

Joy of the Lord

by R. Stanley

The sermon emphasizes that true joy comes from the Lord and is experienced through salvation, submission, and community with other believers.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:1, Nehemiah 8:10, Psalm 85:6, Psalm 119:54, Psalm 126:5, Isaiah 12:3, John 15:11, Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 2 Timothy 1:12, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "Christian Joy", "Spiritual Strength"

Description

R. Stanley preaches on the importance of rejoicing in the Lord, emphasizing the distinction between happiness and joy. Joy, independent of circumstances, is a source of strength and makes us better in our roles. The sermon delves into the joy of salvation, submission, saintliness, the Scriptures, singing, supplication, fellowship with saints, soulwinning, sacrificial service, and the anticipation of the Second Coming of the Lord.

Transcript

The Bible repeatedly commands us to "rejoice in the Lord" (Phil 3:1; 4:4). These are actually the words Apostle Paul wrote from inside the prison to the Christians in Philippi. It's usually the visitors to prisons who would encourage the inmates. But here we see the other way round! That's what points out the difference between "happiness" and "joy."

Happiness depends on what happens; but joy is independent of happenings. That's why it's called joy "of the Lord." Ezra told the people during restoration, "The joy of the Lord is your strength!" (Neh 8:10c). Yes, joy makes us strong. A joyful doctor is a better doctor than others. A joyful student is a better student. A joyful teacher is a better teacher. And so on.

The "joy of the Lord" is presented by Jesus as "My joy" (Jn 15:11; 17:13). The heartcry of the Psalmist was, "O Lord, will You not revive us again that Your People may rejoice IN You?" (Psa 85:6). Yes, revival restores "joy and gladness" to God's people (Joel 1:16). Let's study here what the "joy of the Lord" means, and seek God to revive us personally and corporately to experience it.

1. Joy of Salvation

This means rejoicing in the salvation of the LORD.

It's at our conversion to Christ that we first experience this joy. It's told about the Philippian Jailor that "he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household" (Acts 16:34). From then on it starts growing everyday. Prophet Isaiah portrays this ongoing experience in Isa 12:3, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Drawing water from wells was a daily routine in the Mediterranean. With this daily experience the redeemed shall sing, "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for YAH, the Lord, is my Strength and my Song; He also has become my Salvation" (v2). It's not just that God blesses me with salvation; He Himself becomes my Salvation! This perennial joy is ours through a daily and constant remembrance of salvation because of the finished work of Christ.

Problems or losses do not affect joy if it's in the Lord's salvation. Everything else may change or fluctuate but the salvation of the Lord is constant. This was Prophet Habakkuk's testimony: Hab 3:17,18, "Though the fig tree may not blossom ... no herd in the stalls -- yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation!" Blessing or no blessing, rejoicing in the Lord's salvation, because salvation, which is the greatest of all blessings, is constant.

In the incident of Isaac being laid by Abraham on the altar, we have a type of the substitutionary death of Christ. Commenting on this, Jesus said, "Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad!" (Jn 8:56). Yes, Abraham fore-saw the salvation to be provided by the Lord, and named that place as Jehovah-Jireh! (Gen 22:14). How much more we can rejoice today, living on this side of Calvary!

Mary had the same experience. Following the Angelic announcement, she burst forth into singing, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Lk 1:46,47). Priest Zacharias' song was similar: "Blessed is the Lord God ... he has redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us" (vv 68,69). This is exactly what Hannah rejoiced over (1 Sam 2:1)

Oh Beloved, "Salvation" is our helmet (Eph 6:17). Dare not to go out without wearing it! Any other fracture is not as bad as head injury! In our daily path the devil sets so many traps. Be guarded. Times of darkness are our usual lot. Nothing else will lift up our heads like the remembrance of God's "so great salvation" (Heb 2:3,4). Do not allow the devil to accuse and condemn you! (Rom 8:1; Rev 12:10,11).

