

Joy in God – Part 2: The Love of God

To Know Christ and to Make Christ Known (Luke Series)

Luke 1:46-56; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; October 27, 2013

Joy in God is important for the glory of God.

My soul exalts [magnifies the Lord like a telescope not like a microscope] the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced [to great rejoice; be overjoyed] in God my Savior. (46-47)

Mary has heard the announcement through the angel Gabriel and the prophetic blessing from the lips of Elizabeth and she responds with her own song of joy to God for that He is doing in her life and through her for His people. Luke 1:46-55 is known as Mary's Song or *The Magnificat* (Latin for 'magnify'). Mary's great joy in God 'magnifies' the greatness of the Lord so that He is seen to be as great as He truly is. (Psalm 34:3) The connection between 'exalting, magnifying, glorifying' the Lord and 'rejoicing' in God is important. Our joy in God is an important part of God's glory in our lives. The greater our joy in God, the greater God's glory in our lives. So what is it about God and our relationship to Him that should make the command 'to rejoice in the Lord' in every situation only reasonable?

Joy in God rejoices in God's help.

He has given help [to take up our cause; to act in our stead] to Israel His servant (54)

God is the great Helper and Savior. He saves those who cannot save themselves. He helps those who can't help themselves and know they need His help. God is not the kind of helper who does what we could do but don't want to do. Rather, God is the kind of helper who supports us in ways we desperately need and does for us what we could not do for ourselves. He is especially the Helper of His people, spiritual Israel, all those who have the same faith as Abraham, which for us on this side of the cross, is a faith in all that God has promised us in Jesus. (Isaiah 41:10) God is the gracious helper of undeserving needy people like you and me! For this we can rejoice!

Joy in God rejoices in God's love.

And His mercy [loyal love] is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. (50)

The word translated 'mercy' in this passage is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word which means 'goodness' or 'kindness' and is usually translated 'lovingkindness' or 'steadfast love.' So this 'mercy' is very much about the love of God for us. (Jeremiah 31:3) So Mary rejoices because of God's love, not only to her, but to all God's people. (1 John 4:16)

God's love is to the undeserving needy.

In remembrance [faithfulness to] of His [promise of] mercy (54)

The Greek word 'mercy' here means 'compassion, mercy, pity, clemency.' The reason why 'mercy' is used to translate a Hebrew word for God's covenant love is because God's love is a love for the undeserving needy. (Luke 6:35) God loves us although we don't deserve it and God

loves us in view of our need, especially our need for a Savior from sin and for satisfaction in God.

God's love brings the greatest good to us in whatever way is best and necessary.

He has filled the hungry with good things (53)

If God's 'mercy' here is God's 'steadfast love' and His 'steadfast love' is His goodness then we know that a truly Good Person is going to pursue what is good for those He loves. And if He is the greatest of all Good Persons then to those to whom He is most committed He will bring the greatest Good. And if He is all-powerful and all-wise then He will bring the greatest good to those He loves in whatever way is best and necessary and He will do so without fail. (Psalm 23:6) In verse 53, we can this reflected in that it is God's heart to 'fill' those who are hungry with what is good.

Joy in God trusts God to 'remember' to love.

In remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke [promised] to our fathers (54-55)

It is strange to hear the Bible talk about God 'remembering' something, as if He had temporally forgotten it! This is language that reflects the way it might appear to us since God's delay in bringing about what He has promised might be interpreted as God having forgotten to do what He said He would do. But, in reality, God doesn't forget anything, especially His promises. And even though, when God fulfills His promises to us it might seem like He suddenly 'remembered' what it was He was supposed to do, His timing is perfect and He is always faithful to do what He says He will do. No chance of God having dementia! (Isaiah 49:14-16)

Joy in God is for all those who 'fear' His love as uniquely wonderful and satisfying.

