

Joy Inexpressible and Full of Glory

by Samuel Storms

The quintessential Christian life involves loving, trusting, and enjoying Jesus, resulting in a joy that is inexpressible and full of glory.

Duration: 36:35

Scripture: Psalm 119:67, Psalm 119:71, Matthew 6:33, 1 Peter 1:6-8

Topics: "Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having the gospels as a record of Jesus' life and teachings. He suggests that having the gospels is almost better than being physically present with Jesus because they provide a complete and inspired account of his actions and words. The speaker also highlights the role of trials in deepening our love, trust, and enjoyment of Jesus. He encourages the audience to physically express their hunger and thirst for more of Jesus and prays for the Spirit of God to awaken them to this desire. The sermon concludes by emphasizing that Jesus is the unifying factor in our affections and that our love and belief in him should lead to rejoicing and enjoyment.

Transcript

You're listening to the Bridgeway Church podcast audio found at BridgewayChurch.com forward slash podcast or on iTunes keywords Bridgeway Church. Turn in your Bibles if you have them to 1 Peter chapter 1. If you don't have a Bible, you can follow on the screen. And quite simply, it's not the only expression.

It's not the only way it's made manifest. But what you watched today or experienced today, and it may be confusing to you. I know some of you it may be a jolt given your background and the denomination or churches that you've been raised in.

But really what this was all about is 1 Peter 1.8. In this, excuse me, verse 8. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. And though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

Loving Him, trusting Him, enjoying Him. That's what God has been doing in our hearts here this morning. And I pray that He will seal that upon your soul as well.

Let's pray for just a moment. Father, we do again thank You for all that You have done in our hearts today. Lord, I pray that the reality of this truth in this passage would simply reinforce and solidify in our hearts and

our lives what You have done in so many here this morning.

The freedom, the joy inexpressible to worship, to dance, to celebrate, to kneel, to weep, to laugh, to experience the fullness of all that You are. Thank You, Lord. Thank You.

Lord, I pray that Your Word would come alive now especially in us. Lord, even as we sang this morning, we are hungry and thirsty for more of You. Would You now satisfy that hunger and quench that thirst with Your Son? And we ask that and pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. I want you to define Christian for me this morning in your minds. Shift out of neutral.

Engage your brain for just a moment. Define what it means to be a Christian. When all of the secondary issues are stripped away and all the superficial elements that are so often associated with Christianity are set aside, what's left? How would you define the very essence and the core of what it means to be a believer? If I were to ask all of you to write down your answer this morning and turn it in and we were to spend some time reading those answers, I suspect that it would be very enlightening, probably a little bit shocking to get some of the opinions as to what constitutes the very essence and core of the Christian faith.

The reason I ask you all that question today is because I believe that Peter gives us an answer. You see, I have a theory about verse 8 of 1 Peter chapter 1. And the theory quite simply is, and here comes one of those big \$10 words, okay, so just be patient. What we find here is quintessential Christianity.

Quintessential Christianity. Now, I don't know about you, I just love that word. You say, well I would too if I knew what it meant, if I could spell it.

You look up the word quintessential in the dictionary, it's defined this way. The pure and concentrated essence of something. The pure and concentrated essence.

Or again, the most perfect embodiment of something. So I ask you this morning, what is quintessential Christianity? Is it going to church, as traditionally defined? Tithing? Not getting drunk? You know, praying? Those are all important elements, don't get me wrong. But there has to be something more, something deeper, something purer, something more fundamental and basic to what it is to being a Christian.

And Peter tells us what it is right here in verse 8. Now, why do I say that? Why do I have this theory about what verse 8 is saying to us this morning? It's because of the context. Let me just remind you very quickly, if you were not here, and for those of you who were, just to refresh your memory, about what Peter has been saying in verses 6 and 7. You remember that he's writing to a people who are being persecuted, who are being slandered, who are being oppressed because of their faith. He talks about it all through this epistle.

And yet he says to us, as we saw last week in verses 6 and 7, you can endure, you can persevere, if you know two things about trials and suffering. If you know their duration and their design. He said in verse 6, their duration is for a little while.

