

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 31 December 2017. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

## The Fulfilling of Joy

In the Old Testament, there are hundreds of prophecies of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's prophets foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem; that He would be born of a virgin; that He would die by hanging on a tree, with nails through His hands and feet; and that He would rise again.

This message is what we call "the Gospel." It is the "good news" that God took on human flesh, died for our sins, and rose again, so that we might be saved. The Gospel was foretold many centuries before Christ's birth. But that's not all that was foretold. The prophets also foretold the *spreading of the Gospel message* by God's people. I'd like to begin our message this morning by looking at this prophecy.

### Isaiah 52:1-7

In this part of **Isaiah 52**, Isaiah is prophesying of the day when the Jewish people would be released from their captivity in Babylon, and would return to their land. In **verse 7**, he foretells of how messengers would run through the mountains and cry out the "good news" of the Jews' deliverance from captivity. However, this prophecy has more than one fulfillment. This prophecy looks beyond the return of the Jews from Babylon, and looks even farther into the future. In **verse 10**, Isaiah goes on to say, "**The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.**" Obviously, the "salvation" that Isaiah is talking about is far more than Israel's salvation from their captivity in Babylon. There was another kind of salvation coming—a far greater salvation. There was a salvation coming which "**all the ends of the earth**" would see. What salvation is that?

Well, in the last three verses of **Isaiah 52**, and in **Isaiah 53**, Isaiah tells us about a man whom He calls Jehovah's "Servant." This Servant, he says, would be "**despised and rejected of men.**" He would be "**wounded for our transgressions,**" and "**bruised for our iniquities.**" All our sins, Isaiah said, would be laid on this Man; and He would bear our iniquities. He would be counted as though He were a criminal; and He would die alongside criminals. His face would be beaten, and "**marred more than any man.**" Yet, Isaiah says that it would "**please**" the LORD to bruise His Servant, and to put Him to grief. God would allow these terrible things to happen to His Servant so that He might "**bear the sins of many,**" and make "**intercession for the transgressors.**" Yet, after this righteous Servant had been made an "**offering for sin,**" He would then "**prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD**" would prosper in His hand (in other words, he would come back to life). I don't think I need to tell you who this Servant is. It is the Lord Jesus Christ! *This* is the ultimate "good news." There is no greater "good news" than the "good news" that a sinner can be freed from sin and death through the saving death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul realised that **Isaiah 52:7** was a prophecy of the spreading of the Gospel in the New Testament age. In **Romans 10:13-15**, Paul quoted this passage. He said, "**For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!**"

To this very day, all over the world, God's servants are continuing to proclaim the "good news" of salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Yet, this proclamation of the "good news" didn't begin with human messengers; it began with angels. It was first proclaimed by a host of angels to a band of shepherds on the hillsides outside Bethlehem.

## Luke 2:1-10

On the night of Christ's birth, the angels declared "**good tidings of great joy.**" This "joy" is not merely for God's covenant people, the Jews: it is for "**all people.**" Throughout this past month, we've been talking about this "joy." We've seen that *Jesus Christ* is the **Root of Joy**; and we've seen that the **reason** that we can have joy is that we have been given the gift of salvation. We've seen that Christ produces the **fruit of joy** in Christian's lives, as they trust and obey Him. We've seen that Christians can have **fullness of joy** in their lives, as they await the Resurrection Day.

Yet, there is one more aspect of joy that we need to talk about. Not only does *Christ* give us full joy; He also uses us to bring joy to *others*. The title of this message is ***The Fulfilling of Joy.***

### I. God uses Christians to fulfill other Christians' joy.

In a few moments, we will look at a Scripture in which the Apostle Paul talks about the fulfilling of joy. But before we go there, let's look again at **Luke 2**, and read about what happened *after* the angels announced Christ's birth to the shepherds.

#### Luke 2:11-18

In **Isaiah 52:7**, we read Isaiah's prophecy about the messengers who would use their feet to spread the "good tidings." Well, what do we see *the shepherds* doing in this passage? They literally used *their feet* to spread the good tidings of Jesus Christ! They "**made known abroad**" the news of Christ's birth.

