

*Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is.*

C. S. LEWIS

*Surprised by Joy*<sup>1</sup>

*The fruit of the Spirit is . . . joy.*

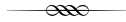
GALATIANS 5:22

*For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

1 CORINTHIANS 4:7

# Joy in God Is a Gift of God

## *Doing Ourselves What Must Be Done for Us*



**T**he title of this chapter is good news for the hopeless and bad news for the self-reliant. Or to put it another way: It is liberating and devastating. It liberates from despair the person who knows that he cannot make himself desire what he does not desire. And it devastates the presumption of the person who thought that all his duties were in his own power.

### A HALF-RIGHT DENIAL

One of the reasons people deny that delighting in God is essential is that they know intuitively that this delight is beyond their control, and they feel that something beyond their control cannot be required. They are half right. In the end, joy in God is a free gift, not a self-wrought human accomplishment. That's right. But it is not biblical to say that the only virtues God can require of me are the ones that I am good enough to perform. If I am so bad that I can't delight in what is good, that is no reason God can't command me to love the good. If I am so corrupt that I can't enjoy what is infinitely beautiful, that does not make me less guilty for disobeying the command to delight in God (Ps. 37:4). It makes me more guilty.

## THE DUTY TO DELIGHT IN GOD

The fact that joy in God is a duty is plain from the straightforward biblical commands to do it. “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:4; see also Ps. 32:11; 37:4; 97:12; 100:1; Joel 2:23). Matthew Henry, writing in the seventeenth century, speaks on behalf of two thousand years of sober reflection on these words:

*Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say Rejoice* (v. 4). All our joy must terminate in God; and our thoughts of God must be delightful thoughts. *Delight Thyself in the Lord* (Ps. 37:4). . . . Observe, It is our duty and privilege to rejoice in God, and to rejoice in him always; at all times, in all conditions; even when we suffer for him, or are afflicted by him. We must not think the worse of him or of his ways for the hardships we meet with in his service. There is enough in God to furnish us with matter of joy in the worst circumstance on earth. . . . Joy in God is a duty of great consequence in the Christian life; and Christians need to be again and again called to it.<sup>2</sup>

Since joy in God is a duty, some say it can't be a gift. But consider now what the Bible says about this. Then we will close this chapter by asking why it matters.

## WE DON'T JUST DO SINS, WE ARE SINNERS

Among those who believe the Bible to be the Word of God, it is a commonplace to say that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). That is a profound and all-important truth. But it's not the whole story. The problem is not that we have all done *acts* that are sinful, but that we *are* sinful. N. P. Williams put it like this: “The ordinary man may feel ashamed of doing wrong; but the saint, endowed with a superior refinement of moral sensibility, and keener powers of introspection, is ashamed of being the kind of man who is liable to do wrong.”<sup>3</sup> Sin is not just something we do; it is a power deeply rooted in our nature. When we are converted to Christ, the Holy Spirit is given to us, and by his power we begin to overcome our fallen, sinful nature.

But by nature we are rebellious, disobedient, and hardened against God. Thus the psalmist cries out, “Enter not into judgment with your servant, for *no one living is righteous before you*” (Ps. 143:2). The

prophet Jeremiah bemoans the truth that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). King David traced this condition back to his birth: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). This inborn corruption is so severe that Paul says, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:18).

What Paul means by “flesh” is not his skin, but his natural self apart from the redemption of Christ and apart from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Another way Paul refers to the “flesh” is by calling it simply the “natural person”—that is, the person we are by nature, without Christ. So he says, for example, in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The *natural person* does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” In other words, “the natural person,” or “the flesh,” is so resistant to spiritual reality that he can’t understand or accept the things of God. This person will not delight in God. The natural heart is so corrupt in its desires that it cannot see or savor the beauty of Christ.

That’s what Paul means when he says in Romans 8:7-8 that the mind of the flesh “is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Notice the word *cannot*. It’s used twice. The natural person, the person defined by flesh, but not yet changed by Christ, is so hostile in mind to God’s glorious authority (not submitting to his law) that he cannot delight in God or rejoice in his ways. He can do many religious and moral things, but his heart is far from God (Matt. 15:8), and he cannot make himself stop seeing the greatness and authority of God as undesirable.

#### HOW THEN ARE WE DEAD?

It is not surprising then to hear Paul describe us, in this fallen, natural, fleshly condition as “dead.” That’s what he says in Ephesians 2:4-5: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, *even when we were dead* in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” The deepest reason why we cannot rejoice in the Lord is that by nature we are dead. That is, we have no spiritual sensitivity to the truth and beauty of the gospel of Christ. We are like the blind in the art gallery of heaven. Our deadness

is not the deadness of the body. It's not even the deadness of the intellect or the will. It is the deadness of the spiritual ability to see reality for what it is.

Paul describes our deadness to divine beauty with phrases like “futility of mind” and “darkened in understanding” and “ignorance that is in us.” And he traces it back to “hardness of heart.” You see this in Ephesians 4:17-18: “You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the *futility* of their minds. They are *darkened* in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the *ignorance* that is in them, due to their *hardness* of heart.” Notice that hardness is deeper than ignorance. Ignorance is rooted in hardness, not the other way around. Therefore we are not excused. The problem with our ignorance of God's beauty is not innocent unawareness, but culpable hardness. Our hardness is our deadness, and our deadness makes us unable to submit to the command, Love the Lord with all your heart.

Because of this fallen, sinful, hardened, rebellious, futile, dead condition of our hearts, joy in God is impossible. Not impossible in a way that makes us less guilty, but more guilty. When the rich young ruler walked away from Jesus because he delighted more in his riches than in following Christ, Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24). The disciples were astonished at this. They knew that a camel *cannot* go through the eye of a needle. That's true. And humans cannot make themselves delight in Christ more than money. So Jesus answered, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (v. 26).

#### COMING TO JESUS FOR JOY IS A GIFT OF GOD

This was Jesus' way of saying that joy in God is a gift. Preferring Jesus to money is a gift of God. We can't produce it on our own. It must be given to us. When Jesus is presented to us as the most desirable Person, Lord, Savior, and Friend in the universe, we will not come to him on our own. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. . . . No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father” (John 6:44, 65). Coming to Jesus as the Treasure and Pleasure of our lives is “granted . . . by the Father” or it doesn't happen.

We are too hard and rebellious in ourselves even to *see* Jesus as attractive, let alone leave all and come to him as our all-satisfying Joy.

Jesus said it another way. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:6-7). Until we are born again by the Spirit of God, all we are is “flesh”—natural people with no spiritual life, no living taste buds in the soul for the sweetness of Christ. How then are we made alive? The next thing out of Jesus’ mouth is, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (v. 8). The point is that the Spirit is free. He blows where he wills. We don’t control him. He controls us. His life-giving work is pure gift. When you see Jesus as your Treasure, the Spirit has blown through your heart. Your joy in Jesus is a gift.

#### IS REPENTANCE TOO A GIFT?

Someone may say, “This sounds like repentance. But isn’t repentance something we do? Are you saying repentance also is a gift?” That’s a good question. The transformation we’ve described is indeed repentance. Repentance refers to the experience of a changed mind. Once the mind was hostile to God, but now the mind is in love with God. Once the crucifixion of Christ seemed foolish, but now it is precious to us. It’s the wisdom and power of God (1 Cor. 1:23-24). Once the mind trusted in human ability to achieve happiness and security, but now the mind despairs of itself and looks to Christ for hope and joy. Christ—and all that God is for us in him—has become our happiness and our security.

Yes, that is repentance. And, yes, repentance is a gift. We do not make ourselves into Christ-adoring people. We do not muster enough human wisdom or strength or willpower to deliver ourselves from the captivity of Satan’s deceptions. No, that is all a precious gift of God. Oh, he uses human means to bring it about. Otherwise I would not be writing this book. But in the end, no human means make the miracle of repentance happen. You can see both the means and the miracle in 2 Timothy 2:24-26: “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. [That’s the means. Now the miracle.] God may perhaps *grant*

*them repentance* leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” We teach and we love, but God grants repentance.

I pray that this book will be used by God as one of his many means to “grant . . . repentance.” But in the end, it will be God, and not this book, or any book, that delivers a person from the captivity of the devil’s deceit and opens his eyes to see the superior worth of Jesus Christ. Then, when God grants repentance, he will prize Christ above all treasures and savor him above all pleasures. That is a gift. I pray for every reader who needs it: *Lord, grant them repentance.*

### THE CENTRAL MYSTERY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

But the question was asked above, “Isn’t repentance something we do? If it’s a gift of God, how do we do it?” Yes, repentance is something we do. After Peter preached a convicting message at Pentecost, the crowd cried, “Brothers, what shall we *do*?” To this Peter answered, “Repent” (Acts 2:37-38). He said more. But that’s the point at issue here. Repentance is a command that we are responsible to obey.

