

July 8, 2012 – Summer of Joy
“A New Creation”
Psalms 21:6 and Acts 16:34

Psalms 21:6 NIV

Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.

Acts 16:34 NIV

He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God.

What gives you joy?

A young Marine and his commanding officer board a train headed to a recruiting mission. They can find no place to sit except for two seats right across the aisle from a young woman and her grandmother.

After a while, it is obvious that the young woman and the young Marine are interested in each other because they are giving each other "looks." Soon the train passes into a tunnel and it is pitch black. There is a sound of the smack of a kiss followed by the sound of the smack of a slap. When the train emerges from the tunnel, the four sit there without saying a word.

The grandmother is thinking to herself: "It was very brash for that young Marine to kiss my granddaughter, but I'm glad she slapped him."

The commanding officer is sitting there thinking: "I didn't think the young Marine was brave enough to kiss the girl, but I sure wish she hadn't missed him when she slapped and hit me!"

The young woman was sitting and thinking: "I'm glad the Marine kissed me, but I wish my grandmother had not slapped him!"

The young Marine sat there with a satisfied smile on his face. He thought to himself: "Life is good. When does a guy have the joy to kiss a beautiful girl and slap his commanding officer all at the same time?!"

So we know what thought brought joy to that young Marine, what thought brings you joy?

2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT

Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

When we place our faith in Jesus Christ a new life has begun, we become a new person. This new person is called a “Christian”. “Christian” is not just a religious title or a member of a particular religion, but a brand new kind of human being the likes of which the earth had never seen before.

A holy nation (1 Peter 2:9)

Who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come. (Hebrews 6:5)

We have some baby dedications coming up, next week Pastor Nick’s grandson Nicholas Franco will be dedicated. I love baby dedications, babies smell good, don’t they, well they should, everything is new.

We are born again, and everything is new; Born again: new mind, new heart, new will, with new spiritual senses. We can hear God, we can see and taste and touch God in a way that those who do not believe in Jesus can’t imagine.

In old movies when a child was born they would hold the child upside down by the feet and slap the baby’s bottom and the baby would start to cry, and everyone would breath a sigh of relief, for it was a sign that the baby was alive and well.

When we were born again, it was a spiritual birth and it was as if our Heavenly Father, slapped us on the bottom and said, “Breath! Feel! See! Taste! You’re alive and well in the Kingdom of God.”

Since the time that Jesus has initiated His kingdom, there is a new creation, something has changed and what has changed? We have! We are no longer our former self, we have been transformed, the old is gone the new has come. The thought fills us with joy. We know the battle isn’t over yet, but sin no longer expresses who we really are. We are children of God, a new creation, holy, and beyond the reach of Satan.

The root of joy is the astounding realization that we are in the kingdom of God...*right now!* Though God’s kingdom on earth is not yet fully realized, yet in us the essentials of His kingdom are already present. We are blessed (Ephesians 1:3 NLT) with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

These spiritual blessings are given by the Holy Spirit, and joy is one of them; a fruit of the Spirit. The joy we have been describing each week is not of this world; it arises from within, from a deep place within, and it comes from heavenly realms. By faith we live in that heavenly realm today.

In my experiment with joy I found over and over again that the greatest joy comes to me when I return to the simple gospel-the Good News of my sins forgiven, and no

condemnation because of Christ Jesus. My greatest joy comes from the Good News of being made right with God, who is My Father in Heaven. How can there be joy without righteousness? Can you be happy knowing you aren't right with God? But, knowing you have been cleansed of all sin, made holy, reconciled to God, and that we even **share his divine nature** as Peter says (2 Peter 1:4) – how could this not produce great joy?

The miracle of the gospel is that we who were enemies of God, lost, fallen human beings have been made righteous in Christ; and this miracle all happened in that one glorious moment when we first believed in Jesus. My joy comes from having Jesus; not from having to accept Jesus all over again, that is not necessary, but rather my joy comes from reminding myself of who I am and what I have in Christ.

When I was a teen, most kids had a transistor radio. It was the I-POD of my day. It was a small, low-powered, portable radio that used transistors. When I was a young teen I asked my parents for a transistor radio. Either my parents didn't know what it was or didn't get the concept of having a small radio that was hard to hear but easy to carry around, because instead of getting me one of these small radios they bought me a regular size radio almost 10 times the size of the more popular transistor radios of the time. Then I was sure they didn't get the concept when I opened a compartment in the back that revealed an electrical cord (I thought I'm going to need a long extension cord!). Then they pointed out that it could be plugged in or work on batteries (I don't remember, but probably 4-6 "C" or "D" batteries). So it was mobile but I was embarrassed to use it. My friends, however, loved it, and as long as one of them was willing to lug it around so we could listen to music that was fine (I guess we had the first boom box that would become be popular about 15 years later).

