring to Him my heavy heart and my gloomy spirit and have it replaced by His own hand, with a garment of praise. How important it is for us to be honest with Him! Don't be satisfied with that spirit of heaviness! Take it to Him, and soon He will have you, with all the company of heaven lauding, praising, magnifying His glorious name. Then you're ready to go out and minister.

That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they

shall repair the waste cities, and the desolations of many generations.

And oh, how this world, is in need of people who can heal, and who can build. Nobody is going to rebuild the waste cities and raise up the former desolations who has not first learned daily to be renewed by God. And those who try without getting that daily renewal are sure to succumb to despair or to be sidetracked with temptation of one kind or another. But if we will first learn to come to Him, every day, He will give us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness.

Should there be someone reading this who has never actually experienced these things, it's not too much to promise you, in the name of the Lord, that you can taste them now,

- Bring to Him your ashes as you go to prayer and He will give you His beauty.
- Bring Him your weeping and your mourning and the anguish of your heart, and He will fill you with His joy.
- Bring Him that heaviness that is weighed down upon your spirit and He will clothe you and send you forth wrapped in the garment of praise and equipped to rebuild the waste places and raise up the former desolations and do something in the name of Jesus that will abide.

CONSTANT JOY

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. *John 15:10-11*

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. *John 16:20-22*

But now I am coming to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. *John 17:13*

Jesus not only promised that we'd have tribulation,
that we'd be persecuted,
that the world would hate us,

he also promised that we would have joy.

Just as surely as we cannot survive as God's sons and daughters without love,

- he that loveth not his brother abideth in death,

and just as surely as we cannot survive without God's peace dwelling in our hearts, neither can we survive without God's joy.

Without joy in us, the whole gospel of Jesus becomes pie-in-the-sky by-and-by — wishing and guessing but never knowing.

Joy is;

- God's reality in us now.
- God's Spirit in us now.
- Jesus' presence with us now.

When we have God's joy in us we don't need to go sniffing at every side road.

We're satisfied,
we're fulfilled, confident, strong.

God's joy,

- carries us through our tribulations,
- sustains us on our desert journeys,
- keeps our minds clear even when the flames sear our bodies.

But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you.

This is what marked the lives of our brothers and sisters of apostolic days. Their families were torn apart, their bodies were tortured, many of them met violent deaths, yet to this day we can still feel the warmth of their joy as we read the scriptures. How else do you suppose they survived, but through their joy?

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. I Peter 1:6-8

Peter was going through tough times, and so were the people to whom he was writing, but they had this divine joy in them nobody could take away and this was the mark of God's presence.

Many of us pretend to have joy when we really don't.

We read scriptures about joy, hear a teaching about it, and say, "Amen," and then pretend we have it. But the emptiness in our hearts is so obvious.

We're so restless,
so unstable,
that anybody can see it isn't there.

I was at a meeting at a university one time — a little gathering of professing believers huddled together like frightened mice in this room overlooking the campus. While we were praying, one of the believers said, "Lord, help us to be able to share our joy with those masses of students out there who don't know you."

"Help us to share our joy....." You almost felt like crying. The first thing anyone out there on the campus would have said is, "Joy? You call that frightened, timid, ingrown spirit joy? Keep it friend!"

That student was dreaming. There was no joy there. There was a presence in that room which would even have dampened the spirit of the happiest child.

And how often we do exactly what those religious students were doing: piously ask God to help us share a joy we don't even have.

- How can we bring joy to our troubled city if we don't have any?
Better we should admit the truth.

"Lord, you promised joy –
yet it keeps getting away from us.

We taste it - then it evaporates.

We touch it sometimes as we worship - then it fades.

Was it only to the twelve that you said,
'I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice,
and no one will take your joy from you.'?

Lord, give it to us! Help us find it!"

Notice how simple the promise is: I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice.

Not: you'll get gifts and your hearts will rejoice,
you'll see visions and your hearts will rejoice.

- I will see you.
- I will come to you.
- I will be your joy.

Once we come to the point where we really meet Jesus, just knowing him, just walking with him is our joy.

The Kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit makes Jesus real.

- What do we need besides him?

One day everything else we have will be taken from us, even these bodies. But Jesus will still be there. And our joy will be undiminished because he is with us.

Ah, but for that joy of the Lord to well up in our hearts and spill out over our lives and fill them constantly, there is one thing we have to do:

we have to rejoice in him.

When you married the girl you were joyful. But as the years passed your joy faded. You say it's her fault. You say she changed. But more likely you failed to rejoice in her. You stopped delighting in her. She didn't kill your joy - you did!

How much more is this true with Jesus.

- His presence in our lives is joy.
- He fulfills and satisfies as nothing else does.

But we have to rejoice in him, delight in him, open our hearts toward him with thanksgiving and praise.

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.

