

Joy in God - Part 4: Joy in the Promise of Joy

Luke 1:46-56; Coast Community Church; Pastor Earl Miles; November 10, 2013

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Joy in God for the present is largely the result of trusting God's promise of Joy in the future.

And Mary said, 'My soul exalts the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior ... As He spoke [promised] to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.' (Luke 1:46-47, 55)

Joy in God is important for the glory of God in our lives. Joy in God is rejoicing in God as the One who loves us, helps us, and will one day make everything right. But the truth is that the key to this joy in God is believing the promises of God for future joy in the face of pain and suffering and confusion and uncertainty right now. We must rest in the promises to rejoice in the Promiser! Mary rejoiced this way (Luke 1:46-55). The disciples rejoiced this way after getting a beating! (Acts 5:40-41; Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23) This is the message of William Cowper's hymn, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*. The saving, prototypical faith of Abraham is very much about trusting in the promises of God (Romans 4:19-22; Hebrews 11:6-8).

We need to turn from seeing God's love primarily in our providences rather than in His promises in Jesus.

He has given help to Israel His servant in remembrance of His mercy [loyal love] (Luke 1:54)

This truth that joy in God now is rooted in trusting God for promised joy in the future leads us to turn (to repent) from basing our perspective on life on other things. If this is the truth, then our sense of God's love for us cannot be founded on our circumstances (ie, God's providence over our lives) but must be founded on His Word, His promises to us because of Jesus. If we look at the life of Job and his suffering, I doubt that we, under the same circumstances, would have 'felt' loved by God based on what we were going through. (Job 1:13-19; 2:7-10) And if we look at the life of the apostle Paul and imagine ourselves going through what he went through, we probably would not have 'felt' like God loved us. (2 Corinthians 6:4-5, 9-10; 11:23-28) John Owen, the great Puritan theologian, on average had one child and lost one child in death every three years in his adult years and yet had a certainty of God's love for him.

We need to trust in the promise of the clear promises, of the precepts and of the Person of God as revealed in Jesus. This truth that joy in God now is rooted in trusting God for promised joy in the future obviously leads us to trust God's promises. But many times we have great difficulty in identifying the promises of God, especially if they are not spelled out for us in very specific ways. If you've ever looked at a collection of divine promises, you may have wondered why many of the verses were included since they do not fit the form of '*I, God, promise to you, the believer in Jesus, such and such.*' This is because there is a sense in which the Word of God as a whole is a book of promise when we understand the different ways in which 'promise' is held out to us through the Scriptures. The first way is the clear and explicit promise statement. These promise statements come in the form of positive promises (Matthew 7:7; Proverbs 16:20)

as well as negative promises (Galatians 6:7-8; James 1:19-20). The second way is the promise implied in God's commands (Ephesians 6:2; Psalm 119:41, 47; John 15:10-11; Luke 6:27-28). The third way is the promise implied by the truth about God as revealed in Jesus (Psalm 86:5-7; Hebrews 13:5-6). Just like the naval officer's wife who did not fear her husband's sword but rested in the 'promise' of His love because of what she knew was true of him, so we can rest in the 'promise' of God's love in light of what we know about Him.

We need to love by obeying God's commands through trusting His promises in Jesus. This truth that joy in God now is rooted in trusting God for promised joy in the future obviously leads us to love by trusting God's promises. God does not call us to obey without good reason and good hope. He weds together His promise of good and our obedience to Him. In fact, the only way we can love in painful, self-sacrificial ways to the glory of God is if we trust God for what He promises us in Jesus and because of His cross. Moses rejected the pleasures of this world and obeyed God by trusting in greater riches promised in Jesus (Hebrews 11:24-26; 2 Peter 1:2-4). Paul calls us to do good to our enemies by trusting God's promise to exercise justice in due time (Romans 12:17-21). Jesus calls us to do good to those who can't repay us by trusting in a future repayment at the resurrection (Luke 14:12-14). The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 obeyed God in the ways they were called to by trusting God for promised future blessings (Hebrews 11:6, 13-16). John Paton went to serve among the cannibals of the south sea islands by trusting the Lord Jesus' promise to be with us. (Matthew 28:20)

What has God promised us in Jesus? God says to us, "I give you My Word (of promise) ..."

1. "I promise you the forgiveness of all sin." (Romans 5:1, 9)
2. "I promise you the gift of righteousness (record of perfect obedience)." (Romans 5:1, 17, 19)
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Is that true in everyday life?

