

JOY

I. ***Introduction***

Vain joy

Many people believe that this life on the earth is the only one humans have. They do not know the purpose of their existence. They are born into this world to simply die and get recycled by the nature. And in-between to work hard, suffer from other people, suffer from weather, taxes, inflation, suffer from sicknesses etc. What a terrible prospect!

Therefore these people believe, that one should get the best out of this life and have all the joy while they can. But they connect their joy only with the things of this physical world. In language of Scriptures: They eat, drink, and are merry for tomorrow they die. - 1. Corinthians 15:32

However their joy is destined to die with them, for they will not be able to take any of those things with them to the grave. - Luke 12:19-20

What kind of joy is that anyway? It cannot be the true joy for eternal beings, that humans are! It is just a vain joy, a poor plaster for wounds suffered from the physical world. But it helps to forget about aimlessness and desperation of their existence at least for a while.

Nevertheless, there is a true joy that lasts beyond the grave and I am going to speak about it in this lesson.

II. ***True joy***

When our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ was born into this world, it was the beginning of this joy which would come to all the people. - Luke 2:10-11

Jesus' birth to the world was not the joy itself, but just the beginning of its coming. Yet it is Jesus' birth that is observed in the spirit of joy during Christmas season even in such atheistic country as the Czech Republic. Almost everybody likes little babies. They are so cute and innocent. It is something new, pure and unspoiled. It is easy to rejoice over little baby Jesus, especially for kids indoctrinated by their atheistic Czech parents with the tale that baby Jesus brings them Christmas presents.

On the other hand Jesus' death on cross has no appeal to pursuers of earthly joys. Joy over Jesus' death sounds like a perversion and celebration of sadism and cruelty to people of postmodern world. Many of them do not believe in Jesus' deity. Many of them do not believe in Jesus' resurrection. Almost all of them do not understand the problem of sin they have before God and that the Son of God, Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross to offer them the solution of this problem. Separate Jesus' suffering and death from who Jesus is and why He suffered and died on the cross and His suffering and death lose any sense. Therefore Paul can say about the people who do so, that Christ crucified is unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness. - 1. Corinthians 1:23

How can such people connect any their joy with a suffering and dying Jesus? They simply cannot. They have no rational answer for Jesus' death and no rational reason to rejoice over it. At such a moment pagan traditions of celebrating the coming of the spring during Easter season come in handy for pursuers of earthly joys.

Yet it is Jesus' suffering and death on the cross that is the reason for our joy! If Jesus was a mere man our joy would be vain like the joy of the world. The difference is that Jesus is God. The same God who created us (Hebrew 1, Psalm 45, 102) died for us, so that we could live for ever.

We are not born into this world to toil and die, but to live forever with our Creator, who by His suffering and death for our sins on the cross opened us the entrance into His kingdom which is not of this world (John 18:36). This is the greatest spiritual blessing we have from God. That is a good reason for true joy that surpasses any joys of this physical world.

For this, our Creator was willing to endure all the suffering, shame and death on the cross and He regarded it as joy that was set before Him. - Hebrews 12:2

If we have this good reason for the true joy, it should permeate all our life. We should not approach life here on the earth from the position that it is just an unpleasant process of dying and lots of trouble caused especially by other people. We should reflect this true joy in all aspects of our life. Even let's eat, drink and find enjoyment in this life, because these are also blessings from the same Creator and we are to enjoy them while remembering Him and fulfilling our duty to Him. - Ecclesiastes 2:24, 12:1, 13-14

We have a great God! David said of Him in OT time: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. (Psalms 23:1) and he explained why. It is because God took care of his physical and spiritual needs while he lived on the earth (v. 2 and 3) and would take care of him even after his death. He was confident that He would dwell in the house of the LORD for ever (v. 6). What else could this be other than salvation that Jesus made possible by His sacrifice and that He spoke about e.g. in John 8:34-36, John 14:2-3?

The Lord is our shepherd, we shall not want as well and we have the same hope of dwelling in the house of the LORD for ever. Who informed us about it? The Holy Spirit through the inspired writers of the NT Scriptures confirmed with signs and miracles made through His power. If we let the Holy Spirit guide our mind, soul and heart by the Word of God contained in the NT Scriptures then it will produce in us the fruits of Holy Spirit and joy is one of them. - Galatians 5:18, 22

Thus Paul can say that God's kingdom prepared for us is in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. - Romans 14:17

To sum it up, the true joy has its origin with God, who is the author of our Christian hope of an eternal heavenly home. This hope was prophesied in the OT time by the prophets and made possible by Jesus' suffering and death. By the power of Holy Spirit was revealed in NT Scriptures and confirmed with miracles and signs. God is the only One who can fill us with the true joy through our knowledge and appreciation of what He has done for us. We accomplish this by doing what pleases Him. - Romans 15:10-13 Therefore true joy is not limited to emotions, but it is the state of mind anchored in the word of God, on the first place, that has impact even on our emotions as well as on all our actions.

III. ***Application of true joy in our life***

Let's look at few practical application of true joy in our life.

a] Firstly, we can live our life with joy of being saved, being part of God's kingdom. - Romans 14:17 There are only two masters, God and Satan and everyone serves to one of these two masters. From the Scriptures we know that Satan and his servants will be thrown into the lake of fire where they will suffer for eternity. Thus servants of God have a good reason to rejoice that they have escaped such terrifying destiny. Moreover they can rejoice for their eternity will be in presence of God, who is the source of life and all we need for our life.

b] We can make our prayers with joy. - Philippians 1:4
Prayer is the means of communication for us with God. We use it to express glory, thanksgivings and petitions to God on our or someone else' behalf parteing to health, overcoming trials or whatever else. Therefore it would not correspond with the nature of prayer if we expressed such glory, thanksgivings and petitions to Almighty God with sad, grievous or indifferent spirit as if we were not happy what we were praying for.

c] We can give and derive joy from one another. - Acts 15:3, Philemon 1:7, 3. John 1:4
There are Christians all around the world who have the same Lord, faith, hope in eternal life and who go through the same trials of their Christian faith as we. We know just small portion of them in person, but it is good to know that we are not alone in our struggles and we can give joy at leas to those Christians that we know. And when someone obeys gospel we have a reason to joy for another soul escaped the eternal torments and was added by Lord to His people.

d] We can have joy when persecuted and count trials we meet as joy. - Luke 6:22-23, James 1:2
It is something very difficult to do, but we can do it if our mind is focused on our reward that is great in heaven.

IV. ***Conclusion***

Paul writes in 1. Corinthians 15:32 "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" However, we can be sure that the dead are raised, because Christ has risen from the dead and Paul and others were witnesses of Christ's resurrection, which is the message of the gospel accounts and epistles. Based on their testimony confirmed by the power of Holy Spirit we can have firm confidence that there is eternal life prepared for those who have faith in Jesus and whose sins were forgiven through Jesus. If there is eternal life before us, we cannot limit our joy to the things of this perishing world. On the contrary, if we connect our joy with eternal things that are with God, our joy will be everlasting. Such joy is the true one, for it corresponds with the everlasting nature of the human soul that is created in image of an everlasting God.

V.
Invitation

Do you find no lasting joy in your present life? Choose Christ for your Savior, obey His gospel, receive the hope of eternal life with God and your joy of escaping eternal torments in separation from God will be eternal!

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