

Christian Joy

by Thomas Watson

Christian Joy is a delightful passion that arises from the feeling of God's love and favor, supporting the soul under present troubles and fencing against future fear.

Scripture: Psalm 94:19, Psalm 97:11, Psalm 138:3, Habakkuk 3:17, Matthew 25:21, John 17:13, Romans 14:17, 2 Corinthians 12:4, Galatians 5:22

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Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the Christian joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, which is a delightful passion arising from the feeling of God's love and favor, supporting the soul in troubles and guarding against future fears. He explains how this joy is wrought through the promises of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, and highlights five seasons when God usually gives divine joys to His people. Watson also contrasts worldly joys with spiritual joys, emphasizing that spiritual joys are inward, sweeter, purer, satisfying, stronger, unwearied, abiding, and self-existent, encouraging believers to seek after them through consistent spiritual living.

Transcript

CHRISTIAN JOY

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"The fruit of the Spirit is joy." Gal. 5:22.

The third fruit of justification, adoption, and sanctification--is joy in the Holy Spirit. Joy is setting the soul upon the top of a pinnacle--it is the cream of the sincere milk of the word. Spiritual joy is a sweet and delightful passion, arising from the apprehension and feeling of some good, whereby the soul is supported under present troubles, and fenced against future fear.

I. Joy is a delightful passion. It is contrary to sorrow, which is a perturbation of mind, whereby the heart is perplexed and cast down. Joy is a sweet and pleasant affection--which eases the mind, and exhilarates and comforts the spirits.

II. Joy arises from the feeling of some good. Joy is not a mere imagination; but is rational, and arises from the feeling of some good, as the sense of God's love and favor. Joy is so real a thing, that it makes a sudden change in a person; and turns mourning into melody. As in the spring-time, when the sun comes

to our horizon, it makes a sudden alteration in the face of the universe--the birds sing, the flowers appear, the fig-tree puts forth her green figs; everything seems to rejoice and put off its mourning, as being revived with the sweet influence of the sun. Just so, when the Sun of Righteousness arises on the soul, it makes a sudden alteration, and the soul is infinitely rejoiced with the golden beams of God's love.

III. By joy, the soul is supported under present troubles. Joy stupefies and swallows up troubles; it carries the heart above them, as the oil swims above the water.

IV. By joy, the heart is fenced against future fear. Joy is both a cordial and an antidote. It is a cordial which gives present relief to the spirits when they are sad; and an antidote, which fences off the fear of approaching danger. "I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me."

How is this joy wrought?

(1.) It arises partly from the promise. As the bee lies at the breast of the flower, and sucks out its sweetness; just so, faith lies at the breast of a promise, and sucks out the quintessence of joy. "Your comforts delight my soul;" that is, the comforts which distill from the promises.

(2.) The Spirit of God who is called the 'Comforter', sometimes drops this golden oil of joy into the soul." John 14:26. The Spirit whispers the remission of his sin to a believer--and sheds God's love abroad in the heart, whence flows infinite joy and delight. Rom 5:5.

What are the SEASONS in which God usually gives his people divine joys? There are five Seasons.

(1.) Sometimes at the blessed Supper. The soul comes weeping after Christ in the Lord's Supper, and God sends it away weeping for joy. The Jews had a custom at their feasts, of pouring ointment on their guests and kissing them; in the Lord's Supper, God often pours the oil of gladness on the saints, and kisses them with the kisses of his lips. There are two grand ends of the Lord's Supper--the strengthening of faith, and the flourishing of joy. Here, in this ordinance, God displays the banner of his love; here believers taste not only sacramental bread--but hidden manna. Not that God always meets the soul with joy. He may give increase of grace, when not increase of joy. But oftentimes he pours in the oil of gladness, and gives the soul a secret seal of his love; as Christ made himself known in the breaking of bread to the two disciples.

