

JOY UNWRAPPED

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Paul gives a list of all the fruit in the letter to the Galatians (*Gal 5 v 22*). When the Holy Spirit comes to live in us he grows these fruit. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Let's look at what the Bible says about joy and also see whether God will inspire us to find any joy in our current situation.

What joy is not

Joy is not about feeling happy in a superficial way. The joy that the Bible talks about is not exactly an emotion in the same way that happiness or sadness are emotions.

What joy is

Joy is what we will know when we are in heaven. It is partly spiritual, and partly emotional. It is to do with relationships, or friendships. In heaven and to some extent in God's kingdom here on earth, Christians are joyful because we are in tune with God and with each other. Perhaps this sort of joy is a bit like when we fall in love, except that in heaven as well as feeling that euphoria we will also feel true peace. So a sort of peaceful euphoria....

Here are a couple of quotes about joy by the Christian writer, C S Lewis, who wrote the Narnia books.

“**Joy** is the serious business of heaven.”

So heaven is very much about feeling joy.

“We are half hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite **joy** is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea.”

Lewis is saying that we can't begin to imagine what real joy is like. And we often look for joy in the wrong places. I am sure we can all think of a wrong place where we have looked for joy. Or perhaps a wrong person.

We feel joy when we are in the presence of God. **The psalms** are constantly telling us to shout, dance and sing for joy. That is what we will be doing much of the time in heaven. We don't do that very often, do we? Why not, I wonder? You might like to sing a song now? Something you know the tune of? You can probably find the words on-line. Or a video. *Seek ye first? One more step? Give me joy in my heart? He's got the whole world?..... Or make up a little song, telling God that you love him?....Or put some music on and dance to God?.....Just some ideas.....*

We should not only feel joyful about happy things. That is certainly relevant today!

Here is a quote from the letter of James, the brother of Jesus. (*James 1 v 2-3*)

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”

When we go through a difficult, or frightening, or lonely time, as many of us are at the moment, we are obviously not going to feel joyful about that. However, God will get us through this, admittedly with the help of his team of scientists, the NHS and all of us in our own ways and using our own talents. If we accept that, then our faith grows and we become much stronger people. That is what we should be joyful about.

Another example of joy where there is a mixture of sadness and happiness might be when we think about all the people who are helping each other at the moment in different ways.

They are sometimes risking their lives. When I think of that, I don't feel happy, because I am sad about the danger they are in, but I feel joy, because they are so amazing.

So joy on earth can come from happy things but also sad or difficult things.

What did Paul say about joy?

Paul often mentions joy in his writings. His letter to the Philippians is full of joy. His main purpose in writing this letter was to show the Philippians that true joy comes from following Jesus. The word joy is mentioned sixteen times.

“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!” (*Philippians 4 v 4*)

Bear in mind that when Paul wrote to the Philippians he had been in confinement for four years, a lot longer than we have been (!) and he was still rejoicing. Paul rejoiced regardless of his circumstances. He must have known that his life was in danger. That didn't stop him.

What did Jesus say about joy?

This is from the Gospel of John. (*John 15 v 11*)

“As my father has loved me, so have I loved you. So remain in my love. If you obey my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

If we follow Jesus and do what he tells us, then we know joy. We live in the right way. We love God and love each other. That is how God wants us to live.

Despite the difficult situation in which we currently find ourselves, let's be joyful now and thank Jesus that we and all who believe in him, are saved.

And let's ask God to care for all those whom we love. If you like, pray for them now, by name, and allow yourself to feel deep joy that, whatever happens to us while we are on earth, we are protected through the blood of Jesus.

Amen