Here we have arrived at the central mystery of living the Christian life. Christ has died for our sins and risen from the dead. Because of his blood and righteousness we are forgiven and counted righteous by God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 5:19). Therefore, Christ has become the Yes to all God’s promises (2 Cor. 1:20). Everything promised by the prophets for the new covenant has been purchased for us infallibly by Christ. These new-covenant promises include, “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart . . . so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart” (Deut. 30:6); and, “I will put my law within them . . . on their hearts” (Jer. 31:33); and, “I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19); and, “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes” (Ezek. 36:27).

All of these new-covenant promises have been secured for us by Christ who said at the Last Supper, “This cup that is poured out for you is *the new covenant in my blood*” (Luke 22:20). The blood of Christ obtained for us all the promises of the new covenant. But look again at these promises. What distinguishes them from the old covenant is that

they are promises for *enablement*. They are promises that God will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We need a new heart to delight in God. We need the Spirit of God whose fruit is joy in God. We need to have the law written on our heart, not just written on stone, so that when it says, “Love the Lord with all your heart,” the Word itself produces the reality within us. In other words, we need the gift of joy in God. Left to ourselves, we will not produce it. That’s what Christ bought for us when he died and shed the blood of the new covenant. He bought for us the gift of joy in God.

#### THE OTHER HALF OF THE MYSTERY

That is half the mystery of the Christian life—the most crucial half. The other half is that we are commanded to do what we cannot do. And we must do it or perish. Our inability does not remove our guilt—it deepens it. We are so bad that we cannot love God. We cannot delight in God above all things. We cannot treasure Christ above money. Our entrenched badness does not make it wrong for God to command us to be good. We ought to delight in God above all things. Therefore it is right for God to command us to delight in God above all things. And if we ever do delight in God, it will be because we have obeyed this command.

That is the mystery: We must obey the command to rejoice in the Lord, and we cannot, because of our willful and culpable corruption. Therefore obedience, when it happens, is a gift. The heretic Pelagius in the fourth century rejected this truth and was shocked and angered when he saw the way St. Augustine prayed in his *Confessions*. Augustine prayed, “Give me the grace [O Lord] to do as you command, and command me to do what you will! . . . O holy God . . . when your commands are obeyed, it is from you that we receive the power to obey them.”<sup>4</sup>

#### THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS ALL OF GRACE

That is a biblical prayer, and we will see many like it in the chapters to come (e.g., Ps. 51:12; 90:14; Rom. 15:13). It corresponds to the mystery of the Christian life. We must delight in God. And only God can change our hearts so that we delight in God. We are thrown back on God utterly. The Christian life is all of grace. “From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever” (Rom. 11:36).



In the next chapter I will talk about the kind of willing and doing involved in obeying the command to rejoice, when this rejoicing itself is a gift. We do not stop and become passive when we hear that joy is a gift. We act. How and why we act is the question we will take up in the next chapter. But first I promised that we would ask why the truth of this chapter matters.

### WHY DOES BELIEVING THIS MATTER?

The first reason is that truth matters, and we should believe and embrace it whether we can see how it benefits us or not. This is what the Bible says about us and about joy in God. We can't produce it; God must give it. That is true, and we should believe and love the truth.

Second, when we believe this truth, our joy in God is multiplied because it is compounded with gratitude. In all our joy we are thankful to God, the Giver, that we delight in God.

Third, when we believe this truth, we will seek our joy from God with greater urgency than if we thought it was in our power. This truth sets us to praying as never before.

Fourth, believing this truth will prevent our strategies in the fight for joy from degenerating into technique and legalism. Technique cannot be paramount because God is sovereign. There are things we must do in the battle for joy. But if joy is a gift, it can never be earned. So legalism that tries to earn things from God is excluded. Not only that, but knowing that joy is ultimately a gift, and not a mere human achievement, also protects us from elevating technique and willpower too highly. Our strategies must be humble and dependent, followed by "May the LORD do what seems good to him" (2 Sam. 10:12). Our strategies to fight for joy are simply means of God's grace. And means of grace are always modest.

The Bible illustrates the modesty of means in numerous ways. "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD" (Prov. 21:31). "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Ps. 127:1). "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand" (Prov. 19:21). If joy is a gift from God, we will use all his appointed means, but we will not trust in means, but in God.

Fifth, believing that joy in God is a gift of God will give all the glory to God. This is the goal of the Christian life—to live in a way that will show God to be most wonderful. The apostle Peter gives a principle in 1 Peter 4:11 for how to do that. He says, “Whoever serves, [let him serve] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” The strength to serve is a gift. God supplies it. When we believe that and lean on it consciously, we show God to be the glorious giver of the strength. The giver gets the glory.

We may paraphrase like this: “Let him who rejoices in the Lord, rejoice in the joy that God supplies, so that in everything—including our joy—God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” Therefore, believing that joy in God is a gift from God is essential in our calling to live for the glory of God. It shapes all our other strategies. It makes them humble. It makes them into acts of faith. In everything we do in our quest for joy we are praying and trusting the grace of God for a gift. May this truth liberate the despairing soul and humble the proud.

*Man's proper happiness consists in the enjoyment of God; but it is not possible that man should enjoy God with only those things in him which he receives by the first birth. So that there is this necessity of man's being born again.*

JONATHAN EDWARDS

“BORN AGAIN”

*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*<sup>1</sup>

*The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:4

*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!*

PSALM 34:8

# The Fight for Joy Is a Fight to See

## *Valuing God Through the Eyes of the Heart and the Ears of the Head*



There is more than one kind of seeing. Otherwise Jesus would not have said, “Seeing they do not see” (Matt. 13:13). It is possible to see in one way while not seeing in another way. The difference the Bible describes is that we have two kinds of eyes—eyes of the heart and eyes of the head. The apostle Paul prayed that you would have “the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:17-18). So there is such a thing as eyes of the heart. And there is a kind of knowing or seeing that comes through these eyes that is different from the seeing that comes through the eyes of the head.

Other Scriptures also link the heart and its eyes. Moses lamented that “to this day the LORD has not given you a *heart* to understand or *eyes* to see” (Deut. 29:4). They could still see with their physical eyes. God had not struck the whole nation blind. But they could not see with the eyes of their hearts. Seeing they did not see. So it was in the days of Ezekiel: “Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not” (Ezek. 12:2). And Jeremiah too grieved over this spiritual blindness: “O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not” (Jer. 5:21).

## BLIND LIKE THE THINGS WE MAKE AND TRUST

The psalmist described the connection between this inner blindness and idolatry. “The idols of the nations are . . . the work of human hands. They have . . . eyes, but do not see. . . . Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them!” (Ps. 135:15-18). Make and trust a blind idol, and you become blind. Apply that principle to the modern world, and think of the idols of our own day. What do we make and what do we trust? Things. Toys. Technology. And so our hearts and our affections are formed by these things. They compress the void in our heart into shapes like toys. The result is that we are easily moved and excited by things—computers, cars, appliances, entertainment media. They seem to fit the shapes in our hearts. They feel good in the tiny spaces they have made. But in this readiness to receive pleasure from things, we are ill-shaped for Christ. He seems unreal, unattractive. The eyes of our hearts grow dull.

Paul said the same thing about the people of Israel in his own day, quoting the prophet Isaiah: “‘This people’s heart has grown dull . . . and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes . . . and understand with their heart’” (Acts 28:27). In other words, the heart and its eyes are failing in their appointed task. In the book of Revelation, Jesus saw this happening in the church of Laodicea, who thought they needed nothing. He said to them, “You are wretched, pitiable, poor, *blind*, and naked.” And he counseled them, “Buy from me . . . salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see” (3:17-18).

This divine “salve” must be what Paul was praying for in Ephesians 1:18 when he asked the Lord that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know our hope and inheritance and power. Without the work of our omnipotent internal Eye Surgeon we would remain blind and unable to see. Oh, how we need the gift of spiritual sight! Whatever joy we have without this sight would not be spiritual joy. It would not be a spontaneous response to seeing the beauty of Christ. And therefore it would not honor Christ. It would be superficial and fleeting.