As hard, as prolonged as it may seem, and it sounds oftentimes and feels in your life as if it's never going to end, Peter says, oh yes it is. In view of eternity and the glory that is reserved for us, it's only for a little while. But then he also talks in verse 7 about the design of our troubles.

And we talked about this at length last week, so I won't go into any depth. But he said that all of this is so that your faith, which is more precious than gold, can be refined and purified, so that when Christ returns, there will be praise and honor and glory for those who have endured. When I read verses 6 and 7, and this context of suffering and trial, and what it does to us, I'm reminded of Psalm 119.

Where the psalmist said in verse 67, Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep thy word. Or again in verse 71, It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. You see, suffering has this unique capacity, more so than anything else in life, to highlight the differences in the human heart between what is false and hypocritical as over against what is true and sincere.

If you think about it, when times get hard, whether it's what Brooks and Elizabeth have gone through with Isabel, or what some of the rest of you have endured, you can respond in one of two ways. You will either become embittered toward God and run from Him, or you will become desperate for Him and run to Him. There really are no other options.

You cannot be indifferent in times of hardship. Hypocrisy is impossible when you're suffering. It really is.

Because it brings to the surface the true intent of your soul. It exposes the human heart either to lay hold of God in the midst of confusion, and heartache, and disappointment, or to shake an angry fist at Him and just run the other direction. And what Peter is saying here in verses 6 and 7 is that the effect of trials and hardship on our faith is analogous to the effect of gold when it is run through the fire.

As gold is run through the fire, the impurities are sifted out and separated. So also, when we go through trial and hardship, hypocrisy, and superficiality, and self-confidence, and pride, and reliance on money and achievement don't survive suffering. And so what Peter is doing is this.

It seems to me that when he now comes to verse 8, he's saying, folks, look, here's what's left of your Christian faith when it's gone through the fire of trial. When the impurities have been burned away, here is what remains. Here, Peter says, is quintessential faith.

Here's the core, grade A Christianity, if you will, that remains once suffering has done its work. It's like, I wish I had been there to see this. I don't know how he did it.

This may not represent it well. But if you've ever seen pictures or actually stood in the presence of the statue, David, that was done by Michelangelo, it's just unbelievable. And I almost have it envisioned in my mind that there was this massive block of granite.

I don't even know if it's made of granite, maybe something else. But Michelangelo comes to that, and he has an image in his mind. He has a picture of a man.

And he uses hammer and chisel and all of his skills to chip away and to remove everything that doesn't look like that man. That's what God does in our suffering, in our trial, in our hardship. He uses it like a hammer and a chisel to chip away in your life anything that doesn't look like Jesus.

And that's what Peter is talking about in verse 8. Or again, it's like an athlete who is in the off season and just becomes a couch potato. You know, the muscles begin to atrophy, the reflexes begin to lose their sharpness. He begins to put on weight.

His lung capacity diminishes until he begins to work out. And he rigorously applies himself to training and exercise. And it burns away all of the excess weight.

And it begins to hone his body. That's what trials do. So what Peter is saying here, if I understand him correctly, is when we understand the duration and the design of our suffering, when we go through that fiery time, however long, hard, and prolonged it may be, what comes out on the other end, what comes out the other side, is verse 8. Loving Jesus.

Trusting Jesus. And enjoying Jesus. That's what the quintessence of being a Christian really is.

Now, real quickly, I do want you to see something here. Because it's important for us living in 2009 to grasp this. Do you notice how twice in this verse Peter makes a point of the fact that we haven't seen Jesus physically? Do you notice that? He says there in verse 8, Though you have not seen Him in the past... And Peter is saying, in effect, I have.

I walked with Him for those three years. I have seen Him eye to eye, face to face. But these believers in northern Turkey back in the first century to whom he's writing have not had that privilege.

And then he goes on to say, Though you have not seen Him, you still love Him. And though you do not now see Him, yet you believe in Him and rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. His point simply is you and I are not at a disadvantage to the apostles.

