

What Provision Has God Made...

That Your Joy May Be Full

1 John 1:1-4

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
4/19/2009*

That Your Joy May Be Full

1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things we write to you that your joy may be full (1 John 1:1-4).

I. The Serious Business of Joy

And these things we write to you that your joy may be full
(1 John 1:4).

The Commandment of Joy

It has been said that in the eyes of God, joy is serious business. Over three hundred and fifty times we see the words “joy” or “rejoice” in the scriptures. Sometimes it’s merely describing a state of being, but it often comes in the form of a command. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, **“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord” (Philippians 3:1)**. It is a command. Rejoicing or being joyful is every bit of a command as “Thou shalt not steal.” You would think it to be an easy command and a delight to obey yet such is not always the case.

Thomas Watson once stated, **“There are two things, which I have always looked upon as difficult. The one is, to make the wicked sad; the other is, to make the godly Joyful.”**¹ And we might mistakenly think that our lack of joy is simply is our own personal problem and casts no aspersion upon our Lord. But as Richard Baxter so profoundly observes,

¹ I.D.E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

I desire the dejected Christian to consider, that by his heavy and uncomfortable life, he seemeth to the world to accuse God and His service, as if he openly called Him a rigorous, hard, unacceptable Master, and His work a sad unpleasant thing. . . . If you see a servant always sad...will you not think that he hath a master that displeaseth him? . . . You are born and new born for God's honor; and will you thus dishonor Him before the world? What do you (in their eyes) but dispraise Him by your very countenance and carriage?²

The Paradox of Joy and Suffering

After all did not the apostles go away rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ? How often we seem to see suffering, shame and persecution connected with joy. How paradoxical! The natural mind equates suffering with despondency and not joy. To the natural man the very nature of suffering excludes the presence of joy; but not so with the spiritual man. To the spiritual man suffering and joy mutually coexist like education and being informed. To the spiritual man suffering and joy coexist as logically as love and joy. Why this is we will examine momentarily.

The Sin of Despondency

But first we must assert that if joy is a command, then despondency³ and discouragement is truly a sin — one of which we must repent. Grumbling is evil and being discontent is a passion which seeks to indict the Lord Himself, for He is Jehovah Jireh (the God who provides.) As Stephen Charnock explains,

There must be delight on our parts. Joy is the tuning the soul.
The command to rejoice precedes the command to pray:
'Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing.'⁴

Joy, like any other fruit of salvation, has its good days and bad days. But a lack of joy is a symptom of a sinful, selfish and ungrateful disposition; ungrateful for gifts of God, both earthly and heavenly—both

² I.D.E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

³ Webster's defines *despondency* as "Depression of spirits from loss of hope."

⁴ I.D.E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

mediate and immediate. We must grow in joy similarly to how we grow in love and patience.

A lack of joy is something which needs to be repented of. If we recognized we weren't loving or patient, it might be more obvious. But gloominess is an insidious sin. It is like the difference between miserliness and drunkenness. We can disguise miserliness as frugality. A drunk is easier to spot and condemn.

The Tuning of the Soul

Before we become even more despondent because we just realized there is yet another sin we must contend with in our lives, let's realize that God's commands are not designed to be burdensome (1 John 5:3) but a delight (Psalm 1). It is a good thing to rejoice and, similar to any other command, we should seek to obey the call to joy with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

I start with verse four because it is in this verse that John tells why he writes the epistle—that our joy may be full. And if joy is the “tuning of the soul” then the fullness of our joy will be the right-working of our soul. And, as is so often the case, God has given us the command and also gives us the means by which we should seek to obey it.

John here, by the grace of God, is seeking to make our joy full. To a certain extent, this might be the theme of the entire epistle. So where, my friends will we begin to find the answer to our sin of despondency and succeed in knowing the obedience of joyfulness? As William Gurnall explains,

The reason why many poor souls have so little heat of joy in their hearts, is that they have so little light of Gospel knowledge in their mind. The further a soul stands from the light of truth the further his needs must be from the heat of comfort.⁵

How does John start?

II. Real Faith

⁵ I.D.E. Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life (1 John 1:1).

Similar to the way John starts his gospel, a multitude of sermons can be preached on this verse. It is unclear whether the beginning here refers to the beginning of the story of Jesus or the beginning as we would understand Genesis 1:1 or John 1:1. It is generally thought that John is talking about what was manifested to them and therefore the beginning of the gospel. What might be more important for the purposes of his readers are the following statements. In the following verbs John annihilates any notion of the Christian faith being based on anything other than historical real events and a real physical Person.

