

ROM 15.13: A THREEFOLD BLESSING

[Chelmsford 28 June 2009]

“Happiness”, said Joyce Grenfell, “*is the sublime moment when you get out of your corsets at night*”. Or is it? I would maintain that ultimate happiness is living a life overflowing with joy, peace and hope.

“**May the God of hope**”, said the Apostle Paul, “**fill you will all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit**”(Rom 15.13).

The other week we looked at the blessing of the triune God: “**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all**” (1 Cor 13.13).

This morning, we look at the joy, peace & hope which spring from the triune God.

1. MAY GOD FILL YOU WITH ALL JOY

i) joy in our hearts

“Joy”, it has been said, “*is the infallible sign of the presence of God*”

Peter in his First Letter writes: “**You rejoice with a great and glorious joy which words cannot express, because you are receiving the salvation of your souls**” (1 Pet 1.8).

Joy is absolutely central to the Christian experience

William Tyndale described the Christian gospel as “*good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that makes a man's heart glad and makes him sing, dance and leap for joy*”.

Time and again, when people come to faith, they experience a deep sense of joy.

- Luke, e.g. tells us that the ***Ethiopian eunuch***, after he had come to faith & been baptised by Philip, went on his way “**full of joy**” (Acts 8.39)
- ***Blaise Pascal***, the French philosopher, described his initial encounter with Jesus on 23rd Nov 1654 as “*joy, joy, joy, tears of joy*”
- ***CS Lewis***, the Oxbridge don and Christian apologist, called his autobiography “***Surprised by Joy***” - there he tells the story of how he moved from complete disbelief to faith in Christ, and in so doing was overwhelmed by joy.

“**May God fill you with all joy**”, says Paul. May you know a fresh experience of God which in turn results in a fresh & overwhelming experience of joy.

For true joy is rooted in God and in our relationship with God. Because he loves us and he never changes, we enjoy a basic security underneath all the problems we may face.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage 248-258, wrote a famous letter to a certain Donatus.

In this letter he describes the joy which may be there even when all the odds seem to be stacked against us. “*This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden, under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see. Brigands on the high road, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheatres men murdered to please the applauding crowds, under all roofs misery and selfishness. It is really a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. Yet in the midst of it I have found a quiet and holy*

people. They have discovered a **joy** which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians... and I am one of them"

Yes, joy is an essential Christian characteristic.

Whatever life may hold, we may know joy - the quiet joy that comes from knowing that there is nothing which can separate us from God's love in Jesus.

ii) **joy in our church**

But this is not just a prayer for individuals. Paul is using the second personal plural. May God fill the church at Rome – and indeed churches in all places and at all times – with “**all joy**”.

May we in our life together know that "**indescribable and glorious joy**" (NRSV) of which the Bible speaks!

To experience such corporate joy, we will have to begin to allow our joy in Christ to surface and to bubble over.

If the truth be told, some of us are not very good at that. We don't like to express our emotions in public - nor indeed do you like to see anybody else display their emotions either. But why not? Why should we be afraid of being real with one another? Emotions are a God-given faculty, which should not be despised.

George Carey wrote in *The Church In The Market Place*: "*If our faith is important to us, I used to muse, why shouldn't we too be moved to express our faith in ways that are true to us as individuals? Instead we sing glorious hymns like 'Praise my soul the King of Heaven' as if we were paying the milk bill; or, if we are Anglicans we sing the 'Te Deum'... as if we are taking a dose of cod liver oil!*"

Yes, of course, there is more to Christian joy than swinging from the chandeliers - but frankly if there is never a time when we want to swing from the chandeliers, then I wonder whether we have ever discovered joy in the first place.

Don't be afraid to express your joy in Christ. Don't repress your true feelings. Be real and express your feelings of joy in Christ. Smile & be joyful together.

The German theologian Helmut Thielicke once said: "*A church is in a bad way when it banishes laughter from the sanctuary and leaves it to the cabaret, the night club and the toastmasters*". I believe that he was right.

Worship is not intended to be a miserable experience.

Worship is intended to be a joyful experience.

“**May God... fill you with all joy**”

2. **MAY GOD FILL YOU WITH ALL PEACE**

Peace is the sister of **joy**. Paul in the previous chapter wrote that "**The Kingdom of God is... a matter of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit**" (Rom 14.17) **Peace**, together with **joy**, is one of the seven fruits of the Spirit.

i) *peace in our hearts*

On a personal level, may each of us know that peace of heart which the Lord Jesus alone can give. Was Paul referring here to the peace with God which comes from the knowledge that our sins are forgiven – or was he referring to the peace which God gives us because he is with us?

