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"It's Time for Joy!" I Chronicles 12:23-40

Introduction

Joy is something God commands us to have. We often view it as an emotion over which we have no control. We'd like to have joy, but it's very often elusive. The Bible teaches us that it is a condition of the heart that transcends our circumstances. Jesus, on the same night He was betrayed, knowing that His disciples were deeply troubled in heart spoke to them about abiding in Him. At the conclusion of that teaching He said *These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.*

Right now joy might be the last thing you want to talk about. It has been many, many years since our church family has faced as much personal trouble and difficulty as we are facing right now. Many of you are right in the middle of it. Those of you who are blessed to have missed out on the difficulties have no doubt notice it among your brothers and sister. And I'm not talking about the global issues that are putting pressure on nearly everyone – the recession that keeps getting deeper; the fear of job losses is very real; wars abound, etc.

I'm talking about the personal troubles that have multiplied – trouble with our marriages, with our children and with our health. And lest you think I'm singling you out, I counted over 25 of our families that would fit into one of these categories right now. Some have asked if this a particular attack of Satan against us right now. I don't know the answer to that

for certain beyond the fact that I've no doubt that Satan wants to use these things to discourage us and to tempt us to turn away from God instead of turning to Him.

So instead of hanging our heads in despair I believe it would be good for us as a church family to consider that fact that God wants us to live above our circumstances. He wants us to have joy in the midst of our burdens, right now. Our troubles don't have to deflate us. They don't have to send us into the tank. So let me direct your attention to a very interesting passage, one that I'm reality sure you wouldn't normally study when considering *joy*, but a passage that nonetheless can help us see some of the prerequisites for joy.

[I Chronicles 12:23-40]

I chose this passage because it looks at joy from the perspective of the whole church, not just the individual. The passage concludes with what can be almost read a surprise statement, *There was joy indeed in Israel.*

This is remarkable when you consider the circumstances of the family of God.

- Had just been soundly defeated by the Philistines.
- They had been plundered and lost a number of cities in the defeat.
- Their king (Saul) had been slain in battle along with his much beloved son, Jonathan
- There was great division in the nation as to who was rightfully the next king.

Their present circumstances were awful. Their future prospects were anything but clear. And yet, there was joy indeed in Israel. How could this be?

In the text there are seven characteristics or traits present among the people of God. Each one was brought to the table by a different tribe. They shared these with one another and learned them from one another. Collectively, as these traits were operative, the foundation was laid for *joy*. As we look briefly at each of these traits this morning, I'd like to ask you to consider them like prerequisites for joy. In other words, if they are present in your life, you are likely to find joy no matter the circumstances. If they are absent, they could well steal your joy. What are they?

1. Obedience

Verse 23 says *Now these are the numbers of the divisions equipped for war, who came to David at Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the Lord.* So here we find that everyone who came to David came there because of God's Word. We know that God had already anointed David as the next king through the prophet Samuel. And God had personally instructed David to go to Hebron that he might assume his kingship.

But that didn't mean obedience was a given. Abner, the commander of Saul's army led a group of Israelites to anoint Saul's son, Ish-bosheth as the next king. For 2 ½ years there was civil war in Israel.

And yet for those who were committed to the Word of the Lord there was joy. You may be facing nearly unbearable trouble in your life. There may be "civil war" in your family. You or a loved one may be facing dangerous health issues. But the starting place in dealing with your problems must always be here at the level of obedience. Are you willing to do things according to the word of Lord? We sang Psalm 51 this morning – *restore to me the joy of my*

salvation. Sin is the first thing that will steal your joy. There was joy in the house of Israel because they knew they were gathering in the will of God. You will find joy too when you walk in obedience to His Word.

2. Courage

There was a certain make up of those who gathered to David at Hebron. They were mostly soldiers in the early days. And as soldiers we read in verses 25, 28 & 30 that they were filled with valor. Often times our greatest experiences of joy come in the wake of victory in battle. But battles require courage.

Some of you young men may someday join the military and will need this same kind of valor. But all of us will at times be called upon by God to undertake something that causes us fear.