2. Joy of Submission

This is rejoicing over submitting of ourselves to the LORD.

Prophet Isaiah portrays Christ as "a Man of sorrows" (Isa 53:3). The strongest test for His submission to the Father came in the Garden of Gethsemane. In spite of His mental agony over His forthcoming torturous death, He submitted Himself to the Father, saying, "Not My will but Yours!" (Lk 22:42). Commenting on this act, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross" (Heb 12:2). Though angelic help was available to Jesus for every beck and call, the Bible speaks of two critical instances when angels came to strengthen Him and minister to Him. One was following Christ's refusal to submit to Satan in the wilderness (Mt 4:10,11), and the other following His total surrender to the Father's will in the Garden (Lk 22:42,43). One incident marked the beginning of His public ministry, and the other the end! There's nothing like the joy of submission to God throughout our life.

In the midst of intense suffering Paul declared, "I suffer ... but not ashamed ... I'm persuaded that He is able to keep what I've committed to Him until that day" (2 Tim 1:12). Fanny Crosby, 1823-1915, patiently endured total blindness all through her life, in total submission to God the Father. She translated her life into her world-famous hymn --

Perfect submission, all is at rest;

I in my Saviour, am happy and blest;

Watching and waiting, looking above;

Filled with His goodness, lost in His love!

Our anxieties at workspot over injustice can be calmed down when we realize that no man can promote or demote us; and the Lord will do what's best for us. Let's also submit our ambitions and aspirations to God. It's by submitting under the mighty hand of God we can experience exaltation (1 Pet 5:6). It's natural to desire promotions, but we must balance it with what the Lord says: "Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them" (Jer 45:5). Otherwise we will fall into manipulative practices.

Submission has a horizontal component also -- that is "submitting to one another." The result is exultant joy through the overflowing Spirit (Eph 5:18-21).

3. Joy of Saintliness/Sanctification

This means rejoicing in walking holy before the LORD.

When Ezra read out to people from the Book of the Law of Moses, they were convicted of their sins and wept (Neh 8:1,8). Conviction of sin is through the Word of God and the Spirit of God, but condemnation is from Satan. By showing our sins to us, God is only interested in leading us to experience His forgiveness and cleansing. This is what Ezra, Nehemiah and the Levites made the people to understand. They said, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep... Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (vv 9-11).

Sin is the worst joy-killer. Psalmist David lost his joy when he committed sin and covered it for two years. He said, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long ... My vitality was turned into drought of summer" (Psa 32:3,4). How cruel! But under conviction when he confessed his sin, he could pray for the restoration of the "joy of salvation" (Psa 51:12). The Bible asserts, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Psa 97:11).

It's told about the earthly life of Jesus that He loved righteousness and hated lawlessness (Heb 1:9). These are two sides of holiness. It's by hating lawlessness our love for righteousness is intensified. Because of this type of practical holiness, Jesus was "anointed with the oil of gladness." All holy people are happy; but all happy people may not be holy. Holy life is jolly life!

Guilt and gladness cannot stay together. When guilt is removed by the thorough cleansing of the Blood of Jesus, radiant joy floods in. Before speaking of the cleansing power of this Blood, Apostle John writes, "These things we write to you that your joy may be full" (1 Jn 1:4-9). Apostle Paul who wrote, "Rejoice always," also added, "Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess 5:16,22). This means we are to walk in truthfulness, sincerity, honesty and transparency. Hypocrisy kills the inner joy. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart!" (Mt 5:8). The word "blessed" means "happy!"

It's true that holy life is difficult. But rejoice over the fact that God who has commanded us, "Be holy," has also promised, "I am the Lord who makes you holy!" (Lev 20:7,8; 21:8).

4. Joy of the Scriptures

This means rejoicing in the Word of the LORD.