There is no reason why we cannot have the same relationship with the Lord Jesus, the same affection, the same trust, the same excitement, the same intimacy that Peter and James and John and Matthew and Mark and so many others did who actually walked with Him. In fact, I wish I had time to go into it. There's actually a case that can be made that having the Gospels is almost better than having been there.

Because you see, the people who were actually with Jesus only saw snippets here and there. Only heard maybe one message here or there. But with the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we have the inspired record of the panorama of what Christ did and what He said.

And we have the promise of the Spirit that if we study them and immerse ourselves in them, that we will see Him not with the physical eye necessarily, but we will see Him with the eyes of the heart in a more glorious and complete way than even those who were with Him in the flesh. Now, even if you don't agree with that, even if you're sitting there saying, yeah, but I would have loved to have been there, I still would have liked to have seen Him and watched Him do the things that He did. Okay.

But don't miss the point. The fact that you weren't there is not an obstacle. It's not a hindrance to experiencing Him in the fullest.

Now, let's look quickly at these three elements. The quintessential Christian life, it involves loving Jesus, believing, trusting in Jesus and enjoying Jesus. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him.

Now, that word love, as you know, defined in any number of ways today. What does Peter mean? He's talking about what I call unashamed, extravagant affection for the Son of God. Unashamed, extravagant affection for the Son of God.

It's what we see in Mary when she came up and broke that alabaster vial and couldn't have cared less what the disciples thought of her. Violated every social code, any sense of propriety and just poured out

the most expensive thing she had as an expression of her love for the Lord Jesus Christ. It's what happened here this morning.

Some of you might have been uncomfortable by the open, physical, verbal displays that occurred. That's unashamed, extravagant affection for the Lord Jesus Christ. It's what David had in mind when he said, I'm like a thirsty deer in a land where there is no water.

I'm desperate to drink, Lord Jesus, at what You can provide and what You alone can give. This means loving Jesus, experiencing Him as precious and dear. It means treasuring Him above all earthly treasures.

It means valuing Him above all that is valuable, prizing Him above all that is costly, and praising Him above all that is praiseworthy. That's at the very core of what it means to be a Christian, without which you cannot be a Christian. Secondly, it's trusting Jesus.

Notice He says there in verse 8, that though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him. Now, don't misunderstand this. He's not simply saying that you kind of check off in your mind your agreement with all sorts of theological truths.

He's not talking about mental assent to ideas, although that is certainly involved, because if you don't have true, proper ideas about who Jesus is, if you don't have biblically shaped concepts about who He is and what He did, then your love for Him is just going to degenerate into infatuation, and you might end up worshiping a Jesus of your own creative imagination rather than the real one. So yes, at the bottom of all this is an affirmation on the basis of what Scripture says about who He is, but it's more than that. It's trusting Him.

This belief is yielding to Him. It is giving your life to Him, confident that He will guide you, turning to Him daily, moment by moment in prayer, and trusting that He will have the best answer and that He will provide in a way that will bring honor to Him and good to your own soul. Third, it is enjoying Jesus.

Loving Jesus, trusting Jesus, and enjoying Jesus. Did you notice how Peter describes this joy? There are two phrases here. They're important.

First, he says, this joy is inexpressible. It is unutterable. The big word is, it is ineffable.

You can't define it. You can't do with this joy what I did with the word quintessential. You can't go to a dictionary and find words that are adequate to explain it.

You never know what this joy is until somebody asks you about it and you just turn mute. You just go... There are no words to express it. It is inexpressible.

It is unutterable. There are no dictionaries. There are no encyclopedias, no books published.

You can't go to dictionary.com on the internet and find ways to articulate this. It is inexpressible joy. But notice also, it is joy that is full of glory.

It's not carnal joy. It's not worldly joy. It's not fleshly joy.

It's glorified joy. It's the Shekinah of God in the Old Testament that radiated in the temple that has now come to dwell in your heart when you love and you trust Jesus. But more than that, I think Peter is actually talking about the glory of the age to come that has broken into the present and we have a foretaste of it

now in our relationship with Him.

