

Hello dear listeners,

In this month's discussion on true joy, we have uncovered a lot of the Bible's rich instruction on the matter. We have discovered that true joy is possible; we have learned what true joy looks like; and we have seen how one might arrive at true joy. Yet there is still one more face to this jewel of biblical teaching that we have yet to study in some depth. We need to concern ourselves with the permanence of joy.

For Scripture never simply teaches us how to live just so that we can get through each day. The Lord God does not want us to live with a mere *survival* mentality. Genuine, biblical joy has even more to offer than the comfort and peace of knowing that by faith I belong to Jesus Christ. The joy that a Christian can have today is a down payment. It is a pledge, a promise that the best of joy is yet to come! And so those who believe in Christ may learn from God's Word that their lives are on a certain trajectory. The one who knows Christ needs to see his life today in the light of eternity, of everlasting life!

For that is what really gives colour to the true joy one may experience today by God's blessing. True Christian joy, the joy of the Bible, the joy worked by the Spirit, is tied to God's end-time victory over evil through Jesus Christ. It is tied to the day when sin and evil will be forever vanquished. In the Belgic Confession, a 16<sup>th</sup> century confessional standard to which the churches that support this broadcast subscribe, there are these beautiful, Scriptural words concerning that day: "...it is a great *joy* and comfort to the righteous and elect. For then their full redemption will be completed and they will receive the fruits of their labour and of the trouble they have suffered." The joy experienced today by the one who has become right with God through Christ is a joy that has come to understand that there is a reality beyond the sorrow of this life. It's a joy that understands a reality of a new heaven and a new earth, a new home, with body and soul made new, where Christ will be with all his chosen ones, where we may see him, face-to-face! And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things will have passed away (Rev. 21:4)! We will rejoice in the Lord always, and forever!

So, dear listeners, true joy today knows that the best is yet to come! The Word of God gives you such a different perspective than much of the literature you find on the Christianity shelf in your local bookstore. There you can find a book by a "health and wealth" preacher Joel Osteen, titled, "Your Best Life Now." A book like that offers you the gospel of health, wealth, happiness, success. It's a gospel without hope, for if your best life is now, that has to mean that your next life is nothing to look forward to.

Scripture has a far different message. A life in Christ is a joy-filled life, but it's a joy that's only going to mature in the life to come! I refer to another of our churches' confessional standards, the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 22. There the question is asked, "What comfort do you receive from the article [in the Apostles' Creed] about *the life everlasting*?" And in the answer to the question, the church echoes God's Word, and says, "Since I now already feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, I shall after this life possess perfect blessedness..." There is an indissoluble connection between this life and the life hereafter. We have to recognise that. We have to understand that when Christ grabs a hold of someone today, that person doesn't remain the same as he was before. He becomes *another* kind of person, by the work of Christ and his Holy Spirit. It's so very rich, dear listeners. If you come to believe in Jesus Christ, you not only receive the promise of eternal life, but you become, as it were, acquainted with eternal life *now* already. Life, joy, blessedness is in God already today! No, it is not and won't be perfect in the present. No one yet knows *perfect* joy in God. In this life even the believer has worries and troubles, aches and sadnesses. And even the good gifts of God that the believer enjoys

in this life, he enjoys only in part. The difference between here and hereafter is this: It's the difference between a bud and a blossom. Here we have the *beginning*, after this life the *blossomed fruit*.

For as the Catechism says, it is now a heartfelt beginning of eternal joy. *Joy* exists in the Christian who looks ahead. It's a joy rooted in Christ. Joy is a conviction, it's an attitude. It's a joy I am convinced of, in my heart and in my head. I know that Christ is preparing me today in this vale of tears for the joy of Christ's return, when I shall experience undisturbed, perfect, eternal joy.

Christ today gives the beginning of eternal joy, and later he will grant the *perfection* of joy when the believer enters God's eternal kingdom in the life hereafter. For us today it's an unspeakable joy, because we cannot fully know what awaits—only that it is going to be mind-blowing. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor. 2:9 that what awaits the believer is something that “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” What a way to describe it! Do you hear what is so fascinating? Perfect life and the joy that accompanies it, is stated *negatively*. “No eye has seen, no ear heard, no heart of man imagined...” When the Bible speaks of the life everlasting, it either uses figurative language, or a description of what it is not. Somewhere else, the apostle Peter speaks of “an inheritance that can *never* perish, spoil, or fade-kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). So, *incorruptible*, *undefiled*, *unfading*-that's what awaits us. There are barely any human words to describe it. The glory and the joy of heaven is truly unspeakable. Magnificent.

Well, dear listeners, after all we have said, what do you think? How do you receive Paul's injunction in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice”? He declared these words from prison. He knew joy in prison. He knew where he stood with the Lord. And so he knew that his eternal well-being was safe, no matter what happened in the interim. Does this encourage you? Does this propel you into seeking after this joy? Or does this make you somewhat overwhelmed? “How could the life everlasting, and the joy that is promised, be for someone like me? How could I possibly be accepted as right before God and become a partaker of his joy? There is so much wrong I have committed in my life!”

Then I encourage you: Do not stare yourself blind at the sins of your past. When we focus on ourselves, we get nowhere. Rather, in all humility, fix your eyes on the God of heaven and earth. If you focus on him, if you search him out in his holy gospel, if you come under the pure preaching of Christ in a faithful church of Christ, the joy of which you have been hearing can be yours, and yours forever. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and the Spirit is promised to those who come under the instruction of God's Word every week again. Yes, the Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, are busy leading sinners by the Word to a place where there will be no more sin, no more tears and sadness. But a place of eternal joy and blessedness. Come, seek the Lord while he may be found. For your joy shall then forever abound!