

How Do We Obtain the Great Joy of the Lord Himself?

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Nehemiah

8:10 "He also told them, 'Go eat the best food, drink the best wine, and give something to those who have nothing, since this day is holy to our Lord. Don't be sorrowful, because the joy of the Lord is your strength.'"
[International Standard Version]

Psalms

16:11 "You cause me to know the path of life; in your presence is joyful abundance, at your right hand there are pleasures forever."

These words from the book of Nehemiah, which we just read are truly encouraging: "Don't be sorrowful, because the joy of the Lord is your strength." When we rejoice in the Lord, we receive strength. It gives us power. A man called David suffered very badly from various things. But, he recovered eventually.

Psalms

16:11 "You cause me to know the path of life; in your presence is joyful abundance, at your right hand there are pleasures forever."

This was the personal experience of David and his wonderful testimony.

I know one family who lives in Shizuoka prefecture. I guess some of you know Brother Jiro Otsuka and Sister Reiko. I received a letter from them the other day, which said: "We are looking forward to going to heaven all together. Today, Jiro and Reiko are suffering from terrible ordeals. When, instead of looking at this world, instead of looking at ourselves, we look at Jesus alone, joy comes up from within us. We feel grateful. Lord, please come." Isn't this a truly wonderful testimony?

When we are preoccupied with the reality of this world, we are dismayed by it and do not know what to do. When we think of Jesus, it makes all of us feel encouraged. Let me read a few verses from the gospel according to John. These are all about joy:

John

3:29 "It is the bridegroom who gets the bride, yet the bridegroom's friend, who merely stands by and listens for him, is overjoyed to hear the bridegroom's voice. That's why this joy of mine is now complete."

This is the testimony of John the Baptist. "This joy of mine is now complete!"

John

3:30 "He must become more important, but I must become less important."

He was slaughtered after he left these words. Let us look at some other verses regarding joy.

John

15:11 "I have told you this so that my joy...."

This refers to the joy of Jesus Himself.

John

15:11 "....my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

John

16:24 "So far you haven't asked for anything in my name. Keep asking and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete."

Keep asking! We all will regret when we get to heaven. "I should have asked more and more. Why didn't I do so? The Lord wanted to give us but because I did not ask, He who can do all things could not." To ask, to pray, and to seek help are more important than anything in our lives, aren't they?

John

17:13 "And now I am coming to you, and I say these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves."

We need to constantly keep in our minds and care about one thing more than ever; that is to say, we should not care about ourselves at all. We should not desire to be esteemed well or admired by others. Instead, we want the Lord Jesus alone to be placed at the center of our lives and Jesus alone to be glorified.

While all believers absolutely need to grow spiritually, each one of us also needs to be a part of the intimate fellowship of believers so that we may stop caring about ourselves. These two things are more important than anything for all believers, aren't they?

We need to rely on Jesus alone instead of relying on human beings. It is not until we do that the Lord begins to bless us and use us for His service. The right way of

life for believers is simply the life that is crucified with the Lord.

What is the most important verse in the Bible for us believers putting this into consideration? It should be chapter 2, verse 20 of the book of Galatians. Paul wrote in his letter to the brothers and sisters who lived in the land called Galatia:

Galatians

2:20 "I no longer live, but the Messiah lives in me, and the life that I am now living in this body I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

We just read this verse from Nehemiah, "Don't be sorrowful, because the joy of the Lord is your strength." What do we need to do to experience this joy of being in the Lord? I suppose that there are five simple answers to this question.

Firstly, when we realize from personal experience the great power of the Lord that can save us, we can experience this joy. We always try to accomplish something on our own efforts, but unfortunately, when we do, this joy fades away instantly. The secret of having this joy is to unceasingly wish, not our will but the will of the Lord be done.

Very often, the Lord leads us in the way that is completely different from what we expect, but in the way that we cannot even imagine. All our innate desires, our thoughts, and our emotions conflict with the intentions of Jesus. When we insist on our own thoughts or intentions, it inevitably makes us all wretched. It is only those who are determined to abandon all their desires and intentions who will be given an opportunity to truly experience the great strength of the Lord and this wonderful joy.

We first asked the question as to how we can receive the joy of Jesus Himself in our hearts. As I just mentioned, the first answer to this question is that it is possible when we accept Jesus as our Saviour. When we believe that we are forgiven, we can rejoice in belonging to the Lord, forever.

The second answer to this question is that when we are convinced of the presence of Jesus, it gives us great joy. When we are determined to live following Jesus, it soon makes us realize that we are totally worthless and have no strength at all.