(2.) Before God calls his people to suffering. "Be of good cheer, Paul." Acts 23:11. When God was about to give Paul a cup of blood to drink--he spiced it with joy. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds." 2 Cor 1:5. This made the martyrs' flames, to be beds of roses to them. When Stephen was being stoned he saw heaven open, and the Sun of Righteousness shone upon his face. God candies our wormwood, with sugar.

(3.) After sore conflicts with Satan. He is the red dragon who troubles the waters; he puts the soul into frights, makes it believe that it has no grace, and that God does not love it. Though he cannot blot out a Christian's evidence for heaven--yet he may cast such a mist before his eyes, that he cannot read it. When the soul has been bruised with temptations, God will comfort the bruised reed by giving joy--to confirm a Christian's title to heaven. After Satan's fiery darts, comes the white stone. No better balm to heal a tempted soul, than the oil of gladness! After Christ was tempted, an angel came to comfort him.

(4.) After spiritual desertion. Desertion is a poisoned arrow which shoots to the heart. "For the Almighty has struck me down with his arrows. He has sent his poisoned arrows deep within my spirit. All God's

terrors are arrayed against me!" Job 6:4. God is called a fire and a light: the deserted soul feels the fire--but does not see the light; it cries out, as Asaph, "Has the Lord rejected me forever? Will he never again show me favor? Is his unfailing love gone forever? Have his promises permanently failed? Has God forgotten to be kind? Has he slammed the door on his compassion?" Psalms 77:7-9. When the soul is in this case, and ready to faint away in despair, God shines upon it, and gives it some apprehension of his favor, and turns the shadow of death into the light of the morning. God keeps his cordials for a time of fainting. Joy after a time of desertion, is like a resurrection from the dead.

(5.) At the hour of death. Of those even who have had no joy in their lifetime. God puts this sugar in the bottom of the cup--to make their death sweet. At the last hour, when all other comforts are gone, God sends the Comforter; and when their appetite to food fails, he feeds them with hidden manna. As the wicked before they die, have some apprehensions of hell and wrath in their conscience; so the godly have some foretastes of God's everlasting favor, though sometimes their diseases may be such, and their bodies so oppressed, that they cannot express what they feel. Jacob laid himself to sleep on a stone and saw a vision of a ladder, and the angels ascending and descending upon it. Just so, when saints lay themselves down to sleep the sleep of death, they have often a vision--they see the light of God's face, and have the evidences of his love sealed up to them forever.

What are the differences between worldly joys and spiritual joys? The gleanings of spiritual joys, are better than the vintage of the worldly joys.

(1.) Spiritual joys help to make us BETTER, worldly joys often make us worse. "I spoke unto you in your prosperity--but you said, I will not hear." Jer 22:21. Pride and luxury are the two worms which are bred from worldly pleasures. Wine is the inflamer of lust. As Satan entered in the sop, so often in the cup. But spiritual joy makes one better; it is like cordial medicine, which, as physicians say, not only cheers the heart--but purges out the noxious humours. Just so, divine joy is cordial medicine, which not only comforts but purifies; it makes a Christian more holy; it causes an antipathy against sin; it infuses strength to live and suffer for Christ. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Some colors not only delight the eye--but strengthen the sight. Just so, the joys of God not only refresh the soul--but strengthen it.

(2.) Spiritual joys are INWARD, they are heart joys. "Your heart shall rejoice." John 16:22. True joy is hidden within, worldly joy lies on the outside, like the dew which wets the leaf. We read of those who "rejoice in appearance," in the Greek, in the face. 2 Cor 5:12. It goes no farther than the face, it is not within. "Laughter can conceal a heavy heart; when the laughter ends, the grief remains." Proverbs 14:13. Like a house which has a gilded frontispiece--but all the rooms within are hung in mourning. But spiritual joy lies most within. "Your heart shall rejoice." Divine joy is like a spring of water which runs underground! Others can see the sufferings of a Christian--but they see not his joy. "Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can fully share its joy." Prov 14:10. His joy is hidden manna--hidden from the eye of the world; he has joyful music which others cannot hear. The marrow lies within, the best joy is within the heart.