It is the Psalmist, more than any other writer in the Bible, who brings out this aspect of joy. The references are quite many. Here are a few of them --

Psalms 119:54, "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." On the average, life on earth has more pressures than pleasures. This is the curse of the "fall" (Gen 3:14-19) from which we have not yet been delivered (Rom 8:18-23), though we have been redeemed from the curse of the "Law" (Gal 3:13). Of course our stay on earth is temporary. It is a "house of pilgrimage," as the Psalmist has rightly said. Lest we sink in sorrow, let the Scriptures become our song!

Psalms 119:92, "Unless Your Law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction." Whether or not you feel like reading the Bible, as you go through the storms of life, turn to its pages so you will be uplifted in your spirit. Daily newspapers are more depressing than delightful. Pessimism has taken hold of mankind. It's through the Scriptures we get "hope" and "comfort" (Rom 15:4).

Our low spirits begin to leap for joy when we get into the pages of the Holy Writ. The voice of the Lord from the written Word makes us "skip like a calf" (Psa 29:6). It's "full of majesty!" (v4b). When we are richly filled with the "Word of Christ," we burst forth into singing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col 3:16).

The testimony of the Psalmist both challenges us and encourages us to delight in God's Word. The very beginning of the Book of Psalms refers to this dimension: "Blessed (= happy) is the man ... whose delight is in the Law of the Lord" (Psa 1:2). A systematic morning meditation of God's Word keeps us blissful all through the day. The very Word of God becomes our delight (Psa 119:24,77,174). Everytime you get a new inspiration from God's Word, it will be like "rejoicing over treasures" (Psa 119:162). We will exclaim, "How sweet are Your Words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psa 119:103).

A casual reading of the Bible does no good, but a painstaking study is rewarding.

5. Joy of Singing

This is the joy that comes through praising and worshipping the LORD.

There is both individual and corporate worship. Prov 29:6b, "The righteous sings and rejoices." Let not the CDs and DVDs do all the singing! Praise God for the worship hymns of the past and the choruses of these days. Keep a standard hymnbook or songbook with you. Even if you don't know all the tunes, you can read through the stanzas. Some of them are amazingly rich. Praise gives us wings!

Referring to the joy of corporate worship, David recollected, "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord ... to give thanks to the Name of the Lord" (Psa 122:1,4). The spiritual warmth we experience when we lift our voices together with the other children of God is unmistakable. David confessed, "O God, You are holy, who inhabit the praises of Israel" (Psa 22:3).

There's fullness of joy in God's presence (Psa 16:11; Acts 2:28). This was quoted by Apostle Peter to defend the hilarious manifestations of the Holy Spirit's outpouring on Christ's disciples! They worshipped God for His "wonderful works" (Acts 2:11b). The inevitable outcome of the Spirit's fullness in our hearts is "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" and "singing and making melody to

the Lord" (Eph 5:18-20). This is the joy of singing!

Praise strengthens us when we become weak because of the heavy burdens and pains. It's praise that fills our hearts with supernatural joy so our "Baca" becomes a "Beracha!" (Psa 84:5-7). "Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You!" (v4).

Beloved, don't become too busy with your work to find time for worship. Don't begin to worship your work. God is pleased more with the "sacrifices of our lips" (Heb 13:15) than the "work of our hands" (Hos 14:2,3). Job satisfaction is not the same as joy. It may soon leave you empty inside.

No two days are alike. Some days we are up; other days we are downcast. But the Bible says that God "crowns the YEAR with His goodness" (Psa 65:11). As for God this is true of everyday. So we are to "shout for joy" and "sing" (v13b). Let's begin each day saying, "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psa 118:24).

Sing when the day is bright;

Sing through the darkest night;

Everyday, all the way,

Let's sing, sing, sing!

6. Joy of Supplication

This is rejoicing in our prayers to the LORD.

