

A Joyful Occasion?

Luke 1:57-66; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; November 17, 2013

Present joy is mixed joy.

Life is a mixed bag.

This is a fallen world. God has promised us tribulation in this fallen world. Perfect joy and peace is only promised for the kingdom to come. So when we talk about joy in God here and now, we are talking about a joy that is not perfect nor is it exclusive. It is a joy in God that is a mixed joy, at best. This 'mixed joy' is seen in everyday life in various ways. We have the joy of a new house and the monthly mortgage payment. We have the joy of a newborn and 2 AM feedings. On a grander scale, we have the joy of victory in war and many casualties. When it comes to our experience of joy in this world, including joy in God, we must remember that it will always be a mixed bag until Jesus comes back. We also see this 'mixed bag of joy' in our passage today.

A Joyful Occasion (57-58)

In verses 57-58, we see the birth of John the Baptist. It was an occasion of joy for Zacharias and Elizabeth and but also for their relatives and neighbors. It was an occasion of joy because (1) the birth of children are always joyful events (2) Elizabeth was old, past child-bearing age, and this birth was a miracle (3) God had told Zacharias that they were going to have a son and God kept His Word and (4) this child was no ordinary child, he had a mission from God. (see Luke 1:5-20)

A Family Occasion (59-61)

In verses 59-61, we see the family of Elizabeth and Zacharias coming together for a special ceremony. It was customary (according to OT Law: Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3) for sons to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth and it was a public, family, and even community, event. In the OT, children were normally named at birth, but it appears that a tradition had arisen of naming the sons at their circumcision, at least in this family. Interestingly enough, the relatives seem to think they know what the newborn should be named and proceed to call him Zacharias, after his father. But Elizabeth will have none of it. She puts her foot down and says his name will be John. So we have a family conflict on a joyous occasion! Sound familiar?

A Surprising Occasion (62-66)

In verses 62-66, we see how this family conflict is resolved. The relatives are surprised, even shocked and disturbed, at this 'transgression' of family tradition and decide to try to trump Elizabeth by asking Zacharias what he wants to name the boy. Now, Zacharias is still mute and appears to also be deaf, since they make 'signs' to ask him what to call the baby. Zacharias affirms Elizabeth's stance and surprises the relatives by naming his son, John. It is at this point that God frees him to speak again and he begins by praising God. This joyous, conflict-filled occasion was also surprising because (1) before now we may have thought that Zacharias was only mute but now it appears he was also deaf by God's discipline (2) family and cultural tradition is set aside by God's direction and by a courageous couple (3) Zacharias is released from his disciplinary restraints so he can praise God and (4) the hand of God was obviously at work even in a situation mixed with joy and conflict and discipline and praise and questions. Do you think God can be at work for good when life is such a mixed bag?

Present joy is mixed with the joy of others.

Our present joy in God is mixed with the joy of others in God. We need to remember that joy, especially joy in God, is not a private matter. It is experienced by us personally but it is not experienced typically in isolation from others. In fact, God has designed that our joy in Him would be fed by the joy of others in God. We can see this in this story as the neighbors and relatives 'were rejoicing with her' (Luke 1:58). We can see this same principle operative in regard to Paul and Titus in 2 Corinthians 7:13 and the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son in Luke 15:6, 9, 32. This is joy in God because of how we see the heart of God in the hand of God at work in other people's lives. When we see God's steadfast love in the lives of others and it should cause us to rejoice with them. Do you rejoice in God's goodness to others? You can't be a joyful person and be a selfish person (ie, the only per-son's joy that matters to you is yours!) Isn't that why we go to weddings?! God satisfies us in the joy of others in God as well as our own!

Present joy is mixed with sorrow.

Our present joy in God is mixed also with sorrow. In this story, the joyful occasion was also an occasion of conflict and argumentation and disagreement that certainly brought sorrow into this joyful picture. Unfortunately, that is life in a fallen world. In the parable of the lost son, we not only see the joy of the father at the return of his younger son but also the sorrow of the father in light of the elder son's resentment at his brother's welcome. (Luke 15:25-32) *The joy over a Savior is mixed with the sorrow over those who refuse His grace.* Our greatest joy in God is our joy in Jesus as our Savior from sin. We rejoice when we see others come to Christ and find salvation from their sins. But we grieve when we see people reject the Savior. Some will receive Jesus and some won't, like the two thieves crucified with Jesus. We rejoice with the one who believed and we grieve over the one who didn't. (Luke 23:39-43) The occasions of the prodigal's return and the two thieves crucified with Jesus were ones of both joy and sorrow. This is important to consider because if we expect joy 'unmixed' in this life, we are likely to have little or no joy at all. Can you rejoice even when you have sorrow? You can't be a joyful person and be a narrow person (ie, one who thinks that the only joy worth having is a joy without any sorrow or conflict). God satisfies us in this world with a joy that is mixed with appropriate sorrow over sin and suffering and conflict. (2 Corinthians 6:10)

Present joy is mixed with faithfulness to God's Word.

