

“Joy in Christ”
Ecclesiastes 2:24-26
(Preached at Trinity, April 23, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. So far, as we've been making our journey through Ecclesiastes, we've noticed that God is absent. He isn't mentioned at all. But that's the point. Without God, nothing has value. Life is empty, meaningless, futile – vanity of vanities, all is vanity.
2. But now, as we come to the end of **Chapter 2** Solomon gives us a brief respite from the gloom; something beyond the emptiness and vanity. He tells us there is nothing better than to receive from God.
Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 NAU - "There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?"
3. To the righteous man there are rich blessings -
"He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy."
There is nothing better than the joy of the Lord.
Nehemiah 8:10 NAU - "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."
4. In the New Covenant, this joy has reached its fullness in Christ.
 - a. Peter writes:
1 Peter 1:8-9 NAU - "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."
 - b. Jesus told His disciples that they would be partakers of His joy.
John 15:11 NAU - "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full."
5. There are two types of people in this world – those who are followers of Christ who have found in Him the greatest of treasures and have forsaken all else to have Him, and those who continue in their rebellion against God and can't see beyond the emptiness of this world. The Bible consistently maintains the contrast between the two.
 - a. **Chapter 2** ends with the contrast.
Ecclesiastes 2:26 NAU - "For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind."
 - b. To the one group we find the promise of life and eternal fellowship with Christ. To the other group we find judgment and eternal torment in hell. Their entire life was an exercise in futility.

I. The lost man knows nothing of the joy possible in Christ.

A. All human beings are capable of experiencing joy. But there is a great difference between worldly joy and Christian joy

1. Worldly joy is a temporary feeling of delight or pleasure based upon something satisfying to our carnal flesh. No one denies that there are joys to be had for the lost person. God is merciful and gives even the lost man wonderful things in which to delight. And so he spends his time and energies desiring these things.

a. He finds joy in the challenges and accomplishments of life, in relationships, in possessions, in things that satisfy the senses: Things that are beautiful to look upon, things beautiful to hear, to touch, to taste, to smell. All these things bring joy.

b. There are three things that characterize worldly joy.

- Worldly joy is largely governed by self-interest—what satisfies me.
- Worldly joy is affected by earthly conditions. Affliction has a direct impact upon the experience of joy so it is avoided at all costs.
- It is temporary – this marks everything in this life. You look forward to a trip and then it's over. A young lady plans her wedding and then it's over. In the end, everything will be left behind.

Ecclesiastes 2:26 NAU - "He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind."

2. Christian joy is based upon a relationship with Christ.

It is delight based upon the sufficiency of Christ—being satisfied in Him.

The greater we are satisfied in Christ the greater our joy.

There are three things characterize Christian joy

- It looks beyond self to Christ. Great joy is found in knowing Him, in pleasing and magnifying Him, in serving Him, in satisfying Him.
- It transcends the conditions and circumstances of this world. Christians find joy even in the midst of suffering.
- It is everlasting

B. What is the source of our joy?

1. God is the author of our joy.

2. Jesus referred to His joy that He would share with us.

John 15:11 NAU - "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full."

3. Joy is also given by the Holy Spirit. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 KJV – "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, . . ."

4. Joy is a grace granted to those believing in Christ and so Christ then becomes the object of our joy. We find great joy in Him.

II. Is it wrong to find joy in our earthly life, in earthly things, in earthly experiences?

A. Like the unbeliever, the Christian also appreciates the joys of life.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 NAU - "There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good."

1. Our five senses are gateways to pleasure
They are evidence of a gracious God.
2. There are endless aromas and fragrances that richly satisfy
There are wonderful sounds to enjoy
There are almost limitless flavors to experience – some spend their entire lives experimenting with culinary delights.
Our eyes are able to behold the endless beauty of God's creation.
And our sense of touch connects us to the experiences of life.
3. Too many Christians have felt guilty if they indulged in the pleasures of life. Instead, we should enjoy the blessings of God's goodness
Ecclesiastes 2:24 - "I have seen that it is from the hand of God."