## WHY IS SEEING SO ESSENTIAL?

Why is spiritual seeing so essential to joy in God? It’s because spiritual seeing is the act of the heart that corresponds to the revelation of the glory of God for the enjoyment of his people. In other words, God’s ulti-

mate purpose for creating the universe and ruling the history of redemption is the manifestation of his glory for the everlasting enjoyment of a redeemed people. Jonathan Edwards, who has taught me as much as any man outside the Bible, said in his great book on *The End for Which God Created the World*, “It appears that all that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God’s works is included in that one phrase, the glory of God.”<sup>2</sup> That is why we exist—to see, and rejoice in, and reflect the value of the glory of God.<sup>3</sup> “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone . . . whom I created for my glory” (Isa. 43:6-7). That’s why we were created, and why we should do everything for the glory of God: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

#### GOD IS GLORIFIED BY BEING SEEN AND REJOICED IN

In one of the most important statements I have ever read, Edwards said it like this:

God glorifies Himself toward the creatures also in two ways: 1. By appearing to . . . their understanding. 2. In communicating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in, and enjoying, the manifestations which He makes of Himself. . . . God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it.<sup>4</sup>

God’s aim in all that he does is to glorify himself. This involves both radiance from God and reflection from creation. His glory streams out from himself, and it streams back again in many ways, especially when he is treasured and enjoyed by his people. “The refulgence shines upon and into the creature,” Edwards says, “and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is *of* God, and *in* God, and *to* God, and God is the beginning, middle and end.”<sup>5</sup>

#### SEEING THE GLORY IS FOUNDATIONAL TO SAVORING THE GLORY

Nothing in the universe is more central than the radiance of the glory of God revealed in Christ for the enjoyment of his people. Therefore, the

importance of *seeing* it for what it really is can hardly be exaggerated. For seeing it is foundational to enjoying it. And that joy is foundational for showing the worth of Christ in the world. It is foundational for the life of love and sacrifice and suffering that it sustains.

Therefore beneath the quest for satisfaction in Christ—which sustains the life of sacrifice for Christ—is always the quest to see the glory of Christ. All strategies in the fight for joy are directly or indirectly strategies to see Christ more fully.

### THE FULLNESS OF THE GLORY IS NOT YET SEEN

This connection between God's glory and our seeing demands that we understand the two kinds of seeing we have spoken about. For in one sense the glory of God is not yet visible, and in another sense it is. Paul says in Romans 8:18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." This means that the glory is not yet here to see. So he says in Romans 8:24-25, "Who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." And in this hope we rejoice: "Through [Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and *we rejoice in hope of the glory of God*" (Rom. 5:2).

This is the great global hope of all the prophets. "The *glory of the LORD* shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isa. 40:5). "The time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall *see my glory*" (Isa. 66:18). Note well: they will *see* the glory of the Lord. Seeing corresponds to the great and final revelation of the glory of God. There is a glory of God that we hope for and do not yet see.

### THE HOPE OF GLORY IS SUSTAINED BY THE GLORY WE HAVE SEEN

But that is not the whole story. The reason we hope for the revelation of God's glory is because we have indeed seen so much of it in Christ and in nature that our hearts are captured by it forever. The apostle Peter admits that in one sense we do not now see Christ. But listen to how he says it: "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inex-

pressible and filled with glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). We may groan at times because our seeing is so incomplete (Rom. 8:23). But for Peter the joy of what we *have* seen and the hope of what we *will* see are inexpressible and full of glory.

Therefore, Peter called Christians to be so enthralled with the hope of glory that they would be willing to make any sacrifice now for the sake of knowing and showing Christ: “Rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad *when his glory is revealed*” (1 Pet. 4:13). The final revelation of the glory of Christ will be the consummation of our joy. Every sacrifice will have been worth it. Indeed those who have suffered most for Christ will say, in one very true sense, “We never made a sacrifice. That slight momentary affliction was ‘preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison’” (see 2 Cor. 4:17).

#### THE REVELATION OF GOD’S GLORY IN NATURE

The glory we have already seen, and the hope that we will see more, creates and sustains our joy now. There are magnificent revelations of it in nature—even if they pale in comparison to Christ. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge” (Ps. 19:1-2). We know from Paul’s strong words in Romans 1:20 that we have “seen” the “invisible” attributes of God in this universal display of divine glory. “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived [=clearly seen, *kathoratai*] ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” This is amazing. Paul says that when we look at God’s display of his glory in nature (from the atom to the supernova) we all see clearly the glory of God. But seeing we do not see.

Why? Paul says it’s because of the “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness *suppress the truth*” (Rom. 1:18). We see, but we suppress. We prefer mindless, moral-less, loveless theories of naturalistic evolution to the glory of God. Oh, how deep is our corruption! This is absolutely tragic. In one act of proud suppression we cut ourselves off from God and joy. Oh, what joys God means for his children to have in the beauties of nature! Not nature as an end



in itself, but as an almost endless diversity of spectacular wonders, pointing always to God's magnificence.

"O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it" (Ps. 104:24-26). The Lord is lavish in creation, because his glory is infinite in beauty and diversity and greatness. Alas that seeing we do not see! And we consign ourselves to the kind of pleasures that sophisticated human animals can feel as their chemicals interact.

#### THE JOY-KILLING BLINDNESS CAN BE HEALED

But that can change, and we should fight to change it with all our might. Our hearts can change so that when the desert blossoms like a crocus we "see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God" (Isa. 35:2). The change comes when we turn to Christ. Here the veil is lifted from the darkened heart. What Paul said about the Jewish people is true for all of us, whether we are reading the Bible or the book of nature: "Their minds were hardened. . . [The] veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. . . . When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" (2 Cor. 3:14-16).

Salvation is the purchase and provision of sight for the blind. God sent Christ into the world to die for our spiritual blindness, pay its penalty, absorb the wrath it deserves, and provide a perfect imputed righteousness for all who believe. This is the most beautiful display of God's glory that has been or ever will be. The divine glory we have been redeemed to see is most beautifully shown in the redemption itself. The all-glorious Christ is both the means and the goal of our salvation from blindness. His life, death, resurrection, and present reign in heaven are *both* the means by which we sinners regain our sight *and* the highest glory we are saved to see.

#### WHY BLINDNESS IS REMOVED ONLY IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

This is why God has appointed that turning to Christ is the way our sight will be restored. The point of restoring the sight of the blind is that they

might see and enjoy the glory of Christ. That is the reason we have eyes—both physical and spiritual. Therefore it would contradict the very purpose of seeing if God were to restore our sight by any other means than the revelation of the glory of Christ. If we were given eyes to see and there were no Christ to see, then the joy of our seeing would not glorify Christ. But the Spirit who wakens our inner sight was sent to glorify Christ. Jesus said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he . . . will glorify me” (John 16:13-14). Therefore the Spirit will open the eyes of the blind only in the presence of the glory of Christ.

#### HOW IS THE GLORY OF CHRIST PRESENT TO SEE?

But how can this be when Christ is in heaven and the glory of his redeeming work happened centuries ago? The answer is given by the apostle Paul in one of the most important gospel passages in the Bible:

*If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:3-6)*

Here Paul defines conversion—which Satan does all he can to hinder—as “seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (v. 4). He says it a different way in verse 6: It is the shining in our hearts of “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” These descriptions of conversion imply two things. One is that the gospel is the proclamation of the “knowledge” of Christ in such a way that its glory can be seen by the eyes of the heart. The other is that this “seeing” is the work of God, “shining in our hearts” the same way he did on the first day of creation when he said, “Let there be light.” In other words, seeing the glory of Christ in the gospel is a gift.

Therefore when I said above that the Spirit will open the eyes of the blind only in the presence of the glory of Christ, I meant, only in the hearing of the gospel of Christ does God say in the heart, “Let there be

light.” *By means of* the glory of Christ in the gospel, and *for the sake of* the glory of Christ in the gospel, God restores our sight only in the presence of Christ in the gospel. In this way, when our eyes are opened and the light shines, it is Christ whom we see and enjoy and glorify.

Telling the gospel of Christ’s death for our sins and his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4) is a re-presentation of the glory of Christ once revealed in history. At that time the apostle John said, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In other words, the eternal “Word”—the Son of God—entered history and revealed “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” So now when the Word of God is preached (“the gospel of the glory of Christ”), that same glory (“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”) shines forth. Becoming a Christian means seeing this glory when we hear the gospel.

#### GOD REVEALS HIMSELF BY HIS WORD

This relationship between the Word of God and the glory of God—between hearing and seeing—is not new. In Exodus 33:18 Moses said to God at Mount Sinai, “Please show me your glory.” He wanted to *see* the glory of God. God responded with a revelation of himself by the Word. He said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD’” (v. 19). And then he did that on the mountain with a full proclamation of the meaning of his name: “The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation’” (Ex. 34:6-7). That was God’s deepest answer to Moses’ request, “Let me see your glory.” He proclaimed in words the essence of his gracious name.

