

## **"Rejoice in the Lord, A Call to Worship"**

In his study and reflection on the book of Psalms, C.S. Lewis concluded that praise is inner health made audible. When you are inwardly spiritually healthy, it is natural to respond to God's goodness, and mercy as revealed in Jesus Christ with joyful praise. What is equally true in Scripture is that just as joyful praise is an expression of inner spiritual health, it also fosters and strengthens our spiritual health. That's one reason we should never think of these commands we find in Scripture that tell us to rejoice in the Lord as some kind of heavy-handed demand God is laying on us that's insensitive to our changing emotions as we work through the struggles of life.

As we saw and said in an earlier sermon, when Scripture tells us to rejoice in the Lord, it's more like a friend finding us thirsty, crushed under the heat of the sun, and reaching out to us and saying, *here, drink this cool water*. It's like telling someone who's panicking, "*It's OK. Just breathe.*" Maybe it's even like stopping someone who's grown weary on a difficult uphill hike and saying, "*pause here for just a moment and take in the beauty of this scene.*" In a similar way, when we read the Scripture here that says to rejoice in the Lord always, the Holy Spirit isn't telling us to deny any aspect of our human struggle. He is telling us to lift up our eyes to see from whence our help comes - to see that in God there is more than good and sufficient cause for hope for faith for trust and, with that, an authentic strengthening and renewing joy in God.

The last time we came to a verse that called us to rejoice in the Lord, we focused on the idea of rejoicing individually and personally. This morning I want to approach this passage a little differently in that I want us to reflect on its implications for our worship. And it's been quite a while since we've done a message on worship, even though worship is something we do every week. So today, we want to focus on this theme: worship is corporate rejoicing, the act of coming together as a church to rejoice in the Lord with each other.

### **I. REJOICING IN THE LORD IS A VITAL PART OF WHAT WE DO TOGETHER WHEN WE WORSHIP.**

**Philippians 4:4** says, *Rejoice in the Lord always.* “Always” includes everyday life but it certainly also includes these times we gather specifically to worship. This is set aside for us to rejoice together. Our Sunday services are not the only time we rejoice, and rejoicing isn't the only thing we do during our Sunday worship services, but rejoicing in the Lord is very much at the heart of what it means to worship.

*You see this throughout Scripture*

**A. When God calls us to worship him, he is calling us  
us to rejoice in him!**

I looked at every verse in the book of Psalms that speaks of joy and rejoicing and there were well over 50 and it was powerful to let the truth of all those verses wash over me I wanted to read them all to you and then I ended up whittling it down to 30 then 13. I thought that was still too many so I chose 6.

**Psalm 5:11** *But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.*

**Psalm 47:1** *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. Clap your hands, all people! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!*

**Psalm 67:4** *Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah*

**Psalm 71:23** *My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have redeemed.*

**Psalm 81:1** *Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob!*

**Psalm 95:1-2** *Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!* That's just a small sampling of the Psalms that call us to rejoice in our worship. There should be no doubt in our minds that rejoicing in the Lord is vital to what we do when we worship together. Doctor John Piper has devoted a lifetime of study to the theme of desiring God and glorifying God. He says, “*Joyful heartfelt hope-filled delight in the God of mercy is the essence of worship, not the totality of worship, but it is the essence.*”

## **B. The Holy Spirit within us helps us to see the glory of Christ and to *rejoice* in Him.**

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be given to all who believe in him. He said the Holy Spirit would show us the things of Christ, show us the glory of Christ, and move us to rejoice in him. In **John 7** He said *out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water.*

**Romans 14:7** says *the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

**Romans 15:3** *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

**Galatians 5:22** describes the fruit of the Spirit and after love comes joy. Joy is the fruit of the Spirit. Earlier the book of Galatians, said that the flesh, our fallen human nature, sets its desires against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. There is this battle that goes on within us between the flesh and the Spirit. Doesn't it make sense that sometimes there will be a part of us emotionally that wants to hold back from fully entering into worship or hold on to self-pity or hurt. Sometimes that's *not* just a desire to be authentic or real, but it is actually the flesh setting its desire against the Spirit who is moving us, even in the midst of heartaches and disappointments, to see the glory of Christ, the goodness of God, and to rejoice in the Lord. The Holy Spirit urges us to turn away from the desires of the flesh in order to give ourselves to the worship that strengthens us and glorifies God. The Holy Spirit moves us to rejoice in the Lord! **Ephesians 5:18-19** says *be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* The Holy Spirit will help us worship in Spirit and in Truth if we want him to and if we let him!

