

Thoughts on Joy

One of my favorite people in the world is a friend, a fellow-minister from years back. His warm, energetic and effervescent personality is a constant. Granted that I have a streak of the cynic in me, it embarrasses me a little to confess that there were times when I thought: “Anyone who smiles that much has *GOT* to be up to something.” The fact is: I have known a number of people for whom such a demeanor masked much pain. Still, he was adequately consistent in keeping up the appearance of being a genuinely happy person that I finally faced my jadedness and conceded: “I think he’s for real.”

I wish I knew more people like that. I wish I was more like that myself. After toying for a few years with the guilt that comes from knowing that I am not a person who is perpetually “up”, (as though that’s unspiritual and sinfully faithless), I came to rest more in the realization that it is not an unchristian thing that all personalities are not the same. Some people are more prone to worry than others. Some people are more prone to over-think things than others. Some people, for whatever reasons, are more prone to moods of melancholy, even depression than others. And yet, to all God’s people, Paul writes:

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! - Philippians 4:4

If yours is not a “happy” personality by nature, what do you do with the Apostle’s mandate to rejoice? First of all, don’t panic. An exuberant personality in and of itself is no measure of divine joy. At the end of the age, depending on how people respond to the Christ of God, much laughter will turn to tears and many tears will turn to laughter. Realize that joy is a fruit of the spirit, not something that we have any capacity to manufacture, but something that the presence of Christ in us brings forth. That is not to say that we must be utterly passive in the matter. There are disciplines of the mind that can help us to fix our thoughts upon the realities of God that have secured joy for us. “*Rejoice*” is still a command that calls forth a response.

One of the most profound calls of God’s people to joy appears in *Zechariah 9:9*. It was first worded to the ancient Israelites, but John appropriated it, thus declaring it fulfilled when Christ entered Jerusalem triumphantly five days before His crucifixion and one week before His resurrection.

*⁹Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. – Zechariah 9:9*

What about King Jesus might we fix our thoughts upon that lead us to joy?

1. **Your King has come!** Not only did Jesus come, but by the gift of His Spirit, we are assured that we are never alone. **Rejoice!**
2. **Your King is righteous!** Jesus is flawlessly just. He will one day vindicate His faithful ones. If we are ever mistreated, we are free to leave our case in His hands rather than to enslave ourselves in the hapless cause of getting even or otherwise trying to put things right ourselves. **Rejoice!**
3. **Our King is lowly!** There is no compassion quite like that which flows from Someone Who knows what it means to suffer. Jesus knew no sin, but He came to know the pain imposed by sin upon all mankind. Were He not a Man of sorrows acquainted with our grief, Jesus could not convincingly minister to us in our weaknesses. **Rejoice!**
4. **Our King is victorious!** Before this week was out, Jesus would endure a humiliating trial and much physical abuse. He would wear a crown of thorns and hang suspended on a tree (a cross) in darkness for three hours. Each of these details emphasized how He became a curse for us so that we would no longer have to endure the curse. His victory was secured, as was ours, when He defeated death. His resurrection is the firstfruits of the final resurrection of all His people to eternal life. **Rejoice!**
5. **Jesus rode a donkey!** A king on a mission of war rode a horse. A king on a mission of peace rode a donkey. Jesus told His disciples that in this world they would have trouble. He told them this in close proximity to telling to not let their hearts be troubled. How do these two streams of thought coincide? Jesus made peace between us and heaven and He promised to leave His peace with us while we await His return. **Rejoice!**

Our joy is not contingent on our personality types. It is not contingent on our circumstances. The self-help gimmicks of men might secure cheap counterfeits for joy, but even that is uncertain. True abiding joy is the product of wrapping our heads and our hearts around all that Jesus has secured in our behalves that touches upon life and eternity. So, let us choose joy and heed Paul's words:

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! - Philippians 4:4

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