When we are thoroughly devastated and are completely broken down, no matter how weak we have gotten, only if we look up to the Lord Jesus will we be able to experience His great strength and the wonderful

joy He gives us. We are never ever alone wherever we are or whatever happens to us. Jesus is standing by, and He is always with us. Jesus left these words of farewell:

Matthew

28:20 "... teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. And remember, I am with you...."

He is with us not from time to time, not on every Sunday, but....

Matthew

28:20 "I am with you each and every day until the end of the age."

Now, this is from the Old Testament.

Lamentation

3:57 "You drew near when I called out to you. You said, 'Stop being afraid'"

We feel so blessed when we experience this. Isaiah said similar things as the servant of the Lord, in this often-cited verse:

Isaiah

41:10 "Don't be afraid, because I'm with you; don't be anxious, because I am your God. I keep on strengthening you; I'm truly helping you. I'm surely upholding you with my victorious right hand."

This word, this promise of the Lord is not given to Isaiah alone, but it is meant for each one of us too. It is a great blessing. Jesus Himself is with us now; it is this very conviction that gives us great joy.

Let me summarize what we discussed so far. We learned that there are two things that give us true joy. Firstly, when we experience Jesus' power of salvation, we will be truly liberated, feel blessed, and understand the meaning of true joy. As the second answer, when we are convinced of the presence of Jesus, we will feel the same blessings. It makes us feel strong. It helps us to live positively and move forward.

As the third answer to the question, being convinced of and experiencing the guidance of Jesus in our lives also gives us great joy. In our lives, very often, we are faced with various challenges, which leave us uncertain of what to do and how we should deal with them. On such occasions, if we feel confident that Jesus stays by our side and is leading us, these challenges will be turned into great blessings. We should feel grateful about them as it is what gives us true joy.

Many difficult things happen as we continue to live in

this world. But, not even one of these events can occur unless it is permitted by the Lord. What gives us great joy is the conviction that we are being guided by the true living Lord Jesus.

David, author of the Psalms, was filled with joy when he experienced protection from the Lord and the guidance of the Lord. Psalm 23, verse 3 was his testimony:

Psalms
23:3 "He revives my life; he leads me in pathways that are righteous for the sake of his name."

This experience released him from all worries and anxieties. David continued his confession and to praise the Lord in Psalm 10;

Psalms
107:6 "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."
107:7 "He led them in a straight way to find a city where they could live."

107:14 "And he brought them out from darkness and the shadow of death, shattering their chains."

107:28 "Yet when they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, the Lord brought them out of their distress."

136:16 "To the one who led his people into the wilderness, for his gracious love is everlasting—"

These words in the Psalms are all testimonies of the personal experiences of the author. Being led by the Lord was the experience all the people of Israel shared in those days, and it was the source of their joy too. When we feel certain that we are being guided by the Lord, we can experience great joy.

How can we share in the joy of the Lord Himself? I gave three answers to this question so far. We can rejoice truly when we accept the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and our liberator because it makes us believe that we are forgiven and realize that we belong to the Lord forever. Feeling certain of the presence of Jesus also gives us great joy. Furthermore, being convinced that we are guided by Jesus and experiencing it also bring great joy to us.

As yet another answer, it also brings us great joy to realize how Jesus has prepared all the things we need. Sometimes, we have to go through some hardships, which we cannot understand at all. There seems to be no escape from such hardships, and we cannot understand why. We have all had such experiences, haven't we?

Just like this, even when we are totally at a loss and do not understand why we have to go through such pain, if we are convinced that Jesus has prepared all things we need, it will turn all our pains into great joy.

Jesus loves every human being, not vaguely, but wholeheartedly. Jesus prepares all the things we need; those who are convinced of this fact are truly blessed. They are very happy. David, author of the Psalms, of course, experienced it personally.

Psalms
23:1 "The Lord is the one who is shepherding me; I lack nothing."

How could he write this way? How could he confess this way? Because he experienced it personally.

Psalms
34:10 "Young lions lack and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord will never lack any good thing."

David could write this way because he personally went through it. Jesus once asked His disciples:

Luke
22:35 "Then Jesus asked his disciples, 'When I sent you out without a wallet, traveling bag, or sandals, you didn't lack anything, did you?' They replied, 'Nothing at all.'"

Paul wrote to his brothers and sisters in Corinth to let them realize that after all, the Lord would give them all the things they needed:

1 Corinthians
1:7 "Therefore, you don't lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus the Messiah to be revealed."