Rejoice in him so much that it affects your relationship toward all men, delivers you from anxiety, fills you with hope, lifts your prayers.

What a difference it makes,

- in our worship,
- in our dealings with each other,
- in our family life,
- in the quality of our work,

when we are constantly rejoicing in the Lord.

"But I just can't seem to do this. I try to rejoice in the Lord, but it isn't real. It seems phony."

Some things to keep in mind:

1. We can't rejoice in the Lord when we're all taken up with ourselves.

Here's a brother who's very, very serious, it would seem, about the things of God. But the truth is, he's very, very serious about himself. He quotes the Bible endlessly, seems to have a profound grasp of truth. But all the time he's standing outside of himself, watching himself,

watching his good deeds,
watching his mistakes,
watching his ministry unfold,
watching himself pray.

Then he wonders why he has no joy. Who of us can have joy watching himself? It will make any of us sick.

What a relief when we come down off our pedestals and turn the spotlight off ourselves and look at him.

Look unto him and be saved, all the ends of the earth.

2. We can't rejoice in the Lord when we're critical.

We can go through the motions of rejoicing. We can say, "Praise the Lord." But a critical spirit and a spirit of joy cannot inhabit the same person at the same time.

When we're critical our attention is fixed on those we're critical of.

When we're joyful our attention is fixed on the thing we're rejoicing in. And when we have given ourselves over to a critical spirit that finds fault with everything except its admirers, how can we rejoice? It's not worth it! Let go of the critical spirit and start rejoicing in the Lord and you'll not only have joy, you'll have all the wisdom you need to steer clear of false prophets, hypocrisy, and whatever demon may come along dressed like an angel.

3. We can't rejoice in the Lord when our minds are cluttered.

When the moneychangers get into the Temple worship ends and it's all business. And when the cares and riches and pleasures of this life get into our hearts and distract us from the glory of our Lord, when we allow ourselves to be so bogged down with the details of living that we lose sight of the purpose of our life, our joy in the Lord is gone.

It's all calculating business. Even our hopes shrivel down to covetousness. What many of us need to do is see what this clutter in our minds is doing to us.

- Push back the clutter and clear a path so that we can rejoice in the Lord.

4. We can't rejoice in the Lord when we're holding back part of the offering.

Nobody told Ananias and Sapphira that they had to sell that field and lay the proceeds at the apostle's feet. Nobody told them they had to give the entire amount.

But when they pretended to be giving all while they were only giving part, they put themselves under judgment. And when we give the impression that we're sold out to the Lord when in fact we're holding back, when we try to make the brothers and sisters think we're absolutely surrendered, when our private thoughts, our home life, our work habits, are far from surrendered, there's no way we can rejoice.

What a relief when we bring our deeds in line with our words — when we let go of this secret reserve we've been holding on to and abandon ourselves to him.

5. We can't rejoice in the Lord when we're prayerless.

It happens so gradually that we aren't even aware that our prayer life is drying up. A little less time in prayer, then a little less. A little more day-dreaming until we have our prayer life down to a dead routine.

We're saying prayers, but we're not communing with the Lord of our lives. So how can there be any joy until we wake up and start to pray once more?

6. We can't rejoice in the Lord when we're uncommitted.

When the rich ruler approached Jesus he came with great hope that was almost joy. But when he wouldn't let go of his riches and commit himself to Jesus he went away sorrowful.

And a great deal of our sorrow is,

- the sorrow of a soul which is walking away from commitment,
- the sorrow of a soul that refuses to be tied down.

Many a marriage is lacking joy because the man and woman aren't really committed to each other. If you're having trouble rejoicing in the Lord, ask yourself if you've really committed yourself to him.

- To the work Jesus has given you to do.
- To the brothers and sisters where Jesus has placed you.
- To the lost to whom Jesus sends you.

***I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice
and no one will take your joy from you.***

The joy is in knowing, loving, obeying, walking with Jesus.

HE IS OUR JOY!

May God help us to clear out of the way those things that have divided our hearts, cluttered our minds, darkened our spirits.

Whatever is hindering us from rejoicing in our Lord is not worth clinging to.

Get rid of it.
Cast it aside.
Turn from it,

and begin this hour to rejoice in the Lord who is with us now and will be with us forever

if we but walk in his light.

SOMETHING TO BE GLAD ABOUT

Most of us, if we think about Heaven at all, think of it as a kind of glorified church where everything is sedate. Or a marathon hymn-sing — a prayer meeting that never ends.

We think of Heaven as a world off by itself, isolated from all the clamor and pain and tragedy of this earth. But the Heaven Jesus describes is not like that at all.

The Heaven Jesus describes is a place where every sorrow,
every pain,
every act of love,
every evil deed that takes
place on this earth is more keenly felt there than it is here.

