

SABBATH THOUGHT 2022-01-08—SUFFERING & JOY

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Today, another child was begotten by God. What a joy it was for the new convert and us as witnesses at the baptism! If we rejoice when a sinner is converted, imagine the sound of angels in heaven who rejoice (Luke 15:7). It amazes me to think that the entire heavenly host spontaneously cheers when someone is baptized. It makes me think of the unspeakable joy to come (1 Pet 1:8).

However, it is paradoxical that the joy of baptism comes with a price—suffering. All who are baptized must count the cost (Luke 14:28-33). Some of the cost we must be willing to pay is suffering for Christ (2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:13). God tests our hearts to prove whether we will obey Him no matter what. Instinctively we know there will be little joy in the midst of suffering.

Jesus Christ said something very interesting when He was talking to the disciples prior to His crucifixion: “These things I have spoken to you, in order that My joy may dwell in you, and *that* your joy may be full” (John 15:11). Why did He say “joy may dwell” and “joy may be full?” Joy is not guaranteed in this life because this physical life always involves some amount of suffering—for everyone.

This might seem to contradict James who said, “Consider it all joy, when you are beset with various trials.” (Jas 1:2). Who can say they experience joy during a trial? Are we lesser Christians if we suffer and are not filled with joy? No, because there is a difference between HAVING joy during a trial and considering the joy that will come AFTER the trial. James goes on to say that joy follows a trial when we successfully endured a test of our faith. Through it, we become more perfect (Jas 1:3-4). We also must be prepared for the possibility that the joy will only come after our death, at the resurrection.

My wife and I personally experienced this recently when talking with a brother in Christ who was dying. Even though he was in terrible pain, he only talked about seeing Jesus Christ and God in the kingdom. Not once did he mention his suffering. He was completely focused on considering the joy that was set before him—at the resurrection—and all of God's people. Just listening to him reminded us of that joy. Ironically, he gave us what we thought to give him! The point is that he had a choice to dwell upon his suffering or think about God's promised kingdom. The former changes nothing but the latter changes everything. Forever.

Trials should be motivation for prayer. We pray more earnestly during a trial than when things are going well but there is also a very special opportunity that comes after a trial or when God eases the suffering. We can then offer thanksgiving to God for allowing us to imitate the suffering of our savior Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:21). While a trial can be most

miserable, afterwards it can be a wonderful joy—even an honor—to be accounted worthy to have suffered in a manner similar to Jesus Christ, our High Priest and Advocate.

As the Preacher said, there is a time in life for everything (Ecc 3:2-8). There are times with joy and times with pain, grief, sadness. But, we can be encouraged because Jesus Christ set the example. He did not have joy during that Passover night and day in 33AD. In fact, He sweat drops of blood just anticipating His suffering (Luke 22:44). He was in agony. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set BEFORE Him. It would come in the future, not in the here and now. Even so, it was His motivation for suffering. No one endures joyous things. Jesus suffering unimaginable pain for the future joy that would come by finishing His task to bring sons and daughters into His Father's kingdom.

FULL joy lies not in this physical life but in spiritual eternity. David recognized this when he said, “You will make known to Me the path of life; **in Your presence is fullness of joy.** At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psa 16:11). Our joy will never be completely full until we are in the presence of God and Jesus Christ.

Even though we suffer, there can be joy in this life. For most, there are times of testing and occasions for rejoicing. The main difference is that **sorrow is always temporary** whereas joy will be permanent at the resurrection. Jesus talked about this in John 16:20-22, comparing the sorrow of short-lived birth pangs to the lifetime joy of a new child.

