

Hello dear listeners,

Today I again have the privilege of speaking with you about the matter of true joy. Last time we considered just what exactly true joy looks like. We concluded that true joy is a certain attitude, an attitude of faith—it's an attitude of believing God's gracious salvation is for me, that I am accepted by God and loved by him, and that this is a status and relationship that no one can strip away. And therefore, true joy is an attitude that transcends the circumstances of life, the weal and woe of daily existence. This joy, we said, is a Christian's joy.

But does this not all then beg the question, how do I acquire true joy? What really is the process by which I come to know true joy? Surely something this rich, this wholesome doesn't come at the snap of a finger! No, it doesn't. Indeed, to ask, "How do I acquire true joy?" is to admit that true joy, durable joy, must be a *gift* from an outside party. So what does the Lord God say on the matter?

What we learn at the outset is rather startling. It's a counter-intuitive thought that emerges from the pages of Scripture. The Lord God says that true joy needs to begin with...remorse, sadness! True joy begins with repentance! God requires us to grieve before him on account of our many sins and transgressions. We need to seek the forgiveness, mercy, and grace of the Lord. That's a very significant part of repentance; it is indeed the first element of repentance. I refer to a historical confession of faith to which the churches that support this broadcast subscribe. It's known as the Heidelberg Catechism, written in the 16th century. In one place, specifically in Lord's Day 33, it describes repentance in this way: "It is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sins." We learn from Holy Scripture what our sins have done: they have alienated us from a holy and perfect God. Just think of the very first sin in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in deliberate disobedience to the command of the Lord. And when they then heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, Adam and Eve hid themselves from the Lord God. Then the Lord called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" How did Adam respond? Gen. 3:10, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was *afraid*, because I was naked, and I hid myself." Adam and Eve knew they sinned against the Lord, and so became terrified of what he would do to them. So they fled! That's what sin has done: separated mankind from a holy and perfect God. We also learn from Scripture then what our sins deserve: everlasting death and damnation. The Lord God had said to Adam, Gen. 2:17, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." And so Adam and Eve, by disobeying God, plunged themselves into a state of death and damnation. Such a state is awful indeed! Though they remained physically alive, they became walking corpses, at enmity with God! They and all humanity with them, says Paul in Romans 5.

And so repentance begins with grieving, weeping, with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sins. But, dear listeners, that's *not* where the Bible's picture of repentance ends. Sorrow over the ugliness of your sins is supposed to get you on your feet and running! That is, sorrow leads to running to the Lord for his mercy! For he has promised in his Word that those who are remorseful over their sins, who cannot live with themselves because of their transgressions, and therefore run to the Lord, will receive his pardon. The Lord Almighty is a merciful and gracious God, and he will dry your tears of weeping and grieving and forgive your sins. And, this same God will then give you true joy!

What we are really getting at here, dear listeners, is the source of true joy, yes, true rejoicing. Your only source is found through a right relationship with the living God. As we did last time, think again of King David, the author of so many of the psalms. He found true joy when he turned his attention away from his sin, and from the adversity that came to him as a result of that sin, and toward God. When David refocused his life on the Lord, he could sing and pray about his joy in the Lord. Only through recalling his relationship with the Lord, a relationship the Lord had established with David,

could David savour true joy. For, dear listeners, what joy there truly is in knowing the Lord and the wonder of his majesty, the enormity of his power and his grace! When you come to know who God is, and therefore who you are in relation to him because of your sins, and when you fall on your knees in grief over your sins and turn to the Lord, confessing your sins, you may know joy. Begin with grief, to go on to joy because of salvation in Christ. You can rest in his constant faithfulness, that no matter what befalls you in this life, you are safe in the Lord's care. You can be lifted up by his almighty power, as he sits enthroned in the heavens! You can rejoice, as did the apostle Paul in the travails of his life. You can rejoice, as the apostle Paul commanded the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Dear listeners, I hope it is clear by now that joy, true joy, is attainable in Christ. But it's quite possible you are still wrestling through the whole process of reaching a truly joyful attitude. Allow me, then, to advance one more thought to help you seek out true joy. I think we can all attest to the fact that each of us can, and probably has, found a certain joy in *other people's* experiences. You and I might be a bit melancholy about some good things in our own life, but we get excited about something good in the life of friends or family, such as an engagement, a pregnancy, a job offer, etc. You can get excited with others.

Well, in a somewhat similar fashion, you can also enter into the true, everlasting joy of God. Yes, if God has *joy*, then you can come into that joy as well! And does God have joy? Certainly! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, spoke near the time of his death about his joy. John 15:11, he said to his disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." Later, in John 17, where we see the Lord Jesus praying to his heavenly Father, he says in vs. 13, "But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." Christ, true man and true God, had and has joy. And there are many reasons for his joy, which we don't have time now to discuss. But for you and me, it is sufficient to know that the God of heaven and earth is the *joyful* God. If he, the God who is all-powerful, and all-knowing, and therefore totally aware of the brokenness of this world, and the sin that pervades all flesh, if he can have true joy, then also I can enter into joy. Joy, the author C.S. Lewis once wrote, is the real business of heaven, and our present job, is to be about the Father's business. Come then, pursue the joy that comes through bowing your knee to the King, Jesus Christ, Saviour of all who believe in him.