Today we can tune into a radio station with just a push of a button, but then my radio had a dial and you had to play with that dial until you found the desired frequency, it could take awhile, and could be frustrating. We had our favorite station that played the music we wanted to hear, so once we were tuned in we stayed tuned in on that radio dial; but if someone messed with the dial even just a little, we'd have to go through the involved process of playing with that dial to re-adjust it again back to our station.

Our right standing with God or our righteousness is like our newer radios. We don't have to keep establishing it, we're already tuned in. We don't have to accept Jesus over and over again, we are tuned in once and for all. Of course sometimes our frequency is off and there is some static, but to adjust it is not like the dial on our older radios, more like pushing the button on our newer radios that gets us right back to our station. Or to use the words of 1 John 1:9 NIV, **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

This is not a long and involved process, just a push of the button, coming before the Lord in prayer, confessing our sin is all it takes.

Hebrews 10:10 NLT

For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.

Not endless repeated sacrifices like in the Old Testament:

Hebrews 10:1, 11-14 NLT

The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship... Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time... For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

The Christian life is not endlessly repeated sacrifices that never really free us from guilt, but a joyous celebration of our union with God through Christ Jesus!

As we read in our texts for today (Psalm 21:6) God has surely granted you eternal blessings and made you glad with the joy of His presence.

And as Acts 16:34 says: you are filled with joy because (you have) come to believe in God.

Joy is a presence. Joy is knowing we are not alone and do not have to face the world alone, or handle our problems without help. Joy fills up our emptiness with a Presence. This sense of presence is the chief characteristic of joy. We have fellowship with God, someone has called it, "an invisible embrace." We have joy because of the loving presence, like a hug of the Spirit of God. Even when we are not consciously aware of Him, His presence is the reason for our joy. To describe joy as a presence is really to call it a Person, and this Person is Jesus. As I talk about joy, I'm really talking about Jesus—about what it's like to know Him and be with Him, about my longing to be with Him always, and about the growing certainty that He is always with me. When I'm not joyful, it is because I don't feel myself in the Lord's presence. He speaks to me and when I hear His Word the result is joy, the voice of the Lord is the voice of joy.

Joy is a Person. To know that is to know the Holy Spirit is not an *It* but a *Who*. We don't have to worry because He will never desert us. We don't have to fear because He loves us unconditionally and perfectly. God is love, and He is also joy. The fact that joy is a Person, and not something we have to try and produce from within ourselves is what is so wonderful about joy. Knowing God as the One Who deeply loves us, delights in us, is for us ...forever, means that our joy is faithful and constant. Feelings may come and go,

but the Presence of God can be known, recalled, and embraced every moment of every day, forever, without limit. He has given His word (Matthew 28:20 NLT), **“I am with you always,”** and joy accompanies Him.

Does your faith in God fill you with joy? Is God alone reason enough to rejoice, or are you looking for something more? If you're not satisfied with God, what more could you possibly want? Our text says a man was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God. He believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of his sin, and not only was he saved, he was filled with joy, because the two go together. Do they for you? If you've got God, you've got joy. If you don't have joy, however religious you may be, you need to wonder whether you've really got a hold of God.

The world despite all its apparent offers of pleasure, is organized against joy. There are many ways to live joylessly. You don't have to be obviously depressed, you may feel merely a bit melancholy, or bored, and somewhat trapped. You may have a productive life, and have a lot of good times. But where is joy? Only the Good News of Jesus Christ contains the joy to break through the façade. Jesus alone offers real, enduring joy.

We are meant to live this way, full of the Holy Spirit, filled daily like jars with the oil of gladness, the oil of His joy. I'm not talking merely of overcoming some problem, but about the joy of the Lord Jesus who has once and for all overcome the world. The joy of Jesus raised from the dead, the joy of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. And we share in this joy by the miracle of faith.

And whenever I have struggles and failures, and discouragement, it only awakens a hunger for a deeper, more persistent joy filling all the empty places of my being, into the very places of my failures. And so I return to the simple gospel- the Good News of Jesus and there I find joy.