That's interesting isn't it? From the very beginning of Jesus' life on this earth, there were already people using their feet to spread the joyful message of Jesus Christ to others. Of course, God could have spread the good tidings of His Son's birth in any way that He wished. He could have given the message to the whole land of Israel all at once, without any help from the shepherds. He could have had the entire skyline above Israel, from Galilee to Judaea, filled with angels, proclaiming Christ's birth, so that no human being would *have* to use his feet to tell anyone else about it! Yet, God chose to give the message of His Son's birth to a small band of shepherds outside Bethlehem; and He used *those shepherds* to spread the message of joy to others. God used *men* to spread His joyous good news to other men.

Though Jesus Christ is the One who *gives* us joy, He chooses to use His people (frail and sinful though we are), to *tell others* the message of how they can have true joy. God chooses to use Christians as channels of blessing and joy to other people.

With this in mind, let's see what Paul had to say about joy.

#### Philippians 2:1-4

Did you see what Paul said there in **verse 2**? He urged the Christians in the church of Philippi to "**fulfill**" his joy. Now, what, exactly, does the word "fulfill" mean? Well, it is translated from the Greek verb *pleroo*, which means "to fill up." It literally has the idea of filling up a net to its fullest capacity. Let's look at a literal, physical example of a net that was "filled up," so that we can get a good mental picture of this idea.

#### Luke 5:1-7

When the disciples decided to let go of their “reason” and simply trust Jesus’ instruction to cast the net on the other side, they got far more fish than they had expected, didn’t they? Their nets were so full, that they were beginning to break. In fact, when they hauled the fish into the ships, both ships were “**filled**” with fish, as well—so much so, that they began to sink! That’s what you call a full net of fish!

Now, apply this picture of the overflowing net of fish to the phrase “**fulfill ye my joy.**” In **Philippians 2**, Paul is asking the Christians of Philippi, “Please help me fill up my ‘net’ of joy to overflowing!”

Now, think about that for a moment. Paul is saying that his cup of joy would *not* be completely “topped up” until he could see that the Christians in the church of Philippi were living together in unselfish love and unity. Paul’s joy would not be overflowing until he could see that the Philippian Christians were esteeming others better than themselves, and looking on the things of others, instead of on their own things. Paul is saying that his own joy was actually *dependent* upon whether *they* were being obedient to the Lord!

Now, throughout this past month we have seen, again and again, that the joy that Christ gives is a joy that transcends outward circumstances. Yet, at the same time, our joy is affected, to some extent, by the obedience (or disobedience) of other Christians! Why? Because God has ordained Christians to be channels of joy and blessing to others.

Christian, do you realise that when you decide that you are not going to obey Christ, you are actually deciding to rob other Christians of the full measure of joy that they *should* be having? The Apostle Paul said in **Romans 14:7** that “**none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.**” In other words, you are not an island. Your service to God, or your *lack* of service to God, greatly affects others around you. It really *does* matter what you do! For example, if you decide that you are going to skip church, when there is no legitimate hindrance to keep you from being there, it isn’t just the Lord whom you make sad; you also make other Christians sad. You rob other Christians of the joy that comes from fellowshiping with like-minded believers. When you decide to complain, mope, and whine, and vent your anger, instead of thanking and praising God for what He has done for you, you not only rob yourself of joy, but you rob other Christians of joy, too. Fellow Christians aren’t going to say, “Wow! This is awesome! I just love hearing all this whining and complaining! It’s so energizing!” No, it will be just the opposite. You will *rob* them of joy.

Are you fulfilling other Christians’ joy, Christian? Or are you robbing them of joy? Let’s look at another Scripture which talks about communicating joy to other Christians.

**Philippians 2:17** (Keep your Bible open to this verse. We will return to it!)

In **verse 17**, Paul uses an interesting analogy. He says, “**If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith.**” What does he mean by this? Well, the word “**offered**” literally means “poured out as a drink offering.” You see, back in Old Testament times, there were five different kinds of sacrifices that the children of Israel offered on the altar. (Four of them were animal sacrifices, and one of them was a meal offering.) However, along with some of these sacrifices, there were *drink offerings* of grape juice that were offered along with the rest of the sacrifice. The grape juice was poured out *on top of* the sacrifice after it had been placed on the altar.