And what makes this joy pure and righteous and holy rather than dark and ugly and perverted as is the case with so much so-called joy in the world is the object or the person enjoyed. If you enjoy pornography or cruelty or abuse or hatred or unforgiveness, it's going to shape your soul. But if the focus of your joy is Jesus, there will be purity and humility and love and sacrifice.

And it's also interesting, there's no way you can have one of these without the other two. If you have two, you've got to have the third. Can you imagine saying, well, Lord, I really do love you.

I have deep and abiding affections for you in my heart, but I don't know if I trust you. I don't really know if I've got much confidence in all your promises. That's ridiculous.

Or to say, yeah, I'm going to trust you. I'm going to give my life to you. I'm going to follow your lead, but I'm really cold when it comes to who you are.

I have no feelings of affection or love. Or, you know, I really kind of love you and I'm going to trust you, but, man, you're boring, God. And there's just no joy at all.

That's just not possible. These three interact with each other and they feed and build on one another. Now, I hope you realize, folks, that not everybody likes what I'm saying right now.

Do you realize that? There are a lot of Christians sitting in gatherings and in church meetings all over the world right now who would be really uneasy with this kind of language. Because talking about affections and emotions and passions is really threatening to a lot of Christians. You may feel threatened and ill at ease this morning.

You know, I've run into Christians who say, well, you know, I can't deny the existence of affections and passions, but I kind of keep them at arm's length, you know. I'm afraid that if I yield to them too much or if I cultivate them, it's going to make my theology squishy and fuzzy and I'm going to lose the sharp edge of my commitment to Christ. Other people, you know, they have this fear about anything that might arouse affections.

By the way, just a little aside, do you realize that the worship wars that have characterized American Christianity for the last 25 years are almost entirely due to this fact? I have a theory, because I've gone through the worship wars. Tired of fighting them. And I've heard all sorts of arguments.

Well, it's about style. No, it's not. Or it's about the lyrics.

No, it's not. Or it's about an electric guitar rather than a Baldwin piano. No, it's not.

What makes people angry and uneasy and resistant to different expressions of worship is they feel something stirred inside. They feel the words and the work of the Spirit in a setting like this beginning to arouse them and they feel all of a sudden their defenses begin to melt and it scares them because they're real ill at ease with their affections and with their feelings and they don't want anybody to see them. They don't want anybody to think that I'm the kind of person that could weep when I worship or I could kneel or I could lift my hands or that I could dance.

At the core of the worship wars is this whole issue of the fear of affections and passions like love and trust and joy inexpressible and full of glory. And yet all through the Bible it's just filled with affections. Sue

mentioned I just wrote a book on the Psalms.

I'm not going to take time to talk about it much this morning. Maybe some other time. Do you know why it was so easy for me to write 50 daily meditations on the Psalms? Do you know why if I asked you all this morning what's your favorite book in the Bible 90% of you would say the Psalms.

It's because it's just overflowing with passion. It's the honesty of the psalmist. David and his grief, his sorrow, his joy, his fear, his gratitude, his mourning, his love, his hatred it all spills out in the Psalms.

That's why everybody loves him. When you read Paul don't think of him as this ivory-towered theologian. Here is a man who talks about the bowels of love.

I mean that's the literal language he used. You don't find it in your English translation. The letter says the bowels of love.

Talks about anguish, weeping. His heart is open wide to the Corinthians. Think of Jesus who prayed with loud crying and tears.

Who many, many times is described as experiencing earnest desire and pity and compassion and amazement and so many other affections of the heart. And don't think for a moment people that this loving Jesus and trusting Jesus and enjoying Jesus which is the quintessence of Christianity is something that you can keep inside. It is a personal matter.

It is not a private one. If it's real and genuine it will express itself. It will change the way you live.

Let me give you an example. One of my dearest friends is Lyle Dorsett. Lyle, I think he's about 70 now.

Taught for 22 years in the Christian Education Department at Wheaton College. He's now teaching at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. And as I was thinking this week about the embodiment of these three elements Lyle just came to mind.

