

THE VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER – THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING JOYFUL

*“Everyone thinks of changing the world,
but no-one thinks of changing himself.”*

(Leo Tolstoy)

Today, I am starting a new series that examines *“the virtues of Christian character,”* and the first lesson is entitled “The Importance of Being Joyful.” As a Christian you are expected to not only exhibit your faith, but also to “be” what you believe. This approach differs greatly from secular philosophy, which is largely mental ascent, and many other ineffective religious beliefs. True Christianity requires you to develop recognisable character. Christ like character.

Acts 17:28 reads, **“For in Him we live and move and have our being.”** Literally, *“In Christ we live and move and are.”* In Christ you can’t hide behind a religious mask - you just are! Notice, *who, what* and *where* you are in Christ is important. And in this context, it is a call to Christ like character. Character cannot be transferred it can only be earned, and true character is not revealed through what you “do” (by human effort), but rather by what you’ve become (who you are).

Talking of salvation for the gentiles, in **Isaiah 56:6-7**, the Lord declares, **“Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants... Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house.”** God has gathered you into His fold and you have been made joyful - this is what you are! Being joyful in God’s house is a true and exact representation of what God has made you to be.

But this characteristic isn’t meant for church life alone, the apostle Paul said, **“I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our misfortunes” [2 Corinthians 7:4].**

It’s often so easy to be joyful when in the presence of God, however, the acid test of true character is whether you, as a believer, can be joyful in suffering, heartbreak or misfortune. **Philippians 4:4** says, **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!”** To rejoice is to *“show great joy,”* or *“to be exceedingly joyful.”* You are expected to be exceedingly joyful in the Lord - always! This is because, in Him you live and move and have your being. In fact, it is where you are positioned - the true “state” you occupy.

You *live* in the joy of the Lord and the joy of the Lord *lives* in you. You *move* in the joy of the Lord and the joy of the Lord *moves* in you. You have your very *being* positioned in the joy of the Lord and the joy of the Lord manifests in your very *being*! Joy should be as natural to you as breathing.

Nehemiah 8:10 **“...Be not grieved and depressed, for the joy of the Lord is your strength and stronghold”** [Amplified]. Although you may freely accept that the *“the joy which comes from the Lord is your strength and your stronghold,”* **Psalms 45:7** and **Hebrews 1:9** both reveal another aspect of joy, **“Therefore God [Jesus], Your God [the Father], has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy more than Your companions.”** Therefore, there’s an *anointing* which comes from the Father that is specifically an anointing of joy. Consequently, inside of you right now is a special kind of oil that produces a “glow” - a measure of joy through which you can receive supernatural strength. Strength that will act as a fortress in times of trouble.

Proverbs 10:28 says, "***The prospect*** [or 'hope'] ***of the righteous is joy.***" And in the New Testament this prospect is referred to as "***inexpressible joy***" [1 Peter 1:8]. Joy, in one form or another, is mentioned over 230 times in the Bible, and it's also connected with a spiritual 'glow'. This "glow" should be evident in every believers life, in spite of adverse or negative circumstances. Some of you may be feeling that the 'glow' [or flame] in you has become dim and obscured by hardship. But your hope for a secure future (*the prospect of the righteous*) is simply joy! And notice, this special kind of joy is *inexpressible* or *unspeakable* because it is not your own joy but the joy which abides in Jesus Himself. It is the joy in which you live, and move and have your being!

Being joyful is your antidote against worry, stress, grief and depression. And it effectively and sufficiently equips you with enough strength to act as an impregnable fortress in times of trouble. Jesus said, in **John 15:11**, that His joy would be perfected in you and I... "***These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.***" Your joy is the perfect and exact representation of Christ's joy. Therefore, it is full and complete - never lacking, never wanting!

Furthermore, Christ's joy is totally fulfilled in His followers. **John 17:13**, "***But now I come to you and these things I speak to you in the world, that they (My followers) may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.***" Jesus is explaining why He was praying this way, in the presence of His disciples. It was as if He was saying to them, "*These are intercessions which I shall never cease to make in heaven before My Father. But for your sakes I make them here and now, in the world, in your hearing, so you may distinctly understand how very concerned I am about your welfare and well-being. Even more so, that you may learn to increase in character and become absolute partakers of My divine joy - My divine nature and strength.*"

God the Father, in Jesus Christ, has made provision for all of you to be vessels of honour, full to overflowing with the oil of joy. Oil that permeates every aspect of your existence. Even in the midst of trials, you should be confidently displaying a perfect measure of His joy. You should remain a full reservoir (at all times and in every circumstance), awash with the life, strength and nature of God. Exactly the way Jesus Himself was when He walked the earth!

The apostle Paul got it right. He learned to be content, confident and joyful in all circumstances - rejoicing in the Lord always! In **Acts 20:24** he declares, "***That I may finish my race with joy.***" Paul was truly a man of strong character. He lived and moved and had his *being* in Christ. He abided in Christ always and in every circumstance he rejoiced. His joy was full! His joy was complete! His joy was absolute!