Similarly God revealed himself to the prophet Samuel by the word. First Samuel 3:21 says, “And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.” This is what we want as human beings: We want a revelation of God

himself. We want to say with Moses, “Show us your glory.” And indeed a time is coming when “the glory that is to be revealed to us” will make all “the sufferings of this present time” seem as nothing (Rom. 8:18). But for now, in this age, God has ordained that primarily he reveals his glory to us “by the word of the LORD.” Hearing is the primary way of seeing in this age.

### SEEING THE GLORY IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HEARING SUCCEEDS

This relationship between the Word of God and the glory of God is remarkable, and we should grasp it firmly. God ordained that spiritual *seeing* should happen mainly through *hearing*. Christ is not visually present for us to see. He is presented today in the Word of God, especially the gospel. Paul said, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). But we know from 2 Corinthians 4:4 that faith springs from “seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” Therefore we can say that seeing the glory of Christ is what happens in the heart when the hearing of the gospel is made effective by the Spirit. That is, when, through the gospel, the omnipotent, creative voice of God says, “Let light shine in the darkness of this heart,” the gospel gives rise to faith. When hearing, by grace, produces seeing, it produces faith.

This is crucial because the glory of God is the ultimate reality. The glory of God is more ultimate than the Word of God. And so seeing is more ultimate than hearing. Nevertheless the glory of God does not come to us in a saving way except through the Word of God. Therefore, *seeing* the glory does not happen except through *hearing* the gospel. Word corresponds to hearing, and glory corresponds to seeing. Ultimately God has spoken in order to reveal his glory for the enjoyment of his people. Therefore we must hear what he says in order to see what he reveals. The Bible does not speak of hearing the glory of God, but seeing it. Hearing is the means. Seeing is the goal. The aim of all our hearing of God’s truth is the seeing of God’s glory.

### THE AIM OF SEEING IS SAVORING AND SHOWING CHRIST

Yes, seeing divine glory is the goal of hearing divine truth. But *seeing* the glory of God is not our ultimate aim. Our ultimate aim is to glorify God

by enjoying him forever. If seeing did not produce savoring, God would not be glorified by our seeing. Therefore the final goal *in our hearts* is the enjoyment of the glory of God, not just the seeing. And the final goal *in the universe* is the fullest possible display of the glory of God. That fullness comes to pass not only but mainly through the white-hot, joy-permeated worship of his people as they exult in the glory of his Son.

The reason I say “not only” is that the wrath of God against unbelief will also glorify his justice and wisdom. And the reason I say “but mainly” is that judgment is not God’s highest design for the glory of his name; rather the highest design is “that the Gentiles might glorify God *for his mercy*” (Rom. 15:9). The revelation of the glory of his grace reflected in the joyful exultation of his people is God’s highest and ultimate end in creation. “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world . . . *to the praise of the glory of His grace*” (Eph. 1:4, 6 NASB).

#### BEHOLDING GLORY MEANS BECOMING ENTHRALLED

This will come to pass, and our hearts will be full of joy in it, if we fight to see the glory of God. Second Corinthians 3:18 gives the decisive word on the necessity of seeing for the sake of rejoicing in and reflecting the glory of God: “And we all, with unveiled face, *beholding the glory of the Lord*, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” By seeing the glory of Christ in the gospel we are changed. In what way? Not first externally, but first internally. What is this internal change that comes from “beholding the glory of the Lord”?

It is the awakening of joy in Christ himself, and all that God is for us in him. It is the awakening of a new taste for spiritual reality centering in Christ. It is the capacity for a new sweetness and a new enjoyment of the glory of God in the Word of God. Therefore, nothing is more important for us in life than to “behold the glory of the Lord.” Satan, as Paul says four verses later (2 Cor. 4:4), uses all his devices to keep us from seeing “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” This is the most foundational strategy in the battle for joy—the strategic battle to see. In all the strategies commended in this book for how to fight for joy, this is always the aim of each. Directly or indirectly every strategy is a

strategy to behold the glory of Christ and become enthralled with his beauty above all.

### THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN A FINAL PRAYER

As Jesus came to his last night before the crucifixion, John, the beloved disciple, says, “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). One of the demonstrations of that love was the great prayer that Jesus prayed for his disciples and for us who would believe on him through their word (John 17:20). And the climax of that prayer came with these words: “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory* that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (v. 24). Why would the most loving man who ever lived, at the most loving hour of his life, pray that we would be able to spend eternity *seeing his glory*?

The answer is not hard: This will satisfy our hearts and glorify his worth. That is what it means to be loved by Christ. He prays for what is eternally satisfying to us and eternally glorifying to him. Seeing his glory forever is the greatest gift he can give to us. Therefore praying and dying that we might have this gift is love. Resolving to fight with all our might that we might see what he died to show—that is a great honor to Christ. The rest of this book is an effort to help you do that. I am still learning myself. May the Lord give us the grace, more and more, to follow the lead of the apostle Paul and “look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen” (2 Cor. 4:18). May this kind of looking enable us to see more of Christ than we would have ever seen if our looking stopped with what is seen.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEE CHRIST WITH THE EYES OF THE HEART?

What then is this seeing with the eyes of the heart? It is a spiritual perception of the truth and beauty and worth of Christ for what they really are. To use the words of Jonathan Edwards, it is “a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the Word of God, and a conviction of the truth a reality of them thence arising.”<sup>6</sup> The key word here is “sense.” The person who sees with the eyes of the heart “does not merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a *sense* of the

gloriousness of God in his heart. There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing, but there is a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness."<sup>7</sup>

This "sense" or perception is different from physical perception, but not disconnected from it. When the gospel is heard and Christ is objectively portrayed in his perfections and his works, the physical perception of these things may lead to an embrace or rejection. But the spiritual perception leads only to an embrace. Indeed it may be so interwoven with the embrace that they are indistinguishable. Can we really distinguish between perceiving something as infinitely desirable from the awakening of desire for it? Is not the wakening of the desire for Christ the recognition of him as desirable?

The words of David in Psalm 34:8 seem to imply this: "Oh, *taste and see* that the LORD is good!" Which comes first: tasting that the Lord is good, or seeing that the Lord is good? Or is the taste the sight? Listen to Thomas Binney's reflections on these words.

There are some things, especially in the depths of the religious life, which can only be understood by being experienced, and which even then are incapable of being adequately embodied in words. "O taste and see that the Lord is good." The enjoyment must come before the illumination *or rather the enjoyment is the illumination*. There are things that must be loved before we can know them to be worthy of our love.<sup>8</sup>

That is the difference between physical perceiving and spiritual perceiving. Spiritual perceiving is the creation of a new taste in the soul. Before our conversion the honey of Christ tasted sour or bland and thus undesirable to our souls. Then, by grace, we were granted a new capacity for sweetness, and we tasted the honey of Christ for what it really is: sweet and desirable. This is the seeing that provides the enjoyment of Christ. The seeing and enjoying are inseparable. Indeed it appears that the enjoying is the seeing. Or as Jonathan Edwards says, the heart's seeing a person as lovely implies that the person is pleasant to the soul.

There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. . . . So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful, and having a sense

of his beauty. The former may be obtained by hearsay, but the latter only by seeing the countenance. . . . When the heart is sensible of the beauty and amiableness of a thing, it necessarily feels pleasure in the apprehension. It is implied in a person's being heartily sensible of the loveliness of a thing, that the idea of it is sweet and pleasant to this soul.<sup>9</sup>

#### HOW DO SEEING AND ENJOYING CHRIST RELATE TO KNOWING HIM?

Together this spiritual seeing of Christ and enjoying him—or this spiritual sense of his beauty and corresponding pleasure in the soul—refer to what Paul calls “knowing” Christ. Paul prays in Ephesians 3:19 that we may “*know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.*” And he says in Philippians 3:8, “I count everything as loss because of *the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” This knowing is no mere intellectual knowledge. The devils have such knowledge and tremble (Jas. 2:19). This knowing “surpasses knowledge.” This knowing includes tasting and seeing. It is the knowledge of honey that you have only when you put it on your tongue and taste that it is sweet. Therefore, knowing Christ in this way means seeing him for who he really is and enjoying him above all things.

Therefore the prophetic challenge, “Let us *know*; let us press on to *know* the LORD” (Hos. 6:3), is the same as the challenge of this book: Let us fight to see; let us press on in the fight to see and enjoy the glory of Christ.