Why? Lyle was an atheist and an alcoholic. Teaching history at the University of Denver back in the late 60's and early 70's. And the Lord gloriously saved him as he was reading C.S. Lewis.

And he's probably the leading C.S. Lewis scholar in the world today. And I can recommend many of his books to you. Lyle and his wife Mary, who are among our very dearest friends learned what it meant to trust Jesus.

When it's talked about believing in Him although you haven't seen Him they learned the hard way. Their little girl, Erica, 8, almost 9 years old came down with a fever one morning. Mary called the doctor and the doctor said Oh, it's nothing.

Just give her a couple of Tylenol and she'll be better. As the day progressed, Erica's condition got worse. Later in the afternoon, Lyle called the doctor again and he said Well, I'm at a dinner party and I'm not going to be free for a couple of more hours but if you'll bring her in later to the hospital, we'll take a look at her.

Mary was holding little Erica in her arms, trying to comfort her. Erica looked up at Mary, 8 years old, and said Mommy, I'm going to die tonight. Mary said, No, no, no, you won't die.

She said, Oh, I think I'm going to die tonight and I'm afraid I won't see Jesus. She said, Oh, Erica, if you die tonight, you will be with Jesus. You know that.

We've taught you that. She seemed to take comfort from that. A few minutes later, she fell into a coma.

Three hours later, she was dead. How do you think Lyle and Mary survived that? I don't know that I could. It's believing in Jesus.

Trusting His promises. Knowing His goodness. Yielding themselves to His mysterious ways that they can't figure out.

And if that weren't enough, 2001, Mary's diagnosed with breast cancer. Had major surgery. She's a cancer survivor and we pray each day that she will live just another day, another year.

She seems to be doing well. How do you get through that? It's because you trust Christ. You believe in Him.

You have faith in Him. You yield to Him. You have confidence in Him.

How do I know that Lyle has love for Jesus that Peter talks about? I'll tell you how I know. Because I watch how it spills out in his love for others. In 1992, Lyle and Mary established a ministry in Fresno, Mexico.

It's one of the most poverty-stricken areas in that country. Alcoholism is rampant. Witchcraft dominates the lives of the people.

Abuse is just off the charts. And they established CCFI, Christ for Children International. CCFI, that's it.

Christ for Children International. And they minister to these kids. Every afternoon, they meet with them.

They speak into their lives. They pray for them. They tutor them.

They counsel them. They've planted a church in Fresno. Wheaton College students sign up every year to go down and spend two to four years with them.

If you'd like to do that, I'll give you the information. They're always looking for those who want to come and invest their lives in others. You know how I know that Lyle Dorsett has unashamed, extravagant affection for the Son of God? It's not primarily because of what he does in his prayer closet, although that's involved.

It's because it spilled out in giving his life and his time and his energy and his money along with Mary for the sake of those otherwise anonymous children in Fresno. How do I know that he has joy inexpressible and full of glory? It's very simple. I've actually heard it from their lips.

I'm not kidding you. Students at Wheaton who would go to Lyle for counsel, for advice, whatever, they would walk out of his office singing. And they said it.

And it was amazing. I heard my nephew say it, whom Lyle actually mentored and disciplined at Wheaton College. He said it was so odd.

He said, I wasn't thinking about it, but I'd walk out of his office and I was singing. And then he talked to a couple of his friends, and they said, you know, I had the strangest experience. I went to see Dr. Dorsett,

and when I left, I was singing.

He said, really? You too? His joy just so robustly fills the room that you can't help but be affected by it. That's what it means to love and to believe in and to rejoice and enjoy the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me conclude with this.

Please don't miss, as you look at this passage, what unites these three affections. What binds them together? It's Jesus. We hear a lot today about love.

Oh, you know, just whatever you want to love, you love it. As long as you're passionate about it, it doesn't really matter. Do you realize, people, that love in the Bible is very discriminating? There are things that we are told about in Scripture that we are to hate, not love.