And holy [unique and wonderful] is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear [reverence in light of who He is] Him. (49-50)

The idea of 'fear' can be confusing. There are different kinds of 'fear.' Good kinds and bad kinds. There is a kind of fear that God calls sin. And a kind of fear that God calls obedience. A better translation here might be 'reverence.' To 'fear' God in the proper way is to 'reverence' or 'honor' Him in light of who He is and what He has promised to do. In fact, fearing God and waiting for God's lovingkindness is connected in the Scriptures (Psalm 147:11). And why would anyone 'fear God' because of 'His lovingkindness'? Because God loves like no one does love or could love. The Scripture tells us that God's lovingkindness is better than anything we might enjoy in this life (Psalm 63:3). So God's love is uniquely wonderful and satisfying. If you can imagine (or remember) being surprised to find out that someone loved you that you thought you had little chance of ever gaining their favor, then how much more should our heart rejoice as undeserving, needy sinners to know that the God who created us and redeemed us loves us with the greatest love there could ever be! (John 15:9-11)

What is crucial to joy in God? Depending on God as our Helper. Believing that He loves us. Resting in the righteousness of Jesus alone!

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Summary Statement

Joy in God is no small matter. The glory of God is at stake. But what is it that should cause us to rejoice in God, even in tough times? The unfailing love of God for His people! Joy in God is very much about rejoicing in the love of God in its mysterious, unique, ruthless, and unrelenting pursuit of our good, now and forever.

What is 'joy in God'?

It's the joy produced by the Holy Spirit.

It's the joy of Jesus (the joy of God in God).

It's a confident expectation/anticipation of good in and from God.

It's a periodic, imperfect experience of tasting the good that is to come.

It's the joy of the sunrise as it peaks over the mountains.

It's the joy of the incoming tide.

It's the joy of the first few drops of rain.

It's the joy of the first few notes of a song.

It's a joy that begins here but will never end.

What is it that gives causes us to rejoice in God?

"Skylar's constant hugs, smiles and kisses fill us with love and happiness." – Her Proud Grandma's Arlyne and Barbara (Project Cuddle Calendar – October – 'Saving Babies from Abandonment)

There is an important connection between love and happiness which we see in this passage.

Let's read **Luke 1:46-56**.

Joy in God is important for the glory of God.

My soul exalts [magnifies like a telescope not like a microscope] the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced [to greatly rejoice; be overjoyed] in God my Savior [or Helper or Deliverer]. (46-47)

Mary has heard the announcement through the angel Gabriel and the prophetic blessing from the lips of Elizabeth and she responds with her own song of joy to God for what He is doing in her life and through her for His people.

Luke 1:46-55 is known as Mary's Song or *The Magnificat* (Latin for 'magnify'). Mary's great joy in God 'magnifies' the greatness of the Lord so that He is seen to be as great as He truly is.

The connection between ‘exalting, magnifying, glorifying’ the Lord and ‘rejoicing’ in God is important. Our joy in God is an important part of God’s glory in our lives.

The greater our joy in God, the greater God’s glory in our lives.

Praise for the Meal

I could praise someone for a meal prepared for a number of reasons:

- (1) fear of what will happen if I don’t
- (2) attempt to manipulate them to get something I want
- (3) because it is a good and right thing to do or
- (4) because I truly enjoyed the meal.

It is obvious to all that the last reason is the best reason and the one that brings the most ‘glory’ to the one who prepared the meal!

Psalm 34:3

This is the OT version of Philippians 4:4. What is there to ‘magnify’ or ‘exalt’?

So what is it about God and our relationship to Him that should make the command ‘to rejoice in the Lord’ in every situation only reasonable?

Joy in God rejoices in God’s help.

He has given help [to take up our cause; to act in our place] to Israel His servant (54)

God is the great Helper and Savior. He saves those who cannot save themselves. He helps those who can’t help themselves and know they need His help.

God is not the kind of helper who does what we could do but don’t want to do. Rather, God is the kind of helper who supports us in ways we desperately need and does for us what we could not do for ourselves.

He is especially the Helper of His people, spiritual Israel, all those who have the same faith as Abraham, which for us on this side of the cross, is a faith in all that God has promised us in Jesus.

God is the gracious helper of undeserving needy people like you and me! For this we can rejoice!

Visiting the Emergency Room

Let's say I find myself in need of help and end up in great pain in an emergency room, I can find joy in any help provided me whether

- (1) It is help required by the 'powers that be'
- (2) It is help that is done for selfish reasons, like money
- (3) It is help that is done because it is the right thing to do or
- (4) It is help that is given because the person loves me.