B. Jesus stands as our example – **John 2:1-10**

1. A young couple was celebrating their marriage with a feast, and they invited all their friends to share the occasion.
Jesus was invited and He attended.
2. When the wine ran out Mary came to Him. His mother knew Him. She had watched Him grow up. He was extraordinary.
Jesus rebuffed her approach knowing His earthly ministry had just begun.
3. He wasn't interested in a public display of His power, but He did have an interest in the situation with this newlywed couple. It is significant that this was the occasion of His first miracle.
John 2:11 NAU - "This beginning of *His* signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him."
4. Wine was served as a customary part of the celebration.
Psalms 104:14-15 NAU - "He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the labor of man, So that he may bring forth food from the earth, ¹⁵ And wine which makes man's heart glad, So that he may make *his* face glisten with oil, And food which sustains man's heart."
 - a. Notice the abundance of our Lord's act of changing the water into wine.
John 2:6 NAU - "Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each."
That's between 120 and 180 gallons. That's a lot of wine! – Somewhere between 600-900 of our average bottles of wine.
 - b. And notice the quality of the wine. It was the best of wine.
John 2:10 NAU - "Every man serves the good wine first, and when *the people* have drunk freely, *then he* serves the poorer *wine*; *but* you have kept the good wine until now."
5. Jesus was not merely a detached observer. He was concerned about the embarrassment of this newlywed couple. He truly entered into their joy. Jesus is gracious and merciful. And He would have enjoyed the occasion.

6. The ultimate joy of Christ was connected to His mission. He found joy in obedience to the Father. He also found joy in the transformed lives of His people.
Hebrews 12:2 NAU - "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."
John 17:13 NAU - "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves."
 "My joy" in the sense of the joy that belongs to Christ – His joy.
 "My joy" in the sense of that which he gives to others.
John 15:10 NAU - "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full."
7. But Jesus also found joy in life. He enjoyed friends and feasts. I read a tract once that condemned our laughter. It claimed we need to be more like Jesus, the Man of Sorrows. It commented that there isn't a single reference to Jesus laughing.
- a. It is true that Jesus was the Man of Sorrows. He came to bear the sins of His people and suffer in their stead. There was agony in the cross.
Isaiah 53:3 NAU - "He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him."
 - b. But we have no reason to suspect that Jesus went about moping with a long face. We have every reason to suppose that Jesus experienced wonderful times of joy and laughter with His friends.
8. **William Barclay** – "Jesus was perfectly at home at a wedding feast. He was no severe, austere killjoy. He loved to share in the happy rejoicing of a wedding feast. There are certain religious people who shed a gloom wherever they go. There are certain people who are suspicious of all joy and happiness. To them religion is the thing of black clothes, the lowered voice, the expulsion of social fellowship. They descend like a gloom wherever they go."¹

¹ Barclay, William, *The Gospel of John, Volume 1*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), Page 85.

Charles Spurgeon wrote in *Lectures to My Students* – “I don’t believe in going about like certain monks whom I saw in Rome, who salute each other in sepulchral tones, and convey the pleasant information, ‘Brother we must die;’ to which salutation each lively brother of the order replies, ‘Yes, brother, we must die.’ I was glad to be assured upon such good authority that all these lazy fellows are about to die; upon the whole, it is about the best thing they can do; but till that event occurs, they might use some more comfortable form of salutation. A man who has no geniality about him had better be an undertaker, and bury the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living.”²

Conclusion:

1. We are inhabitants of this earth. We have possessions. We desire creature comforts. But we know very well that this is not our home. Of our forefathers in the faith we read, **Hebrews 11:13 NAU** - "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."
2. We never plant our roots too deep. We see everything here as temporary. This takes great discipline, particularly in our hedonistic pleasure-seeking culture. We need to learn to estimate things in this life according to their true value.
3. Nothing upon this earth must be your true source of joy. Our joy must be fixed upon Christ. Are you ever filled with unhappiness or discontent? Why? What is your source of joy?
4. We must never forget that our ultimate joy is reserved for eternity. We must fix our sights upon the hope of glory. It is by faith that you lay hold to this blessed promise. It is by this faith that you can live your life with exceeding great joy even in the midst of great sorrow and adversity. Nothing or no one can take that joy from you.

² Spurgeon, Charles, *Lectures to My Students*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), Page 197.