*When we come together like this to worship both the written Word of God, the Scriptures, and the indwelling Spirit of God - the Holy Spirit calls us to rejoice in the Lord.*

### **II. WHAT, THEN, DOES SCRIPTURE TELL US ABOUT HOW WE ARE TO REJOICE IN THE LORD?**

Did you know that there is a verse in the Bible that tells you exactly what to do when you are rejoicing in the Lord? **James 5:13** *Is anyone*

*among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? (rejoicing) Let him sing praise.*

*Two things I'd like to stress. First we can say ....*

**A. It is good for us to rejoice in the Lord with singing.**

All of the Scriptures we just read from Psalms tell us to rejoice in the Lord with music and songs of praise. **Psalm 95:1** says, *Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

***Music and singing is from God and of God.*** Music and singing in worship is not something we came up with. The Book of Job talks about the angels singing before the world began. In **Revelation 5** where we're given a vision of heaven in which myriads of angels - ten thousand times ten thousand - are singing the praise of Jesus. **Hebrews 12** tells us that when we come to God in worship, we are entering into the ongoing praise of the angels in heaven and of the believers who have gone to heaven before us. *Do you ever picture Jesus singing?* There are four places in the New Testament that specifically mention Jesus singing (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26, Hebrews 2:12, Romans 15:9). In **Hebrews 2:11-12** says, Jesus is not ashamed to call all of us who have received him as Savior, his brothers. Then it quotes Jesus speaking these words from **Psalm 22**, *"I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."* When we come to worship, we join the joyful singing of the angels and of our Lord and Savior.

***Music and song is powerful.*** The famous Neurologist Oliver Sacks wrote a book titled *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. In it, he shares a deeply personal account of the role that music played in lifting him out of depression after the death of his mother. Sacks writes:

For weeks I would get up, dress, drive to work, see my patients, try to present a normal appearance. But inside, I was dead, as lifeless as a zombie. Then one day, as I was walking down Bronx Park East, I felt a sudden lightening, a quickening of mood, a sudden whisper or intimation of life, of joy. Only then did I realize that I was hearing music, though so faintly it might have been no more than an image or memory? As I continued to walk, the music grew louder until finally, I came to its source, a radio pouring Schubert out of an open basement window. The music pierced me, releasing a cascade of images and feelings-memories of childhood, of summer holidays

together, and of my mother's fondness for Schubert ... I found myself not only smiling for the first time in weeks but laughing aloud and alive once again.

The fact that music and singing not only express emotions but also impact emotions is well-known. Scripture and experience confirms it.

In light of all God says about worship in Scripture, shouldn't we refuse to be satisfied with a sort of half-hearted under-our-breath-singing. Our singing is part of our witness to the world, it is one way we encourage and strengthen each other, but most of all, it is part of the sacrifice of praise we offer in worship to God because of who he is and what he means to us. So we have to give ourselves to it and give him our best.

This should even affect how we view the whole of our Sunday morning worship service. It is a service of praise we offer him together, and so we should be here from the beginning. I know it's hard sometimes when we're trying to get kids squared away so we can enter the worship area to be ready for the call to worship, but all of it is important, not just the sermon, but singing matters. All of it, from the call to Worship to the Benediction, is our service of worship to Christ.

*It is good to rejoice in the Lord with singing. And, second...*

**B. It's good when we rejoice to focus more on proclaiming our devotion to God than on preserving our dignity before others.**

There is a famous story found in **2 Samuel 6** about King David, this great warrior and king who had many faults but also was a man after God's own heart. And **2 Samuel 6** tells us that when the ark, a powerful symbol of the presence of God with his people, was brought into Jerusalem after having been neglected for many years, David danced before the Lord with all of his might with shouts and the sound of trumpets. And it also tells us though that Michal, David's wife and the daughter of Saul, the previous king, thought what he did was undignified. The Bible says that as she watched, she despised him in her heart. She complained sarcastically, "*How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today!*" David responded with these words "*It was before the Lord who chose me... I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this.*" The following verse says that Michal, daughter of Saul, had no children to the day of her death. Throughout the rest of Scripture, she is described as *barren, unfruitful, unproductive*. It's hard to read that story without becoming aware of our human preoccupation with our own dignity.

Michal's objection was to David's freedom in rejoicing. He might have marched sedately, sung discreetly, or thought deep and noble thoughts about God continually, but the discomfort and even contempt surfaced when, in his devotion, he forgot to protect his dignity. Dignity in itself is not bad. That's not the point. The sad thing is that our reaction to the expression of what we think excessive emotion is sometimes that we overcorrect and go into a full retreat and settle for a cold careful, self-conscious reserve not just for now but for now on. In worship, my responsibility is not to judge others whose hearts I cannot see. And it's also not to fear the opinion of others when I am in the presence of God.

