

Acts 2: 46 and 47; “Gladness and Simplicity of Heart”, Sermon # 12
in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on September 25th, 2011,
in the Morning Worship Service.

I am personally convinced that many Christians today are not experiencing the joy of living the Christian life. They may know their duty, as Christians; and they may be doing it; but they may not, at many points, be experiencing the joy of the Lord which is their strength. This being sad or melancholy may be happening to them for a number of different reasons, but if they are true Christians they need to come to terms with it, not only that they might not be sad, but that they might better honor God in their heart and by their countenance. In both Psalm 42 and Psalm 43, David reasons in his own soul this way. He says, “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” “And why are you disquieted within me?” “Hope in God for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance, and my God.” There are definite reasons why a Christian may become sad or disheartened; downcast or discouraged. They may be pressed with the cares of this life. They may have experienced great difficulties in their work situation or in their family life. They may be in bad health. They may not have many friends, or even think that they have a friend at all. They may, for some right reason or wrong reason be disillusioned with the church that they are attending. Or they may have a worldly view of what joy really is. I do not want to try to address all these particulars, but only the last reason that I gave. It is this last reason (a worldly view of joy), which I believe lies at the heart of why many Christians are not experiencing true spiritual joy. Either they have forgotten where true spiritual joy comes from, or they have never really understood it at all. It is a worldly view of joy that causes many to fall short of experiencing the joy of the Lord. But I would declare to you this morning that true spiritual joy is a grace of Christ which comes to you, the believer, by remembering that you have Christ with you in all the activities of your day. In our text this realization of having Christ with you is termed, “gladness and simplicity of heart.” Christ is with you in the person of His Holy Spirit who has been given to you. And He is with you at all times. It is this blessed Holy Spirit who is with you, who gives you the true spiritual joy in living the Christian life. The fruit of the Spirit is love and then next in the list of the fruit of the Spirit comes joy. But you and I must learn to “walk in the Spirit” in order to have true spiritual joy. So this morning we will examine our subject by thinking about these truths. 1st – To walk in the Spirit and to have true spiritual joy, you must continue daily in devotion to Christ. 2^{ndly} – To walk in the Spirit and to have true spiritual joy you must learn the importance of simplicity of heart. And then 3^{rdly} – To walk in the Spirit and to have true spiritual joy you must seek to praise God in all things.

1st of all, then, To walk in the Spirit and to have true spiritual joy, you must continue daily in devotion to Christ.

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” The reason that these young believers could continue with one accord (that is; doing what they agreed to do together; continuing in their worship and devotion, steadfastly); devoting themselves to the Apostle’s doctrine, and to have fellowship, to observe the Lord’s Supper, and to continually be engaging in prayers; all this was happening because of the presence of the Holy Spirit with them; working in their hearts, to give them gladness of heart to do so. The reason that you can continue to be devoted to daily worshiping and serving God is because you, as a believer have the Holy Spirit. If you will look over at Acts Chapter 2, verse 38, for a moment you will see how I am linking this truth that we are studying, with the truth of that important verse. “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” The promise that Peter is speaking of here is the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit who is given to each and every person who repents. You will say to me, “Well I thought that salvation comes by faith in Christ, and so how can it be that if I repent, that I will receive the Holy Spirit?” You need to understand that faith and repentance are twin graces. By faith you receive and rest upon Christ for your salvation; by repentance you turn from your sin unto God; leaving your old life of living for yourself and the sinful pleasures of the world behind you. It is not as though you do not appreciate the good things of this life which God has given to you, or will give to you. But you have resolved by the grace of Christ that you will carefully sort through the things of your experience, on a daily basis, to find out what to get rid of; what is sinful in your life. This is an important part of your devotion to God; your learning to separate the precious from the vile. (Jeremiah 15: 9) You have come to realize that there is something far more to life than the sinful fleshly pleasures of this life. There is something much better; something that you have missed before, and now you want to cultivate it. It is having fellowship in your heart with Christ, and cultivating fellowship with Him by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is thinking about spiritual things. Thinking spiritual thoughts, joying and rejoicing, and delighting in spiritual things. It is learning to do and to keep all of God’s commandments. This is what makes you glad now.

