

EXCELLENT JOY

(Philippians 4.4-9 and 1 Corinthians 13.1-13)

Great to be with you as part of this sermon series on joy.

Looking back at previous weeks of the series I see that you started with COMPLETE JOY- also in the book of Philippians St Paul wrote:

“Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

Then as part of a Baptism celebration there was the verse from the prophet Isaiah – “with joy you will draw from the wells of salvation.”

And last week the title was SPIRITUAL JOY and that great verse from Galatians – that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

This morning our title is EXCELLENT JOY and we will be considering what God may be saying to us from our Bible passages that we have heard read particularly focusing on joy, love and our relationship with God.

We have seen on our TV screens the terrible devastation caused by the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean – people have lost so much – homes, possessions and friends / family have been injured or even killed. However, we have also seen Christians on Anguilla meeting in churches some without roofs due to the hurricane but still worshipping and praising God. They still have joy in the Lord.

They are putting into practice Philippians 4 verse 4.

“REJOICE in the Lord always, I will say it again rejoice.”

Also, people were singing without hymn books or words on a screen - a lesson for us – if we are ever in a position due to illness or loss of eyesight where we cannot read words are still able to rejoice and praise God.

We could hardly blame them if they were to feel fearful but one Pastor in the Caribbean wrote recently: "The Lord is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear?"

Again we see Philippians 4 verse 6 and 7...

There is a big difference between being happy and Christian joy. Many things in life can make people happy whether they are Christians or not- for example;

- The birth of a baby
- A family wedding
- Or even winning the lottery.

However, these happy times may be short lived, e.g. a baby may become ill. Tensions can arise in marriages. Winning the lottery brings all the tensions associated with sudden wealth and attempts to change lifestyle.

It is helpful to know what the Bible says about joy and happiness.

The Bible never promises happiness to us as believers but it tells us a lot about joy and we are promised joy as believers:

In Old Testament Times - the people came back from exile to the ruins of Jerusalem and considerable hardship - in many ways similar to the situation in the Caribbean - lack of housing, food and clothing but the Prophet Nehemiah reminded them "Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Joy is not in circumstances but from the Lord.

Jesus taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5.11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven."

So again the command to rejoice in times of persecution. So let us see what the Bible says about joy and love.

When Jesus died on the cross a new relationship with God became possible- as we trust in Jesus as our personal Lord and Saviour we know God's forgiveness and a personal relationship with him. Out of that relationship our joy in the Lord becomes possible. That relationship is based on God's love for us.

John 3:16- For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him may have everlasting life.

The words joy and love are used a lot in the Bible- Joy = 218 and Love = 552 in the NIV.

Jesus taught :

- the love of God for us
- loving one another sharing love and joy in fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ.
- loving others – "We love because God first loved us."

Our second reading this morning was the famous passage from One Corinthians chapter 13 on love and what love is like or should be like for us all.

A somewhat amusing but challenging way to look at this passage is to replace the word love from verses 4-7 with our own name and consider how far we fall short of love as described in this passage and prayerfully ask for God's help in each aspect of love.

Love is :

- patient
- kind
- it does not envy
- it does not boast
- it is not proud
- it does not dishonour others
- it is not self-seeking

- it is not easily angered
- it keeps no record of wrongs
- love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth
- it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres

We all have room to develop as believers and love more in the way that God loves us.

In our hymn- "give me oil in my lamp keep me burning" we sang verses about both joy and love.

Just as Joy and love are in consecutive verses in the hymn the two do go very closely together in the Christian life and are known as fruits of the work of God's Holy Spirit in us.

The verse about love was "Give me love in my heart keep me serving." The loving action of Christians can bring much happiness and joy to others.

For example, Christian Aid support to the Caribbean

Also-love that Christians on Teesside have shown to the people of Belarus since Chernobyl – convoys of gifts and holidays for children have brought much joy to many people.

As believers we all go through testing times in our lives due to various crises – bereavement, health issues for ourselves and family members. (Personal illustration- our own family earlier this year sad and challenging times- sudden tragic death of one cousin on my side of the family; another cousin on Linda's side very seriously ill admitted to an Intensive Care Unit and other health issues closer to home).

How do we continue to know the Lord's joy in these circumstances? Continue to prayerfully focus on our Lord and remember that he loved us so much that he died for us on the cross.

Read his word the Bible- particularly chapters like Philippians chapter 4 in order to understand and hear more from God. Know his promises for us – like those in Philippians chapter 4 and remember them.

Ask God through his Holy Spirit to continue to give us his peace and joy. Take opportunities to rejoice and praise God both as individuals and with others even if that is hard for us.

Prayerfully and practically support one another in difficult times. Continue to love others as God loves us.

We can then know God's excellent joy in our own lives and in our church.