One of the outstanding promises of God in the Book of Isaiah: "I will make them joyful in My house of prayer" (Isa 56:7). Prayer is communion and communication with the Lord. What can be more joyful than this holy exercise? Prayer is sharing our feelings with our Heavenly Father. It lifts the burdens off us. Prayer is spending time with the Lover of our souls. It fills the vacuum in our hearts. No wonder the hymnologist William W. Walford, a blind lay-preacher, 1772-1850, sang --

Sweet hour of prayer,

Sweet hour of prayer,

That calls me from a world of care ...

Getting answers to our prayers is undoubtedly a joyous thing. Jesus Himself said, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (Jn 16:24). But more than answers to prayer, praying itself is delightful. The fact that we have a God who is near us and to whom we can speak is what makes this an exciting experience. Moses challenged before the Israelites, "What great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?" (Dt 4:7). David put it this way: Psa 65:2, "O You who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come." This is what made Joseph Scriven, 1819-1886, sing, "What a Friend we have in Jesus!"

Hannah was "in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish" (1 Sam 1:10). She poured out her soul before the Lord (v15). Priest Eli encouraged her saying that God would grant her petition (v17). Even before the actual answer to her prayer came, we read, "her face was no longer sad" (v18b).

This is the joy of prayer. The very first line in her song was, "My heart rejoices in the LORD" (2:1).

Apostle Paul's teaching is along the same lines. He wrote to the Philippian Christians, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice ... Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:4,6,7). Whether or not our requests are granted or problems solved, what's guaranteed is the "peace" of God! This is what "ununderstandable" peace means. Yes, as the Psalmist confesses, "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul" (Psa 94:19).

7. Joy with the Saints

This is rejoicing in the company of the people of the LORD.

David's description of the joy in the fellowship of God's people is unparalleled. Psalm 133, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" He compares the refreshing nature of this fellowship to "precious oil" and "dew of mountains." The warmth of fellowship has no substitute.

Jesus promised His very presence where two or three are gathered in His Name (Mt 18:20). We have already seen that it is in His presence there's fullness of joy (Acts 2:28). The fellowship of God's people is like a family gathering with the head of the family. It creates a celebrative mood. The "general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are registered in Heaven" is called a "festal gathering!" (Heb 12:23). That's why the Bible often calls us to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16). In Romans 16 the word "greet" comes 16 times!

As long as we are in this world we never outgrow the need of fellowship with God's people. The apostles, though busy in their itinerant ministries, often returned to their company of brothers and sisters in the Lord. Apostle Paul almost begs the believers in Rome to pray for him so he would somehow be able to visit them and be "refreshed" (Rom 1:10; 15:32). We know how much Jesus longed for the company of His disciples, however imperfect they might be. The very first reason of the choice of the Twelve was that they might be "with Him" (Mk 3:14). Other things were only next. Fellowship with God's children has been the longing of Jesus even from eternity past! Here's His testimony: Prov 8:30,31, "I was beside Him (the Father) as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and My delight was with the sons of men!" He considered God's children as His "brothers and sisters" (Mk 3:33-35).

Men and women by and large these days are sad because the society is individualistic. Folks are excited with their facebook contacts but not enthusiastic enough to interact with the members of their local fellowships. The enemy from the beginning subtly provides substitutes. There will be both good and bad, but he knows that man in his fallen nature would choose the bad. Beware! There's not only joy but also safety in the company of saints (Eccl 4:9-12).

8. Joy of Soulwinning

This is rejoicing in bringing people to the LORD.

The joy of the soulwinner is the joy of the harvest. Psa 126:5,6, "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." In the context of soulwinning Jesus said that "both he who sows

and he who reaps will rejoice together" (Jn 4:36). Any Christian without a heart for evangelism and passion for souls will be joyless.