Our present joy in God is also mixed, in a different way, with faithfulness to God's Word. In this story, Zacharias and Elizabeth held on to trust and obey God's word by naming their son John, as God commanded, even in the face of family and cultural pressure to do something different. We must realize that joy in God will come as we trust and obey His Word, even when it is hard and brings us into conflict with others, including the members of our own family. When we trust and obey God's Word there is a joy that God gives us in Him, even in the face of loss of various kinds. (Hebrews 10:34; John 15:9-11) We cannot separate God's love and His commandments to us nor can we separate obedience to God's commandments and the experience of His joy. (John 15:9-11) Is what God says more important to you than what your family or the culture says?

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Let's pray. Let's read **Luke 1:57-66**.

Elizabeth has finally had her baby boy, John. And friends and relatives have come to share her joy. But like some (many?) family get-togethers, this celebration quickly turns into conflict.

Question: How do we maintain our joy in God in our closest relationships when everyone is not on the same page?

It is very helpful to remember:

It's all about Jesus! I am to trust in Jesus. I am to love like Jesus.

Present joy is mixed joy.

Life is a mixed bag.

- *a varied collection of people or things. (Refers originally to a bag of game brought home after a day's hunting.) (thefreedictionary.com)*

This is a fallen world. God has promised us tribulation in this fallen world. Perfect joy and peace is only promised for the kingdom to come. So when we talk about joy in God here and now, we are talking about a joy that is not perfect nor is it exclusive. It is a joy in God that is a mixed joy, at best. This 'mixed joy' is seen in everyday life in various ways.

- We have the joy of a new house and the monthly mortgage payment.
- We have the joy of a newborn and 2 AM feedings.
- Holiday realization of 'newborns' and 'passings'

On a grander scale, we have the joy of victory in war and many casualties.

- just celebrated Veterans Day
- Battles of the Civil War
 - Gettysburg (Union winner – 23,000 casualties)
 - Chickamauga (Confederates winner – 18,454 casualties)
- Allied Military Casualties in WWII: 18,587,000

When it comes to our experience of joy in this world, including joy in God, we must remember that it will always be a mixed bag until Jesus comes back. We also see this ‘mixed bag of joy’ in our passage today.

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It was an occasion of joy because

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- (2) Elizabeth was old, past child-bearing age, and this birth was a miracle
- (3) God had told Zacharias that they were going to have a son and God kept His Word and
- (4) this child was no ordinary child, he had a mission from God. (see Luke 1:5-20)

A Family Occasion (59-61)

In **verses 59-61**, we see the family of Elizabeth and Zacharias coming together for a special ceremony. It was customary (according to OT Law: Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3) for sons to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth and it was a public, family, and even community, event.

- How did you pick your children’s names?

In the OT, children were normally named at birth, but it appears that a tradition had arisen of naming the sons at their circumcision, at least in this family.

Interestingly enough, the relatives seem to think they know what the newborn should be named and proceed to call him Zacharias, after his father. But Elizabeth will have none of it. She puts her foot down and says his name will be John.

- How much of your conflict with others is based on what you expect instead of what God says?

So we have a family conflict on a joyous occasion! Sound familiar?

- Rejoicing with Elizabeth and Zacharias.

- Assuming a right that is not theirs.
- Reacting to a decision by the parents.
- family pressures/conflict

A Surprising Occasion (62-66)

In **verses 62-66**, we see how this family conflict is resolved.

The relatives are surprised, even shocked and disturbed, at this ‘trans-gression’ of family tradition and decide to try to trump Elizabeth by asking Zacharias what he wants to name the boy.

- Charades!
- Sign language
- appeal to the father, Zacharias (signs to a deaf and mute man)

Now, Zacharias is still mute and appears to also be deaf, since they make ‘signs’ to ask him what to call the baby. Zacharias affirms Elizabeth’s stance and surprises the relatives by naming his son, John. It is at this point that God frees him to speak again and he begins by praising God.

- Are you fathers taking responsibility for what happens in your home/family? For faithfulness to God’s Word in your family?
- Has God ever weakened your pride in order to strengthen your praise?