Now, what was the purpose of pouring out the grape juice? Well, in one sense, it was a prophetic picture. The grape juice was a symbol of Christ’s blood, which would one day be shed for our sins. However, it was also simply a way of saying, “Thank you, God, for providing this fruit of the vine, and this animal that I am sacrificing. I give you back this portion of my flock, and of my grape harvest, to show you my gratitude.” The drink offering was *part of* the sacrifice.

Are you getting the picture? Paul is telling these Philippian Christians, “I want to have a part in your spiritual sacrifices. I want to have a part in your service to God.” Now, how could Paul have a part in *their* service to God? In many ways! For one thing, **Paul gave them Biblical instruction** in His letters. He built them up in the Word of God, so that they might be more equipped to serve God. In so doing, Paul had a part in their service to God. By **praying for them**, he had a part in their service to God. By **being their missionary** (whom they supported financially), he took part in their service to God. (The church of Philippi gave to Paul financially so that he could take the Gospel to places where they could not go.) Paul’s service to God was entwined with *their* service to God. Now, why did Paul want to have a part of their spiritual sacrifices to God? Why was it so important to him? Because he wanted to have **joy**. Paul knew that joining together with other Christians to serve God brings joy!

Christian, you don’t have to be a pastor or a missionary in order to be a channel of joy and blessing to others. By sharing the Gospel with a lost person, you can communicate joy to others. For one thing, you can bring joy to another Christian who is trying to reach that same lost person. That Christian sees that he is not alone in trying to win that person to Christ; and he is encouraged by your help. And, you bring joy to that lost person after he finally receives Christ as Saviour. When that person gets saved, you can *all* rejoice together.

You can bring joy to a younger Christian by helping to teach and instruct that Christian in the Word of God. By the way, if you have known Christ for five, seven, or ten years, you *should* be grounded enough in the Scriptures not only to be able to lead someone to the Lord, but to instruct younger Christians in God’s Word. Instructing people in God’s Word is not merely the job of pastors; it is the job of every Christian. That is why you should be in church every time church assembles itself. That’s why, if you are a young Christian, you should want to do Bible study with your pastor, or with another strong church member, and learn as much as you can. That’s why you should be seriously reading and studying God’s Word *on your own* every single day! Teaching other people God’s Word brings them joy.

You can bring joy to other Christians by simply being in God’s House whenever church assembles, so that they can fellowship together with you. You can bring joy to fellow believers by singing songs of praise at church, and singing with all your heart. Singing is actually a form of mutual instruction. God designed it that way. **Colossians 3:16** says that we should be **“teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”**

The shepherds, on the night of Christ’s birth, used their feet to spread joy to others. God designed it to be that way. He wants every believer to be a channel to spread the message of joy. By doing what Christ has commanded you to do, you can bring joy to others. Is that what you are doing, Christian?

## II. **When you fulfill someone else’s joy, your own joy is fulfilled.**

As we begin this point, I’d like to take you back to **Philippians 2**, and read the verse that we just read a few minutes ago. However, this time, we will read the *next* verse, as well. Let’s read **verses 17 and 18. (Read Philippians 2:17-18.)**

In **verse 17**, Paul says that the Philippian Christians brought joy to *him* by allowing him to be part of their service to God. But then, in **verse 18**, we find that as the Phillipians allowed Paul to be part of their service to God, *they* found joy, as well. By serving the Lord together, Paul and the Christians in Philippi were able to *rejoice* together. The joy was mutual. It went both ways. Paul brought them joy; and they brought Paul joy.

Christian, you are an instrument. You are a vessel. One of the reasons why Christ saved you is that you might bring His joy to others. God wants to use *you*, Christian. Are you fulfilling other people's joy? Are you "filling up" their cup?

Let's see what John had to say about fulfilling other people's joy.

## 2 John 1-4, 13

In these verses, John says that he is writing to "**the elect** (or, "chosen") **lady.**" Now, it is important that you realize who this "lady" is. This "elect lady" is not an actual woman: she is a *church*! You'll notice that John addresses this "lady" as "thee"; yet, in other places, he addresses her as "you." Why is that important? Because the pronoun "you" is *plural*, not singular. (By the way, this is one of the reasons why we use the King James Version. In modern English, the pronoun "you" can be either singular or plural. However, in the KJV, the "thee's" and "thou's" are singular; and the "ye's" and "you's" are always plural.)

