

Joy Unspeakable

October 3, 2012

I want to ask you a question this morning.....Are you happy?...What makes you happy?.....so if that wasn't in your life, would you be happy?

Ask Cornell to come and sit up front.

Cornell? How old are you? 85. Cornell, do you know that 85 years ago, God blessed the earth with one of His best creations? The Bible tells me that before you were born, that God laid His hand on you and covered you. He designed you exactly as he wanted you and He formed your parts and ordained all your days. He knew you would live to be this old and He chose the exact time when you would live on this earth and He also placed you in the very place He wanted you to live. Look at this bowl of sand. If it were possible to count each of these grains of sand, they would only be a fraction of the representation of God's thoughts toward you for we are told that if you were to count all the grains of sand on the whole earth, his thoughts about you Cornell, are more than that.

And from the time of your birth He began to open your heart to His love....It might have started with your mother's love and the love of a beautiful wife and children who thought their pop was all it. But one day someone shared with you a story of how this God who loves you so much wants a minute by minute relationship with you and Cornell though your heart longed for that, you knew that you were unworthy because you knew that there was sin in your life. Maybe everyone else thought you were a pretty good person, but you knew your heart was wicked. And then someone told you that God knew that too and He also knew you could never ever...as hard you tried...you couldn't be good enough for a Holy God and so God said to His son....His only son, "Jesus, would you be willing to take the punishment for Cornell's sin.....Before you answer, I need you to know that it will mean death for you....it will mean they will hate you and beat you and pull out your beard.....You will go through unspeakable anguish and then they will nail to a tree and I will have to turn away from you because I cannot bear to look upon sin. Son would you do that for Cornell?" And Jesus, with eyes so full of compassion and love. Said, "For Cornell, I will." And He did just that and Cornell, You were set free and not only set free, but you stepped into a place occupied by Jesus, that of a son. God adopted you. Took you as His very own and watches over you ever day of your life and Jesus after having

taking your place.....defeated death and is again at the right hand of the Father and every day He says to the Father....That's Cornell dad, Remember I paid the price and he stands before you robed in the white of a saint. And Jesus is even now in the process of building you... a carpenter yourselfa home like you couldn't imagine in heaven with Him.

I asked Cornell to sit in front of you as I told his true story because I know his heart. You see, you look at an old broken man. A stroke has left him unable to use his left side as he should be able to. He doesn't like it. But in spite of this annoyance.... deep inside this man is a wonder, a joy that can only be spoken through the tears that you have seen this morning.

Cornell, I'm sorry for using you in this manner, but I love your heart. I love the Jesus I see in you.

Cornell thank you and you may take your seat.

Last week I told you about a man who became a Christian as an adult and left the security of his career to follow Christ. Persecution became his constant companion. He was misunderstood by his friends and maligned by his enemies, nevertheless, he pressed on joyfully. This man was a brilliant scholar, an eloquent public speaker, a fearless lawyer and religious theologian. He once boasted of his attainments, but would later write, *I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, Philippians 3:8. That was the apostle Paul.

If there was anyone who had a reason to give into despair and claim that he was a victim of his circumstances it was the apostle Paul and yet he admonished us to "rejoice in the Lord." From his prison or his prison house in Rome, Paul writes one of the most joy-filled letters that anyone could ever read. The book of Philippians was a prison epistle and one of the last letters Paul wrote before being beheaded. How then could Paul maintain such a joyful spirit? He's in prison and his life is on the rocks and yet we hear words like rejoice or things like God delivered me from them all.....knowing full well that he endured awful things. Again, the secret is revealed in Chapter 3 Paul was content because Christ was central in his life.

Philippians 3:20. *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."*

That was what Paul was focused on. He said, rejoice in the Lord...No matter what....Yes in this world you will have trouble, but this isn't the end of the story. Our story isn't complete....even now at the right hand of the Father sits one who is ever interceding for us and is preparing a place for us where no tear dims the eye.. **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"** You can't imagine it....seriously no matter how grand a picture you paint, it would pale in comparison to the reality of what God has in store for us.