*I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, "The same yesterday, today, and forever." Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that time those dreadful scriptures of God [about the unforgivable sin] left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God.*

JOHN BUNYAN

*Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*<sup>1</sup>

*... looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

HEBREWS 12:2

*Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication.*

MICAH 7:8-9

# Fighting for Joy Like a Justified Sinner

## *Learning the Secret of Gutsy Guilt*



Nothing is more foundational for the joy of undeserving people than the cross of Jesus Christ. The fight for joy is a fight to grasp and marvel at what happened in the death of Christ—and what it reveals about our suffering Savior. If it were not for the death of Jesus in our place, the only possible joy would be the joy of delusion—like the joy on the *Titanic* just before it hit the iceberg. Without the cross, joy could be sustained only by denying (consciously or subconsciously) the inevitability of divine judgment. In fact, that's the kind of joy that drives most of the world—a joy that preserves the power of its pleasures by being oblivious to the peril just ahead. If the passengers were suddenly made aware that in a matter of hours most of them would drown in the icy ocean, all their merrymaking would cease. Their joy depends on their ignorance.

However, if the passengers knew that the ocean liner would sink, but that a great armada of utterly dependable ships and sailors was already on the way and would arrive and save everyone who followed their instructions, something very different would happen. To be sure, the lighthearted merrymaking would cease, and a great seriousness would spread over the *Titanic*; but there would be a different kind of joy—a deep sense of gratitude for the rescuers, and a deep sense of hope that, though much would be lost, life would be saved. Some may panic

in unbelief, doubting the promise of rescue. But others would rise in the strength of hope and do great acts of love in preparation for the coming destruction.

#### TITANIC: WE ARE CORRUPT AND WE ARE CONDEMNED

Jesus Christ came into the world as the divine Son of God in order to die for our sins and rescue us from the wrath of God, the burden of guilt, the condemnation of justice, the bondage of sin, the torment of hell, and the loss of all that is good—especially the loss of God. Our problem is not merely our own corruption but, more seriously, God's condemnation. To be sure, we are corrupt, or as the old theologians said, depraved. Paul's way of saying it is that "all . . . are *under sin*. . . . 'None is righteous, no, not one'" (Rom. 3:9-10).

This corruption is a massive obstacle to everlasting joy. We desire the wrong things, and we desire right things in the wrong way. And both are deadly—like eating pleasant poison. But our corruption is not our main obstacle to joy. God's wrath is greater. God is infinitely valuable, and we have offended him infinitely by valuing other things more. We have "exchanged the glory of . . . God" (Rom. 1:23). Or as Paul says in Romans 3:23, we all "fall short of the glory of God."

Therefore, God's holiness and justice will move him to settle accounts with us in his wrath. "Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God remains on him*" (John 3:36). "*Cursed* be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them" (Gal. 3:10). The consequence of this curse and wrath is eternal misery apart from the glory of God. "Those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus . . . will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess. 1:8-9). The iceberg just ahead is no happiness forever, only misery.

We are on a doomed *Titanic* because of our sin—all of us without exception. "Every mouth [is] stopped, and the whole world [is] held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). The sinful ship of our lives is headed for everlasting ruin because of God's righteousness and wrath. Without a Savior, that's the reality we must keep out of our minds in order to be happy on the *Titanic* of this world.

JESUS CHRIST IS A GREAT SAVIOR FROM EVERYTHING  
THAT DESTROYS JOY

But we are not without a Savior. Jesus Christ has come. And he is a great Savior. Every need we have, he supplies. And his death on the cross is the price that purchases every gift that leads to deep and lasting joy.

Is there wrath and curse hanging over us?

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” (Gal. 3:13)*

Is there condemnation against us in the courtroom of heaven?

*Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. (Rom. 8:33-34)*

Are there innumerable trespasses mounting up against us?

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace. (Eph. 1:7)*

Is righteousness required that we cannot produce?

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). By the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:19)*

Are we cut off from eternal life?

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

Are we trapped in the dominion of sin that ruins our lives?

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24). He died for all, that those*

*who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Cor. 5:15)*

Will all the follies and failures of our past drag us down with irrevocable, destructive consequences?

*We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28)*

Have we lost all the good things God planned for his children?

*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom. 8:32)*

Is there any hope that sinners like us could spend an all-satisfying eternity with God? Can I ever come home to God?

*Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. (1 Pet. 3:18)*

Oh, what a great salvation Jesus Christ accomplished when he died and rose again! All that, and more, Christ purchased by his death. Therefore, Christ crucified is the foundation of all honest and everlasting joy. No self-deception is necessary to enjoy it. Indeed all deception must cease in order to enjoy it to the full.

#### THE TASTE AND HOPE OF JOY SUSTAINED CHRIST IN HIS SUFFERING

Christ himself connected joy and the cross in his own soul. Hebrews 12:2 tells us, "For the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross." So in his own heart the unshakable hope of joy with the Father sustained him through his final suffering. Christ knew from experience the joy that he had with the Father before creation. He prayed the night before he died, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:5).

But Jesus also knew this prayer depended on his obedience to the Father. He would have to complete the great work of salvation by deliberate death. Paul said that Jesus was "obedient to the point of death,

even death on a cross,” and “*therefore* God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him a name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:8-9). The word “therefore” means that his obedience unto death was the reason God exalted Christ and gave him the glory he had with the Father before creation. He had come to save sinners. When the price was paid, the work was decisively done. “It is finished,” he cried (John 19:30). And God rewarded him with great glory.

### CHRIST DIED FOR HIS JOY AND OURS

So in a sense Christ died for his own everlasting life and joy. He had done no sin and so did not need to be saved from guilt. He had none. But the Father had sent him to die, and not to do so would have been disobedient. And if he had been disobedient to God, neither his nor our eternal life would have been achieved. Therefore, the death of Jesus was the means by which he regained his place of glory with the Father and came into the fullness of his own everlasting joy. His joy was blood-bought at the price of his own obedient death.

The reason this matters to us is that Jesus planned for his joy to be our joy. He said in John 15:11, “These things I have spoken to you, *that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*” When Jesus bought his own joy at the price of his obedient death, he also bought ours. He said it again in John 17:13, “But now [Father] I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have *my joy fulfilled in themselves.*” The very joy that Jesus would have in the presence of the Father is the joy he died for us to have.

In the Parable of the Talents Jesus, the master, says to his faithful servant, “Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . *Enter into the joy of your master*” (Matt. 25:23). It is his joy first. Then he welcomes us into it. While he was on earth, the unwavering confidence that his joy would soon be made full sustained him in his suffering. And by his obedience he obtained everlasting joy for himself and for us.

### THE FULLNESS OF HIS JOY AND OURS FLOWS FROM HIS GLORY

The joy he died to obtain for himself and give to us is joy in the glory of God. We know this because, after praying that his joy would be

fulfilled in them (John 17:13), he prayed, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory that you have given me*” (v. 24). Because of his obedience, God elevated Jesus, the God-Man, to his right hand and acclaimed him as both God and Savior—triumphant Lion and sacrificed Lamb, omnipotent Lord and obedient Servant. Thus Christ regained the fullness of the divine glory that he had with God from the beginning. But now it was more fully displayed through his redeeming obedience and death. This glory from the Father was the ultimate ground of Jesus’ joy.

And he prayed that we would be with him to see this glory. This would be our entrance into “the joy of the Master.” This would be our joy fulfilled in his joy. The aim and achievement of the cross of Christ is the everlasting, ever-increasing<sup>2</sup> joy of his people as they see and savor the glory of Christ. That is what Jesus died to obtain for us—even while we were still sinners. Therefore, nothing is more foundational for the joy of undeserving people than the cross of Jesus Christ.

#### THE GOSPEL IS CENTRAL IN THE FIGHT FOR JOY

Therefore, in the battle for joy we must take this truth and preach it to ourselves. The gospel of Christ crucified and risen is meant to be preached to the soul—both in corporate worship where we hear it week after week, and from hour to hour as we preach it to ourselves in the daily fight for joy. The message of the cross has a central and unique place in the fight for joy. Paul put the gospel in a class by itself when he said, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14), and when he said, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

These are sweeping statements. No boast except in the cross! And no knowledge that is not a knowledge of Christ and him crucified! Every boast we make in any good thing must include the boast that, without the cross, we would have hell and not this good thing. Everything we know must include the knowledge that we do not know it rightly except in relation to Christ crucified.

## DO BELIEVERS NEED TO HEAR THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS?

Therefore the cross must be central in the fight for joy. We must put ourselves under its preaching on the Lord's day, and we must preach it to ourselves all day every day. Don't neglect the corporate hearing of the word of the cross preached. I stress *preached* because I do believe that God has ordained that the word of the cross—and all things in relation to the cross—be preached and not just taught or discussed.