There's nothing like the joy of the shepherd who found the one lost sheep. When he found it, he laid it on his shoulders, "rejoicing." When he came home, he called his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep" (Lk 15:5,6). In the same way, when the woman found her lost coin, she called her friends to rejoice with her (vv 8,9). The only place in the New Testament where "dancing" is mentioned in good sense is when the prodigal son returned home (v25). Jesus gave these three illustrations just to point out the importance of seeking the lost and the intense joy that accompanies it both on earth and in Heaven (vv 7,10). Are you a soulwinner?

The sufferings of Jesus were just for the salvation of souls. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be "satisfied" with His "travail" (Isa 53:11,12). All the difficulties encountered in soulwinning and evangelism will be forgotten when we harvest the fruits. The remembrance of labour pain is gone because of the "joy" that a baby is born! (Jn 16:21). O the joy of bringing forth children into the Kingdom of God!

What is a greater service than to show our fellowmen the way to Heaven where they would live endlessly? What can be a greater joy than to be instruments in the hands of God in saving men and women from eternal fire and preparing them for eternal glory? "He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (Js 5:20). Apostle Paul rejoiced over even those who preached the Gospel with ulterior motives (Phil 1:15-18).

How much at times songleaders and pastors have to struggle to enthuse the congregations to worship God with joy! Most of what we see in worship services is not spontaneous; it's just worked up. Is there a solution? Send the congregational members out into the streets, marketplaces and villages to share the Gospel with the lost and the least. They shall return with uncontrollable joy (Psa 126:5,6). This is the only way to restore jubilant worship (Acts 2:46,47).

9. Joy of Sacrifice

This is rejoicing in sacrificial services to people in the Name of the LORD.

We are called to serve people in the spirit of Jesus who said, "Not to be served but to serve!" (Mt 20:28). Such a service demands sacrifice. According to Apostle Paul it's literally pouring out of ourselves for the good of people. He wrote to the Philippian Christians, "I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith; I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me" (Phil 2:17,18). Sacrificial service fills the one who serves, as well as the one who is served, with serene joy.

Sincere and sacrificial labour for the glory of God and the good of man will not go unnoticed by the Almighty (Heb 6:10). Though the full reward is only in eternity, God blesses us with incommunicable inner joy. This will be seen on our smile towards the poor beneficiaries. Such an inner joy so satisfies us that we will not look for any human applause or appreciation. If all that we look for is only the gladdening of God's heart, identifying ourselves with the poor, the marginalized and the helpless becomes easy. The striking Biblical examples are Job, David and Jesus.

Job: "Have I not wept for him who is in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?" (Job 30:25).

David: "When they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth ... I bowed down heavily, as one mourns for his mother" (Psa 35:13,14).

Jesus: "I was hungry ... homeless ... imprisoned ... sick" (Mt 25:35,36).

Pioneer missionary work calls for all sorts of sacrifices -- comforts, friends, children, and so on. On top of all these, there's persecution and opposition. In Paul's missionary journeys the "Holy Spirit testified in every city, saying, that chains and tribulations awaited him" (Acts 20:22,23). Here's how he responded to it: "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus" (v24). For Moses the joy of suffering with the people of God was superior to the passing pleasures of Egypt (Heb 11:24-26).

10. Joy of Second Coming

This is rejoicing in the hope of the return of our LORD.

This call to rejoice in the Lord's return is pointedly given in Psalm 96:11-13, "Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and all its fullness; let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord, FOR He is coming!" What else can uplift the pessimistic world?

The early disciples lived with the every-moment-expectation of the soon return of the Lord. The very word of greeting exchanged between them was, "Maranatha!" (1 Cor 16:22).

Turning again to Philippians, the Epistle of Joy, Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand!" (Phil 4:4,5).

The prescription to the bereaved to come out of their sorrow is to be reminded of the glorious return of the Lord (1 Thess 4:16-18). The Second Coming will usher in the New Heaven and New Earth where there would be "no more death, no more sorrow, nor crying" (Rev 21:4). These words are not imaginary but "true and faithful" (v5). We would then have entered the "joy of the Lord" -- in the literal sense (Mt 25:21,23).

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