- Present engagement joy is rooted in promised marriage joy.
- Present senior joy is rooted in promised graduation joy.
- Present pregnancy joy is rooted in promised baby joy.
- Present Friday joy is rooted in promised weekend joy.
- Present Amazon order joy is rooted in promised delivery.
- Present holiday joy is rooted in promised open present joy on Christmas day.

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But the truth is that the key to this joy in God is believing the promises of God for future joy in the face of pain and suffering and confusion and uncertainty right now.

- We must rest in the promises to rejoice in the Promiser! Mary rejoiced this way (Luke 1:46-55).
- The disciples rejoiced this way after getting a beating! (Acts 5:40-41; Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23)
- This is the message of William Cowper's hymn, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill

He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

**His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.**

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

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If this is the truth, then our sense of God's love for us cannot be founded on our circumstances (ie, God's providence over our lives) but must be founded on His Word, His promises to us because of Jesus.

- If we look at the life of Job and his suffering, I doubt that we, under the same circumstances, would have 'felt' loved by God based on what we were going through. (Job 1:13-19; 2:7-10)
- And if we look at the life of the apostle Paul and imagine ourselves going through what he went through, we probably would not have 'felt' like God loved us. (2 Corinthians 6:4-5, 9-10; 11:23-28)

- John Owen, the great Puritan theologian, on average had one child and lost one child in death every three years in his adult years and yet had a certainty of God's love for him.

'The second crucial event in those early years in London was Owen's marriage to a young woman named Mary Rooke. He was married to her for 31 years, from 1644 to 1675. We know virtually nothing about her. But we do know one absolutely stunning fact that must have colored all of Owen's ministry for the rest of his life (He died eight years after she did.). We know that she bore him 11 children, and all but one died as a child, and that one daughter died as a young adult. In other words Owen experienced the death of eleven children and his wife! *That's one child born and lost on the average every three years of Owen's adult life.* We don't have one reference to Mary or to the children or to his pain in all his books. But *just knowing that the man walked in the valley of the shadow of death most of his life gives me a clue to the depth of dealing with God that we find in his works.* God has his strange and painful ways of making us the kind of pastors and theologians he wants us to be. (short biography on John Owen by John Piper)

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- The third way is the promise implied by the truth about God as revealed in Jesus (Psalm 86:5-7; Hebrews 13:5-6).
- Just like the naval officer's wife who did not fear her husband's sword but rested in the 'promise' of His love because of what she knew was true of him, so we can rest in the 'promise' of God's love in light of what we know about Him.

‘Years ago a naval officer and his wife were at sea during a raging storm. Seeing the frantic look in her eyes, the experienced seaman tried unsuccessfully to subdue her fears. When she grabbed his arm and said, ‘How can you be so calm in such a storm?’ he drew his sword and said, ‘Are you afraid?’ Without hesitation she answered, ‘Of course not!’ ‘Why not?’ he inquired. *‘Because I know that the sword is in the hand of my husband and he loves me too much to hurt me.’* The man replied, ‘Remember, *I too know whom I have believed* and He is the One who holds the winds in His fist and the waters in the hollow of His hand!’”

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God does not call us to obey without good reason and good hope. He weds together His promise of good and our obedience to Him. In fact, the only way we can love in painful, self-sacrificial ways to the glory of God is if we trust God for what He promises us in Jesus and because of His cross.

- Moses rejected the pleasures of this world and obeyed God by trusting in greater riches promised in Jesus (Hebrews 11:24-26; 2 Peter 1:2-4).
- Paul calls us to do good to our enemies by trusting God’s promise to exercise justice in due time (Romans 12:17-21).
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Without that abiding consciousness of the presence and power of my dear Lord and Savior, nothing else in all the world could have preserved me from losing my reason and perishing miserably. In his words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," became to me so real that it would not have startled me to behold Him, as Stephen did, gazing down upon the scene. I felt His supporting power. . . . It is the sober truth, and it comes back to me sweetly after 20 years, that I had my nearest and dearest glimpses of the face and smiles of my blessed Lord in those dread moments when musket, club, or spear was being leveled at my life. Oh the bliss of living and enduring, as seeing "Him who is invisible"! (John Paton)

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How can I know that the promises of God are for me?

- Turn to God for mercy.
- Trust in Jesus for the gift of His righteousness.
- Obey Jesus as your Lord. (Romans 10:9-13; 12:1-2)

Have you done that?

‘One day as I was passing into the field . . . this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And me thought, withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he wants [=lacks] my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "The same yesterday, today, and forever." Heb. 13:8. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God [about the unforgiv-able sin] left off to trouble me; **now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God.**" (John Bunyan)

Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.” (Luke 10:20)