

## I say it again--rejoice!

I begin this morning with the question of belief. Does true joy have anything to do with whether or not we believe in God?

### Psalm 126

As I read Psalm 126-- especially verse two, "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy..." I recognize that this is the true song of the Christian pilgrim who is on his/her way of salvation. Joy! Joy is characteristic for the Christian life. Paul lists it as part of the Fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23.

Joy is a gift we receive by walking with God. Joy is not a requirement for being Christian. Some of us can find ourselves in times of deep sorrow and pain. Some of us have been through many difficulties in life. When you find yourself in those times of sadness and pain, never convince yourself that this is the final proof that you're not a real Christian.

Again, joy is not a requirement for being a Christian. Rather, what I want you to know is that joy is a consequence of the Christian journey. Let me say it another way: Joy is not something that we have to have in order to experience our life with Jesus. Rather joy is something we pick up along the way as we live a life of faith in God.

Joy is a product of abundance. Joy is tied to a life that works together harmoniously. But... we know something about our condition. We are a sinful people. No one here can hold on to these things that bring joy--for very long.

We certainly want joy though. Many try to get it through entertainment (comedy, stories or songs). Somehow we can get lost, at least for a little while from our own troubles and live in the life of someone else's imagination. Perhaps this is why Hollywood is so successful. Our culture is pursuing joy. For some being poor would be the worst thing that could ever happen. For others, having more money would bring joy. The truth is this kind of pursuit for joy is not long lasting.

But we still want joy... don't we? There is something we can do. We can decide today to live in response to the abundance of God and not to the trials and hardships that we inevitably have to face and deal with. What I'm saying is we can decide to live in the Kingdom of God--not the kingdom of a dying world. We can decide today to live our lives in the center of God who so freely gives to us abundantly--and not live in the midst of our own egos that always wants. This is what Psalm 126 is talking about. It's talking about a joy that can only come from walking with God.

Here's what we know: Psalm 126:3b "we are filled with joy."

I don't think this is put here in the middle of the Psalm accidentally. "We are filled with joy" is in the middle of the Psalm. Vv. 1&2 "When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. 2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." This is spoken of in the past tense. Vv. 4-6 "Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev.

5 Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

6 He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him" is in the future tense.

Present joy has a history (past) and a future. This is not a short-lived joy. This is not a joy that comes about by having some good feelings at the moment (weather, stock market, good food, my kids behaved... today!).

**Here's what we know from vv. 1-2:** God brought back Israel from exile! Wow!! Amen!! Praise God!!  
Why were the Israelites the talk of the nations? That *'the Lord has done great things for them.'*

The Scripture of the OT is filled with stories of Israel and God. The OT is the story of God's people in this long, inconsistent relationship with Yahweh. It is a relationship that we see throughout the majority of the OT that lives in the shadows of Egyptian bondage. It is the story about how God shows up one day in the lives of His people and frees them from this horrific bondage. One day Israel is making "bricks without straw" and the next day they find themselves at the shores of the Red Sea singing...

**Exodus 15:1-2** (New Living Translation) *1Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; he has thrown both horse and rider into the sea. 2The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my victory. He is my God, and I will praise him; he is my father's God, and I will exalt him!"*

But the story doesn't end here. As we continue to read the pages of the OT we find the story of David. David is the one who writes the Song in Psalm 61 (Hear my cry of God...).

**Hear my cry O God. Attend unto my prayers. From the ends of the earth, will I cry out to You. And when my heart is overwhelmed, please lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.**

Israel is fighting with the Philistines. David is in the middle of this story living under the leadership of perhaps the most moody King of Israel (King Saul). In this story of David we witness the pain and regret of his decision to murder and commitment adultery. We see David on his face praying through this guilt of sin. Then we see David in his old age having to flee his throne by the hand of his eldest son Absalom. At the end of all of this we get to hear his song in 2 Sam. 22:1-2, 29-30, 47.