So, John is writing to a church; and he addresses this church as if she were a lady. In some places, he calls her "thee." Yet, he also uses the pronoun "you." The plural pronoun "you" lets us know that this "elect lady" is not an actual lady, but a group of people. This "lady" is a church. The "children" of the elect lady are the individual members of that church. The "**elect sister**" that John mentions in **verse 13** is the church of which *John* was pastor. This letter was sent by John's church to another church; and John, as the pastor of his church, is sending greetings to the other church on the behalf of *his* church.

Isn't this a beautiful picture? God likens each and every true, New Testament church to a beautiful and gracious lady. Why? Because, in God's eyes, each and every church is part of His chosen "bride." We are precious to Him.

With this in mind, let's look now at what John says in **verse 12**.

## 2 John 12

Apparently, John was planning to visit this church at some point in the near future. And what did John expect to experience during his visit with them, when he would see them "**face to face**"? He was expecting that their "**joy**" would be "**full.**" He was expecting that *his* joy would be "full," and that *their* joy would also be "full." He was expecting that as they fellowshipped together, they would "fill up" each other's joy. Obviously, John believed that every Christian is a vessel through which God's joy can be spread to others.

Let's skip over to the book of **3 John**, and look at another one of John's short letters. This time, John was writing to a Christian friend named Gaius; and, once again, John had something to say concerning "joy."

## 3 John 1-4

Did you notice what Paul said in **verse 3**? He said that he had "**rejoiced greatly**" when he heard that Gaius was walking in the truth. This means that if Gaius had *not* been walking in the truth, John would not have been able to rejoice over the news. To some degree, John's joy would have been *diminished* if he had heard that Gaius was not walking closely with the Lord.

Now, who was this Gaius, anyway? Gaius was probably a man whom John had personally led to the Lord. At the very least, John probably had a big part in leading Gaius to spiritual maturity.

John derived *his* joy from seeing people saved, growing in God’s Word, and serving God. And he delighted in bringing *others* joy by helping them along in their walk with the Lord.

Christian, do you have this kind of mindset? Are you walking so closely with the Lord that you derive great joy from seeing people get saved? Are you walking so closely with the Lord that you derive great joy from seeing other Christians growing in the Lord? I can tell you from experience that there is nothing else on this earth that brings me joy like knowing that someone else has been saved, and that God has used me as a vessel to bring that person to Christ. I can also tell you, from experience, that there is nothing that brings me joy like seeing a Christian growing in Christ. I want to see the fruit of joy blossoming in people’s lives; and I want to have my *own* joy filled up, as I see the fruit of joy developing in other people’s lives.

In closing, let’s see what brought joy to the Apostle Paul.

### **Philemon 1-20**

If you don’t know the background of the book of Philemon, a short explanation is in order. In the city of Colossae (in modern-day Turkey), there was a Christian man named Philemon, who was a good friend of the Apostle Paul; and this Philemon had a servant named Onesimus. Now, at some point, Onesimus decided to run away from his master; and before he ran way, he stole some money from his master. Onesimus fled to the city of Rome; and while he was there, he somehow came into contact with the Apostle Paul, who was under house arrest there in Rome. Of course, Paul never missed a chance to share the Gospel with anyone. Apparently, Paul began to witness to Onesimus; and Onesimus ended up putting his faith in Christ. Now, as Onesimus shared his background with Paul, it didn’t take long for Paul to realise that Onesimus’s master was his old friend Philemon, who lived in Colossae. Paul persuaded Onesimus that he needed to go back to his master and make things right; and so, he wrote this letter to Philemon, and sent the letter with Onesimus. In this letter, Paul entreated Philemon to forgive Onesimus, because he was now a changed man; and he also offered to pay back the money that Onesimus had stolen.

Now, what I want to focus on is **verse 20. (Read verse 20.)** What did Paul urge Philemon to let him have? He said, “***Let me have joy of thee in the Lord.***” Now, how, exactly, did Paul expect Philemon to give him joy? Well, first of all, he wanted Philemon to give him joy by forgiving his servant, Onesimus, and by receiving Onesimus back into his service. He wanted Philemon to receive him back not just as a servant, but as a brother in the Lord. Secondly, Paul wanted Philemon to bring him joy by allowing him (Paul) to *pay back* the money that Onesimus had stolen!