(3.) Spiritual joys are SWEETER than worldly joys. "Your love is sweeter than wine!" Song of Songs 1:2. Spiritual joys are a Christian's festival; they are the golden pot and the sweet manna, they are so sweet, that they make everything else sweet! Spiritual joys sweeten health and estate, as sweet water poured on flowers makes them more fragrant and aromatic. Divine joys are so delicious and ravishing, that they put our mouth out of taste for earthly delights; just as he who has been drinking cordials tastes little sweetness in water. Paul had so tasted these divine joys, that his mouth was out of taste for worldly things; the world

was crucified to him, it was like a dead thing, he could find no sweetness in it. Gal 6:14.

(4.) Spiritual joys are more PURE, they are not tempered with any bitter ingredients. A sinner's joy is mixed with dregs, it is embittered with fear and guilt--he drinks wormwood wine. But spiritual joy is not muddled with guilt--but like a crystal stream, it runs pure. It is a rose without prickles; it is honey without wax.

(5.) Spiritual joys are SATISFYING joys. "Ask, that your joy may be full." Worldly joys can no more fill the heart than a drop can fill an ocean; they may please the palate or imagination--but cannot satisfy the soul. "No matter how much we see--we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear--we are not content." Ecclesiastes 1:8. But the joys of God satisfy. "Your comforts delight my soul." Psalm 94:19. There is as much difference between spiritual joys and earthly joys--as between a banquet which is eaten--and one which is painted on the wall!

(6.) Spiritual joys are STRONGER joys than worldly joys. "Strong consolation." Heb 6:18. They are strong joys indeed, which can bear up a Christian's heart in trials and afflictions. "Having received the word in much affliction, with joy." These joys are roses which grow in winter! These joys can sweeten the bitter waters of Marah! He who has these joys, can gather grapes from thorns, and fetch honey out of the carcass of a lion! "As sorrowing--yet always rejoicing." 2 Cor 6: 10. At the end of the rod--a Christian tastes honey!

(7.) Spiritual joys are UNWEARIED joys. Other joys, when in excess, often cause loathing; too much honey nauseates. One may be tired of pleasure, as well as labor. King Xerxes offered a reward to him who could find out a new pleasure! But the joys of God, though they satisfy--yet they never glut. A drop of joy is sweet--but the more of this wine the better! Such as drink of the joys of heaven--are never glutted. Their satiety is without loathing, because they still desire more of the joy with which they are satiated.

(8.) Spiritual joys are ABIDING joys. Worldly joys are soon gone. Such as crown themselves with rosebuds, and bathe in the perfumed waters of pleasure--may have joys which seem to be sweet--but they are swift. They are like meteors, which give a bright and sudden flash, and then disappear. But the joys which believers have are abiding; they are a blossom of eternity--a pledge of those rivers of pleasure which run at God's right hand! "In Your presence is abundant joy; in Your right hand are eternal pleasures!" Psalm 16:11

Why is this joy to be labored for?

(1.) Because it is self-existent. Spiritual joy can exist in the absence of all other carnal joy. This joy does not depend upon outward things. As the philosophers said, when the musicians came to them, "Philosophers can be merry without music;" so he who has this spiritual joy can be cheerful in the deficiency of carnal joys; he can rejoice in God, in sure hope of glory! "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. Habakkuk 3:17-18. Spiritual joy can go without silver crutches to support it. Spiritual joy is built higher, than upon creatures, for it is built on the love of God, on the promises of Scripture, and on the blood of Christ.

(2.) Because spiritual joy carries the soul through duty cheerfully. Religion becomes a recreation. Fear and sorrow hinder us in the discharge of duty; but a Christian serves God with activity, when he serves him

with joy. The oil of joy makes the wheels of obedience move faster. How fervently did they pray, whom God made joyful in the house of prayer! "I will bring them also to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer." Isaiah 56:7.

