

Sunday September 3rd sermon: "The Joy Set Before Christ! -- The God of All Comforts (Pt 31)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,
by John Pittman Hey

Matthew 26:38-42; Hebrews 12:2

God comforts us by the oath He made to Christ, appointing Him our high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

What Christ delights in is His sacrifice that takes away our sin, and reconciles us to a Holy God, and justifies us, declaring us perfect before God in Christ, and rescues our bodies from sin and death and corruption.

The ultimate expression of Christ's joy in His redeeming work at Calvary is expressed in Hebrews 12:2, where we are exhorted to look unto Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith; Who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame; and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God!"

All of our faith in the Gospel is wrought first and last in Christ! He is the Alpha and Omega, the genesis and completion of all our trust in His promises to save us from our sin.

Christ is the basis and ground of our faith, indeed, the Cause of our faith, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost. Even our faith, which Christ is the author and finisher of, is God's gift, and not of our own self-generation or maintenance.

All those examples of faith in the Old Testament, recited in Hebrews 11, are based upon the work of Christ, and praise God, Christ has finished it for us! As He died at Calvary, He declared, "It is finished!"

All that we hope for, the deposit of our faith, is fulfilled in and by Christ: His saving us, His blood justifying us, His mighty work in us, transforming us into His image, and His raising us up from the dead.

Christ was motivated at Calvary by the joy that was set before Him! That joy, we have described in glorious detail – a joy in our rescue, in His carrying out the duties of that priesthood which God appointed to Christ by an unchangeable and everlasting oath.

But Christ also joyed in His promised resurrection found in Psalm 16 and other places, the promised exaltation which took place when He ascended to glory, and the glory of His sacrifice that forever took away our sins.

No doubt, we will have all of eternity to come to grips with that full joy that was set before our dear Lord Jesus, when He went to the cross.

But because that joy was anticipated by Christ, He endured the cross, and counted its shame and humiliation as nothing to compare with!

That is a remarkable truth, since the cross was no mere pro-forma event. It was the most detestable terror that any man could imagine.

On the cross, Christ was treated as guilty for our sins laid on Him. He was required to take them as His own, though He Himself is forever sinless.

Jesus was made a curse there for us, and in our place. He was subject to all of God's promised wrath and judgment for the sinners He died to save.

Indeed, Christ was forsaken by God unto judgment there, He Whom God loves eternally and infinitely.

There was no hope for deliverance for Jesus as He suffered there for us, until He lay in the grave, awaiting the resurrection that was promised to Him.

All of this was on top of the excruciating physical torment Jesus suffered, the cruelty His Own creatures inflicted upon Him.

Imagine, that the One Who created all things, and gave life to everything that lives, should Himself be subject to death, and surrender that which is most valuable to all men – life itself.

All this anguish was set forth by the Spirit of Christ in Psalm 22, 40, and 69, and in other places.

But two texts in the Gospels relate how Christ expressed His distress, in His humanity, at what He was about to endure to save us.

In John 12, when the Gentiles start to inquire about Christ, Jesus told how His soul was troubled at the prospect of His dying. Yet, Christ was clear that there was no other way to bring life to His people, without His dying for us.

He might have asked His Father to save Him from that hour, but no, that hour's terror was the very reason why He had come to that hour!

Then in Gethsemane, the night He was betrayed, Jesus told His disciples that His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. He sweat as it were great drops of blood in His agony at the prospect. He prayed desperately that, if it were possible, this cup might pass away from Him.

But if it must be that He must suffer thus, for the accomplishing of His great work of redemption, let God's will be done!

There was no other way His people could be rescued from judgment and everlasting torment.

Note well that Christ came to the garden, and stayed there, in order that He might be betrayed by Judas, carried off by the wicked mob, and crucified and slain for us.

No doubt Christ was in agony at the prospect, not of the death in itself, but rather at the dread of being made sin for us, and treated as guilty in our place.

How could any man who knows the true wrath of God for sin be anyway other than terrified?

It was the moral guilt to be laid on Him, and discharged upon Him, the only innocent One, that was the horror of it all.

And yet, Christ knew that it would be His Glory for all eternity, that He had done this in obedience to God, in delight to do His will, and with the joy set before Him in it all, to save His loved ones, you and me!

No wonder the saints in glory sing that new song: "worthy is the Lamb to receive all honor and power and glory and blessing, for Thou was slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood!"

And so it was the fulfillment and completion of Christ's delight to do God's will.

But note that we are exhorted to follow after Christ's example as our model, to regard His endurance of the worst possible pain and sorrow, for the joy set before Him, as how we should respond to trouble and heartaches, and terrors of our own.

We are to anticipate the joy Christ has set before us, and lay hold of it by faith, and face every trial like Jesus did.

Whatever we face, it won't be anything near as bad as what Jesus faced for us at Calvary!

Which makes it all the more poignant: that Jesus, Who had done nothing amiss, suffered far greater than His poor sinful beloved ones, while we receive all the benefits of Christ's suffering!

He suffered all that was due to us, so that we might be rescued from all that suffering.

That fact brings joy to Christ, and joy to us, and gives us courage to endure to the end.

Looking unto Jesus, looking to His joy, and how the prospect of that joy powered Him through to the end of Glory!

Psalm 21 gives us a glorious description of Christ's rejoicing in God's salvation, wrought by His sacrifice for our sins. His glory is great in God's salvation, and honor and majesty God has laid upon Him because of it!

So too must we glory in Christ's joy, and the cause of it, as He did the work of the priesthood that God appointed unto Him, thereby comforting us with great comfort and rejoicing.

We love the words of that great hymn by Philip P. Bliss:

I will sing of my Redeemer,
And His wondrous love to me;
On the cruel cross He suffered,
From the curse to set me free.

Sing, O sing, of my Redeemer!
With His blood He purchased me,
On the cross He sealed my pardon,
Paid the debt, and made me free.

I will tell the wondrous story,
How my lost estate to save,
In His boundless love and mercy,
He the ransom freely gave.

I will praise my dear Redeemer,
His triumphant pow'r I'll tell,
How the victory He giveth
Over sin and death and hell.

I will sing of my Redeemer,
And His heav'nly love to me;
He from death to life hath brought me,
Son of God, with Him to be.