Jesus says that every child that walks this earth has an angel that constantly beholds the face of the Father in Heaven.

Jesus says that when one sinner repents Heaven is filled with joy over that one sinner. Imagine! One broken-down soul like you or me repents and all heaven rejoices.

Jesus says that the people this world forgets are the very ones that Heaven remembers. The people this world ignores, despises, tramples on are the ones Heaven pays special attention to.

When poor Lazarus who laid at the rich man's gate died

- he was given royal treatment,
- he was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom.

There are numberless people who never will get decent treatment on this earth. They will die without ever having one human being take their part or give them a decent meal.

But Heaven will see to it that they are comforted. They will be comforted.

There are people in our city who don't know how to stand up and demand attention. If they die before the coming of the Lord they will die forgotten by this world. But not by Heaven.

Heaven may be far away, as far as human eyes are concerned, but it's closer than our own hands, as far as God is concerned.

When you pray,

Our Father who art in Heaven ,

it doesn't take half-a-year for your prayer to get there. It is heard immediately.

Precisely because this earth is Satan's present home and the scene of so much misery and grief Heaven is very close. The eyes of Heaven are on this earth 24 hours a day.

Not a sparrow falls.

Not a hair drops from your head.

Not one tear runs down the face of a child without the Heavenly Father and all the glory-creatures that surround Him knowing all about it.

If you really want to know what Heaven is like, and whether Heaven cares about what's going on in this world, watch Jesus as he walks through the land of Israel

- healing the sick,
- feeding the hungry,
- comforting the bereaved,
- forgiving the sinners.

There's not a pain or a sorrow or a temptation that He doesn't feel. And who are the people Jesus' heart goes out to?

The lost sheep.

The sinners.

Jesus wasn't being sentimental. He was simply doing the thing He came to do — to seek the lost.

Jesus didn't just sit around and drink beer all night with these sinners and try to be their buddy. He called them to repentance. And they repented.

God be merciful to me a sinner!

Lord remember me when you come into your Kingdom!

Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold!

And every time one sinner repented, how Jesus rejoiced! Nothing on this earth brought Jesus more joy than to see a sinner turn around and come into the Kingdom!

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it. And when he has found it he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost'. Just so I tell you there will be more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Jesus hasn't changed. Jesus is still seeking the lost. And Jesus is seeking the lost not invisibly or in midair, Jesus is seeking the lost through a Body of flesh-and-blood people. A Body of people who are ruled by His love.

If you want to know where the Church of Jesus Christ really is,

- Don't ask what brand it is,
- Don't ask how many members they have,
- Don't ask what kind of building they meet in,
- Don't even ask what their doctrines are.
- Don't ask whether it's institutional or non-institutional.

If you really want to know where the Church of Jesus Christ is, look for people who give evidence of two things:

1. They're out there with Jesus seeking the lost.
2. They rejoice with Jesus and all the company of Heaven when one sinner repents.

Wherever you see these two things you're looking at the true church of Jesus Christ. You will see His church nowhere else.

Churchianity is not out there seeking the lost. It's busy seeking numbers, building its own thing, expanding its influence, asserting its power, consolidating its gains. It goes not where the lost are

- but where the money is,
- where the people are that it can use,
- or where it can make an impression on the news media.

Many of us have spent years of our lives laboring to build churchianity. Some of us still haven't caught on to what a waste this is. We're trying to preserve something that isn't worth preserving. God isn't in it and we know it.

The true Body of Christ on earth is made up of the people who are out there finding that one lost sheep, that one lost coin, that lonely broken prodigal.

They're out there looking, seeking, calling.

If we really belong to Jesus,

- we're going to see people through his eyes,
- we're going to care about them,
- we're going to weep over them,
- we're going to pray,
- we're going to give them of our substance,
- we're going to share what we have.

If we really belong to Jesus, we will be drawn by God to the very people that this world is passing by. We'll spend time with them. And when we start having the love of Jesus toward them, God will give us the power to speak just the words they need to hear.

If there is any message the Spirit of God has been driving home to his people, it's:

Get out there and seek the lost!

Spend time with those people this world has forgotten!

And I'm not just talking about people in bars and dope houses and street corners and convalescent homes and bikers clubs — although we ought to be in all these places. Sit down with pencil and paper and ask God to remind you of the people you have forgotten and you'll be amazed at the faces that will flash across your mind,

To seek the lost!

- That's what we're here for.
- That's the only reason God didn't take us off this earth.
- That's our work - to share with them the forgiveness of God

that has set us free from Satan's power. To touch them with healing. To show them the love that never fails. And we don't seek them in numbers. We seek them one-at-a-time.

When you start seeking the lost in the name of Jesus, you will find that the lost will start seeking you,

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him.

They drew near to Jesus because they knew that they were close to his heart. And they will draw near to you when they know His love is in you.