This joyous, conflict-filled occasion was also surprising because

(1) before now we may have thought that Zacharias was only mute but now it appears he was also deaf by God’s discipline

(2) family and cultural tradition is set aside by God’s direction and by a courageous couple

(3) Zacharias is released from his disciplinary restraints so he can praise God and

(4) the hand of God was obviously at work even in a situation mixed with joy and conflict and discipline and praise and questions.

- Do you think God can be at work for good when life is such a mixed bag?

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We need to remember that joy, especially joy in God, is not a private matter. It is experienced by us personally but it is not experienced typically in isolation from others. In fact, God has designed that our joy in Him would be fed by the joy of others in God.

We can see this in this story as the neighbors and relatives ‘were rejoicing with her’ (**Luke 1:58**).

- We can see this same principle operative in regard to Paul and Titus in **2 Corinthians 7:13** and
- the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son in **Luke 15:6, 9, 32**.

This is joy in God because of how we see the heart of God in the hand of God at work in other people’s lives. When we see God’s steadfast love in the lives of others and it should cause us to rejoice with them.

- Do you rejoice in God’s goodness to others?

You can’t be a joyful person and be a selfish person (ie, the only per-son’s joy that matters to you is yours!)

- Isn’t that why we go to weddings?!

God satisfies us in the joy of others in God as well as our own!

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- In the parable of the lost son, we not only see the joy of the father at the return of his younger son but also the sorrow of the father in light of the elder son’s resentment at his brother’s welcome. (**Luke 15:25-32**)

The joy over a Savior is mixed with the sorrow over those who refuse His grace.

Our greatest joy in God is our joy in Jesus as our Savior from sin. We rejoice when we see others come to Christ and find salvation from their sins. But we grieve when we see people reject the Savior.

- Some will receive Jesus and some won't, like the two thieves crucified with Jesus. We rejoice with the one who believed and we grieve over the one who didn't. (**Luke 23:39-43**)

The occasions of the prodigal's return and the two thieves crucified with Jesus were ones of both joy and sorrow. This is important to consider because if we expect joy 'unmixed' in this life, we are likely to have little or no joy at all.

- Can you rejoice even when you have sorrow?

You can't be a joyful person and be a narrow person (ie, one who thinks that the only joy worth having is a joy without any sorrow or conflict).

God satisfies us in this world with a joy that is mixed with appropriate sorrow over sin and suffering and conflict. (**2 Corinthians 6:10**)

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In this story, Zacharias and Elizabeth held on to trust and obey God's word by naming their son John, as God commanded, even in the face of family and cultural pressure to do something different.

We must realize that joy in God will come as we trust and obey His Word, even when it is hard and brings us into conflict with others, including the members of our own family.

- When we trust and obey God's Word there is a joy that God gives us in Him, even in the face of loss of various kinds. (**Hebrews 10:34**)
- We cannot separate God's love and His commandments to us nor can we separate obedience to God's commandments and the experience of His joy. (**John 15:9-11**)
- Is what God says more important to you than what your family or the culture says?

So we should expect our joy in God ...

To be, in large measure, a sharing in the joy of others.

To not be without conflict in our closest relationships.

To be more experienced as we seek to be faithful to God's Word.

'Remember, O my soul,
It is your duty and privilege to rejoice in God.
He requires it of you for all His favors of grace.
Rejoice then in the Giver and His goodness.
Be happy in Him, O my heart, and in nothing but God,
For whatever man trusts in,
From that he expects happiness.

He who is the ground of your faith
Should be the substance of your joy.
From where then comes heaviness and dejection,
When joy is sown in you,
Promised by the Father,
Bestowed by the Son,
Inwrought by the Holy Spirit,
Yours by grace,
Your birthright in believing?

Are you seeking to rejoice in yourself
From an evil motive of pride and self-reputation?
You have nothing of your own but sin,
Nothing to move God to be gracious,
Or to continue His grace towards you.
If you forget this you will lose your joy.

Are you grieving under a sense of indwelling sin?
Let godly sorrow work repentance,
As the true spirit which the Lord blesses,
And which creates fullest joy;
Sorrow for self opens rejoicing in God,
Self-loathing draws down divine delights.

Have you sought joys in some creature comfort?
Look not below God for happiness;
Fall not asleep in Delilah's lap.
Let God be all in all to you,
And joy in the fountain that is always full. (*A Colloquy on Rejoicing*, Puritan Prayer)

How are we called to begin (come to Jesus Christ)? Turn and Trust

- Turn to God for mercy.
- Trust Jesus for His perfect righteousness.
- Trust Jesus for His perfect Rule.

How are we called to live (follow Christ)? Turn, Trust and Love

- Turn to God for help and happiness.
- Trust His promises.
- Love by obeying His commands.