Heard

When John says “heard” He means there was an understandable message. Later he will tell Christians to test the spirits by his own testimony. The Christian faith is intelligible. It is committed to writing, including and excluding certain ideas. I would say there is a great deal of joy robbed from Christians who have abandoned this notion and opt for non-information from a God who speaks to them mystically and irrationally. This type of anti-rationalism is getting legs in 21st century America.

In his very popular book *Velvet Elvis*, Rob Bell promotes this mystical approach as an earmark of the growing emergent church. He writes:

The Christian faith is mysterious to the core. It is about things and beings that ultimately can't be put into words. Language fails. And if we do definitively put God into words, we have at that very moment made God something God is not.⁶

And, no doubt, for effect, Bell quotes a popular figure who has clearly planted his flag in anti-Christian ideologies. Bell writes:

⁶ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Zondervan, 2005) p. 32

One of the great “theologians” of our time, Sean Penn, put it this way: “When everything gets answered, it’s fake. The mystery is the truth.”⁷

Two quick responses to this:

1) when the apostle Paul recounted how he had been “caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:4), is it not necessary to conclude that that experience assumes there are other words which are expressible and lawful to utter (which Paul expressed more frequently than not)?⁸

2) If the Christian faith is about “things and beings that ultimately can’t be put into words” the nefarious question from the serpent “Has God indeed said...?” (Genesis 3:1) now becomes the theme of the entire emergent church movement. It may, at first glance, appear humble, but it is very dangerous doctrine.

Seen, Touched

“Seen” means they actually saw Jesus and “our eyes” can be understood that He wasn’t a phantom. “Looked upon” gives the idea of scrutinized. “Our hands handled” means they purposely touched him to see if He was real (especially Thomas). The sense of John’s writing here is that the Christian faith is not a myth, nor is it mystical in some sort of Eastern, Zen, unknowable sort of way.

Jesus was a physical man who walked and talked and taught and lived and died and rose again in reality and in history. It is interesting that John would see the need to be so emphatic regarding this. No doubt heresies had already sprung up as they do to this very day that the Christian faith is something you project out of your own mind. Nothing could be further from what John declares.

Word of Life

All this concerning the “Word of life.” Jesus is so called because Jesus is the giver of life in every sense. He gave life to all living things. He also is the giver of everlasting life. “Word” can also be in two senses: Christ or doctrine. It is more appropriate here to recognize this as the

⁷ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Zondervan, 2005) p. 33

⁸ I might add that they were still words.

person of Christ. But we also must realize that apart from doctrine the person of Christ cannot ordinarily be known.

III. The Declaration of the Apostles

...the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:2, 3).

Manifested to the Apostles

This Word of life, who is Christ, is manifested or made known. The apostles saw Him and bear witness of this historical fact. This was not some new thing. Contrary to the thinking of many, there is no religion older than the Christian faith. Jesus was with the Father from all eternity. In the fullness of time He became flesh and was manifested to the apostles.

Declared by the Apostles

Here we see the method of access to Jesus—the apostles. They saw and heard and declare the gospel to humanity. And in uniting ourselves with them, more specifically their message, we are united with Christ. In verse five he begins to deliver the essence of the true message but let me go back to the quote of William Gurnall:

The reason why many poor souls have so little heat of joy in their hearts, is that they have so little light of Gospel knowledge in their mind. The further a soul stands from the light of truth the further his needs must be from the heat of comfort.

I am going to contend here, at the beginning of the examination of this epistle, that the reason so few Christians know the joy of Christ is because their relationship with Christ is based upon some existential, emotional, mysterious experience. They are lurching from religious experience to religious experience and some have had none for years. What John seems to be emphasizing is that our joy must be based upon an

actual event that happened in history which was accompanied by a glorious message. An apostle, by the Spirit of God, has written us a letter recording these things for us that our joy may be full.

Questions for Study

1. Is joy optional for the Christian?
2. Do you find joy to be an easy thing to have? Why, why not?
3. How does having or not having joy reflect our view of God?
4. How can you suffer and have joy at the same time?
5. Is God's command to be joyful a burden?
6. What is good starting place for the Christian to obey the call to joy?
7. According to verse four, why is John writing this epistle?
8. Why do so many "poor souls" have so little joy?
9. Why does John mention that he "heard," had "seen," and "touched" Jesus?
10. How is Jesus the "Word of life?"
11. What was "manifested" to the apostles?
12. What was "declared" by the apostles?
13. How can an experiential, emotional or existential relationship with Jesus result in more despondency than joy?
14. What should be the source of our joy?
15. How do you suppose you can start moving in that direction?