It's easy to spot a group of believers that seeks the lost. That fellowship will be sought out by the tax collectors and sinners and Lazaruses and Mary Magdelenes — they'll all be there.

And the second mark of the true Body of Christ on this earth is that there is genuine joy among them when one sinner repents.

- Not froth.
- Not cheap enthusiasm...

"Strike up the band, we got another member."

But **JOY**.

The joy of God and all the angels to see another brother or sister walk in the door of the Father's house.

Not joy over numbers. "We got 25 souls tonight." Joy over one sinner that repents. There will be numbers. 3000 were baptized on Pentecost. But Heaven rejoiced over each one of those 3000 as if it were the only one. Not one soul was lost in the shuffle. Not one was forgotten.

Expect to see it happen:

- All kinds.
- All ages.
- All races.
- All classes. Finding their way into the kingdom.

We will have more occasion for joy than we have ever had in our lives. I pray that for every one of us as we see these things it will be not hardness of heart like those murmuring Pharisees, but holy joy.

I pray that joy will spread over us like a mantle each time one man finds his way home to God. Each time one woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears.

For as the clouds thicken and the storm of Divine Judgment prepares to strike;

God is giving his people on this earth something to be glad about.

God is giving a harvest of reborn souls wherever his people are out there seeking the lost,

There will be more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

If, as you read these words, you are hearing the call of Jesus to repent and draw near to Him, don't hesitate! Jesus himself invites you. And may God give us all — today and in the days ahead — **the joy that sweeps through Heaven every time one sinner repents.**

THE OIL OF JOY

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

Isaiah 61:1-3 KJV

These words of the Messiah, spoken through the prophet centuries before his actual appearance on earth, give a clear description of his ministry and the outcome of his ministry. There is no way we can hear these words of Isaiah 61 and wonder what the Messiah has come to do: He has come

- to preach good news to the poor,
- to bind up the brokenhearted,
- to set the captives free.

Any Messiah who concerns himself with other things or who neglects the poor,

- the brokenhearted,
- the captives, has to be false.

And the outcome of his ministry is joy,

- beauty for ashes,
- the oil of joy for mourning,
- the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness.

When the Messiah finally arrived on the scene in flesh and blood, he began his ministry among us by using this passage in Isaiah 61 as his starting point. He read the opening verses of this chapter in the synagogue in his home town and declared,

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

And throughout Jesus' entire ministry the two thrusts of Isaiah 61 continue to appear and reappear.

1. Make sure that your Messiah is the real Messiah, bearing fruit among the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the mourners.

2. Let your mourning be turned into joy.

Jesus takes extreme pains to make sure his followers don't get misled by false prophets, false Christs. You can't read the New Testament without being struck by how many times Jesus says, "Beware," "Look out."

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. Matthew 7:15

Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues. Matthew 10:17

Jesus said to them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 16:6

Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger." Matthew 23:1-4

Then if any one says to you, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. Matthew 24:23

Jesus wasn't trying to make them paranoid, he was equipping them to function as lambs in the midst of wolves, to be not only innocent as doves, but wise as serpents.

These warnings of the Lord are preserved in the New Testament because, until the end of this age, the world, especially the religious world, is teeming with wolves in sheep's clothing — innocent sounding gospels which will lead the unwary far from the highway of God. Gospels which try to tell you

you can serve God and mammon,
you can have Jesus and still keep your monstrous ego....
so beware.

But along with our Lord's warnings to beware, Jesus also gave his followers something which preserved them against paranoia he gave them joy. As they

- broke bread with him — served him,
- took care of the needs of countless people who kept coming to them,

these men and women had more joy than they had ever known in their lives. It was joy for them just to be around their master. It was their joy to provide him with anything they had that he could use.

- You need my fishing boat?
..... take it Lord.
- You want a place to meet?
.....I have lots of room.
- You want to have dinner at my house Lord?
.....Fantastic!

And as Jesus neared the end of his flesh and blood ministry, he began making sure that this joy would continue with them even after he returned to the Father.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. John 15:11

Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. John 16:24

All we have to do is read the book of Acts, or any of the epistles, to see that this joy not only stayed with them it increased with the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Today in the Body of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord continues to move upon us in these two areas:

1. We are still to beware of false prophets, false Christs, polluted gospels which mislead.
2. And we are still to rejoice in the Lord all the time.

The atmosphere of our life together and our corporate service, even in the midst of suffering, is to be joy and gladness.

But what often happens is that a congregation of believers will begin to major in one of these two things and neglect the other.

There are those who major in joy...all the time happy....happy and gullible. Then some wolf in sheep's clothing comes along and gets happy with them and leads them happily into delusions which turn them into a cult, or scatters them to the four winds.

On the other hand are fellowships that major in wariness ...they don't have time to rejoice with all these false prophets and phony doctrines and hypocrite Christian evangelists around. They're so busy being suspicious they fail to see they've been overcome by an insidious self-righteousness.