This may not mean much to some of you, since you may have had little experience of true preaching. That was J. I. Packer's experience, he said, until he heard Martyn Lloyd-Jones at the Westminster Chapel in the school year of 1948-1949, when he was twenty-two years old. Packer heard Lloyd-Jones preach every Sunday evening. He said that he had "never heard such preaching." It came to him "with the force of electric shock, bringing to at least one of his listeners more of a sense of God than any other man." Packer said it was through this preaching that he learned about "the greatness of God and the greatness of the soul." "Listening to Martyn Lloyd-Jones," he said, "was like hearing a whole orchestra perform after a single piano."<sup>3</sup>

I don't mean that you must find a Martyn Lloyd-Jones to hear each Sunday in worship. There was only one Lloyd-Jones. The point is not personality; the point is depth and earnestness and a sense of the weight of glory. The point is heartfelt rigor in the unfolding of Scripture, which is heralded (not just discussed or analyzed) with a worshipful sense of exultation over the beauty of God's truth.

When Paul exhorts Timothy, "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2), two things make me think he would encourage us to hear the Word preached in the setting of gathered worship. One is that the context of the passage relates to the church being "trained in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16), not mainly to evangelism among unbelievers. In other words, Paul means, "Preach the word to believers." The other point is that the word for "preach" here is a Greek word (*kēruxon*) that means "to herald." It was the work of one who made public proclamations for government officials before there was radio or television or print media. This kind of speech has a spirit of exultation and seriousness about it. It is part of worship. When it is done in the power of the Holy Spirit, it



is worship. It is expository exultation. The preacher worships over the Word that he proclaims. There is Spirit-given truth, and there is Spirit-given passion. And the effect on God's people is to awaken aspects of joy in Christ that may not come any other way.

Please do not picture a fine, well-lit sanctuary with oak pews and a white pulpit. Don't even picture a flat multipurpose room with carpet and chairs and a keyboard. Picture a mud-walled room with a zinc roof, or a cave with torches, or a thatched roof on poles with no walls, or a living room with all the simple furniture removed, or a patch of grass under a tree. And don't picture thousands of hearers and the finest acoustics. Picture eight or twenty or forty worshipers. Even in small settings with small numbers, preaching can happen. The preacher will use his voice differently, but all the essentials of passion, and seriousness, and expository exultation can be there. They should be there. The word of the cross is the kind of news—incomparably good news—that calls for this kind of heralding, even for a dozen saints.

#### WHAT IF TRUE PREACHING IS NOT AVAILABLE TO ME?

Surely the question will be raised: How shall I fight for joy with this weapon if I do not live in a place with this kind of worship gathering? What if the preachers do not believe the Bible? Or what if they do not preach the word of the cross but only human experiences? Or what if all the weightiness and seriousness is missing and the leaders seem bent on being mainly jocular? Or what if I am homebound and cannot get out to worship services? In answer to these questions, please do not take me to mean that hearing the word of the cross preached is the only arrow in your quiver. It is good. It is important. God brings churches into being with preaching as one of his purposes. Over the long haul, it hurts us not to have it.

But God is merciful and can supply our needs when we have no access to a church that preaches the word of the cross. He will meet you in your meditations on the Word. He will meet you in family worship. He will meet you in small groups where the Word is discussed and applied, even if no one there is called and gifted to preach. He will meet you through preaching on the radio or television or Internet or tapes and CDs. These are not the same as the living voice in the context of wor-

ship and community. But they are good, and God can make himself known powerfully through them.

Nevertheless, it is a biblical goal and norm for Christians to be a part of worship gatherings where the word of the cross is preached. God ordains this for our joy. Studying the Word is good. Meditation is good. Discussion is good. Analyzing and explaining is good. But preaching is also good, and God calls us to enjoy the blessing that comes to us when the word of the cross explodes in the heart of a godly preacher and overflows in exultation to the minds and hearts of a worshipping people. The fight for joy loses one of its weapons when it does not regularly hear the gospel preached. God can make it up to us in other ways. But preaching is one precious gift of God to the church. When it exults over “the word of the cross,” it becomes “to us who are being saved . . . the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

#### FIGHTING FOR JOY WITH THE BREAD AND THE CUP

Let’s not overlook that eating the Lord’s Supper with God’s people is a kind of preaching that is also meant to feed the joy of Christ’s people. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you *proclaim* the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). The death and resurrection of Christ are being proclaimed in the act of serving and eating Communion. This proclamation is the means of our nourishment with the bread and cup.

Christ has appointed that we feast spiritually on the benefits of the cross as we eat the bread and drink the cup. “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *participation* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *participation* in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16). We participate in the cup and the bread by feasting on what the blood and body of Christ obtained for us when he died, especially the forgiveness of sins, the gift of righteousness, and never-ending personal fellowship with Christ and his Father. This is why regular presence at the Lord’s Table is a great weapon in the fight for joy.

#### PREACHING FOR JOY, AND PREACHING FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

Preaching the word of the cross is designed for our joy, because it’s designed for the glory of God. Jonathan Edwards saw more clearly than

most that preaching for the glory of God had implications for the role of preaching in the fight for joy. One of his great insights was that “God is glorified not only by His glory’s being seen, but by its being rejoiced in.”<sup>4</sup> He concluded, therefore, that the aim of preaching must be joy in the glory of God. So he described his preaching like this: “I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.”<sup>5</sup> Truth and affections. Doctrine and joy. Both are essential. When the word of the cross is preached like this, a great blow is struck against the joylessness of God’s people. And that is a blow for the glory of God.

#### BECOME A PREACHER AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOURSELF

But now we must go back to the other preaching that I mentioned. We should not only be preached to; we should become preachers and preach the word of the cross to ourselves every day. We must not rely only on being preached to, but must become good preachers to our own soul. The gospel is the power of God to lead us joyfully to final salvation, *if we preach it to ourselves*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) emphasized this truth. He was the senior minister at Westminster Chapel in London from 1943 to 1968 and preached a series of messages that were published in 1964 as one of his most helpful and popular books, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures*. I recommend it highly. He writes out of the conviction that

the greatest need of the hour is a revived and joyful Church. . . . Nothing is more important . . . than that we should be delivered from a condition which gives other people looking at us, the impression that to be a Christian means to be unhappy, to be sad, to be morbid, and that the Christian is one who ‘scorns delights and lives laborious days’. . . . Christian people too often seem to be perpetually in the doldrums and too often give this appearance of unhappiness and lack of freedom and of absence of joy. There is no question at all but that this is the main reason why large numbers of people have ceased to be interested in Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

His book is an exposition of Psalm 42, especially verse 5: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance” (KJV). Among the many things Lloyd-Jones sees in this verse is that the psalmist is preaching to himself. He applies this to us:

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man’s treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, “Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you.”<sup>7</sup>

DO NOT SURRENDER TO THE VICTIM MENTALITY,  
BUT DEFY YOURSELF

This is a profound lesson. Far too many Christians are passive in their fight for joy. They tell me about their condition of joylessness, and I ask about the kinds of strategies they have pursued to defeat this enemy, and they give the impression that they are a helpless victim: “Joylessness is just there. What can I do?” Well, God does not mean for us to be passive. He means for us to fight the fight of faith—the fight for joy. And the central strategy is to preach the gospel to yourself. This is war. Satan is preaching for sure. If we remain passive, we surrender the field to him.

So Lloyd-Jones gets specific and gets tough:

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. . . . You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: “Hope thou in God”—instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way, and then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and . . . what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great

note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man: “I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God.”<sup>8</sup>

The word of the cross—“the Gospel of the glory of Christ”—is the main source for truth about “Who God is,” and “what God has done,” and “what God has pledged himself to do.” These are the great discouragement slayers. They are all in the gospel. In the final analysis, it is the cross of Christ alone that can kill the joy-killers in our lives.

Of course, the “self” is not the only one who talks to us in our head. So does the devil, and so do other people as we replay their comments in our memories. Therefore, when Lloyd-Jones tells us to preach to ourselves, he knows we must be addressing all these joy-killing messages. That’s why he talks about *defying* self, Satan, and other people. When we preach the gospel to ourselves, we are addressing every word of every enemy of every kind.

#### THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION AND THE FIGHT FOR JOY

So let’s consider a great example of this preaching that has helped me through many dark seasons. It comes from an unlikely place: the prophet Micah, who preached seven hundred years before Christ and gave one of the most practical applications in all the Bible of the great truth of justification by faith alone. This doctrine is at the heart of the gospel. It is the essence of the word of the cross. So before we consider Micah’s application of the doctrine to his dark and miserable condition, let’s clarify what justification is. We will come back to Micah shortly.

