

#24 “How to Have Real Joy”

by Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

There are lots of ideas floating around out there as to how a person can truly be happy, yet the answer is right within us, if we are Christians.

Christ lists nine ways in Matthew 5:1-12 that we can be happy. These ways include being pure in heart, being humble, being gentle, being peacemakers, hungering for righteousness, being merciful, and having an eternal perspective about life. And let us not forget that we are to have joy when we are persecuted and suffer for righteousness' sake and for Jesus' sake. Christ's message to us is that joy is possible at all times and in all areas of life, if we live as He is commanding us to live. Those who were listening to this discourse at the time were hoping that Christ would conquer Rome and set up a Jewish empire. They wanted their circumstances changed so that they could be happy. Yet Christ gave up His life, He did not fix their circumstances, and He did not set up an earthly kingdom. Still He said that they could be happy, if and only if they let the kingdom of Christ rule in their hearts. The happiness that Christ was referring to was clearly not circumstantial in nature. Rather, it was all about investing in heavenly priorities and putting faith in Christ regardless of the circumstances. In Christ alone, we can find fullness of joy. As Psalm 16:11 says, “In His presence is fullness of joy.” Jesus alone can make us happy.

The believer's joy is not a fleshly, conjured up type of smiling, niceness, and politeness no matter what. Such is fake and worldly. What Christ is after is a happiness that stems from hope in a Person, even if our face is downcast, even when tears fall, and even when we are in great pain. Joy is an issue of the heart, and it gives us strength in our inner person to carry on in obedience and faithfulness. As Nehemiah 8:10 says, “Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” True joy transcends circumstances such that, even when we are suffering, we can have joy in our hearts. We may feel pain in the members of our bodies, but we can have joy in our spirits and in our hearts. We may be mocked, ridiculed, persecuted, and harassed, yet we can be happy because we are always in the presence of God. *There is nothing like knowing that our joy remains full even when we have been rendered empty of all that we had thought we needed to sustain our happiness.*

Yet even Christians sometimes fail to experience joy in both good times and bad. Sometimes we get so caught up in the issues of life that we forget to rejoice in the Lord. Rejoicing in the Lord is a choice. This is why Paul commanded us twice in Philippians 4:4 to rejoice in the Lord always. Just because we are in the presence of God (seeing that He indwells our hearts) does not mean that we necessarily will experience joy unless we by faith rest in Him. We must make a choice to let Christ be our joy, to let Him give us joy, and to believe that He will do just that. If we falter in our faith, we will try to

manufacture our own joy, which will not last and will fail. *Only when we find our happiness in the person of Jesus as we rest in Him can we experience true joy.* We must rest in Him, love Him, enjoy Him, worship Him, and trust in the fact that our lives are indeed hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Constant communion with God is possible through Christ Who works in and through us.

John 15:11 says, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” John reminds us that we will not have fullness of joy unless we abide in Christ which involves keeping His commands and putting our full trust and confidence in Him. *Obedience to God is central to experiencing the joy of God.* If we do not follow His will and listen to the Holy Spirit in accordance with God’s Word, we will lose out on our joy. There may be some there, seeing that we will still know that we are saved, yet the fullness of joy will be gone because we are not being and doing what God would have us be and do. The darkest times of life are the times of disobedience because there is a lack of joy even if circumstances are easy. In fact, the brightest and most joyous times can actually be when we triumph in faith and obedience during the most difficult and oppressive of times. If we want joy that is supernatural and truly divine, then we must walk in obedience, resting in God all the while.

Sin’s pleasures are temporary (Hebrews 11:25), but God’s joy endures forever. When we put our confidence in God and choose to have His joy, we can have access to a fruit of the Spirit which is unspeakably wonderful. It transcends the issues of life and draws our minds to heaven. His joy is a pleasure that is forever, and we can experience it even this very moment if we walk in faith and obedience.