Perhaps we favor the latter approach. We belong to the wise and wary crowd. We're experts at seeing through the compromise and hypocrisy of American Christendom. We can't stand to watch Christian TV. And when one of these high flying hot-shots comes up to us and says, "Praise the Lord," we stare at his diamond stick pin until he goes away. We are so busy being cynical we've neglected the joy God has given us.

The Spirit of God has a word for us.....

**"Receive my joy. Why do you think I died on the cross?
What do you think I accomplished by rising from the dead?"**

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion; to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

Isaiah 61:3

How are we going to bring good news to the poor,
to heal the brokenhearted,
to release the captives,
to comfort those who mourn,
if we ourselves are walking around in a cloud of self-righteous gloom?

It's almost as if the Lord is saying to us,

"Look, you guys, it's okay to be happy. I'm giving you the oil of joy to replace your mourning ... the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

What a change will come into our lives and what a lift will come into our service to God when we receive the anointing of this oil of joy and clothe ourselves with this garment of praise.

"But doesn't this joy come to us by itself? Surely we don't have to go looking for it."

True ... it comes,
it has come,
it's here now. But when the joy of God comes to our door, as it has, we at least have to open the door and let it in.

When we're around somebody that has this inward joy it's contagious. A facade of joy may be repulsive, but a person who has the real thing burning in their heart imparts it like the sun imparts light.

The reason the disciples liked to be around Jesus was that he had this joy — even when he wept for Jerusalem, even when he was troubled within — there was still this flame of joy burning within him. And it's his joy which Jesus now imparts to us. When he speaks to us, his very words bring his joy into our hearts.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ***John 15:11***

And where does he get all this joy? from the Father. To commune with the Father was for Jesus not a duty — it was his pleasure.

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will." ***Luke 10:21***

And to us he says,

"You go to the Father too. If you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive that your joy may be full."

This oil of joy is not just for the good days ... Indian summer, blue sky, an apple pie in the oven. It's for the bad days too ... in times of bitter cold, storm, hunger, even in times of tragedy. This anointing oil will turn any kind of sorrow into joy.

So, we open the door and let him in ... hour by hour,

we practice his presence,

we commune with the Father in Jesus' name,

and the oil of joy begins to flow in our hearts. And now we do one more thing:

with an act of the will we learn to rejoice in our Lord just as he rejoiced in the Father all the time.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4

"Rejoice in the Lord always" ...all the time ... in all circumstances. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." This is counsel from One who walked through more flames than we've ever seen and come out still praising God.

It is possible to keep rejoicing in the Lord all the time...**and it's necessary**...just as necessary as watching out for false prophets.

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

Isaiah 61:3

God help us to receive the oil of joy for mourning together now before his throne.

God help us to put on that garment of praise.

God help us to go out into that world with hearts which rejoice in the Lord always in all circumstances,

..... forever!

SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness....
Psalm 100:1-2a

.....Serve the Lord with gladness one of the most practical commands in all scripture, because no one will serve the Lord very long, or with any effectiveness, if they're not glad to do it.

When the angel Gabriel told Mary, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus," Mary's answer was, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."...."Here I am, I am your servant. I am glad to be your servant!" This pregnancy was baffling, fraught with problems. It might threaten her marriage and her reputation ... but she was glad to serve God.

My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Listen to this catalogue of trials the apostle Paul went through.

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. II Corinthians 11:23-28

Is he complaining? Is he saying, "How much more is God going to dump on me?" ... No. He was glad to do it ... he'd do it all again. It was this gladness that kept the man going and made him fruitful.

Our Lord went to the cross ... Did this depress him?

....looking to Jesus the pioneer 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

...who for the joy that was set before him. Even in the face of the cross

... even with the prospect of walking into total darkness, sinking into death under the weight of our sins, Jesus still rejoiced. He served his Father with gladness.

The disciples came back to the well with food for Jesus and saw him talking to a woman. When she left her water jar and hurried back to town, the disciples said, "Rabbi, eat." Jesus said, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."

"Did someone bring him food? Did that lady bring you a lunch?"

***My food is to do the will of him who sent me...
to accomplish his work.***

It's my joy to serve the Father ... my meat and drink.

The Church of Jesus Christ is a prophetic church ... meaning,

- we're all prophets,
- we are servants of God.

As soon as our sins are forgiven.
As soon as we're washed in the blood of the Lamb,

- we're sent into the vineyard to get to work.

The problem is that many of us find ourselves getting weary...

- "the sun's too hot,
- the grapes are hard to pick,
- nobody seems to appreciate how much we're putting into this....

besides, quite a few of our comrades have fainted from exhaustion or given up in despair."

The word of the Lord to us today is,

"If it's hard it's because you're making it hard for yourself."