The doctrine of justification says that the remedy for my alienation from God is first a legal one, and only then a moral one. First, I have to be legally absolved of guilt and credited with a righteousness that I don’t have. That is, I have to be declared righteous in the courtroom of heaven, where God sits as judge, and where I stand condemned by his law. That’s what the word *justify* means: not *make* just, but *declare* just. We can see this in Luke 7:29 where the people “justified God” (RSV)! That is, they declared that he was just. They didn’t *make* him just. The difference is

that we are sinners and do not have a righteousness of our own. We should, but we don't. That's why we are guilty and destined for eternal punishment.

To make a way for us to be saved, God sent Christ to live a perfect divine-human life and die an obedient death. In this way Christ became both the substitute punishment for our sins (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 3:18) and the substitute performer of our righteousness (Rom. 5:19; 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). Therefore, in the courtroom of God, my guilt for sin is removed by Christ's blood ("In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" [Eph. 1:7]); and my title to heaven is provided by Christ's obedience ("By the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" [Rom. 5:19]). I am declared just—freed from the punishment of sin and now possessing a title to heaven. This is what we mean by justification.

#### THE JOY OF SEEING THAT JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE

And the capstone of its joy-producing glory is that justification is by faith alone apart from works of the law. Paul said, "We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Rom. 3:28). Then he contrasted two ways for sinners to try to get right with God. One is by working to deserve acceptance; the other is by trusting in the purely free act of grace that gives acceptance to those who will simply receive it as a precious gift. "To the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but *trusts him who justifies the ungodly*, his faith is counted as righteousness" (Rom. 4:4-5).

For "the ungodly"—who know that they are riding the *Titanic* to destruction—the best news in all the world is the news that God will, by faith alone, count them as righteous because of Christ. This is the great ground of joy in the word of the cross: Justification is by *grace alone* (not mixed with our merit), through *faith alone* (not mixed with our works), on the basis of Christ *alone* (not mingling his righteousness with ours), to the glory of *God alone* (not ours).

## CONFUSING JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION WILL KILL JOY

Then, and only then, on the basis of this forgiveness and this declaration of righteousness, God gives us his Holy Spirit to transform us morally and progressively into the image of his Son. This progressive change is *not* justification but is based on justification. This change is what we call *sanctification*. “Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” (Rom. 6:22). First the legal issue must be settled. In the courtroom of heaven, an ungodly sinner is declared righteous by faith alone! Christ’s righteousness is imputed to him. He does not have a righteousness of his own when God accepts him (Phil. 3:9). His faith is all receiving. He has not yet become loving. Christ’s faithful life of love, which perfectly fulfilled the law of God, is imputed to the ungodly. This is justification. This is the settling of the legal issue first.

When that is settled—and it is settled in the twinkling of an eye—then the moral progress goes forward (sanctification). Both are gifts, and both are bought by the blood of Christ. They are inseparable but different. Both are by faith alone. Justification is by faith alone because only faith receives the declaration that the ungodly is counted righteous. Sanctification is by faith alone because only faith receives the power to bear the fruit of love. It is crucial in the fight for joy that we not confuse or combine justification and sanctification. Confusing them will, in the end, undermine the gospel and turn justification by *faith* into justification by *performance*. If that happens, the great gospel weapon in the fight for joy will fall from our hands.

## BECOME WHAT YOU ARE

One of the ways the Bible talks about our *action* in relation to our *standing* in Christ is to command us to become what we are. For example, using Old Testament ceremonial language Paul says, “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:7). In other words, become what you are. You *are* unleavened (sinless in Christ); therefore *become* unleavened (sinless in practice).

Perfect sinlessness does not happen in this life, but we move toward it. Paul was clear on that: “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil. 3:12). “I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25). But the principle is clear: Fight for joy, not by doing things that establish your identity with God, but by becoming what your identity already is with God in Christ. Become what you are.

We are justified by grace through faith alone because of our union with Christ whose righteousness is counted as ours. Because of this union with Christ, we are already dead and raised and holy and light. The secret of rugged joy in the battle with sin is to fight to become what we are in Christ. You have already *died* with Christ (Rom. 6:5-6); therefore “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). You have already been *made alive* together with Christ (Eph. 2:5); therefore, “seek the things that are above” (Col. 3:1). You are already *holy* in Christ (Col. 3:12); therefore “be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). You *already* are the light of the world in Christ (Matt. 5:14); therefore, “let your light shine” (Matt. 5:16).

All of that is another way of saying, live as a justified sinner. Don’t make peace with the sin in your life. If you make peace with sin and settle down with it as an accepted long-term partner, you show that you are not united with Christ. In union with Christ two things happen: His righteousness is imputed to us, and, because of that, a new impulse is given to become what we are. The great gospel weapon in the fight for joy is the rock-solid reality that we are counted righteous in Christ by faith alone. This imputed righteousness is because of his performance alone, not ours. By our behavior we gradually become what we are in him and because of him.

That gospel weapon is powerful only to the degree we keep the basis of our justification free from our own performances. God accepts us on the basis of Christ’s righteousness, not ours. To be sure, our progressive sanctification—our all-too-slow growth in Christ-likeness—matters. It is the necessary evidence that our faith is real.<sup>9</sup> But, oh, what a difference it makes to be assured, in the discouraging darkness of our own imperfection, that we have a perfect righteousness—namely, Christ’s.



## JOHN BUNYAN: “NOW WENT I ALSO HOME REJOICING”

This was John Bunyan's experience. He tells his story to encourage us to rejoice in the doctrine of justification—that there is a perfect, objective, external righteousness imputed to us that is not our own but Christ's. Bunyan is the one who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which has sold more copies than any book besides the Bible. He was a pastor in the seventeenth century who spent over twelve years in prison because he refused to stop preaching the word of the cross. The greatest Puritan theologian and contemporary of Bunyan, John Owen, when asked by King Charles II why he went to hear an uneducated tinker preach, said, “May it please your Majesty, could I possess the tinker's ability for preaching, I would willingly relinquish all my learning.”<sup>10</sup>

But Bunyan was not always so bold and full of gospel power. In his twenties there were terrible struggles.

A whole flood of blasphemies, both against God, Christ, and the Scriptures were poured upon my spirit, to my great confusion and astonishment. . . . My heart was at times exceeding hard. If I would have given a thousand pounds for a tear, I could not shed one. . . . Oh, the desperateness of man's heart. . . . I feared that this wicked sin of mine might be that sin unpardonable. . . . Oh, no one knows the terrors of those days but myself.<sup>11</sup>

Then came the decisive moment of triumph over despair and joylessness. It was an awakening to the magnificent truth of the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

One day as I was passing into the field . . . this sentence fell upon my soul. *Thy righteousness is in heaven*. And . . . I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ at God's right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he [lacks] my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, “The same yesterday, today, and forever.” Heb. 13:8. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that from that

time those dreadful scriptures of God [about the unforgivable sin] left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing for the grace and love of God.<sup>12</sup>

He went home rejoicing. This is the effect of the word of the cross, when one sees, with the eyes of the heart, the glory of God's grace in justification. As he walked home from the field, Bunyan was breathing the same air as Martin Luther, who made the same discovery in a monastery. As the light dawned, Luther said:

I began to understand [that] the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith. . . . Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.<sup>13</sup>

#### HOW MICAH FOUGHT FOR JOY WHEN HE HAD SINNED

Bunyan and Luther describe the joy of discovering the truth of justification by faith alone. But the prophet Micah shows us how a person who *already believes* the doctrine can preach it into the face of the enemy (whether self or Satan or other people) and use it to fight for joy. So now we have finally returned to the example of Micah that I promised earlier. Even though he only knew the doctrine of justification in its Old Testament form, his application of it is a powerful illustration of how we can preach it to ourselves or to any enemy who tries to kill our joy with counsels of despair. This passage has proved to be a great help to me in many times of darkness.

Here is what Micah said:

*Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. <sup>9</sup> I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication. (Micah 7:8-9)*

I like to call Micah's attitude *gutsy guilt*. On the one hand he is guilty

of real sin. In verse 9 he says, simply, “I have sinned against him.” Micah knows it and is not trying to hide it. He is sorry and broken and is not trying to sweep anything under the rug. “I will bear the indignation of the LORD.” So not only is there real guilt, there is real divine indignation. God does not like what Micah did. He is angry. Micah does not protest that this can’t be—that God doesn’t get angry at his children. He does not short-circuit the discipline of his God by sentimental talk about God’s mercy. The mercy will have its place soon enough.

