

Episode 131

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

- Romans 14.17

Joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit, so it should come as no surprise that it is referenced here as the very nature of living in the kingdom of God. Jesus says in John 15 that the purpose behind his teachings was so that His joy would be in us, and our joy would be complete. In other words, joy is inevitable if we walk in Jesus' footsteps.

Somewhere in our hearts and heads, we may come to think that joy is optional, but Paul says it's the very foundation of the kingdom of God alive in our lives. Do you remember the very first miracle of Jesus? This was the beginning of his public ministry and the moment where he lay the groundwork for what he came to do. This is his first speech at a rally, his first announcement of his coming campaign, and rather than raising the dead, walking on water, or healing the sick, he turns water into wine at a wedding in Cana. He created around 600 litres of incredible wine to move a party to a new level. What was he saying by doing this?

With that as the beginning of Jesus' ministry, what about the beginning of the church? On the day of Pentecost, when the church was inaugurated, everybody who saw the disciples that day, wondered if they were all drunk. Now, don't hear what I'm not saying! But notice that they didn't wonder if they were depressed. What is scripture saying by mentioning this?

Look at the word gospel. Its very meaning is good news. In other words, it is news that brings joy, not works, not sweat and toil, but joy. At the very beginning of the gospel story, we find the angels announcing the birth of Christ saying, "behold I bring good tidings of great joy". Then, even before Jesus had been born, when pregnant Mary visited pregnant Elizabeth, she said that at the sound of Mary's greeting the child in her womb left for joy. Then, at the end, when Jesus returns, scripture says that even the trees of the fields will shout for joy.

If babies, trees, disciples or anything and anyone else who gets near Jesus leaps and shouts with joy, why aren't we?

Yes, there are seasons in life where the tree of joy doesn't blossom. Yes, there are seasons of grief. But most often it is a comparatively small thing that keeps us from seeing what we have in Jesus. What comparatively small thing has upset you, that keeps you from seeing what you have in Jesus? We must be doing something.

That's why Jonathan Edwards could say many years ago, that the difference between a religious person and a Christian is not that one obeys laws and the other one doesn't, in fact, they both obey God. The difference is that only the Christian is attracted to God. The religious person finds God useful, while a Christian finds God beautiful. A religious person will follow and obey as long as God answers their prayers and responds on their terms. Should God step outside of these parameters, joy disappears and eventually so do they. A Christian, on the other hand, is anchored in their love for their saviour, which is more than able to coexist with sorrow, because of the wonder of the greatness and goodness of God. It's not that we are not aware of it, we are just no longer controlled by it, because what we have and who we have is far greater than any loss we can suffer in our brief existence on earth.

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