We were studying the conversion of the apostle Paul in Bible study this week. After Paul had been struck blind by Jesus on the road to Damascus, a faithful servant of Christ named Ananias was asked by the Lord to go to him and restore his sight. Can you imagine the courage that it took to undertake that assignment? Saul was known as a Pharisee that hated and brutalized Christians. To approach him in the name of Christ, not knowing that his heart had been changed by Jesus had to have been an unbelievable test for Ananias. Yet he mustered his courage and was rewarded with the fantastic joy of witnessing the conversion of Paul!

In the middle of your troubles, God may ask you to do something that is very difficult for you. He may ask you to humble yourself or speak to someone, or get some help of counsel – but take

courage. Courage grounded in faith is often rewarded with great blessing and joy.

3. Faithfulness

Verse 29 says *Of the sons of Benjamin, Saul's kinsmen, 3,000; for until now the greatest part of them had kept their allegiance to the house of Saul.* Saul of course was a Benjamite. Here were 3,000 men who had remained faithful and loyal to Saul as long as he lived. This was a good thing. David himself had set the pace in this regard. As long as Saul was alive, David would do nothing to remove him or seize the kingdom.

These Benjamites brought with them an integrity and a loyalty that must exist within the body of Christ. John wrote that he had no greater joy than to know that his children walked in the truth. One of the things that will bring us collective joy as a church family is a commitment to be faithful and loyal to one another. If we can count on one another to hold each other up in our troubles, to pray for one another, to serve each other, we will find great joy and delight in knowing that we don't have to bear our burdens alone. No wonder there was joy in Israel. They knew they stood together and they could count on each other to survive their troubles.

4. Wisdom

Much has been said about the men of Issachar. These were the men that understood the times. But if you look closely at verse 32 you'll notice something else about these men. It's not just that they understood the times; but that they understood the times *with the knowledge of what Israel should do.*

There was nothing magical about the men of Issachar. They couldn't predict the future or

anything like that. But they had the wisdom to look at the circumstances of the day and discern how to apply the Word of the Lord. This is what we all need to pray for today. If trouble has visited your household, pray that God would give you an ability to understand the times. We need to be able to evaluate what is happening around us – but we can only do that if we think about life through the grid of the Word of God. So pray for wisdom to know what to do. So often, just having a plan from the Lord, where you can move forward in faith, will bring a sense of peace and joy

5. Devotion

I especially like verse 33. Only the New King James version leaves off the phrase at the end that says that the men of Zebulun came *with an undivided heart*. Tonight we are going to look at this subject much more closely, but for now let it just be noted that there is nothing more troublesome for a Christian than to be half committed. To have one foot in the world and one foot in the things of God is like surf of the sea, we are tossed and driven here and there. James wrote that such a man should expect to receive nothing from the Lord.

I wrote in the margin of my Bible, *Lord, send us men and women with undivided hearts*. In the end, it is the devoted to whom the Lord will say, *Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master*.

6. Usefulness

(Read 37-38a). Here are men with great skill who came with a perfect heart. What that means is, not that they had no sin, but rather that their intentions were pure. They took their skills and made them

available to the Lord. They submitted what they had to God for His purposes.

One of the things that we need to realize is that we will be happiest when we are using our gifts and talents and skills to glorify God. God created us to work for His purposes. If you want joy, make sure that you are finding ways to use what He had given you for His glory.

7. Unity

How hard is it to get everyone on the same page and moving in the same direction? You don't have to be around the church very long to know that it's not easy. But here we find (vs. 38) that the people were of one mind to make David king.

When the church is united around a common vision and purpose, there is a contentment and joy that comes from our labors. There is a great picture at the end of this chapter of the family of God eating and talking and in deep fellowship together.

The truth is we need each other. In the middle of our struggles and discouragements and trials, we need to hold one another's hand and share time together. The church is the family of God because we find strength and joy in our relationship to God and one another.

So these 7 things are building blocks and prerequisites to joy: obedience, courage, faithfulness, wisdom, devotion, usefulness and unity. James wrote that we are to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance which will lead to our growth toward godliness. How is your joy? Are you abiding Christ under pressure? My prayer is that God would hold us up and help us to live with joy above our troubles so that He might be glorified.