Jesus, in the context of speaking of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, said: "**Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give to you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid**" (Jn 14.27).

The Puritan Matthew Henry commented: "*When Christ died he left a will in which he bequeathed his soul to his Father, his body to Joseph of Arimathea, his clothes fell to the soldiers, his mother he gave to John, but to his disciples, who had left all for him, he left not silver or gold but something that was infinitely better - his peace*"

If we are truthful, there are times when it is hard not to worry. There are so many uncertainties in life. What's more, as Christians we know that we are not spared the difficulties and troubles of life - God unfortunately has not provided us with some little protective bubble which shields us from the realities of life.

However, the good news is that we are not called to cope with life on our own.

The Lord Jesus has left his Spirit with us. His presence with us.

This is the key to our peace.

A Japanese student named Toki Miyashina wrote this adaptation of Ps 23 which focuses on inner peace with God:

*"The Lord is my Pace-setter, I shall not rush
He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals,
He provides me with images of stillness, which restore my serenity.
he leads me in ways of efficiency, through calmness of mind,
And his guidance is peace.
Even though I have a great many thing to accomplish each day
I will not fret, for his presence is here,
His timelessness, his all-importance will keep me in balance.
he prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity
By anointing my mind with his oils of tranquility;
My cup of joyous energy overflows.
Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruits of my hours,
For I shall walk at the pace of my Lord, & dwell in his house for ever"*

ii) *peace in our church*

Again, let's not over-individualise this blessing. Let's apply it to our church. In our life together may we know peace - the peace that comes from being one in Christ Jesus. In the words of the Apostle Paul found in Rom 15.5: "**May God... enable you to have the same point of view among yourselves**" – or as the NRSV puts it, "**May God... grant you to live in harmony with one another**"

We are a church with all kinds of differences.

We are made up of men and women – think of all the differences that alone provides. We are a church made up of young people, old people, and all sorts of people in-between – we therefore don't all like the same songs or the same hymns. What's more, we are a church made up of people from different social, educational, and cultural backgrounds.

Frankly, we are not a natural grouping.

But, God has blessed us with the miracle of his peace!

“May God fill you with all peace”

3. MAY GOD FILL YOU WITH HOPE

Lit: **"May your hope continue to grow"**

i) hope in our hearts

There is nothing more certain than Christian **hope**. Christian hope has nothing in common with the false hope which accompanies the first four hours of a diet.

Listen to the apostle Peter who wrote: **“God gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope”** (1 Pet 1.3).

It is the resurrection which makes our hope sure and certain.

Hope in the biblical sense is a future expectation based on a past event.

It is because of Jesus that we can look death in the face; because of him for us death is not the end, but rather the gateway into a fuller life.

Paul here in his letter to the Romans writes of **“the hope of sharing God's glory”** (Rom 5.2). He goes on: **“We... boast of our troubles, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God's approval, and his approval creates hope”** (Rom 5.3-4).

Christians by definition are people of hope. Indeed, according to one distinguished commentator: *"Hope is... that characteristic which has at all periods most strikingly distinguished the authentic Christian from his pagan believer"* (CEB Cranfield).

God and hope inextricably belong together

(ii) hope in our church

Again, let's apply this blessing to our life as a church.

May our life together overflow with hope.

William Barclay tells the story of a church meeting called to consider some emergency which had arisen. The chairman of the meeting began with a formal prayer in which he addressed God as the *"Almighty & eternal God, whose grace is sufficient for all things"*. However, unfortunately he seemed to be unable to relate his faith to the world in which he was living. For immediately after having prayed his prayer the chairman introduced the business of the evening by saying: *"Ladies & gentlemen, the situation in this church is completely hopeless, and nothing can be done"*.

Barclay went on to say: *"There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them... There is something in Christian hope that nothing can kill, that not all the shadows can quench - and that something is the conviction that God is still alive"*.

Our hope in God should relate not just to the future, but also to the present.

We are called to believe that God is not just working out his purposes in the world to come, but also in the here and now.

There is no challenge too great for God's people. For as Paul said earlier in his letter to the Romans **"if God is for us, who then can be against us?"** (Rom 8.31)

The fact is that **"God is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for or even think of"** (Eph 3.20).

But for us to experience that hope – as indeed to know God's joy and his peace – we need to believe. Let me read out text in full: **"May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit"**.

Joy, peace and hope are ours – when we believe.

So let me encourage you to put your trust in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, in the words of Eugene Peterson's paraphrase: ***"May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!"***