

Joy in the Lord, in the Church, and in the Ministry

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by David Schrock

***Not that we lord it over your faith,
but we work with you for your joy,
for you stand firm in your faith.
2 Corinthians 1:24***

Joy in the Lord

Joy is what pulsed in the Godhead when the world was still an idea (cf. John 17:24–26). And joy is what moved God to create the world. While under no compulsion to create, it was God's good pleasure to create a world whereby his glory could be displayed and enjoyed.

For the sheer pleasure of it, God created the Manatee and the Milky Way, earthworms and electricity. And in the middle of it all, he made man and woman—the pinnacle of creation (Psalm 8), the acme of his affection.

Even when devastated by sin, God's commitment to humanity remained. Without holding a grudge God redeemed a people for himself. Zephaniah 3:17 speaks of the way God sings over his children, while Isaiah 53:10 speaks of God's good pleasure to bruise his son for the sake of elect.

*He will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.*

*Yet it was the will (lit. good pleasure) of the Lord to crush him;
he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt,...*

Long story short, God's holy joy impels him to lavish his love on the ones he gave to his Son (see John 17).

And this same joy was in the heart of Christ when he ascended Calvary. As Hebrews 12 says, "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross." In other words, Jesus was not coerced to suffer. In perfect obedience to his father, joy moved him to lay down his life.

And what sort of joy could possibly mingle with the agony of the cross?

It was the sure promise his crucifixion would not end in death. Rather, Isaiah goes on to say of the Suffering Servant: "He shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand."

On the other side of the cross stood a kingdom—a people purchased, justified, and set apart by his death. This was the promise that Jesus believed as he died, and the reward he received in his resurrection.

Therefore, at the heart of the gospel stands the joy of the Lord—the Father's joy to send the Son; the Son's joy to obey the Father and save his bride. And now, it is the joy of the Spirit to come and dwell with us. As Jesus said in John 15:11, I give you "my joy." When Jesus gave us his Spirit, he gives us joy in the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22; Rom 14:17).

Joy in the Lord, therefore, is at the heart of Christianity.

Joy in the Church

If joy is a central feature of who God is and what he is doing in the world, then the same must be true of God's church. Both in its existence and gospel ministry, joy must not be accidental or occasional. It must resource and refresh the work of the saints.

Here's what I mean. In Nehemiah 8:10 we learn "the joy of the Lord is our strength," which teaches us joy which finds its object and source in God supplies our motivation and manpower to accomplish his will. To say it differently, as we commune with God in his Word, the Spirit gladdens our hearts, which in turn empowers us to do the good works he has for us (cf. Eph 2:10). This is what we see in the New Testament and what we ought seek in our lives.

For instance, in Acts we find the apostles rejoicing after they were arrested and beaten by the Sanhedrin (5:41). Joy in the face of opposition is more than unusual; it is Spirit-given. As Luke will write later in Acts 13:52, when the disciples were filled with the Spirit, they were filled with joy. Clearly in the early church, joy in the Lord was what strengthened the saints for ministry.

Such joy does not eliminate the profound pain and spiritual emptiness that comes from living in a fallen world. In fact, to follow Christ often increases the hostilities and hardships faced in this life (Matt 5:10–12; John 15:18–25). James even says in the face of sin to stop rejoicing: "Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom" (James 4:9).

So even as joy is tested by suffering, there is an abiding joy believers have, and this joy is what gives us strength. Such joy can be temporarily buried under unrepentant sin, blocked by sinful circumstances, or broken by a failure to grasp biblical truth, but ultimately it cannot be extinguished for those claimed and kept by the Lord Jesus Christ.

And therefore, because joy is so vital for the life and strength of the Christian, it is the pastors calling to fight for the joy of his people.

Joy as the Aim of the Ministry

Just as Christ died to give himself to his people, he also died to give his people shepherds who might lead his sheep to find joy in Christ. This, I believe, is what Paul is saying in 2

Corinthians 1:24 when he writes, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith."

There are at least three things to see in this verse.

1. **"Not that we lord it over your faith."** Faith is personal and cannot be forced upon anyone. The role of the pastor, like the role of the parent, is not to produce faith in another. God alone can give faith and grant repentance. It is the role of the pastor to be a strong and gentle voice heralding the good news of Jesus. We don't force faith into the hearts of our people; we extol the grace of the gospel, the pardon of the cross, and the power of the Spirit. We point to Christ because we believe he will fill their hearts with faith.
2. **"But we work with you for your joy."** Notice Paul doesn't say "faith." Even though he wants them to stand firm in faith, he doesn't work for their faith, but for their joy. Why is that? In addition to the point that we can't produce faith in another, there is the reality that faith is downstream from joy. We believe in what we treasure (Matt 6:19-21). So naturally the things that bring us joy are the things we tilt our lives and our beliefs toward.

Every week, you and I are tempted to delight ourselves in things that will send our souls to hell. We are invited to find joy in sinful things and good things. And it is the good things, when they become god-things (read: idols), which are most pernicious. Therefore, Paul and every earnest pastor must labor to show the supremacy of Christ over these things.

It is not enough to care for what others believe. What do they rejoice in? What thrills their soul? The faithful servant of the Lord must not be content to aim at true beliefs; we must aim at the affections of the heart.

3. **"For you stand firm in your faith."** The way to grow faith is to plant it deep in the truth, beauty, and goodness of the gospel. This is the task of every believer, but it is especially the calling God puts on the shepherds of the flock. It is this task which burdens my soul and shapes my ministry. As I preach, plan, counsel, and pray, I am constantly thinking about your joy, so that it might bolster your faith.

I long for OBC to stand firm in the faith, and thus will labor in the Word to show you the excellencies of Christ found therein.

My Prayer for OBC

As I begin preaching this week, it is my pledge and my prayer to point us to Christ. He is superior to every created thing. He is more true, more beautiful, more satisfying than anything else in creation. And I firmly believe that when he is lifted up in his Word, our hearts will rejoice in him, which in turn will give us power to say no to ungodliness and yes to all that he calls us to.

Like Paul, this is the aim of my ministry and my prayer for OBC. I long for us to be a church that finds its greatest joy in the Lord. Would you join me in that prayer and pursuit.

For His Glory and your joy, Pastor David