12-15-24

Psalm 98

On this day in the advent Calander, we focus on joy; and I need to add that this joy is based strictly on Christ. Any other experience of joy will be either short lived or false. I’m not saying we shouldn’t have joy in other things; it’s just that our deepest most firmly rooted joy needs to be in Christ our Saviour. All other ground is sinking sand.

Unfortunately, I don’t think joy is all that prevalent among Christians; and we, of all people, ought to be most joyful. I realize that there is no lack of difficulty in the world, in our communities, in our homes. In this world we will have tribulation. But don’t let the thorns of life choke out the word that has been implanted in you. Now Paul tells us in Galatians 5 that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. In other words, it is a gift. It is only the Holy Spirit that can give you that deep abiding joy in Christ; a joy that weathers all storms and is real even in harsh conditions.

But as is so often the case, we are not to simply sit back and wait for it. The gift is from the Spirit but we must cooperate. The first thing to do is ask. Ask for joy. And not just once; ask and keep on asking. And ask with gratitude; joy is a good thing and the Lord loves to shower good gifts on His children. Also, counteract all the bad with God’s word. The Bible is God speaking to you and His word is good. We can’t help being influenced by the world, but we do have control to dilute it with joyful truth.

Keep in mind, too, what Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8, “*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things*.” Notice that this is not something as trite as “think happy thoughts”. No, this is dwelling on what is from God to enrich the soil of our minds so the seed of the Gospel can grow and produce the fruit of joy and push out the thorns.

And this is not easy. That’s because this is a spiritual battle. Satan wants your mind clogged with depressing things so that you will be ineffective for the Kingdom. If you have accepted Jesus, satan can’t have your soul; but he will try to keep you from the good things God has planned for you to do. And, he will steal your joy. It requires work and diligence on our part. As Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “*We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*” That’s hard. But the Holy Spirit will help us; if we ask.

Psalm 98 is a Psalm of joy. It is proclaiming the victory of the Lord over all the enemies and it is honoring Him because it is all won by His great power. And with His might come mercy and kindness and Israel and all the nations are admonished to praise Him with joy. Both the first and second comings of Christ are prophesied in this Psalm along with the Gospel. The Psalm is exuberant, with the only warning being buried deep in the mention of judgement. But even that judgement is a source of joy and praise for those who are in Christ.

To begin with we are encouraged to sing a new song. In Christ, we are a new creation; we have new life. The old man has been nailed to the cross and we are reborn, regenerated to a new man who will enjoy eternal life in the presence of God. We don’t put new wine in old wineskins. This calls for a new song of praise for our Saviour. We are no longer under law, but under grace. So, while the law is good and it is to our benefit to meditate on it, our new song is joy in His grace and our salvation in Jesus.

Every evening, every day, we have material for a new song of praise to our God. The Bible tells us this, and it is very poignant that this point is made in the book of Lamentations: *The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.* (Lam 3:22-23) As we look back on each and every day, there is demonstration of God’s goodness in our lives and reason to worship Him and thank Him. Look for that new song; and gratefully sing it to our Father.

In these first verses we, in the New Testament age, can see the promise of the first advent of Jesus and the Gospel of salvation. God has done wonderful things. At the time this Psalm was written, God had performed miracles and great signs; He had all of creation singing His glory. But we know of the wonderous first Christmas, when the almighty God of the universe laid aside His glory and became one of us. God, was and is, perfectly content and complete in Himself. But He has chosen to love us and was willing to become one of His creation to offer salvation after we had rejected Him.

God did it all by His own power. Jesus was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit. The man Jesus retained His deity, yet He laid it aside and depended entirely on the direction of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit. He allowed satan to bring Him to crucifixion and He even gave up His own spirit; it was not taken from Him. He preached to the spirits in prison for three days while His body was in the tomb. But He saw no corruption; for He came back from the dead and rose again. He ascended back into heaven where His work of redemption has been completed, while He yet pleads for us in intercession.

All this God did without help; all by His own power. In so doing, He is the victor. He defeated sin and guilt by bearing the full weight of God’s own just wrath against our wrongdoing. As believers in Christ, our sin is forgiven and our guilt is removed. He defeated death, because death could not keep Him. He is stronger than death so now we have the promise of eternal life in Him. Jesus defeated satan and all his myriad demons. Satan’s power of sin and death has been shattered and satan has received his death blow. All by God’s own might: His right hand and His holy arm.

God’s victory is revealed in His salvation and His victory is that salvation we receive. Dwell on these things and see why we ought to be joyful.

God’s promises are always true; and so, “*He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel.*” Jesus was born to the house of Israel. These are the people that God had chosen long before to be His holy people. They were entrusted with the Law, they received the word from the prophets, their history demonstrated the sovereign hand of God; and in spite of their rejection, He blessed them with the Messiah who could redeem them from slavery to sin.