The other morning I was up at about 4:30am and I spent some time praying and reading my Bible and talking to God about this sermon. As it began to get light I went out onto the deck and sat there just sitting in His presence....Just knowing that I didn't need words. Acts 17 says, In Him we live and move and have our being....that means that though I can't see Him. Though I can't reach out and touch Him. He is all around me. I sat there that morning and simply breathed God. And suddenly I saw incredible beauty all around me....stuff we take for granted every day. The beauty of the green trees reaching as it were branches to God. I followed those branches down to the roots and I saw places where limbs had been cut to take away dead branches or trim the tree so that it might grow in the direction that would be most beneficial for it. And though the trunk was scarred as it were from that pruning.....I didn't see it as scars so much as I saw it as marks of character etched into that old tree. And those knots and swirls were almost works of art. My eye went to the sky and I saw a most peaceful gentle blue that God had created for us....it wasn't an ugly brown or yellow but a blue such as calms the insides of us and I saw it as a gift from God to us and everywhere I looked that morning reminded me of God's love and watchcare over us... the clouds held in the sky by an unseen hand, the breeze only seen because it played with a flag across the street....even the chairs on my deck...I saw in them the wisdom of God in the mind of a mere human that was able to create out of iron and plastic a work of beauty that gave me a place to rest. Deep in my heart there was a depth of Joy that went beyond circumstances and feelings. A knowing in my belly that there was more of God around me than I could take in.

There is an emotion....and that almost doesn't feel like the right word because it goes beyond emotion.... It might be what the writer of the old hymn was trying to describe: There is a place of quiet rest...near to the heart of God... A place where sin cannot molest...near to the heart of God. Maybe that is a good word... a place. You see the chains that bound Paul could not shackle his joy. Instead he writes this:

Verse 12. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Do you see what Paul was focused on here? His sight was on heaven...on being forever with his Lord. In other words, his present circumstances were not the end of the story. Everything would turn out exactly as God had promised and he had faith in that. In **2 Timothy 1:12** He says, **Yeah I know I am suffering. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.** There is in even the worst of circumstances a hope..... a place of Joy.

During the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century, German pastor Paul Gerhardt and his family were forced to flee from their home. One night as they stayed in a small village inn, homeless and afraid, his wife broke down and cried openly in despair. To comfort her, Gerhardt reminded her of Scripture promises about God's provision and keeping. Then, going out to the garden to be alone, he too broke down and wept. He felt he had come to his darkest hour. Soon afterward, Gerhardt felt the burden lifted and sensed anew the Lord's presence. Taking his pen, he wrote a hymn that has brought comfort to many. "Give to the winds thy fears; hope, and be undismayed; God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears; God shall lift up thy head. Through waves and clouds and storms He gently clears the way. Wait thou His time, so shall the night soon end in joyous day."

It is often in our darkest times that God makes His presence known most clearly. He uses our sufferings and troubles to show us that He is our only source of strength. And when we see this truth, like Paster Gerhardt, we receive new hope. Are you facing a great trial? Take heart. Put yourself in God's hands. Wait for His timing. He will give you a "song in the night."

Max Lucado in his picturesque way of relating says this: Take a fish and place him on the beach. Watch his gills gasp and scales dry. Is he happy? No! How do you make him happy? Do you cover him with a mountain of cash? Do you get him a beach chair and sunglasses? Do you bring him a Playfish magazine and martini? Do you wardrobe him in double-breasted fins and people skinned shoes?

Of course not. Then how do you make him happy? You put him back in his element. You put him back in the water. He will never be happy on the beach simply because he was not made for the beach.

And you will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have . . . moments of joy. You will catch a glimpse of light. . . You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead.

"Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

Again, we have our moments. The newborn at our breast, the bride on our arm, the sunshine on our back. But even those moments are simply slivers of light breaking through heaven's window. God flirts with us. He tantalizes us. He romances us. Those moments are appetizers for the dish that is to come."

God has put eternity in our hearts. A longing for Him. A homesickness for God and heaven. And for those of us who like Cornell have realized our need for a Savior and have trusted Him to be true to His promise of adoption and eternal life, there is within us a place of joy that transcends the trials of this life. Yes, we are in a battle and we stand in the full armor of God against the onslaught of the enemy, but beyond the battle, there is a joy.... Unspeakable, unshakeable, undeniable, unending.

Cultivate that joy. Turn off the TV....put down the newspaper.....shut off the busyness and listen for God.

Tim Hansel tells this: One day, while my son Zac and I were out in the country, climbing around in some cliffs, I heard a voice from above me yell, "Hey Dad! Catch me!" I turned around to see Zac joyfully jumping off a rock straight at me. He had jumped and then yelled "Hey Dad!" I became an instant circus act, catching him. We both fell to the ground. For a moment after I caught him I could hardly talk.

When I found my voice again I gasped in exasperation: "Zac! Can you give me one good reason why you did that???"

He responded with remarkable calmness: "Sure...because you're my Dad." His whole assurance was based in the fact that his father was trustworthy. He could live life to the hilt because I could be trusted. Isn't this even more true for a Christian?

You see, our trust is not in a politician....our hope is not in money.....our salvation is not in rain.....our trust is in God.

Psalm 5:11

But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for **joy**, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be **joyful** in You.

SO BE IT!

Jude 1:24

**²⁴ Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
²⁵ To God our Savior,
Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,
Both now and forever.
Amen.**