**1** David sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. **2** He said: "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;

**29** You are my lamp, O LORD; the LORD turns my darkness into light.

**30** With your help I can advance against a troop with my God I can scale a wall.

**47** "The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God, the Rock, my Savior!"

Not long after all of this we read about the terrible reality of Israel's exile under Babylonian captivity. We read in this history how Israel experienced the worst kind of mistreatment. There was rape, cannibalism, and a marching across the desert into captivity. But even in the midst of this terrible reality we find--joy! Isaiah 40:1-2 shares with us the gently voice of God "

**1** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

**2** Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.  
**In other words God is saying that Israel is forgiven.**

**But it doesn't end here: Isaiah 43:1-2** But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. **2** When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

**“When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.” Psa. 126:1** You know what the Psalmist is saying? **“Who'd a thunk it?!”** or **“we couldn't believe it!”**

Israel going back to Jerusalem was an absolute impossibility! But God took this impossibility and made it a reality. **The Psalmist says it was like a dream! ...like a dream come true!**

Memories are important. As functional people we hold on to the memories of laughter and shouts of joy! As Christians we hold on to the stories of how God has acted in our lives. Joy has a history! Joy is a consequence for those who walk into what God is doing. **That's the history of Joy!**

**However, the future of joy is-- vv. 4-6** Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev. **5** Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. **6** He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

**Eugene Peterson says: “Joy is nurtured by anticipation”**

**In other words if God has been our joy in the past, he will also be our joy in the future.** Joy expects certain things to happen.

Verse 4 really says it for us: The Negev is south of Israel and is a huge desert. In fact the word “Negev” means south. **Following a visit to Palestine in 1867, Mark Twain described the Negev Desert in his book "The Innocents Abroad" as "a desolation that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action..."**As you know, rain and desert do not usually go in the same sentence. However, it does rain on occasion. When it does, the erosion of the rains creates water bowls. Eventually these water bowls dry out. But when a sudden burst of rain comes, the desert floor explodes with life! The Psalmist is trying to show us that this is what our lives are like. Many times our lives are plagued with drought, and then suddenly, after years of waiting our drought is awakened by God's pouring of grace!

**Also, Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. 6** He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

As any farmer or amateur gardener knows--sow seed, get a harvest. Listen, our suffering, pain, times of emptiness and disappointment is seed. Sow these seeds in God and expect a crop of joy from it. It will be like the beginning of the Psalm: **When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. 2** Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. It will be just like a dream come true. We'll have so much joy we'll hardly be able to contain ourselves.

It's clear that the Psalmist and those who sang this song understood something about hardship. These people carried with them the memory of exile. They knew what it was like to be parched of heart and wet in nights of weeping. These people knew what it meant to weep in tears.

Here's what the Poirier's know. Laughter is good medicine. Jessika was talking with her boyfriend the other day... yes Jessika has a boy friend!!! It's like a dream come true!!! Anyway, he said to her "you know I'm crazy about you?" She replies, "yes." He says, "but you are SO LOUD!" Jessika laughs (loud of course) and says "you think I'm loud, wait until you meet my family in September!" This family can cry and laugh all in the same sentence. We've done it. We continue to do it; we expect that this will not change.

Here's what the Christian learns: "Laughter does not exclude weeping." To have Christian joy does not mean we somehow elude sorrow. The Christian learns that pain and sorrow come, but not even this can remove the happiness of being redeemed.

I can't remember who said this... "you can't have good news without the reality of bad news." I say that you can't have joy without recognizing pain and hardship in life. Psalm 126 does not give anything to the pilgrim to aid them in eliminating hurt, numbing pain or getting rid of insecurity by removing risks, or getting rid of disappointment by depersonalizing your relationships with others.

Psalm 126 does show us that laughter is a result of walking with God. (v. 2 **our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy**)

Chris Dion pulled me aside the other day and said she figured something out. It's theological, and it makes great sense. "Some believe in God while others believe God." Hmm. That's pretty good.

Joy is not an escape from boredom. Joy comes because we believe God. Joy comes because of faith in what God does.