As we read God’s word in the New Testament, we see the joy that was a part of the apostles and the true disciples of Christ. Certainly, things did not go well for them in their lives; but they understood and believed what was coming. They were thrilled with God for keeping His promises and winning the victory that resulted in salvation for them and any who would follow Jesus.

God had also promised Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in his seed. This Psalm looks forward to that as having already happened. *All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.* The salvation of our God is Jesus Christ. Once the apostles and disciples understood the implications of this, they brought the good news of the Gospel to other nations and it is still spreading. The nations of the world have seen Jesus, and even those who live in oppressive regimes carry the joy of knowing that they have salvation; that they are citizens of the Kingdom of Christ.

Joy has an interesting characteristic: it wants to be expressed. If something makes you joyful, it tends to come out in physical manifestations; you smile or laugh, your face lights up; children are better at expressing it because they will jump up and down and squeal and clap their hands. And we need to be better at expressing the joy of the Lord that indwells us. The Psalm exhorts us to shout to the Lord, to sing, to play musical instruments; all in praise of God, who has won the victory of our salvation.

When we consider singing and shouting our praises to the Lord, we must consider what James, the brother of our Lord tells us: we have to work on our tongues. In chapter three of his letter, James tells us that the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity, and is set on fire by hell itself. That is a formidable problem. If such a thing is to be tamed so that we may praise our God, we need His help. Again, ask for it; ask Him to tame your tongue so that it may be used for God-honoring purposes. This also takes work for it is in direct opposition to the tongue’s nature. As James tells us that blessing and cursing others ought not come from the same mouth; neither should praise and grumbling.

There will be times when joy will well-up inside and it will be good to sing praises to the Lord. During a worship service, I pray that the Holy Spirit will work in each of us such that we can worship in joy. Praise God for these times when we are blessed with joyful worship. However, there will be those times when we are filled with disappointment; when the weight of life crushes us; when we are overwhelmed with grief. These are not the times to sing a joyous melody, but to rest quietly in His arms. Pour out your heart to God but at the same time profess your confidence in Him; a confidence that comes entirely from stubborn faith; not from feeling or evidence. And know that: *Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning.* (Psalm 30:5)

When we think about being joyful in Christ; when we think about praising Jesus, it is very important to remember the last part of verse 6: He is King. He is King Jesus now, as He sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven. And we are His subjects if we claim Him as our Saviour. How precious that we can have such a close relationship with the King. We can talk with Him anytime we want; and when we do, He happily listens to us. Moreover, He is able to deal with any situation we have perfectly. Yet another reason to be joyful.

But these last three verses tell of the coming Kingdom of Christ here on earth; because they tell us He is coming in judgement. This will be the second advent of Christ. The Bible tells us that this return of Jesus will be in absolute glory and He will rule the world in justice. Also, nature is waiting for this moment. We learn from the apostle Paul in Romans 8: *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.*

All creation groans under the weight of the curse from Adam’s sin. King Jesus will free it. No wonder the seas will roar in joy and the earth itself resound with praise. All the creatures that dwell on earth and in the sea will be released from the curse and will glorify God. Somehow, if we imagine just a little, we can picture the rivers clapping their watery hands in delight and the mountains singing praises to God. Joy to the world, the curse is gone.

When Jesus returns, He will take His rightful place as King and dethrone the current prince of darkness. The light of Christ will shine and will penetrate anything hidden so that just judgement will take place. And that is a source of joy for those of us who belong to Him. By His blood, we have already been declared “not guilty”. Our judgement will be to receive reward for being faithful to our King.

Joy is a beautiful gift from our merciful God. It is not just happiness or happy-go-lucky or ignoring troubles in life. It is a state of knowing who our King Jesus is and that He is on the throne. It is knowing that all our hope is in Him and He does not fail. It is a reason to worship and praise Him, in spite of the oppression of all the forces of hell. Jesus is King.

Prayer

Merciful Lord Jesus, thank You for having come to this earth as a lamb to be slain. Your perfect sacrifice has won for us all that we could never attain. Most importantly and more than we could hope for, You have made peace between us and Father God. You have fulfilled His justice against our sin so that He may now be just in declaring us “not guilty”. What’s more, You have gained us access to the throne; You have made possible our adoption by the Father; You have made us co-heirs with You. And how much more is there? All this at Your first advent as a helpless child.

You have provided for us the Holy Spirit who pours out blessing upon us. He is able to give us spiritual gifts that we can’t obtain for ourselves. Today especially, we thank You for joy. And even so, we ask for it. May the joy of Christ dwell in each heart, so that we may endure all things while reflecting that light of Christ to a dark world where joy is in short supply.

And thank You Lord for Your second advent. We know You will come back because You told us You will. We look forward to when You return in great glory. All will see You and all will bow in homage to the Lord of all. You will dispatch Your enemies and cast out forever death and sin and satan. We will be free from their effects and forever clothed in righteousness. It is a joyous thought for Your people; that our Saviour Jesus will be King of all the earth.

We await Your glorious coming in Your holy name

Amen