He has ordained that we should serve him with gladness...

- that his joy should be our strength,
- that we should really like being his servants, enjoy it, find our meat and drink in serving him.

But instead of gladness driving us on as prophets of God, even through crosses and trials and persecutions and hard days, we find ourselves driven by three things that will never take us to the end of the journey....

- guilt,
- fear,
- the "Christian itch."

1. We all know what it's like to try to serve God out of guilt.

"I don't really want to do this thing but I know that if I don't I'm going to feel guilty.... so I guess I will."

Whether it's daily prayers,
 gathering with the saints,
 sharing our money with people in need,
 or speaking a word of encouragement to that person on the job who's really down ... if we do it out of guilt or obligation we'll do it for a while, but in time we'll get so tired, so weary, we'll say, "I've had enough! I'm leaving the vineyard! Who can live like this?" ...and we'll be gone.

2. And most of us also know what it's like to try to serve God out of fear.

Of course we live in an age where people are less inclined to fear the consequences of their action....

- from God,
- from the law,
- from friends and neighbors.

Yet, there is still a fear in most of us that keeps us from going too far. And it's a good thing that fear is there it may keep you from stealing,
 from slander,
 from murder,
 from adultery.

But that fear will not drive you into the presence of God day after day to pray, or gather you with the saints, or move you to show mercy.

- He who fears is not made perfect in love.

- He who fears cannot serve the Lord with gladness.

3. And most of us have experienced this that we could call the "Christian itch."

We have this itch and we're looking for something to scratch it...

some new experience,
some new doctrine,
some better method of worship ... or church life.

If I've received the fullness of the Holy Spirit what more do I need? But this itch has me grabbing hold of the "doctrine of the latter rain" ... then that's not enough. Now I have to be one of the "manifested sons of God." Then I want holy oil to appear on my hands every time I pray ... it goes on and on and on.

Most church growth among American Evangelicals is not bringing people from the world into the Kingdom. It's just moving them from one church to another as they try to ease this itch.

"Ah! I've found it! I've found the truth! I've found the real way to serve God!"

Three years later the itch returns and the search resumes. And it will continue until we learn what it means to serve the Lord with gladness.

***Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness.***

God has made it possible for us to serve him with gladness ...that's why Jesus came ... that's why he died on the cross, to purge our troubled conscience from the dead works of

- guilt,
- fear,
- the Christian itch — to serve him with gladness.

... He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more

shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Hebrews 9:12-14

Jesus' blood washes away the guilt,
the fear,
the itch, so that we can really serve God and
have a wonderful time doing it.

There are three places where we are called as his prophets to serve God. And in each of these three places we need to get off the treadmill of dead works so that we can serve him with gladness.

1. We need to serve the Lord with gladness before his throne in worship.
2. We need to serve the Lord with gladness in the Body where he has placed us to wash feet and strengthen the brethren.
3. We need to serve the Lord with gladness in the real everyday world here he has made us his prophets.

1. We need to serve the Lord with gladness before his throne in worship.

Our prayer life can be dead works ... heavy, gloomy, full of righteous self-pity.

"Oh, that there were more who prayed like me! Oh, that there were others who knew how to intercede like me! It's such a burden!"

It's such a burden because it's dead weight, dead works, coming from a dead heart. Take your prayer life to the cross ... let the blood of the Lamb wash it.

For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Jesus cleared the way for you. He took your sins and your guilt and all the burdens. Follow him now into the presence of the Father ... stand be-

fore the mercy seat, lift up your hands and rejoice!

- Worship the Lord with gladness.
- Praise him with joy.
- Lay your needs before him with confidence.
- Intercede for the saints with thanksgiving.
- Pray for the nations and the rulers of nations...

knowing that the Spirit of God is moving through your prayers to bring healing to the earth as a sign of the coming Kingdom.

2. We need to serve the Lord with gladness in this Body where He has placed us to wash feet and strengthen the brethren.

Our Body life can become dead works ... heavy, gloomy.

"Here it is another Sunday and I know I should be with the saints, so I'll be there but I'm sure getting tired of this routine! What good is it doing? It's such a burden?"

We need to take our Body life to the cross and let the blood of the Lamb wash it.

For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

...Washed in the blood, our assembly can be a living service to God, glad service, flooded with his life, so that we become a sacrament to each other, an encouragement, a strength to each other. The Lord himself stands in our midst and floods us with power because we are one.

- We're washing each others feet.
- We're bearing each others burdens.

*Then joy floods our assembly...gladness overflows our hearts ...
and we go forth with that gladness to reap the harvest which we
and others have sowed with tears.*

3. We need to serve the Lord with gladness in the real everyday world where he has made us his prophets.

The reason we have such a hard time out there witnessing, being the light he ordained us to be, is that we have often allowed our witnessing to be a dead chore, dead works ... there's no joy in it.... little hope.