Here's the truth: Suffering is on both sides... past and future. Joy is something that God gives, not what we manufacture. The height of joy is knowing that our lives are working together for good to those who love God (**Rom 8:28**). Joy is not a feeling good about yourself--but about feeling good about God! Amen? We find that God's ways and God's promises can be relied upon. We have joy because we believe God.

Back to the Scripture reading (**Rom. 5:1-11**) **1**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2**through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we **rejoice** in the hope of the glory of God. **3**Not only so, but we also **rejoice** in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; **4**perseverance, character; and character, hope. **5**And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

**...and we believe it!**

**11**Not only is this so, but we also **rejoice** in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

**...and we believe it!**

Paul is a living example of what it means to be a Christian whose mouth is **filled with laughter**, and tongue with songs of joy.

Out of Paul's prison cell we get to hear his celebration of God. **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** **5**Let your gentleness be evident (to be considerate) to all. The Lord is near. **Phil. 4:4-5**

**Message-** 4-5 Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

When we believe God, the end result is hope. When we have hope we have joy! **V. 6 He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.**

This Psalm is not to be understood as a package or a formula. But there are some things this Psalm does do: It reminds us that those who pursue pleasure as a path to joy end up losing dearly. Psalm 126 introduces us to the way of discipleship. And the consequence of discipleship is joy. Psalm 126 encourages us to not only believe in God, but to believe God. Psalms 126 tells the story of what God has done (**only God can turn exile into bliss**), which in turn puts laughter in the mouths and songs of joy on the tongues of his people. Psalm 126 repeats the promise of a God who does not abandon his people while they are in their suffering and weeping. It repeats the promise of a God who is with us to the end--until we arrive home singing songs of joy and with arms filled with blessings. Psalm 126 proclaims the gathering of God's people who come to worship because of who he is, and what he has done. And it proclaims the hope that is found in God's promises.

May you be a person who not only believes in God, but believes God!

And as a result of this belief, may you be able to say (more to yourself) that you are a person filled with joy!

### **Believe It Or Not!**

- A cockroach will live nine days without its head, before it starves to death.
- A crocodile cannot stick its tongue out.
- A snail can sleep for three years.
- All Polar bears are left-handed.
- American Airlines saved \$40,000 in 1987 by eliminating one olive from each salad served in first-class.
- Babies are born without kneecaps. They don't appear until the child reaches 2 to 6 years of age.
- Banging your head against a wall uses 150 calories an hour.
- Butterflies taste with their feet.
- Cats have over one hundred vocal sounds, dogs only have about ten.
- China has more English speakers than the United States.
- If the population of China walked past you in single file, the line would never end because of the rate of reproduction.
- If you yelled for 8 years, 7 months and 6 days, you would have produced enough sound energy to heat one cup of coffee.
- Our eyes are always the same size from birth, but our nose and ears never stop growing.
- In ancient Egypt, priests plucked EVERY hair from their bodies, including their eyebrows and eyelashes.
- Michael Jordan makes more money from Nike annually than all of the Nike factory workers in Malaysia combined.
- More people are killed by donkeys annually than are killed in plane crashes.
- No word in the English language

rhymes with month.  
live to be 116 or older.  
right side when intoxicated.  
eight spiders in their lifetime at night.  
invented by a dentist.  
name in the world is Mohammed.

Arlington, Virginia, has twice as many bathrooms as is necessary. When it was built in the 1940s, the state of Virginia still had segregation laws requiring separate toilet facilities for blacks and whites.

war in history was between Zanzibar and England in 1896. Zanzibar surrendered after 38 minutes.

word "lethologica" describes the state of not being able to remember the word you want.

- You share your birthday with at least nine million other people in the world.

*Author Unknown [<http://www.naute.com/stories/believe.phtml>]*

- Only one person in two billion will
- The ant always falls over on its
  - The average human eats
  - The electric chair was
    - The most common
    - The Pentagon, in
- The shortest
- The

### **Scot Poirier**

Minister

Chelmsford Church of Christ

205 North St.

Chelmsford Ma.

978-256-8901