By the way, according to the Law of Moses, if someone was caught in a theft, and the thief had spent or used up everything that he had stolen, the thief was to restore *four times* the amount he had stolen. I guarantee you that Paul, being the good Jew that he was, insisted that Philemon be paid back *fourfold*, according to the Law. If so, that means that Paul was offering to pay *four times* the amount of money that Onesimus had stolen, since Onesimus had probably already used up most of what he had stolen, and had no way to replace it.

Now, this definitely is not the world’s idea of joy, is it? I dare say that even most believers would struggle with this one. Going out of your way to reconcile two people who have had a “falling out” is one thing; but offering to pay a thief’s debt is quite another! Paul actually derived *joy* from using his own money (which he certainly did not have much of) to repay the debt of a thief who had stolen from his master! That is not a natural joy, by any means. Yet, it is the kind of joy that Christ puts in a Christian’s heart, as that Christian surrenders his heart and will to God.

More than anything else, Paul found joy in leading this thief named Onesimus to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He rejoiced to see the transformation that Christ made in that man's life. By the way, according to extra-biblical records, Onesimus later became the senior pastor of the church of Ephesus; and he was eventually put to death for his faith by the Roman government. Onesimus was an unprofitable servant, who became very profitable to the Lord.

By the way, the story of Onesimus's reconciliation to Philemon is a picture of our salvation. Just as Paul paid Onesimus's debt to Philemon, so Christ paid the debt of our sin to God the Father, so that we could be reconciled to Him. Even though it cost Jesus His life's blood, He was willing to go through the pain of the cross so that He could have the joy of seeing people saved. **Hebrews 12:2** says, "***Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.***"

Even though Christ had to endure unspeakable agony in order to purchase our salvation, He was filled with joy at the prospect of going to the cross! Well, guess what, Christian? We need to follow in His footsteps! We should imitate His attitude of having joy in the midst of suffering for the Lord. Of course, our sufferings for the Lord can't purchase anyone's salvation: however, we should be filled with joy at the prospect of suffering for the Lord. That is why Paul went on to say, "***For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.***" In other words, Paul is saying, "Look, Christian, you haven't had to die for the Lord yet; but you should be *willing* to give your life, if it should come to that. You should be *willing* to endure suffering. In fact, it should bring you *joy* to suffer for the Lord! Christ was filled with joy to go to the cross for you: you should be filled with joy to suffer in your service to *Him*."

Christian, as you draw closer to the Lord, you will find that you will *think* more and more like Christ. As you develop *His* mind, you will begin to derive joy from seeing others reconciled to God—even if you must go through much pain, effort, time, or inconvenience in order for it to happen. The closer you walk with Christ, the more you will *think* like Christ, and have His mind: and you will find joy in the things that bring *Him* joy. That is why Paul said in **Philippians 2:5-8**, "***Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.***"

Do you want to have joy? Then you must die. I'm not talking about dying physically: I'm talking about dying to self, and to sin, every day. Christian, if you will allow Jesus Christ to use you as a vessel, He can use you to bring joy to others. And as you allow Him to bring joy to others, you will find joy, yourself. Is that what you desire? I surely hope so!

**Conclusion:** We've learned much about joy this month. We learned that Jesus Christ is the Root of Joy. We learned that the salvation that Christ provides for us is the *reason* that we can have joy. We've learned that as Christians surrender to Jesus Christ every day, they can have the continual fruit of joy in their lives. We've learned that Christians can have true *fullness* of joy—not only on the future Resurrection Day, but even now, in this life, in the midst of sorrow and pain. And, as we've seen in the Scripture today, God wants to use us to spread joy to others. He wants us to bring joy to unsaved people, by using our feet and our mouths to bring them the Gospel. He also wants to use us to bring joy to other Christians. He wants us to uplift and encourage fellow believers in their service to the Lord. Do you have much joy this morning, Christian? Should your cup of joy not be as full as it could be, perhaps part of the reason is that you are not sharing Christ's joy with others very much. Sharing the "good news" with the lost, and uplifting other Christians in the Lord, *always* brings joy!

Perhaps there are some of you this morning who are not sure that you are saved. If you be not sure of where you stand with the Lord, don't put this matter off any longer. *Now* is the day of salvation! Repent of your sin and place your faith in Christ today! If you will come to Him in humility and faith, He will save you; and He will give you true, full, abounding, everlasting joy!