"It's never any fun. It's my somber duty to proclaim the truth,"

and the words fall from our lips like stones, and our deeds have a synthetic hard look about them. We need to take our prophetic life to the cross ... get a bath in the Lamb's blood.

For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

And now we go out with joy as prophets of the living God with the only real word of hope there is,

- the only freedom,
- the only healing,
- the only genuine peace there is.

How can we bring healing to the sick,
sight to the blind,
life to the dead, and not have joy?

*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands!
Serve the Lord with gladness!*

May the Lord himself wash away our guilt, our fear, our itch, in his own blood and send us forth this day to serve him with unspeakable joy.

MOUNTING UP ON WINGS

Jesus died on the cross and rose again so that we might have, burning within us, a flame from heaven so strong that, no matter what storms come sweeping over us, we're able to rise above them.

He poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we should have such strength that we can never say, "I'm the victim of circumstances. It's too much! I can't handle it."

Yet, who of us has arrived at such a place of power?

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.

Mark 14: 26

Here was a word of hope that they could have seized upon and by the strength of that word, could have continued through the crisis. But nobody seemed to hear it.

Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, even this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you."

We know what happened. That night it came to pass exactly as Jesus said. Peter ran out of gas. And the circumstances of that awful night rolled over him and flattened like a bulldozer.

We can relate to what Peter went through. How many times have we started out with great enthusiasm...we're going to live for God...we're going to serve the Kingdom...we are going to go all the way with Jesus...and then we run out of gas. Circumstances engulf us like a ten-foot wave.

Jesus sends us out to make disciples of all nations. We are to turn the world upside down. But instead, the world turns us upside down.

Why is it that we seem to make it for a while? Maybe six months. Five or ten years, maybe. Then suddenly, we're drained of strength.

Circumstances that we could handle before, become too much.

Somebody hurts our feelings.

Too many problems come at us at once.
We're torn between God and mammon.
We faint in the middle of the road.
And the world walks past us without a glance of care.

Where are we missing it? What's wrong?

Peter learned a lesson that night. He learned how weak he really was. He learned that if he was ever going to be able to rise above his circumstances and stand against the powers of darkness, it would have to be by a power which was not his own.

After the resurrection and after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we see Peter rising up out of the dust of his past failures, able now to stand against forces which before would flatten him.

Now we see Peter standing before the rulers of Israel, men who have authority to sentence him to death, and boldly speaking the truth. His fear is gone.

Tradition has it that Peter was a martyr for his Lord. The story goes that he refused to be crucified right-side-up like Jesus, but upside-down instead. Peter joyfully died for his Lord. He never again ran out of gas, because Peter learned how to rise up over circumstances which before would smash him.

So how do WE mount up on wings and rise up over our circumstances, instead of being flattened by them?

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40: 28-31

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted...

The youths faint and the young men fall exhausted because they draw their strength from themselves.

But now it is possible to have a strength that mounts us up on wings. We can rise above our circumstances. We don't run out of gas. We have courage that comes straight from God, and enables us to stand.

They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

So what does it mean to "wait on the Lord"

Three very simple things.

They are easy to remember because the Lord put them at the beginning of the prayer He taught us:

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.

First of all, "to wait on the Lord", is to hallow God's name – to worship Him.

Thy Kingdom come.

Secondly, "to wait on the Lord", is to seek God's Kingdom above everything else.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Thirdly, "to wait on the Lord", is to **do** God's will of mercy.

First, "to wait on the Lord", is to hallow God's name – to worship Him.

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.

After this I looked and beheld a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb; clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb. And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever Amen."

Revelation 7:9

This is a description of the goal of our journey – the destination toward which we are always moving as we follow the Lord Jesus. This is our hope. And we need to think of ourselves as in that multitude even now.

What do we see as we look at the multitude? Worship. Uninhibited praise of God.

They have palm branches, and they're not dragging them on the ground – they're waving them. They're crying out in a loud voice,

"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!"

They are consumed with gratefulness, praise, worship toward the Living God.

It is unselfconscious praise.

No one is distracted by the thought, "I hope they are watching me to see how one should really praise God."

Nor are they thinking, "I hope nobody sees me. I look kind of funny."

They do not care what they look like to others. They are so absorbed in the One who sits upon the throne and so taken up with the Lamb and His glory that they think of nothing but Whom they are worshipping. They are free from themselves.

Moreover it is uncritical praise.

No one is looking around saying,

"What's the matter with that dummy? His palm branch is upside down!"

"That lady has her eyes shut. Why doesn't she open them?"

"And who does that man think he think he is — an angel? He's down on his face. Why isn't he standing like I am?"

Everybody is so absorbed in the worship of God that anybody can do it any way they feel led to do it.

To wait upon the Lord is to worship him.