It is obvious again that the last reason is the best reason of all.

Isaiah 41:10

God promises His people His help.

And this help is rooted in His love for us.

Joy in God rejoices in God's love!

And His mercy [loyal love] is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. (50)

The word translated 'mercy' (eleos) in this passage is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew word (hesed) which means 'goodness' or 'kindness' and is usually translated 'lovingkindness' or 'steadfast love.'

So this 'mercy' is very much about the love of God for us. So Mary rejoices because of God's love, not only to her, but to all God's people.

Two things need to be noted about this love:

1. It is what draws us.
 2. It is what causes us to rejoice.
- It is the love of God that draws us.

The Attraction of Love

The Lord Jesus had crowds around Him all the time. Now there were many reasons for that, some good, some bad. But we cannot dismiss the reality that one powerful reason for the crowds was the attraction of love. He loved people like no one has ever loved people.

How many of us like to be around angry, bitter, selfish people? How many of us are drawn to kind, generous, unselfish people?

'He also loved old Cowboy & Indian movies, Dr. House, Monk, Jimmy Stewart, President Kennedy & Lincoln...& so much more. I think you get the picture. But as his wife, & a constant witness to Joel's life for several years, what I would like to have you talk about is his heart being one with Jesus. That being a prayerful man, he had a strong faith & relied completely on the One who created him, trusting in His promises. That he was a man of peace...quiet & gentle, even a man with a profound sense of humor, subtly expressed. That he was a kindly, friendly man who drew people, & even small animals & birds, to him as if he were a magnet, as they sensed that they could trust him. That he was a man who had a passion for the elderly & forgotten in convalescent homes & until his illness interfered, had made regular visits for many years to his "friends", as he called them.' (Charlotte Towler's Eulogy for Joel)

Jeremiah 31:3

It is the love of God that draws us!

'None of us loves men as Christ loves them; and if the love of all the tender hearted in the world could run together, they would make but a drop compared with the ocean of the compassion of Jesus.' (Spurgeon)

'Love is the great attraction. Without the sternness of holiness and justice it would be the love of an unholy and unjust God; yet the holiness and justice of God repel the sinner.'

- It is the love that causes our hearts to rejoice.

"American Children's Folklore" by Simon J. Bronner (August House Inc., Little Rock, 1988) under "Beliefs and Customs" says: "To find out how a certain person feels about you, repeat the phrase "He loves me, he loves me not" as you pluck the petals of a daisy. If you take the gold center from the daisy and throw it up in the air, the number of pieces that fall on the back of your hand as you hold it out tells the number of children that you will have." (Heathengrrl's blog)

1 John 4:16

1 Peter 1:8

What causes us to love Him? His love for us! What could cause believers to rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory? Knowing and believing the love which God has for us in Jesus!

But we feel so undeserving of His love!

God's love is to the undeserving needy.

In remembrance [faithfulness to] of His mercy (54)

The Greek word 'mercy' here (eleos) means 'compassion, mercy, pity, clemency.'

The reason why 'mercy' is used to translate a Hebrew word for God's covenant love is because God's love is a love for the undeserving needy.

God loves us although we don't deserve it and God loves us in view of our need, especially our need for a Savior from sin and for satisfaction in God.

Love for the Drowning

Do they deserve it?

Is your love for your children based on what they deserve?

Is your love for your banker based on what he deserves?

Do you ask a drowning man, 'How did you come to be in this predicament?'

Luke 6:35

Certainly the ungrateful and evil are undeserving of God's love, but God gives it and He promises it perfectly in Jesus!

But what does God's love really mean?

God's love brings the greatest good to us in whatever way is best and necessary.

He has filled the hungry with good things (53)

If God's 'mercy' here is God's 'steadfast love' and His 'steadfast love' is His goodness then we know that a truly Good Person is going to pursue what is good for those He loves.

And if He is the greatest of all Good Persons then to those to whom He is most committed He will bring the greatest Good.