People have told me they have friends who have come to our church from other churches, and in the worship they've started to sing enthusiastically or raise their hands and they've kind of looked around and suddenly felt self-conscious. Later they've said something like, "*I realized you don't do that here.*" Well, some of us do, and some of us don't. If you read the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms, you'll find the Bible talks about rejoicing with great freedom of expression that includes, not only enthusiastic singing but things like raising the hands. None of these expressions are laid on us as legalistic commands or as litmus tests of our love for God, but they do suggest that we should worship God with a freedom of expression that is more about proclaiming our devotion than it is about preserving our dignity. Whatever that looks like for you – do that – from the heart.

*Ultimately*

### **III. IN WORSHIP, WE REJOICE IN THE LORD BECAUSE WE HAVE GOOD REASON TO FIND OUR DEEPEST JOY IN HIM.**

***The Lord in whom we're called to rejoice is the Lord Jesus Christ.***

He came into our world and lived a perfect life for our sakes, and then he laid that life down as a sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sins. The moment you truly turn to him and trust in him, you're forgiven, you become a child of God, you're promised eternity, and every tear –will be wiped away. And he promises to be with you in this life to cause even the saddest things to work together for good. Because God is a God of grace, because God the son, Jesus is a sacrificial savior, because the Holy Spirit awakens our need for God, draws us to him, and imparts life. You can have salvation. You can be reconciled so as to walk with God in this life, to be transformed by his grace, and that to live with him for eternity. To rejoice in the Lord is to rejoice in who he is and what he has done for you. Have you come to him?

Have you received him? Do you know him? If not come to him! If so, rejoice in him for you have an immeasurable treasure in him!

***The treasure we have in Christ can so often seem to be under appreciated.*** Imagine a woman who has inherited a piece of jewelry, a brooch, passed down in the family. Nobody knows what it is worth, and half the time, they don't even know where it is. One day a friend is visiting who is a Jeweler, and he says, *"You know I appraise old jewelry sometimes, and some people don't know what they've got. Do you have any old jewelry?"* She says, "Yes, I've got one old piece. I don't think it's anything special." But she gets it, and he starts looking at this brooch. Bit by bit, as he is examining this thing, he begins to shake his head. As he looks at it carefully he sees what it is. It is unbelievably valuable. It was made by a famous artist-jeweler. The reason he is so moved is because he realizes what is in his hand is more valuable than any jewelry in his shop. It is more valuable than all the jewelry he has ever had in his shop in the last thirty years. And when he tells the woman, she is stunned. She realizes she hasn't been treating this thing in light of its true value. She didn't know how valuable it was. Now she thinks differently; she feels differently. We know from studies and polls that most people in America say they believe in God. They say, "I believe in God," and "I believe there is a creator." But many people think of God the way the woman in that story thought about her brooch. They are completely unaware of his value. What important is not just the difference between believing in a God or not believing in a God but believing in God and worshipping God as God, rejoicing in the Lord because you have discovered that he is your greatest treasure.

## CONCLUSION

Are you growing as a worshipper of God? Most of us think of spiritual growth, and we think of growing in our understanding of God and the Bible or growing in our character. But are you growing as a worshipper of God? Are we, as a church, growing in our worship together? Worship is not entertainment. You don't come to listen and judge how others perform. In worship, you are the performer. The leaders are there to lead *you* into your service. So when it's over, the question isn't *"Did I get anything out of the worship, but how did I do in the worship?"*

***Amen.***

## A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Almighty God, I turned to you in faith. My desire is to know you in your grace and goodness so as to worship you truly. To this end I continually repent of my sin and unbelief. I receive and rest on Christ alone as my Lord and Savior. His sacrificial death to pay for my sins and his powerful resurrection from the dead to vindicate his lordship, in these great gospel truths, I place my trust and find my greatest treasure. In Christ's name, I pray.

## A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Holy Father, Help us to live lives of such deep faith in you and in your promises that the spirit of rejoicing become a source of continual renewal for us and pleasure for you. Deliver us from the bondage to this broken world and the blindness to your goodness and glory that stunts the joy that could be ours. Fill us with the Holy Spirit who alone can impart such deep and lasting joy in this very broken world. Make our church a holy place of authentic joy and our worship a Christ-centered celebration Of your goodness and glory in Christ.