Listen to Psalm 30, verse 6 – “There are many who say, ‘who will show us any good?’ “Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.” “You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased.” Do you see that it was God who put this gladness in David’s heart? He did this in by “lifting up the light of His countenance” upon him. Do you have a

greater gladness in your heart for earthly blessings, or spiritual blessings? If it is for spiritual blessings, such as joy, this is something that God can place there in your heart. If you are a new Christian or a young Christian, God expects that you will want to be baptized and join the church which has been preaching the gospel and the Word of God to you. It is not something to dread or to avoid, but will be, if you take this step of obedience, a source of great joy to you. You do these things for His sake, not for men's sake. It will also be your joy to be able to repent of all of your sins, on a daily basis, if grace is at work in your heart. God Himself will give you gladness of heart and real spiritual joy when you choose Him over every other worldly thing you could pursue to be blessed by. Have you learned this truth? Wherever there is the grace of true and saving faith in Jesus Christ, there will also be the grace of repentance and a desire to obey the Word of God. Repentance and obedience are your works, but they are works which are done by the power of the Holy Spirit, because of the joy you now have to get rid of the guilt of your sins, and the gladness it gives to you to obey God and walk in fellowship with Him. You repent of your sins, not only to obey God, but in an on-going fashion, as you find them in your heart and life, because you want to honor and please Him. He then, lifts up the light of His countenance upon you, and gives you true spiritual joy. He has shown you great grace in Christ. So what will be your response to Him?

You can see the need to come to this holy mindset; also, in terms of other people coming to know the Lord. If you will turn over to Acts Chapter 11, verse 5, you will see it. Here Peter has been relating the vision which he had received, to those of the party of the circumcision who were objecting to his having gone to eat with uncircumcised men. They believed that this was unlawful, for Peter to do this; having this social interaction with those who were not Jews, and even preaching to them the gospel. Peter says this: "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me." When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air." "And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'" "But I said, 'Not so, Lord!'" "For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth." "But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.'" "Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven." "At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea." "Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing." "Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house." "And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'" "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning." "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the

Holy Spirit.” “If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’”

Notice the words, “granted to the Gentiles”. The Holy Spirit had led them to Peter, and Peter preached Jesus to them. They repented of their sins, and it was God who gave them that grace of repentance. They saw that they needed to get rid of their mindset of thinking that their religious works would bring them God’s favor and the blessings of eternal life. They realized that they needed to obey the words of the gospel in order to be saved. They acted upon those words by grace. For you see, Cornelius the Centurion was already a very devout and religious man, one who feared God, in the right sense of that term. But still, he needed to repent. He still needed to obey the Word of God to him. He needed to repent of thinking that his own religious works would bring him to have the blessings of eternal life, or that his good works were works which were complete in God’s sight, apart from their being seen in Christ. He needed Christ for all of his heart sins as well as any other sins he might commit. He needed Christ to be his righteousness. And he had come to know that he was still was a sinner, even though not as great a sinner outwardly as other men. Indeed he was a most exemplary believer in the true and living God. But he had not, as of yet, been saved through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord until Peter came and preached to him. When Peter preached Jesus to him, and to the others with him; God gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is how it is; that a person comes to the place where they love to be devoted continually to the Lord; that they are devoted to Christ and to spiritual things. This is how it is, that they come to the place where they love to attend all the services of the church; that they are continually desirous to have fellowship with other believers; that they want to take the Lord’s Supper whenever it is observed; that they are a person of prayer on a regular, continuous, and on-going basis. I say to you that it was because the Holy Spirit was giving them the grace of joy and gladness to be like that. And He can do the same for you. He can give you joy and gladness in doing those good and wonderful spiritual things which have nothing to do with the pleasures and entertainments of the world; but yet learning these spiritual truths and having these interactions with your Lord, and learning to help others around you, and being of one accord with the brethren at church, will become your chief delight.

Is this something you have, dear friend, or are you missing something very important in living your Christian life? Do you have real spiritual joy? Are you really excited about this Wonderful Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by His Holy Spirit, is living in your heart? I think that if you are not excited about His being there that you may actually be grieving Him, and yet you may not even realize it. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption,” it says in Ephesians 5: 30. And listen to the connection this

has with repentance, which is given in the following verse. “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.” “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ has forgiven you.” Why is it that true Christians have to be exhorted by the Apostle Paul to repentance over such bad attitudes as bitterness, wrath, and anger, and such actions as evil speaking? It is because they have not, or they are not, recognizing that the most important thing is their having their greatest joy in their relationship with Christ; that it is this which gives them gladness, and lets them live in simplicity and sincerity of heart.

2ndly – To walk in the Spirit and to have true spiritual joy you must learn the importance of simplicity of heart.

Our verse 46 says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” Not only gladness of heart; but simplicity of heart. What is simplicity of heart? In some of the translations of the Bible it is translated “singleness” of heart. The word in the Greek is ἀφελότες ([aphelotes](#)) which can be translated sincerity, singleness, or simplicity. I believe that “simplicity of heart” in the context of this verse meant these believers in the early church had adopted to themselves a sincere, simple, single view of devotion to Christ. This simplicity of devotion to Christ extended itself into something as simple as the way that they ate their meals. This is a very important component of living the Christian life to the glory of God, and having joy in doing so. “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14: 17) And yet the same Apostle said in 1 Corinthians 10: 31 – “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Do not let the complexities and difficulties that you encounter in living your life move you, as a Christian, away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. Do not let the World or the Devil deceive you or lead you astray from that simplicity of devotion to Christ Himself which gives you a calm and steady heart, which is trusting in Him.

