

Series Title: Inexpressible Joy

Subtitle: The Joy of the LORD is our strength

Primary Aim: This series is all about experiencing Joy. True joy is found not in the pleasures and treasures of this world, but in the person of Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 1:8-9 Peter says that we love Him [Jesus], believe in Him and experience joy that he describes as 'inexpressible' and 'glorious'. John Piper writes: "We become what we crave and what Christians crave above all else is the glory of Christ. So our joy is 'inexpressible and glorified' because it is joy in loving Christ and trusting Christ who is inexpressibly glorious." This is what this series is all about – delighting and glorifying in Jesus and helping others to do the same. We will explore this idea of Joy in Christ through the lens of a number of things which draw our focus in our search for joy – things that rob of us of our joy. Ultimately, we will see that true and lasting joy is a fruit of living in right relationship with Jesus.

1. NO GREATER JOY

Passages: 1 Peter 1:8-9, John 16:16-24, Philippians 1:25-26

Blurb: The dictionary defines joy as *a feeling of great pleasure and happiness*, but what is distinctive about Biblical joy? Joy is mentioned as part of what Paul refers to as the *fruit of the Spirit* (Galatians 5:22-23) and Peter says that it is inexpressible and glorious. In the Psalms joy is linked with praise and celebration, often in the context of what God had done for His people. Jesus speaks of how the disciples would grieve and says that their grief would turn to joy (John 16:16-24). Why? They would rejoice in seeing Him again and no-one would take away that joy. Biblical joy it seems is rooted in the person and presence of Christ. In Philippians 1:25-26, Paul tells his readers that he would continue with them for their progress and joy in the faith. Why? So that their boasting in Christ Jesus would abound on account of Him. The greatest joy says John is in seeing others walking with Jesus (2 John 1:4, 3 John 1:3-4) and Paul makes similar statements too (2 Cor 1:24, 1 Thess 2:19-20, 3:9-10).

2. THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION – LIVING IN GRACE

Passages: Psalm 51:12, Isaiah 12:3-6, Selected chunks of Galatians

Blurb: After David committed adultery and murder, he asked God in Psalm 51 to restore to him *the joy of his Salvation* (v12). Failure had robbed him of joy! *With joy*, Isaiah says we will draw water from the well of Salvation – he then speaks of how God's people would respond to the LORD in praise and sing to Him for the glorious things He had done. However, in the letter to the Galatians we find Paul addressing a church who were in danger of losing their joy. Why? Because they had lost sight of how the Gospel is the good news of God's grace and replaced it with legalism (1:6-9, 2:19-21, 3:1-9, 4:8-20 & 5:1-12). Neither will we experience joy when we use our Salvation as licence to sin (5:13-26). We find joy in Jesus and the Salvation He has achieved on our behalf, but that joy is diminished through our failures, legalism and licence to sin.

3. CONSIDER IT PURE JOY: TOUGH TIMES

Passages: James 1:2-12, 1 Peter 1:3-9, Romans 5:1-5

Blurb: While we might think that joy and suffering are opposed to one another, it is particularly interesting how the New Testament writers brought them together. For instance, James instructs his readers to consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds. Why? Because he says, we know that the testing of our faith produces perseverance which in turn leads us to maturity. Peter also speaks of suffering grief in all kinds of trials. These he says have come so that the proven genuineness of our faith may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus returns. We have not seen Jesus, but we love Him, believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. This radical perspective enables us to be joyful even when we are experiencing pain, loss and disappointment. Our joy is rooted not in our circumstances, but in Jesus Christ who is ever-present with us.

4. THE JOY OF OUR HEARTS: GOD'S WORD

Passages: Psalm 119, Jeremiah 15:16

Blurb: We are surrounded by a world in which lies, falsehoods, untruths and alternative facts appear to reign supreme. These things are opposed to the Word of God and conspire to rob us of the joy of our hearts. In contrast Jeremiah speaking about God's words to him, describes them as his *joy* and his *hearts delight* (15:16). Psalm 119 is an incredible articulation of the greatness of God's Word. On 15 occasions the Psalmist speaks of his heart, on 9 occasions he speaks of his delight and 4 times he speaks of rejoicing. He even says categorically that God's statutes are *the joy of his heart* (v111). If God's Word is our source of joy then we too must learn to delight in it and through it approach God not so much as a student but as a worshipper.

5. OVERFLOWING JOY: CONTENTMENT

Passages: Philippians 4:4-20, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Blurb: We're constantly being told that we need more, and yet more is rarely enough. The world around us is constantly trying to tell us that joy and satisfaction is found in all sorts of things. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians tells his readers to rejoice in the Lord (4:4). A few verses later in v10-20 Paul describes what he calls the secret of being content in every situation. Rather than continuing to chase more and more Paul has learned this secret and it is a place of deep joy and rejoicing in the Lord. The example of the Macedonian believers in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 is particularly poignant on this – despite severe trial and poverty their overflowing joy welled up in rich generosity. Joy in Christ brings contentment, and it overflows into generosity!

6. EVERLASTING JOY: NEW CREATION

Passages: Psalm 16:11, Isaiah 60, 65:17-25, Luke 6:21-23,

Blurb: People often talk of having a bucket list of things we want to do before we die. But such a list fails to appreciate that our eternal future will be full of pleasure and joy. E.g., David speaks of there being joy in God's presence and eternal pleasures at His right hand (Psalm 16:11). There is nothing we can miss out on in this life that won't be dwarfed by all that awaits us in Heaven. Human history will culminate when God makes a New Heaven & New Earth. Isaiah's vision of that New Creation is littered with references to joy, delight, gladness, rejoicing and enjoyment. He also specifically mentions that there will be no weeping, crying, violence, vanity & frustration. This shouldn't surprise us given that Jesus speaks of laughing, rejoicing and leaping for joy because of our reward in Heaven (Luke 6:21-23). Ultimately, the reason for our eternal joy will be the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.