And if He is all-powerful and all-wise then He will bring the greatest good to those He loves in whatever way is best and necessary and He will do so without fail.

In verse 53, we can see this reflected in that it is God's heart to 'fill' those who are hungry with what is good.

The Stalker Shepherd

If you find someone chasing you or pursuing you or stalking you, it would make you uncomfortable. Especially if, no matter what you do, they are relentless in their pursuit. And no matter how frightened you become or whether you fall and scrape your knee, they will not give up the chase. It is like the trucker who chased a woman driving a car with a man hidden in her back seat. She was frightened out of her mind, but the trucker would not give up the chase because he was determined to rescue her from imminent danger.

Psalm 23:6

The word for 'follow' is actually most often translated 'pursue'! We can rejoice in our 'Stalker Shepherd' in the most wonderful sense!

John 15:9-11

'Meditate upon the love of Christ to you. *It is a love ancient and venerable, tried and proved.* He loved you when you were not; he loved you when you were, but were not what you should be. He has loved you into spiritual being; he has loved you so as to keep you in that being. He loved you so as to suffer and to die, and he loves you so as to permit you to suffer for his sake. He has loved you so well as to bear with your ill manners, your shortcomings, and your transgressions, your coldness, your backsliding, your lack of prayer, your hardness of heart your little love to your brethren, and all the other sins of which I will not now accuse you, for it is a time of love. He has loved you right on without pausing or slackening. Some of you have known his love these twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years; yes, some of you even more than that. It is no new thing with us to sing, "Jesus loves me." All this while he has never failed us once, nor done us an ill turn. The kindest husband that ever lived may sometimes be faulty, but this husband of our souls overfloweth with divine affection every day, and all the day. We could not find fault or flaw in his love, if we were to try. Doubtless, in the future we shall have to make continued trial of his love, but we are sure it will endure every test. We may have rough ways to traverse, but he will tread them with us, and we shall lean upon our Beloved. We may be very sick and faint, but he hath borne our sicknesses, and will sympathize with us. He hath said, and we believe it, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." His promise is "Certainly I will be with thee. Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you." The longer we live the more abundant evidence shall we receive of that love of Christ, which at this moment is assuredly ours. At this moment we believe in this love as implicitly as yonder babe believes in its mother's love, and stretches out its little hands to be embraced in those dear arms. Is it not so, dear friends? Do you not lean on the bosom of your Lord, without a shadow of mistrust, and do you not there find your fears all laid asleep? What love is this! ... This love *fills believers with delight*. If you would be always happy, sustain your mirth upon the spiced wine of his pomegranate. He loveth me; he loveth me, O joyous thought! Such an assurance creates a Paradise in a prison, and a heaven in heaviness. (Spurgeon – *Love At Its Utmost*)

But is it possible for God to 'forget' to pursue us with this love?

Joy in God trusts God to ‘remember’ to love.

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It is strange to hear the Bible talk about God ‘remembering’ something, as if He had temporally forgotten it! This is language that reflects the way it might appear to us since God’s delay in bringing about what He has promised might be interpreted as God having forgotten to do what He said He would do.

But, in reality, God doesn’t forget anything, especially His promises. And even though, when God fulfills His promises to us it might seem like He suddenly ‘remembered’ what it was He was supposed to do, His timing is perfect and He is always faithful to do what He says He will do. No chance of God having dementia!

The Appearance of Dementia

‘One day I noticed a disheveled stranger pacing through our neighborhood. He was chain-smoking, jerking his head to the side and shouting out into the air, “OK! OK! OK!” He had a wild, disturbed look. After about fifteen minutes of erratically walking up and down the sidewalk, he started to trespass through back yards, continuing to carry on. Convinced that a madman was on the loose, I called 911. A few minutes later the squad car pulled up. By now the man was standing on the sidewalk right in front of our house, still agitated, still shouting out “OK! OK!” The policeman cranked down his window, leaned out, and asked, “Can I help you, buddy?” (I could hear the conversation through an open window.) The man leapt over to him and effused, “Oh, officer, I’m so glad you’re here. I’m visiting this neighborhood and I’ve lost my little brown puppy. He’s named Jose. I’ve been looking all over, calling his name over and over again. He doesn’t know the area to find his way back to the house. Could you please keep your eyes out for him?” The officer paused and said, “Sure, buddy. I’ll look around.” He rolled up his window and started to drive off. I could see him slowly shaking his head, as if to say, “Oh brother, who’s the madman in this neighborhood?!” (David Powlison, *Seeing With New Eyes*)

Isaiah 49:14-16

God does not forget His people and the promises He has made to us. His commitment is far greater than the unlikely, though possible, situation where a mother would forget her nursing child.