We can also give joy to others. It usually is a simple matter of spending time or communicating with them. What did Jesus say in John 15:11? “**These things I have spoken to you, in order that My joy may dwell in you,** and *that* your joy may be full.” Jesus Christ spread joy to His disciples by talking with them about the kingdom and showing He loved them. In the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus commended those who helped people. The sheep brought joy to others simply because they showed they cared. Even if the suffering or pain isn't eliminated, the joy that we can give to others by doing good works will certainly ease it. This is one way we “bear one another's burdens” (Gal 6:2). The bottom line is that we might intellectually know that someone cares for us but, we know it in our HEARTS when they take the time to reach out to us. Joy comes from the heart, not the mind.

God does this, too. Who can read the last few verses of 1 Thessalonians 4 or chapters 20 and 21 of Revelation and not be filled with joy? I'm certain you can list dozens of uplifting, encouraging, helpful, and spiritual scriptures that bring joy just by reading them. What is the scripture you go to when you need to be refreshed with God's joy?

In fact, do not ALL the words of God show us how much He loves us? Does not the sacrifice of Jesus Christ speak volumes about His love toward us? If we, being flesh and

blood, can bring joy to others with a few loving and kind words, who among us can lack for joy when God personally speaks to us through His Word of life?

Joy from God can be powerful. Have you ever talked to God about the joy in your life? Have you ever thanked Him for the joy He gives us? Just thinking about God's kingdom can produce joy. I don't know about you, but I have an unending list of questions about God's kingdom. I think about them and talk to God about them at times. What will it be like to live forever? How long will it take to personally get to know every angel and child of God? Probably a ridiculous question for timeless beings. What will the new heaven and earth look like? As vast and amazing as the universe is, I believe it is barely a shadow of the vast expanse of glory and grandeur of the one that is yet to come. God promises to GIVE US this brand new kingdom (Luke 12:32)—it won't be the secondhand, "high-mileage" universe we live in now.

I also imagine construction of beautiful, incredible cities in the kingdom. Did you know that God's throne on Mount Zion is part of a CITY (Heb 12:22)? The replacement, called New Jerusalem, is currently under construction and will be brought down to this earth where God and Jesus Christ will dwell with us (Rev 21). Perhaps more cities will be constructed throughout the New Heavens for the vast numbers of God's children. Thinking about these things is both peaceful and joyful.

Something else I picture in my mind at times is being resurrected. After a moment of confusion upon awakening in a new body, I imagine all the brethren I have known—and more—around me. All are shining like suns and stunning in their white robes. Standing next to each one is an angel who will show us how to step off this earth to meet Jesus Christ in His full glory above! We will be exploding with joy and anticipation at seeing the Father and everything He has in store for us. I love to ponder these things.

For many, this will be the first time in memory they are without pain or grief or torment. Think bigger now. Imagine a whole world without suffering. No. More. Tears. Jesus makes this promise not only to the firstfruits (Rev 7:17) but all the future children of God (Rev 21:4). He specifically mentioned this twice because His promise is to everyone, not just the firstfruits. Maybe because everywhere on earth, all God sees are faces filled with tears. But that is about to end. Read this scripture that gives more hope in a few words than exist anywhere in the world today—it is central to His promises established from the beginning.

ISAIAH 25:8-9 He will destroy death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces. And He shall take away from all the earth the rebuke of His people, for the LORD has spoken it. 9 And one shall say in that day, "Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Did you notice that this OT scripture speaks of both God **and** Jesus Christ (“LORD”)? We will REJOICE in salvation! Who can read this and not see the joy that is set before us? One particular Psalm, I think, describes in a few words what happens on the day that God's spiritual family is complete and this physical world is gone. It is one of the shortest Psalms but then, there really are no words to describe what awaits us

PSALM 100:1-5 **Shout for joy** to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Serve the LORD with gladness; **come before His presence with singing**. 3 Know that the LORD, He is God. He has made us, and we are His; **we are His people** and the sheep of His pasture. 4 **Enter into His gates with thanksgiving** and into His courts with praise; give thanks unto Him and bless His name, 5 For the LORD is good; **His steadfast love is everlasting**; and His faithfulness endures to all generations.

May God fill you with His peace and joy!

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