

# That Your Joy May Be Full

Isaiah 42:1-4, John 16:16-33 (ESV)

July 1, 2007

“Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” What a strange thing to say! After his last supper with his disciples, moments before his betrayal and arrest, Jesus exhorted his disciples, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” In the very face of his own death, he was concerned for their joy and, by extension, concerned for our joy. How wonderful is our savior!

Listen again to this good news, building step by step upon the teachings of Jesus Christ until it arrives at the fullness of joy. Jesus began with prophecies of his crucifixion and death. “A little while, and you will see me no longer.” In a little while, he would be crucified, dead, and buried. This was a terrible death, almost unspeakable, and yet he knew it was coming and he told his disciples so. They would still be overwhelmed by it, and yet they would come to remember that he had prophesied it. They would come to remember that he had foretold the future. They would come to realize that he had divine foreknowledge of what was about to happen. They would come to know not only that he was a prophet who spoke the word of God but also that he was the word of God and so that he was God living among them.

In addition to these prophecies, Jesus also made promises to his disciples. “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” It was not only the case that he was going to die. It was also the case, far more remarkably, that he was going to be resurrected, raised from the dead in the very same body though forever beyond pain, decay, decline, and death. This promise appears, in slightly different forms, three different times, as he says it, his disciples repeat it, and he says it to them yet again, all of this repetition surely being for our benefit, to be sure that we hear it and hear it and get the point: “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” Jesus was going to be raised from the dead. He was going to be made alive again. Despite his impending death, they would see him again. This was a promise. “So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” His promised resurrection would lead to their promised and inalienable joy.

Consider, in addition to the prophecy and the promise, the explicitly stated premise upon which these both were based. “I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” Jesus

Christ is eternally the Son of God the Father. God the Father is eternally the Father of Jesus Christ. This is the premise of his prophecy. This is the premise of the promise. This is why Jesus knew the future. This is why he promised to return. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He always has been, and he always shall be. There is none other like him. Jesus Christ is God with us. Thanks be to God!

In addition to the prophecy, the promise, and the premise of them both, there was also a purpose to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. This is the good news with which we started. "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." "That your joy may be full." He did all of this for our sake! He lived and died and lives again in order that we might know and share his joy. This is the most expensive gift we shall ever receive. This is the most valuable gift we shall ever receive. This is the most precious gift we shall ever receive. We dare not neglect it. It may not lead to earthly wealth. It may not lead to ease or even to happiness as we understand it. It has to do instead with joy in the continuing presence of the living Lord. Surely we do not want to be unmindful of it. Surely we do not want to be ungrateful. Surely we do not want to be less than joyful.

Perhaps the most significant reason that our lives are not full of joy has to do with the weight of the sorrows that bear down upon us. Jesus acknowledges the reality of our sorrow. He does not deny or belittle it. We suffer pain, disappointment, and worst of all, the loss of loved ones. It would be hard-hearted and un-Christian to pretend we had no sorrow. Christian faith does not have anything to do with pretending. Christian worship does not ask us to engage in any make-believe. Jesus acknowledges the reality of sorrow. He enters into our lives of suffering. And he has an answer for us, words of comfort and assurance spoken from the other side of his own suffering. Would you like to know about the joy that overcomes sorrow?

Perhaps another reason for a lack of joy in our lives today is that we are too distracted. Life is full of a lot of little things, some more and some less interesting in and of themselves, but which finally are of no significance at all! It is a danger that our lives— our time, energy, attention, emotion, money and dedication— get wasted on trivial little distractions that are not fulfilling to our lives, that are not helpful to others, and that reflect nothing of the glory of God. Human life is a precious gift; it was created for very specific purposes; it is a crying shame when we throw it away for nothing. What is really important in your life?

Yet another reason for a lack of joy, and perhaps the most difficult with which to deal, is sheer boredom. This is not based in sorrow or loss, for those require more feeling than boredom allows. This is not based in distraction, for that

requires more passion and energy than boredom allows. Instead, this is rooted in a kind of numbness, a withdrawal that may intend to protect but that ends up suffocating, becoming a living death. Is life itself for you more boring than joyful? Would you like to experience instead the joy of which Christ teaches?

Against all of this, Jesus says, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” How can that be? First of all, Christian joy is at variance with the world. When Christians sorrow, the world rejoices. The world does not have a clue about Jesus Christ, about what is important, or about the meaning, goal, and purpose of life. So when the world rejoices, do not be deceived or lured away by that. Other side of that, when Christians rejoice, the world has no understanding or comprehension. Do not expect the world to come along.

Second, the disciples’ sorrow had to do with the death, departure, and absence of Jesus Christ; their sorrow turned to joy with his resurrection. We live in this second time, the time after the resurrection. However, we are still in between the resurrection of Christ and the final coming of Christ. We still do not see Christ. We continue to live in his apparent absence. That is, we live by faith, not by sight. While sorrow at his absence is not appropriate, it is understandable. Still, the good news is that Christ has been raised from the dead, that he is alive, that he is with the Father in heaven, and that he has sent the Holy Spirit to guide, guard, protect, and comfort us. This is good reason for joy.

Third, Jesus says, “You have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” Do you see what that means? Christian joy is not based on the fading, transitory, passing things of this world, all of which eventually disappear and disappoint.

Christian joy is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, based on the eternal things of God, and therefore is good for eternity. Christian joy is held for us in a safe place. The world cannot touch it or take it away.

In addition to the prophecy, the promise, the premise, and the purpose, there is also clear instruction about prayer. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.... In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.” We are to pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself tells us this, right here. This is not a burden. This is a high privilege. This is part of the joy for which he died. We are to pray in the name of Jesus Christ. How in the world can some be so bold, so brazen, so audacious, so disobedient, so ungrateful, and so stupid as knowingly to reject this gracious and life-giving invitation? We are to pray in the name of Jesus Christ. We have no other standing, and certainly no standing of our own, before God. Let us always pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

Where do the prophecy, the promise, the premise, the purpose, and the prayer finally lead? They all lead to peace. “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” Note that he indicates that this has already been done. That is how sure he was. “What the world thought his shame was his glory; what the world thought his defeat was his victory.”<sup>1</sup> Thus it is that he could say, “I have overcome the world,” and, “You may have peace.” Even when we desert Christ, he is not alone, for the Father has not deserted him. And he has told us all of these things in order that we may have peace in Jesus Christ. All other attempts at peace, security, hope, meaning, and love will fail. But Jesus Christ has provided, by his crucifixion and resurrection, for us to have peace in him. And this is our greatest joy.

Jesus Christ came and lived and died and lives again, in order that we might believe, and obey, and so that our joy might be full. Here is a joy that will come to us on the other side of sorrow. We do not deny the reality of loss. We do not deny the severity of sorrow. But Christ has won the victory over sin, death, and evil. He has secured for us an eternal life. We have good reason for joy that no one can take away.

Here is a joy that is greater than the distractions of life. What is important? God and his Christ. Look at these things. Focus on these things. Set aside and let go the little distractions in life that soak up time and energy, that soak up commitment and resources, and that leave us with nothing.

Here is a joy that can even overcome boredom. The good news of life, death, and new life, of victory over sin, death, and evil, can capture our hearts, souls, minds and imaginations as can nothing else.

Are you fretful today? Are you uneasy? Do you yearn for that which is not yet? Does your heart ache? Are you aware of the hatefulness and contempt of the world which press down upon us? Jesus Christ came in order that you might have peace. Is this of interest to you? Do you need peace not only in the world but also in your own life? “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup>William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited: 1949), p. 302.

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