For whom is this love to be a ‘given’?

In this passage, believers are characterized as those who ‘fear’ God.

As believers in Jesus, we are to ‘fear’ God’s love as uniquely wonderful and satisfying.

And holy [unique and wonderful] is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear [reverence in light of who He is] Him. (49-50)

The idea of 'fear' can be confusing. There are different kinds of 'fear.' Good kinds and bad kinds.

There is a kind of fear that God calls sin. And a kind of fear that God calls obedience.

A better translation here might be 'reverence.' To 'fear' God in the proper way is to 'reverence' or 'honor' Him in light of who He is and what He has promised to do.

In fact, fearing God and waiting for God's lovingkindness is connected in the Scriptures (**Psalm 147:11**).

But why would anyone 'fear God' because of 'His lovingkindness'?

Because God loves like no one does love or could love. The Scripture tells us that God's lovingkindness is better than anything we might enjoy in this life (**Psalm 63:3**).

So God's love is uniquely wonderful and satisfying. If you can imagine (or remember) being surprised to find out that someone loved you that you thought you had little chance of ever gaining their favor, then how much more should our heart rejoice as undeserving, needy sinners to know that the God who created us and redeemed us loves us with the greatest love there could ever be!

A False Hope

'Something has changed in the air. The media is positive towards the church once again. People are returning to the faith because of the sincerity and joy they see in Pope Francis. This of course isn't to say that Pope Benedict or his successors weren't sincere or joyful. Anyone that knows me, knows just how much I love Pope Emeritus Benedict. But what amazes me today is the way in which Francis is being received by the world. He seems to be reaching people that were previously thought unreachable.

And I'm sure it's because of his Joy. He speaks of the mercy of God and of the acceptance of God. Constantly. He doesn't need to add a 'but' or an 'unless' after that statements. God loves us because he created us. He loves us no matter what our sins are.

If that truth doesn't bring joy to your life then I don't know what will.' – (by a fellow Roman Catholic priest at patheos.com)

It is true that knowing that God loves us – approves of us, accepts us, welcomes us, includes us - is the greatest of all joys, but it is only for those who trust in the righteousness of Jesus alone.

'When I began to look into this matter I was shocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson and Thomas Aquinas taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval or (I might say) "appreciation' by God. And then,

when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine *accolade*, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” With that, a good deal of what I had been thinking all my life fell down like a house of cards. I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child—not in a conceited child, but in a good child—as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. Not only in a child, either, but even in a dog or a horse. Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures—nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator. I am not forgetting how horribly this most innocent desire is parodied in our human ambitions, or how very quickly, in my own experience, the lawful pleasure of praise from those whom it was my duty to please turns into the deadly poison of self-admiration. But I thought I could detect a moment—a very, very short moment—before this happened, during which the satisfaction of having pleased those whom I rightly loved and rightly feared was pure. And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex for ever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero’s book. Perfect humility dispenses with modesty. If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself; “it is not for her to bandy compliments with her Sovereign.” I can imagine someone saying that he dislikes my idea of heaven as a place where we are patted on the back. But proud misunderstanding is behind that dislike. In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised. I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us. It is written that we shall “stand before” Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is. (C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)

So what is crucial to our joy in God?

- Depending on Him as our Helper.

We depend on Him, He delivers, He gets the glory, we get the joy!

- Believing that He loves us.

That we are approved, accepted, welcomed by the God who created us and has purposed to make us perfectly happy forever!

- Resting in the righteousness of Jesus.

Knowing that it is not 'my good frame or my bad frame' that make the difference in God's helping me and loving me, but the righteousness of Jesus which is outside of me!