We need to worship when we are alone in our room with the door shut, thanking God for who he is.

"Thank you, Lord God, for your answers to my prayer."

"Thank you, Lord God, for scrapes you've gotten me out of."

"Thank you, God, for who you are."

"Thank you for you."

When we come together in worship, may the Lord help us to truly let go of ourselves and give him uninhibited praise – unselfconscious praise – uncritical praise.

And when they sang a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives...

Everything we do when we gather in his name is worship.

It's worship when we're singing hymns.

It's worship when we're following a liturgy.

It's also worship when we're in prayer.

It's worship all the way through.

May the Spirit help us to let go of ourselves and melt into that multitude that no man can number as we worship the Lamb and the Father who sits on the throne. As we worship we shall mount up on wings like eagles. We shall run and not be weary. We shall walk and not faint. We shall serve and never burn out.

Secondly: To wait on the Lord is to seek his kingdom above everything else.

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come.

A man found treasure buried in a field. In his joy he sold all that he had and bought the field. What was the treasure? The Kingdom? Yes, the Kingdom, but the Kingdom embodied in a man whom we can know and love: Jesus.

Jesus is the treasure.

To sell all that I have and buy the field is to put away from my life all things that distract me from the Lamb.

"If any one thirst let him come to me and drink."

He who believes in me, from his heart, his mouth, his hands shall flow rivers of living water – water that gives life.

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever."

To live forever is simply to live a life, now, that is saturated with heaven.

"Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Rest, even while we labor. Because we are renewed, refreshed, replenished with energy of the Lord Jesus himself.

Getting to know Jesus is a joy that never ends.

Paul, after following Jesus for years and years, still says, "***...that I may know him in the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, being made like him in his death.***"

The pursuit of Jesus always comes first. Accomplishing things for the kingdom comes second.

Kingdom miracles will flow freely from our lives only when our hearts are one with our Messiah.

So we need to ask ourselves, "Am I in pursuit of the face of the Lamb of God, who is Himself the Kingdom?" He is the King. He is the Life of God in this world. When I see him, when I behold him, I am renewed. I mount up on wings like the eagle. I rise above the circumstances that threaten to overwhelm me

Thirdly: To wait on the Lord is to do his will:

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.***

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the Kingdom of heaven. But he who does the will of God

Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

The will of God is mercy. And when I live his mercy, I'm in his Kingdom. I mount up on wings like eagles.

I pray mercy.

I think mercy.

I do mercy.

Perhaps somebody has wronged us terribly. The only thing we can seem to think of is how to get revenge. But the Spirit of the Lord convicts us. The Spirit says, "Pray mercy on that person. Ask the Father to flood that person with his fulfilling mercies."

"Lord, I cannot possibly do that without your help."

"You have my help. Just pray."

As we **pray** mercy upon this person, blessings from heaven descend upon them, while light from God visits us. We mount up on wings.

We also have to **think** mercy.

We are going down the elevator at the hospital from the ninth floor. It seems as though we're trapped in this confined space with some strange characters.

A couple doctor's who think they're God.
Some nurse's aids giggling about Friday night's party.
A man in his eighties with a face ten miles long.

Suddenly, we're convicted by the Spirit of God:

"Who are you to be jumping to conclusions about these people? Do you know what they've been going through? Those doctors have been up for the last three nights caring for people. Those aids are angels of mercy, loved by their patients. That man's wife of 54 years is in a coma."

We are called to think mercy toward people, no matter who they are or how strange they may appear to us. As we begin to think mercy, we are released from our judgmental prison, the elevator door opens we mount up on wings like eagles.

But we also have to **do** mercy.

As we walk out into the lobby, we find the elderly man in a panic. He's lost his wallet. And he has begun to weep.

"Can I help you? Is there anything wrong?" we inquire.

"I lost my wallet. I don't know what to do!"

We return with him to the ninth floor, entering the room where his wife lays in a coma. There on the night table is his wallet -- everything is in it except his money. We reach into our own wallet and give him our last two twenties. The man begins again to weep.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;(everyone who relies on their own strength) but they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40: 28-31

To wait upon the Lord is to worship Him.

God help us to lay aside our reserve, our self-consciousness, and enter into that great multitude that no man can number and begin to praise the Lord the way He would have us praise Him.

To wait upon the Lord is to seek His Kingdom.

To seek the face of Jesus, who is the Life of God in this world.
The living Bread.
The Living Water.
The True Sabbath.

To wait upon the Lord is to do God's will, which is mercy.

....As we see it revealed in Jesus' own life and His teachings.

And as we do that will of mercy...
As we pray mercy upon those who have wronged us,
And think mercy upon all people,
And do mercy to everyone who comes across our path,

We mount up on wings as eagles.
We run and are not weary.
We walk and never faint.
We serve God and never burn out.