

“Joy in the Christian Life”

Psalm 24; Romans 12:9-21 – Tesa Hauser

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Holy God bless the speaking and the hearing of these words so that we may know the joy you have provided. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

What is joy? Many of the typical dictionary definitions describe joy as, “a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.” Which I think is a definition of joy that is experienced in the Christian life, but I don’t think it is so easily definable. I think joy is this definition, and more than this definition. Joy digs deep inside of us, for we know that joy comes from God. Like we see with love, it is a feeling, but also an action. So, what does a Christian life filled with joy look like?

Joy is included in the nine fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5, squeezed in between love and peace, and we know how hard it is to love and how hard it is to achieve peace. Also alongside joy is patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, all of which require a tremendous amount of work and time to achieve. All things that are attributed to God. For joy to be named in this list means that it is something that is worked for, not just an emotion. Joy is something you work towards; it is a Spiritual discipline that is nurtured and valued as such.

This section in Romans 12 is where I see the fruits of the Spirit in action. In this section Paul is talking about living in Christian community, and with the wider community, even our enemies, with love and in action. He tells us that our love must be sincere, and though it doesn't sound notable, verse 10 has big implications for our lives. In the NRSV verse 10 says, "Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." However, I prefer the New Living Translation where it says, "Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other." Or the ESV version, "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." Make sure the love you give is genuine, and take delight in honoring one another, and outdo each other in kindness. Have joy when you are showing love to another person!

What would it be like if someone decided to bring you dinner because they wanted to show you how much they love you, and instead of bringing their loving selves with an attitude of joy, they were kind of sour? They arrive at your door, and instead of embracing you with an upbeat attitude, they say are short and say, "I brought you this, but I have to go now so take it. Bye." You might enjoy the meal, and be thankful for the meal, but not exactly joyful about their visit or want any subsequent visitations. Instead, what if they greeted you with a smile, asked how you were doing, and said, "I brought you this meal because I know it is your favorite, I hope you enjoy it." It is not about being fake nice or not yourself, but

when it is sincere, the air around you is nice, your presence is different, and the love is felt. Even after the leave and the meal is finished, the joy of their gift lingers. You may even start planning a way to return the love.

After they leave, there is this gladness, since you don't have to cook, but also knowing someone thought about you enough to do this small act. Verse 10 doesn't mean you have to negate your needs or put yourself down, in the way it can sound in the NSRV. It is acknowledged deep inside you that the meal took time and money for that person, whether they bought it or made it, but you were worth spending that time and money. Delight in loving one another. Why? Because we have an example in God who goes above and beyond in loving and honoring us. In the Greek, to rejoice is to delight in or to be glad for God's grace/favor. We rejoice and respond to God's love for us, whose goodness chases us, by turning around and loving one another.

We see the acknowledgement of God's grace and love in Psalm 24, which comes after the famous and well-known Psalm 23, about God leading us through the hardship and promising protection, safety, and nourishment, the rest of our days. The 24th chapter of psalms is known as an entrance liturgy that was said or even possibly sung, entering the Temple gates as preparation for participating in worship. After acknowledging that it is God who will lead us through the hard time and provide our every need, the people will go to the Temple to praise God.

This acknowledgement begins by noting that God is sovereign, for all the earth is God's. A strong and mighty God, who has tamed the chaotic waters and has ordered the cosmos and that world. This is the beginning and the end of the chapter, verses 1-2 and 7-10. We are encompassed by God.

Then we have this middle section, verses 3-6, and it becomes more than just about entering the Temple, but about a life under God's sovereignty. One commentary I read noted that verses 3-4, "do not designate ritual holiness or preparation that could easily be measured. Rather, they seem to indicate proper relatedness to God and neighbor in every aspect." These verses are asking and sharing what it means to live a life in covenant relationship with God and with one another. Verse 5 confirms what was already noted in Psalm 23, that God provides for God's people. Joy in Psalm 24 means rejoicing in God's provision and in response, as we try to seek God's face, our lives will be ones where we live out this covenant relationship with God and one another.

When I think of Psalm 24, I can't help but also think of another well-known scripture found in Nehemiah 8:10, "...This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." The setting for Nehemiah is time after exile, a time of restoration of a community once scattered by war and chaos. This community is now learning how to live together under God after a difficult time. What this says though, is that God rejoices in God's people, and finds deep

satisfaction and gladness with us, and we have done nothing to deserve it. We have received God's grace, love, mercy, and in this truth, we find our strength because the work is hard! Let's look again at Romans 12.

What is being asked of us is hard work! It's hard work to be "devoted to one another in love," it's hard work to "delight in honoring each other," and try to live peaceably with all. To be honest, it's hard work to care about anybody else when life is tough and isn't letting up; it is hard to care about someone who you strongly disagree with. It is hard to find joy among God's people when there is hurt and pain, when it feels like harmony has been disrupted. Where do you find joy when this work is hard? In God, we find our strength, in the king of Glory, the Lord mighty in battle from whom all blessings flow. To know God, is to know joy, and that is the ground on which we stand on in all we do.

Joy is a feeling, but it is also cultivated, by loving others, by practicing hospitality and kindness, and many of the things we see in Romans. It is hard work, but it will create a joy within us that will be our strength in times of need. Joy in the Christian life is many things. It looks like a life devoted to God, in which the life you create is to fulfill God's work in the world with your talents, interests, and abilities. Joy is serving for, caring for, and loving our neighbors, those who we call siblings in Christ, and even at times those whom we call enemy, which as we mentioned earlier is hard work. Sometimes, when this world is harsh and hard, the

only joy we know is God's joy, one that is filled with gladness about us, and love for us, not deserving, but freely given, which will give us the strength to continue.

It is a spiritual practice that we build to rejoice in God's goodness and with thanksgiving, even when times are hard in our lives, or when we are trying to show love to one another, or when we are wondering if the work is even worth doing.

The joy of the Lord is our strength.

Joy is on the table below, as we rejoice in new life, honor those who are no longer with us, and celebrate another year of life for all those here today. Joy is found in a Welcome Saturday meal, in the voice of the greeters, in the food donations, even in a Zoom room, and as we worship God together and love one another. Alleluia and Amen.