

Joy ~ Part 2

"Don't be afraid, because I am here announcing to you Good News that will bring great joy to all the people." ~ Luke 2:10

Joy to the world! The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

[Media file goes here.]

Performed by Bing Crosby and Choir

In my last post, we looked at a definition of **Joy** and several stumbling blocks that can hinder our **Joy**. Let's now turn our attention to some stepping stones that can take in experiencing the fruit of **Joy**.

Stepping-Stones

Before considering any of the practical steps we can take to cultivate a joyful spirit, we must remind ourselves that **joy** is a fruit of the Ruach (see Galatians 5:22), the effect of His ministry in our hearts. Sha'ul said in his letter to the Romans, ***"May God, the source of hope, fill you completely with joy and shalom as you continue trusting, so that by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh you may overflow with hope."*** (Romans 15:13) It is by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh that we experience the **joy** of salvation and are enabled to rejoice even in the midst of trials.

The Ruach uses His Word to create **joy** in our hearts. Romans 15 contains an interesting connection between God and the Scriptures. Verses 4 & 5 of that chapter speak of the encouragement and patience that come from the Scriptures. That God gives encouragement and patience through the Scriptures should not surprise us. God is the Source; the Scriptures are the Means. The same truth applies to **joy**. Verse 13 speaks of the God of hope filling us with **joy** and shalom as we trust in Him. How would we expect God to fill us with **joy** and hope? The reasonable answer is by means of the comfort of the Scriptures.

When I have experienced the Lord's discipline, this passage in Hebrews, ***"Adonai disciplines those He loves,"*** (Hebrews 12:6) has been a source of comfort and a means of restoring joy. Psalm 50 can become a real source of comfort when God says: ***"call on Me when you are in trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor Me."*** (Psalm 50:15) We can also rejoice in the Lord through the assurance of Jeremiah, ***"For I know what plans I have in mind for you," says Adonai, 'plans for well-being, not for bad things; so that you can have hope and a future.'"*** (Jeremiah 29:11)

These are the words the Ruach will use to promote **joy** in our hearts. In order for Him to use the Scriptures, however, they must be in our hearts through regular exposure to and meditation upon them. This is our responsibility and is one of the practical means we must pursue to exhibit the fruit of **joy**.

But does the Word always minister to us in times of need? Are there not times when the Scriptures seem barren and lifeless and utterly powerless to arouse the spirit of **joy** in the face of difficult trials? Yes, there are those times, but we must remember that it is the Ruach HaKodesh who comforts us and enables us to rejoice. His Word is simply His instrument. He works when and how He pleases, so we must look to Him with faith and patience to bring life to His Word and apply it to our hearts.

The Ruach enables us to rest on the promise of Romans 8:28 (see quote below) that God is in control and at work in those circumstances for our good. Romans 8:28 is a passage I have known for years, but it did not help until the Ruach applied it to my heart and enabled me to believe it.

As we look to Him, let us remember that the purpose of rejoicing is not so we can feel better emotionally (though that will happen). The *purpose of joy* is to glorify God by demonstrating to an unbelieving world that our loving and faithful heavenly Father cares for us and provides all that we need.

Now for some specific practical aids to joy in our lives.

1. **Confess and forsake sin.** I have already referred to the lack of **joy**, or the strong spirit of oppression, that David experienced when he failed to deal with his sin (see Psalm 32:3-4). But as David confessed his sin, there was an interesting progression in his thoughts, starting with freedom from guilt, moving to faith in God's deliverance, to testimony to God's unfailing love, to rejoicing and singing (see verses 5-11).

God's forgiveness is always a source of amazement to me. It seems incredible that in spite of repeated sins, if we confess them, He is faithful and just to forgive them. And the continued faithfulness of God to forgive and to restore me to His fellowship is a source of **joy** to me. I am ready to sing just as David did.

2. **Trust in God.** Romans 15:13 speaks of God filling us with **joy** and shalom as we trust in Him. It is God who stands behind His Word. The promises of the Bible are nothing more than God's covenant to be faithful to His people. It is His character that makes these promises valid.

Consider that absolutely amazing statement of Romans 8:28: ***"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose."*** (Romans 8:28) That statement is true whether you believe it or not. Your faith or lack of it does not determine God's working. He is at work in all the circumstances of your life to bring out the good for you, even if you had never heard of Romans 8:28. His work is not dependent upon your faith. But the comfort and **joy** that statement is intended to give you is dependent upon your believing it, upon your trusting in Him who is at work, even though you cannot see the outcome of that work. God never explained to Job the reason for his trials. He simply brought Job to the place where Job trusted Him without an explanation.

3. **Take the long-range view of life.** The Scriptures repeatedly affirm that the focal point of our **joy** should be our hope of the eternal inheritance that awaits us in Yeshua and the final revelation of His glory. Consider, for example, the following passages:

"Rejoice in this, even though for a little while you may have to experience grief in various trials." (1 Peter 1:6)

"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5:2 ^{HCSB})

To take the long-range view is to follow the example of Yeshua Himself, who *"in exchange for obtaining the joy set before him, endured execution on a stake as a criminal, scorning the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Hebrews 12:2)

- 4. Give thanks in all circumstances.** (1 Thessalonians 5:18). This refers, of course, to both pleasant and unpleasant circumstances. We are to be thankful all the time. This does not mean we are to be thankful for a difficult circumstance; rather, we are to give thanks *in the midst* of every circumstance, good or bad. We are to be thankful that God is working in this circumstance for our good. We are to be thankful for past deliverances from trials. We are to be thankful that in this present trial, God will not allow a greater burden than we can bear and His grace is sufficient to enable us to bear it. And as we give thanks to God, we will begin to experience once again the joy that is our heritage in Yeshua.

The Results of Experiencing Joy

- **God is pleased.** Rabbi Sha'ul wrote: *"For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom and joy in the Ruach HaKodesh. Anyone who serves the Messiah in this fashion both pleases God and wins the approval of other people."* (Romans 14:17-18) If Yeshua came that we might have **joy** (life to the full), if the Ruach HaKodesh is at work in us to produce **joy**, then it is a contradiction of God's purpose for us when we are not joyful. Certainly, some people are more joyful by nature than others, but every Believer is to exhibit a balanced display of all the virtues of Yeshua's character, regardless of personal temperament. We must look to God and apply all the means He has given us until we can rejoice in the Lord always.
- **We are strengthened physically, emotionally, and spiritually.** Nehemiah said to the returned exiles, *"Don't be sad, because the joy of Adonai is your strength."* (Nehemiah 8:10) I have experienced the direct relationship of physical strength to **joy** in my personal exercise program. When I am rejoicing in the Lord, listening to my praise music the strength is there and the exercises go much easier. If I am discouraged, I seem to have no energy at all.

So the choice is ours. We can be joyless Believers, or we can be joyful Believers. We can go through life bored, glum, and complaining, or we can rejoice in the Lord that our names are written for passage to heaven, in the hope of an eternal inheritance. It is both our privilege and our duty to be joyful. To be joyless is to dishonor God and to deny His love and His control over our lives. It is practical atheism. To be joyful is to experience the power of the Ruach HaKodesh within us and to say to a watching world, **"Joy to the world! The Lord has come!"**

In my next post, I will be starting a new series on "Holiness: A Gift of God's Grace."