

VOTC Nov. 2017

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Joy In A Broken World,  
*Galatians 5:22*

Hello Dear Listeners;

Just how bad can it get? How much more terror because of hurricanes, fires and floods? What disasters are waiting to swallow lives, ruin neighbourhoods, devastate vineyards, leaving a trail of death and destruction?

These are only a portion, a sampling of sorts of the ills and threats that face us in the world today. There are daily tremors on the political scene. I think of seemingly deranged dictators such as North Korea's leader who threatens to unleash a nuclear holocaust on his perceived enemies: South Korea and its big brother, the U.S.A.

I haven't even begun to mention the numerous social upheavals and tragedies that are escalating the world over: Violence behind closed doors as well as in the streets; suicides in epidemic proportions.

It appears that no amount of crisis management and the availability of grief counsellors are able to stem the tide of what can only be described as the "pure evil" of our days.

We would not be faulted if we cried out in despair, "*Where then is joy?*" Where is peace to be found, where true tranquility in this broken world seething with what seems to be uncontrollable misery?

To be sure, there are those who advocate what to them is a sure antidote to all the forces that threaten one's equilibrium, - the violence and the breakdown of what used to be thought of as man's lasting institutions.

*Says one: " Make regular trips to the nearest casino and live it up a little"*

*Advocates another, " Join me in my bomb proof shelter underground and under three or four meters of concrete. It is well-stocked with food and medicine. You can leave your weapons at the door, while together we ride out the storm."*<sup>1</sup>

Neither unbridled frivolity however, nor seemingly secure protection against atomic bombs or earthquakes can hide the fact we live in a broken world, in which nightmares abound. The ever-increasing numbers of suicides, even amongst young people, are but one indication of the stress that is current.

Yet the bible, which is God's unshakeable truth, does not tire of speaking about joy for today and tomorrow. It is mentioned close to one hundred times throughout its sixty-six books.

Now it is important to realize that joy is not the same as happiness. Something or someone may seem to provide an enduring source of happiness, yet happiness and joy are not synonymous.

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<sup>1</sup> see the leading article in *The Toronto Star* October 14, 2017

In our culture the word *happy* has been sentimentalized and trivialized.<sup>2</sup> “Smile, and be happy”, says the clown-faced man on the magazine cover. Charles M. Schulz, in the comic strip *Peanuts*, said, “*Happiness is a warm puppy,*” seeing it as a kind of sentimental, warm-and-fuzzy stuffed thing you might have at your side in a storm.

The New Testament ( Greek) word for being happy, however is “*Blessed*” and biblical blessedness speaks not only of happiness but even deep-seated peace, comfort, stability, and *great joy*.

True, Christian and biblical joy, covers a very wide range of human experiences. There is joy at the birth of children, ( Psalm 113:9), the gathering of the harvest as well as in military victories ( Isa.9:3). There is a special spiritual joy in one’s heart when contemplating salvation and the blessing of eternal life. Then too there is the joy of angels at an unbeliever’s conversion ( Luke 10:20). There’s a shepherd rejoicing at finding his lost sheep, ( Luke 15: 3-7).

Not that the bible dismisses grief and pain as if these things were but illusions. The psalmist who wrote so many songs of joy also wrote of suffering and pain and grief. Listen to the psalmist David in Ps. 13.” *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?*” Yet it was not a mystery to David as to why he found himself in deep sorrow and dismay. Here’s what he said in Psalm 31: 9, 10.

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. R.C. Sproul makes this point in an article, “ Keystone to the Christian ’s Joy” on the net.

*My eyes grow weak with sorrow my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my ears by groaning;. Then he said, My strength fails because of my guilt.*

Sin, rebellion, human disobedience has caused a lot of sadness throughout the generations. We need to be reminded, even often, lest we forget, that it was our first parents, and we *in* them, disobeyed the clear commands and direction of God. As a result God cursed the ground and the relationship, between God and humankind and between brothers, sisters, neighbours, nations, the world over was utterly ruined.

Yet, king David could still sing, “*The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song.*” ( Psalm 28: 7.)

How was, and is that possible? It was because David knew, as Paul the apostle knew, that God heard his cry for mercy. He trusted and confessed that the LORD was the strength of His people not only. No, David said, “*He is my strength and my shield.*”

I pray you too can say, “The Lord is my strength. He is my precious God and I am inseparable from Him” . “I trust that in the midst of these storms that threaten me, he will carry me and see me through”

You know something? He will and he does do more! He saves you! He truly saves you and me and all who believe in him.

That doesn't only mean there is a bright and welcoming light at the end of some dark tunnel. True there is such a light for those who are

true Christians for the best is still to come. When at the end of one's life Christ Jesus welcomes you into your eternal home. There's that universal light when Jesus returns, and, having judged this world he makes all things sparkling new.

But there is more. There is joy, great joy *today*. No, it's not some momentary superficial warm fuzzy in which you wave your pompoms and shout slogans whenever your favorite team scores the winning touchdown.

True, Christian joy, is a whole lot deeper than that. It's that inner heartfelt joy in which you rejoice in knowing, really knowing Jesus Christ. The Christ who directed his followers to remain in his love, obeying his commands. This in order the Jesus' love might remain in them and that their joy might be complete, lacking nothing. ( John 15: 10, 11).

For you see, dear listeners, your joy and mine and our attempts to find it will be futile if we don't have our lives anchored in Christ. We'll only be searching but never finding unless we follow the direction of the Holy Spirit by His Word. We can't make ourselves joyful in our own power. It is as Paul writes very clearly in Galatians 5, where we find joy as one of the "fruits of the Spirit." There's actually a whole cluster of those amazing fruits. It begins with *love*, that genuine, selfless and generous living and surrendering to Jesus Christ. That wholesome Christian lifestyle in which you want and do the best for your neighbor.

*Joy, is rooted in God's own love.* That's why the bible says *the joy of the Lord is your strength, or my strength.* In that strength Job, that man who lost his whole household, his goods, his family, his health,

was able to say, “ The Lord gave and the Lord has taken way; may the name of the Lord be praised.” ( Job 1:21).

To be sure, the LORD God may allow fires and floods and wars to ravage the earth. He does allow tragedies to confront people with challenges full of sorrow. Yet all the while He is directing this world, to that day when there will be no more pain and suffering and tears and disappointments. But in order to reach that shore, where joy and gladness, will be found in universal abundance, we need to go through the surf, as it were. But not alone, no, *not alone*, for He who suffered the most extreme terror and agony on Calvary’s cross, has promised never, never to forsake his own.

Therefore dear listeners, “*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.*”<sup>3</sup> Let others know of this joy which eclipses mere happiness by far. That also your heart may sing to God and not be silent. Yes, “*Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning*” ( Psalm 31: 5b).

Amen, and thanks so much for listening today.

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:4