What do we need to do to obtain the joy of Jesus Himself in our hands? As I just mentioned, we need to recognize Jesus empirically as the one who saves us and be convinced that He forgave us. Jesus does not only forgive, but He forgets everything. "I will never again remember your sins." This is an unimaginable promise.

Try to imagine that, when we get to heaven, we will be so glad and tell Him, "Thank you, Jesus! You died on my behalf and sacrificed yourself. But, I feel ashamed because I was a horrible person. I did this and I did not do that." Jesus' answer will be, "Really? I don't remember." When Jesus forgives something, He forgets about it instantly. It is absolutely impossible for humans. "I will never again remember your sins." This is an unthinkable promise, which is beyond our

imagination.

Let us be convinced of the presence of Jesus and we will realize that we are not alone. You all know what the most common illness of today is. It is not cancer. Cancer is nothing. It is a disease called loneliness. Loneliness is a serious illness. There is nothing we can do about it. It is a disease that nobody but Jesus can cure. When we are convinced of the guidance of Jesus, we will realize that everything is happening because of Him. Unthinkably, many people are wondering, "why" and "how come," every day. Why don't we consider that all things are happening because of Jesus? We may not understand why today. But, let us not worry about it. The time will absolutely come when everything will be clearly explained.

Therefore, when you enter the world of eternity and meet Jesus, you will understand everything at once, although it may not be adequate to call it pleasant. "While I was alive, my life was filled with unpleasant things. It was very painful." However, you will understand instantly. You will realize that it was just necessary for you. You do not need Jesus if you have no worry, no pain at all.

If you never get sick, you do not need a doctor. "I am so miserable. Please have mercy on me. I am sorry. Please forgive me." If you are broken down and feel this way, you will feel the presence of Jesus nearby. It is indispensable for you to suffer. It may be hard to understand now. However, it is not just indispensable, but it is unimaginably important for you. It is not only important, but it is the best thing for you. What Jesus does is always best for you. Therefore, it brings you joy to keep in mind that, "Jesus is my guide, I accept Him and He prepared everything for me."

The other answer to the question as to what brings us the joy is the fact that Jesus is eagerly waiting to see someone like us. Although we have not experienced it yet, it is clearly written in many parts of the Bible as a fact. To die is not to completely vanish away, but it simply means to return to Jesus.

It is for this reason that when someone dies, we believers only feel envious for their crossing the finish line before us. We are left miserable on this side. We have funeral ceremonies in Kichijouji almost every week these days, and I only feel envious of them for crossing the finish line and getting together with Jesus. It is not just for a few days, not for a few weeks, not even for hundreds of millions of years, but they will be with Jesus forever. It is an unimaginable glory.

What is the source of true joy? The five convictions I just listed provide us with true joy and courage

everywhere and always. Firstly, Jesus is the one who forgives our arrogance, our sins, and our failures. He has the strength to liberate us. Secondly, Jesus would never ever forsake us. We will never be left alone. Thirdly, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who guides us. Jesus guides us with clear intentions and His guidance is always perfect. Furthermore, He loves each one of us human beings, and He is the one who prepares all things for each one of us. Jesus is eagerly waiting to see and welcome someone like us.

The joy of being in Jesus gives us a strength greater than anything; it is the strength that can resolve all the problems in our lives. This joy of being in Jesus, not only gives us strength, but it serves as a measure of the sureness of our faith.

When we are disobedient to Jesus, we will lose our joy. However, even when we do something unrighteous, if we confess everything entirely to Him without holding back anything, He will happily forgive everything we did and give us new joy. Whether we have this joy or not is a significant matter. Without this joy, not only will we be unable to testify at all, but Jesus will never be able to use us in His service.

I would like to pick up some confessions of the author of Psalms. Psalm 5, verse 11 is the confession David made 3000 years ago.

Psalms

5:11 "Let all those who take refuge in you rejoice! Let them shout for joy forever, and may you protect them. Let those who love your name exult in you."

32:11 "Righteous ones, be glad in the Lord and rejoice! Shout for joy, all of you who are upright in heart."

33:21 "Indeed, our heart will rejoice in him, because we have placed our trust in his holy name."

68:3 "But the righteous rejoice and exult before God; they are overwhelmed with joy."

These words are not suggestions, but commands from the Lord. Psalm 104 is another confession of David.

104:34 "I will rejoice in the Lord!"

The Lord Jesus is certainly waiting for us to praise Him from the bottom of our hearts and rejoice in Him just like David, the author of the Psalms did.

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