

Where Does God's Joy Come From?

Listen, friends, even mainstream psychology teaches that it's not what happens to us, it's our response that determines success. Jesus, in Matthew 5, comments that it rains on the righteous and the unrighteous all the same.

There's a dangerous false gospel that basically says once we receive salvation, it never rains again. All we have to look forward to are financial windfalls, favor (in the sense of, say, being supernaturally first in every line you ever would have had to wait in) and immunity from any of life's difficulties.

Other than the really "big dogs" who profit indefinitely from this message, I have not seen a disciple of this kind of teaching last more than a couple of years. By the 26th time they don't claim what they've named (i.e. private jet), it's off to disillusionment with Christianity or joining a new "spiritualish" belief system that carries promises to "fill their vats to overflowing."

However, there's another false gospel that may be even more dangerous because it's endorsed by more credible people and movements: If you truly follow Christ as Lord and Savior, get ready for the rain, baby! This one interprets the "narrow road" talked about in the Bible as one chock full of suffering, pain and self-denial in the sense of denying yourself any fun, pleasure or happiness. It teaches that things are bad and only getting worse now, but if we just hold on until Jesus gets back, it will all be worth it.

The whole of Scripture on this particular subject seems to be summed up in what Jesus said to His followers: "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! *I have overcome the*

world" (John 16:33). Here's the Pope Massé commentary: "There are going to be times of rain no matter what. But Jesus is so much bigger than even the biggest storm. Sometimes He will supernaturally command them to be still (remember Peter), and other times there's a shipwreck coming but you will not be harmed (our good buddy Paul)."

All of that pales in comparison to His love for us. If we make Him our focus, we can immensely enjoy the sunny days. While we acknowledge the reality of the rainstorms, they do not cause us to lose our joy or get off course in His plan for our lives.

In fact, we will come out of them with stronger faith, character and spiritual sensitivity because we chose to pass these tests by following faith over feelings. How else does it make sense to " My brothers, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations" (James 1:2)?

Learn to respond to tough circumstances Jesus-style! Jesus had just been baptized by the Holy Spirit, passed His tests in the desert and been released to start ministering in power. Then, He gets a piece of terrible news. John had been put in prison. This is huge! His cousin and likely childhood friend—the "greatest man born of woman," who had overseen His very baptism—had just received, in essence, a death sentence.

How did Jesus respond? "After John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel'" (Mark 1:14).

That was His response! It's unfathomable in our own strength. The "wisdom" of the world might even call Jesus "uncaring." "Your cousin just got sentence to death, man. You're going to go preach a sermon?" We know from the story of Lazarus and other accounts that He experienced grief and anguish. It's pretty safe to surmise He didn't take this as a pleasant

development. But even the worst of circumstances couldn't take the joy of the Lord from His heart. Nothing could send Him into self-pity or distract Him from declaring the good news.

How was that kind of surrender and dependency on God possible? Most would say a combination of constant communion with the Spirit and withdrawing to lonely places to pray and "see what His Father was doing." But there was also something else. Before any recorded signs and wonders, before any mention of making disciples, there was His baptism. The incident where God the Father spoke and said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

When God speaks over you and calls you His beloved son or daughter, in whom He is well pleased ... That's it, my friend. Nothing can steal that joy. Temporary unpleasant circumstances no longer dictate my happiness level. He alone does. I'm not talking about a head knowledge or mental assent that God loves me, or that I'm His child, or any "church-ism" along those lines. .

I'm referring to the heart-shaking encounter with the Father's heart. Though emotions fade and feelings change, every time I am reminded of my heavenly Father's heart toward me, my joy increases. That's the place where the joy of the Lord is my strength. Whether it rains or the sun shines, whether the circumstances are pleasant or unpleasant, what our lives will manifest depends on our response!

Never having a bad day doesn't depend on pleasant circumstances or even whether I feel joyful. It's in the immovable knowledge that He remains joyful, and His heart is for me. That's where I draw my strength. Period. So God continually pours into us the love, grace and joy to live sincerely happy. Where does it all come from? His love, poured into a heart that is devoted and passionate toward Him.

 *Adapted from #iamholly-The Life You've Always Wanted–Based*

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Prayer Power for the Week of Nov. 17, 20014

This week seek to have a heart-shaking encounter with the Father's heart. If you trust Him as your Lord and Savior, know that He sees you as His beloved son or daughter in whom He is well pleased. With that knowledge, enter His throne room with boldness to request whatever He desires—His perfect will for you. Ask for the salvation of loved ones who are lost, for the return of those who have backslidden, for healing to manifest in the lives of those who are sick, for the spread of the gospel around the world, for more laborers for His harvest field and for revival to ignite in our churches and in our nation. Lift up our persecuted brothers and sisters, and pray God's will for Israel in this season (John 16:33; Mark 1:14-15).