1 John 2 says, do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. He says, for all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, pride and possessions, is not from the Father, but it's from the world.

Don't love the world. Be discriminating in your affection. It's the same with belief.

How often do we have to hear it today? Well, it doesn't really matter what you believe or in whom you put your trust, just as long as you really mean it. You know, be sincere, be zealous, give your life to it. And God forbid that we should ever actually have the courage to say to somebody, you know, your belief is wrong.

It's misguided. Let me point you to the truth. It's the epitome today of intolerance.

It's soon and fast becoming hate speech. And then there is joy. Well, whatever makes you happy, go for it.

Whatever enhances your sense of self-esteem, whatever brings your dreams to fulfillment, whatever feels good, delight yourself in it. People, being a Christian, the quintessence of being a Christian, is loving Christ and trusting Christ and enjoying Christ. Apart from Him as the center of our affections, we have no hope.

If He is not the sure and firm foundation for our trust and belief, if He is not the one who awakens joy and sustains it, if our joy is in something other than ultimately Him, we are above all people most to be pitied. If you're here this morning and you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ and you hear me saying these words, please understand that I'm saying them with the zeal that I do and I'm setting them before you in Peter's language because of a love for you and a desire to see you come into the experience of loving the Son of God and knowing His deep affection for you, of trusting in Him and finding a sure and solid rock, not only for now but for eternity, so that you can experience real joy, true, genuine, life-giving, sin-killing delight in the Son of God. I don't know what more I can offer you but the person of Jesus Christ and all that God is for you in Him.

Forgiveness of sins, a death on the cross for sinners, satisfying the wrath of God, offering redemption and righteousness and hope and eternity. And if your love and your trust and your joy is in anything or anyone else or any other system of thought that you think is going to bring you those things, I'm here to say, and it's not hate speech, it's love speech. You are sadly deluded.

You are wrong. And we want to help you by the Spirit of God to come to an understanding of the One in whom life is ultimately found. Christians here this morning, Brad, if you'd come on back up, you and the worship team.

Christians here this morning, God is at work in our midst today, people, to overcome the indifference of our hearts, the coldness, the apathy. Some of you are in a position in life right now to where the idea of unashamed, extravagant affection for Jesus just sounds like a foreign language. And you think, you know, I think I used to know what that was like.

And trusting in Him, maybe sometimes. Enjoying Him in such a way that I can't even put words to it? Hardly. Do you want that again? Do you want that renewal? Do you want that refreshing presence of the person of Christ to bring that back to life so that you can face the kinds of things that Lyle and Mary did? And without, for a moment, diminishing the heartache and the anguish of what they and so many others like them have endured, you can persevere.

And not only persevere, but rejoice. If that is your heart's cry this morning, I want to invite you to come to the Lord. You don't come to the Lord by walking up here and kneeling or seeking prayer.

It's a spiritual coming, but at the same time, we want to be here to pray for you. Sometimes you just need to express it physically. It kind of seals in your heart what you've been saying and what you've been longing for.

When you say, I'm hungry for more of you, I'm thirsty for more of you, well then come and eat, come and drink. May the Spirit of God stir us and awaken us to that. Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, Oh Father, thank you that, as Peter has said, because of your great mercy, you've caused us to be born again to a living hope. A hope that transcends all the tragedies and disappointments of this life. A hope that is reserved in heaven for us.

Thank you that you are keeping us for that hope. Thank you, Father, that the trials are for a little while. Just a little while.

But Lord, thank you most of all that you don't waste our pain. You use it to refine our faith, expose to our hearts where we really are in life and what we really cherish most. Oh Father, I pray right now, by the power of your Spirit, you would awaken love.

Let us be a people like Mary. Extravagant and unashamed in our affection. Let us be a people like Lyle and Mary, trusting, confident in your goodness, looking to you even in the midst of devastation.

Let us be a people filled with joy inexpressible and full of glory so that when we leave this place, we cannot help but speak the name of Jesus to a lost and dying world and live it in every context that we find ourselves in. Help us, Lord, I pray.

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