Micah is ashamed and accepts God’s anger. “I sit in darkness.” He puts his hand on his mouth and accepts the sorrow and gloom that hang over him. No quick fix here. There are many times in the Christian life like this. It is foolish of us to make light of them, or trivialize them, or try to deny that they exist. God is holy, and he disciplines the children whom he loves. There is a fatherly anger that is no longer the wrath of a judge (Heb. 12:5-11).

#### HOW WAS MICAH’S GUILT GUTSY?

But I said that this text describes *gutsy* guilt. Astonishingly, in all his contrition and gloom under God’s anger, Micah gets in the face of his enemy and says, “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise.” The enemy is rubbing it in. The enemy is saying that the sin of Micah cuts him off from his God. The enemy is lying and trying to make Micah hopeless. This is a major battle against Micah’s joy in God. And Micah fights well—he preaches the gospel of justification by faith. He gives us an example of how to fight for joy with the weapon of the gospel.

He says, “When I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.” Remember, this darkness is the Lord’s discipline. God’s indignation burns. And in the midst of the darkness imposed by God, Micah says, “God will be my light.” He counts on God’s light in the darkness that God himself has sent. That is gutsy. That is what we must learn to do in our darkness—even the darkness we have brought on ourselves because of our sin. Yes, I am under the gloom of failure. Yes, God has put me here in his displeasure. But *no*, I am not abandoned, and God is not against me. He is for me. Even in the darkness that he imposes, he will sustain me. He will not let me go. Though he slay me, he will

save me. We must learn to preach to ourselves like this in our fight for joy.

Then, even more astonishingly, Micah says, “I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, *until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me.*” In the midst of his guilt, and in the gloom of its consequences, he knows that a limit has been set to the darkness. God will come. “And when he comes, he will come *pleading my cause.*” He will be my advocate, not the prosecuting attorney. The one who has thrown him in the jail of darkness will pay his bail and plead his case in court and make sure that he goes free to live in joy again.

He goes even further and says that when God comes to him in the darkness, he will “execute judgment” for him. Micah’s enemies are saying that he has fallen and that this means God is *against* him. “Isn’t it clear, Micah? You yourself admit that you sinned. You yourself say that God is angry. You yourself say that the darkness and gloom are from the Lord. There is only one reasonable explanation: God is executing judgment *against* you. You may have once called him Father, but no longer. Now he is Judge. You are guilty, and the judgment is falling—against you.” That’s what the enemy says.

Against all this “reasonable” accusation (from self, Satan, or others) Micah preaches the doctrine of justification by faith. If he had lived on this side of the cross of Christ, he would be making the ground of God’s mercy explicit, namely, the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He says, “Watch out all you who speak thus. My God—my covenant God who declares me righteous by faith and not by works—is about to execute judgment *for* me. That means you, my enemies, will be the ones judged. Take heed, and learn from my rising hope and gutsy guilt the doctrine of justification by faith alone.” If you do not learn this, your joys in this life will all be based on an illusion—that your ship is unsinkable.

Micah’s words are an utterly crucial illustration of how to preach the gospel to ourselves when discouragement and darkness threaten to overwhelm us as Christians. Micah’s way—the biblical way—is very different from the quick fix that tries to deny the seriousness of sin and the pain of God’s discipline. We must not think that God only sends us to this painful school because of blatant sins. Paul accepted every calamity

in life as from the disciplining hand of God. Even those that made him say, “We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself”—even these he accepted as from God’s sovereign hand. He explained that in all these things God’s purpose was good, namely, “to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (2 Cor. 1:8-9).

#### GUTSY GUILT IS THE OPPOSITE OF CHEAP GRACE

In the fight for life-supporting, love-sustaining joy, we must learn to preach to ourselves with gutsy guilt. This is very different from “cheap grace.” Do you remember Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German theologian? He was hanged on April 9, 1945, by a special order of Himmler at the concentration camp in Buchenwald. He wrote a little book that was read by many in the radical days of the late sixties when I was in college. It is called *The Cost of Discipleship*. I bought it when I was a senior in 1967. It cost me \$1.45. I thank God when I look at my underlining in this book as a twenty-one-year-old student in search of a cause worth living for.

What Bonhoeffer attacks in this book is the opposite of what Micah did. People refuse to go with Micah into the darkness and bear God’s reproach. Bonhoeffer calls such refusal “cheap grace.” Here is the way he described it. We need to hear this, lest we confuse the fight for joy with cheap grace. The fight for joy is not cheap grace. It is Micah’s gutsy guilt. It is the power of preaching justification by faith in the darkness of God’s real indignation.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. . . . The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ. . . . We . . . have gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Things have not improved since Bonhoeffer’s day in the church of

the West. Today cheap grace is common among evangelicals in the unpersecuted church. It is the wrong way to lean on grace in the pursuit of joy. There is another way to fight for joy—the way of Micah, the way of bold brokenness, the way of gutsy guilt.

In the battle for joy, the difference between Micah’s gutsy guilt and “cheap grace” is that Micah takes sin so seriously. There was a reprehensible fall. There is real and terrible indignation from God. There is a time in awful darkness. There is brokenness, contrition, and remorse as we bear patiently the chastisement of our God. But in the ashes of our regret, the flame of boldness never goes out. It may flicker. But when self or Satan taunts us that we are finished, we lay hold on Micah’s faith—indeed we lay hold on Christ and his righteousness—and say, “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. . . . He pleads my cause and executes judgment *for* me. He will bring me out to the light.”

#### THE CENTER OF THE FIGHT FOR JOY

Hearing the word of the cross, and preaching it to ourselves, is the central strategy for sinners in the fight for joy. Nothing works without this. Here is where we start. And here is where we stay. We never outgrow the gospel. Here we see the glory of Christ more clearly than anywhere else. Indeed the gospel is “the gospel of *the glory of Christ*, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). If seeing Christ is the key to savoring Christ—and it is!—then here is where we must linger. The word of the cross is the revelation of the glory of Christ.

And here in the cross is where every enemy of joy is overcome: divine wrath, as he becomes a curse for us; real guilt, as he becomes forgiveness for us; lawbreaking, as he becomes righteousness for us; estrangement from God, as he becomes reconciliation for us; slavery to Satan, as he becomes redemption for us; bondage to sin, as he becomes liberation for us; pangs of conscience, as he becomes cleansing for us; death, as he becomes the resurrection for us; hell, as he becomes eternal life for us. And here I resist the desire to go on with dozens of ways that the cross defeats the enemies of our joy. Instead I send you to the place

where I gathered fifty of them, *The Passion of Jesus Christ: Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die*.<sup>15</sup>

Through the cross God purchased and secured every possible blessing that could ever be needed to make us happy forever. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). The answer to that question is not uncertain. God *will*—signed in blood—give us all things with Christ, because of the death of his Son. That is, he will give us all things that are truly good for us. We must preach this to ourselves every day, because Satan is preaching the opposite. What could stop our joy if we really believed this truth: Everything we need to be satisfied in God, the cross has made certain. It cannot fail.

#### THE CROSS, THE JOY, THE SACRIFICE OF LOVE, AND THE GLORY OF GOD

Jesus, in his obedient death, has become our righteousness with God. He has become, therefore, the ground of our unshakable joy. And therefore the ground of our most radical, risk-taking acts of love. When the famous five missionaries to Ecuador—Jim Elliot, Peter Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, Roger Youderian—made their last attempt in 1956 to take the love of God to the Waorani people, among their final preparations before they were killed on the river beach was to sing Edith Cherry’s hymn, “We Rest on Thee.” At the heart of this hymn is the verse with the heart of the gospel—the imputed righteousness of Christ:

*Yea, in Thy Name, O Captain of salvation!  
In Thy dear Name, all other names above;  
Jesus our righteousness, our sure foundation,  
Our Prince of glory and our King of love.*

Where do missionaries (who, like all of us, are sinners) get the courage to face the spears of those they love and not use the firearms in their hands, but rather die? They get it from the superior satisfaction that they have in Christ above all that this earth can offer. “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”<sup>16</sup> Yes, especially if what we cannot lose is the all-satisfying glory of Christ.

And underneath this superior satisfaction in Christ is the gospel of justification by faith alone. Christ was their righteousness. Christ was their sure foundation. Therefore their joy was invincible. And their love for people was greater than their love for life. Oh, that we might learn the secret of gutsy guilt and how to fight for joy like justified sinners. When the gospel of Christ has that effect, our joy will be full, and his glory will shine.