(3.) It is called the kingdom of God, because it is a taste of that which the saints have in the kingdom of God. "For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Romans 14:17. What is the heaven of the angels--but the smiles of God's face, the sensible perception and feeling of those joys which are infinitely ravishing and full of glory!

To encourage and quicken us in seeking after them, consider, that Christ died to purchase this joy for his saints. He was a man of sorrows--that we might be full of joy; he prayed that the saints might have this divine joy. "And now I am coming to you. I have told them many things while I was with them so they would be filled with my joy." John 17:13. Christ knows we never love him so much--as when we feel his love; which may encourage us to seek after this joy. We pray for that which Christ himself is praying for, when we pray that his joy may be fulfilled in us.

What shall we do to obtain this spiritual joy?

Walk consistently and spiritually. God gives joy after long and close walking with him.

(1.) Observe your hours. Set time every day apart for God.

(2.) Mourn for sin. "Mourning is the seed," as Basil says, "out of which the flower of spiritual joy grows." "I will comfort those who mourn." Isa 57:18.

(3.) Keep the book of conscience fair written. Do not by presumptuous sins, blur your evidences. A good conscience is the ark in which God puts the hidden manna!

(4.) Be often upon your knees--pray with life and fervency. The same Spirit who fills the heart with sighs--fills it with joys. The same Spirit who inspires the prayer--seals it. When Hannah had prayed, her countenance was no longer sad. I Sam 1:18. Praying Christians have much fellowship with God; and none are so likely to have the secrets of his love imparted, as those who hold correspondence with him. By close walking with God, we get clusters of Eshcol's grapes along the way, which are pledge of future happiness.

How shall we comfort those who lack joy?

Such as walk in close communion with God--have more joy than others.

(1.) Initial joy, joy in the seed. "Light is shed upon the righteous, and joy on the upright in heart." Psalm 97:11. Grace in the heart, is a seed of joy. Though a Christian lacks the sun, he has a day-star in his heart.

(2.) A believer has real joy--though not royal comforts. He has, as Aquinas says, "joy in God, though not from God." Joy in God, is the delight and pleasure the soul takes in God. "My soul shall be glad in the Lord." He who is truly gracious, is so far joyful as to take comfort in God. Though he cannot say that God rejoices in him; he can say that he rejoices in God.

(3.) He has supporting joy--though not transporting comforts. He has as much as keeps him from sinking. "You strengthen me with strength in my soul." Psalm 138:3. If a Christian has not God's arm to embrace him--yet he has it to uphold him. Thus a Christian who walks with God has something which bears up his

heart from sinking; and it is but waiting awhile, and he is sure of those eternal joys which are unspeakable and full of glory!

Use one: See that true religion is no melancholy thing--it brings joy. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Joy may vary--but it is never totally destroyed. A poor Christian who exists on bread and water, may have purer joy than the greatest monarch. Though he fares hard--he feeds high. He has a table spread from heaven--angels' food, and the hidden manna. He has sometimes sweet raptures of joy--which cause jubilation of spirit; he has that which is better felt--than can be expressed. "But I do know that I was caught up into paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be told." 2 Corinthians 12:4.

Use two: If God gives his people such joy in this life, oh! then, what glorious joy will he give them in heaven! "Enter into the joy of your Lord!" Matt 25:21. Here on earth--joy begins to enter into us; there in heaven--we shall enter into joy. God keeps his best wine until last. Heliogabalus bathed himself in sweet perfumed waters. What joy will that be--when the soul shall forever bathe itself in the pure and pleasant fountain of God's love! What joy will that be--to see the orient brightness of Christ's face, and have the kisses of those lips which drop sweet-smelling myrrh! "The Bride will rejoice in the embrace of her Lord," Augustine. Oh! if a cluster of grapes here is so sweet, what will the full vintage be! How may this set us all longing for that place where sorrow cannot live--and where joy cannot die!

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