There are other people around you who have a great need to see the importance of spiritual truth and the right way to live, and they need a witness of Christ born to them. This is what God is looking for, from you. Be concerned about whether people around you see Christ in you. They do not need to see your selfishness or your criticisms of Christians around you. They need to behold Christ Himself in the way that you think, and act, and live. Christ wants you to faithfully represent the truth of His Word to others around you. But you cannot do that if you yourself do not learn the Word God with a view to doing it. You say to me, “Where do I begin to learn to live this way?” Well, turn with me over to Psalm 86, verse 10 and you will see where you begin. “Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.” In the margin in relation to the words, “unite my heart,” it says, “give me singleness of heart”. You must pray

to have this kind of singleness and simplicity of heart. Pray that God would teach you His good way in connection with the Bible. Pray to be able to walk in His truth – the Scriptures. And pray to have Him “unite your heart to fear His name.”

I like what John Gill says about this: “There must be an heart given to man to fear the Lord; for the fear of the Lord is not naturally in their hearts, or before their eyes; and they should have, not a divided and distracted heart, an heart divided between God and the world, between the fear of God and the fear of man; but a heart united to the Lord, that cleaves to him, and him only; a single and a sincere heart; a heart that has a single view to his glory, and a sincere affection for him; and such a heart the Lord has promised to give to his people, in order to fear him, Jeremiah 32:39.” Jeremiah 32, verse 39 says, “Then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them.” ‘And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.’ This is speaking about the conversion of the Jews to Christ, and their being brought into the Church, but because it speaks of the everlasting covenant, it applies to us Gentiles as well, even now. To fear the Lord is to regard the Lord with a view to doing and keeping His commandments by faith in Christ, and out of love to God. This holy fear will enable us, by the power of the Holy Spirit to face temptations of all sorts.

Turn with me over to 2 Corinthians 11, verse 1. Listen to what Paul says here about simplicity. “Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.” “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ.” “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” The New American Standard translation says, “But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. This verse confirms what our text in Acts is describing as regards the life of a Christian. The life of a Christian is pursuing right thinking and acting through pursuing right doctrine; the correct teaching of how you should live, which comes from the Word of God. The Apostle Paul was afraid that Satan might deceive the believers at Corinth by means of false teachers and their teaching. He says in verse 4 – “For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it.”

False teachers often have a spirit of extreme self-confidence in their own opinions or understanding. They either will not hold to the Word of God, or they twist it and turn it to their own sinful and selfish purposes, resulting in their eternal destruction. False teachers either add to the Word of God and try to make you a legalist, or they take away from the Word of God and you become a person

who will not live by the commandments of God; you become an Antinomian. But when you are simply trusting in the Lord for salvation, you can also trust Him sincerely and simply for every good thing, trusting in Him for all the grace that you will need to keep His commandments in all the various situations of your life. Psalm 84: 11 – “The Lord God is a Sun and a Shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” “O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!”

And then 3rdly - To walk in the Spirit and to have true spiritual joy you must seek to praise God in all things.

Verse 46b says, “They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.” One of the greatest witnesses that you will ever bear before other people will be if you are able to praise God in all situations. In this situation in Acts 2: 47 we find that it was because God had given these gathered believers every good thing; all food and good teaching, and fellowship, and gladness and simplicity of heart that they could desire; that this praising of Him took place. But we shall see as we read further in the book of Acts that the early Church sought to praise God in all things; whether it was for the good spiritual things, or even the trials and tribulations that they went through. This has always been a blessing that God will give to His true people, whether it was in the Old Testament or the New. He has always given His people a spirit of praise by the powerful working of His Holy Spirit. In Psalm 34: 1, when David was fleeing from Saul, and felt like he had to feign madness before King Abimelech, who drove him away from him, he says, “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” “My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad.” “Oh magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.”

And in Psalm 86, in the verses just before the verses where he asks God to unite his heart to fear His name, He says, “Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; nor are there any works like Your works.” And in the verse just following, in verse 12, he says, “I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore.” “For great is your mercy toward me.” Are you able to praise God every day, my dear believing friend? Are you able to praise Him in the good times and the bad? This is what you are called to, as it says in Psalm 84: 4 – “They are ever praising You.” Peter knew this truth, for he says in 1 Peter 2: 9 – “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...” But you are also called to suffer with Christ at certain times in your Christian life; to suffer for the sake of the truth, and to suffer for the sake of righteousness.

But listen to what Peter says about that in 1 Peter 4: 12 – “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of

Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." O how wonderful it is to realize that a Christian can joy and rejoice in the Holy Spirit and in the greatness of the grace of Christ. You dear believer, need to think more carefully upon these things so that you too will be able to have that joy at all times active in your heart. Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!"