

In Thy presence is fulness of joy (Ps. 5)

Part 1

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[00:00:00] Would you turn please to the book of Psalms. First of all, Psalm 5. Psalm 5, verse 11.

But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice. Let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them. Let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. Psalm 27 and verse 6.

And now mine head be lifted up, above mine enemies round about me. Therefore will I [00:01:03] offer in his tabernacles sacrifices of joy. I will sing, yea I will sing praises unto the Lord.

And Psalm 30, verse 5. His anger endureth but for a moment. In his favour is life. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

The published exercise of the conveners, as that we might be directed to those [00:02:10] portions of Scripture, and so comment on the Scriptures, that we are encouraged to develop the practice of enjoying the presence of the Lord. We might and could go to many Scriptures, very, very few books in the Bible don't refer to the matter of joy. But since the conveners have encouraged us to consider our experience and our knowledge and practice of the joy of the Lord's [00:03:01] presence, I felt that on this occasion I couldn't do better than direct you to the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms have been helpful to myriads of the Lord's people in many days. Days of difficulty, days of problems, days of trouble, days of anguish, days of pleasant circumstances, days of painful circumstances. And in it all we get the beatings of the heart, the feelings that are produced in going through the experiences of life in the presence of the Lord. Now, thinking of that, it came to mind, as it does whenever we turn to the book of Psalms, that [00:04:05] Hebrew scholars and Hebrew historians readily split the book of Psalms into five books, corresponding to the five books of Moses. And it did occur to me, whether it would be worthwhile to see whether or not what we all believe, that the Lord's presence and the joy of His presence can be known in whatever day we find ourselves and whatever the present circumstances of life. I wondered whether this would be borne out by consistent treatment of the matter in the five books of Psalms. So I've read to you three little portions from the first book of Psalms, that is, [00:05:05] the first 41 Psalms. Corresponding, as it does, to the first book of Moses, the book of Genesis, my thoughts went on from there. What do I find when I study the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings? I find that from the outset, those who were true to God found themselves in a numerical minority. Time and again, in difficult, even evil days, we find a man standing for God when everybody else seems to be against God. Now, whatever the day, [00:06:02] whatever the background, a necessary lesson for any of us to learn is that, if necessary, if the Lord so decrees, we need to be prepared to stand alone, however great and antagonistic the enemies, whatever the problems may

be. But that once having demonstrated our preparedness to stand alone, that God, in his grace, provides fellowship by those who are like-minded. And so we find it in the book of Genesis. And so I read from these Psalms in the first book. There are many more. I read the three merely to underline this principle. From the outset, God has demonstrated the joy, the availability of the joy of his presence to those who are prepared to be true [00:07:02] to him in whatever kind of circumstances they find themselves. I read in particular that verse from Psalm 30 because it tells us that God begins, as creation began, the evening and the morning were the first day. That, however difficult the evening, the night period, whatever the sorrow or the problems, God's will is that, having gone through that with the assurance of the Lord's presence, that the joy of the light of day assuredly comes in line with his promise. Now, we are merely able to touch fleetingly on each of these things, and we must keep moving on. Perhaps one example, historical example, will suffice. You remember when Saul was persecuting David? [00:08:05] David was being hounded from pillar to post, and then we have that little gem of a phrase in 1 Samuel chapter 3. We read, when everybody and everything was against him, we read that David encouraged himself in the Lord. Oh, it's grand to have the fellowship of like-minded believers, and the Lord is gracious in his provision. But unless we start with this, that if necessary, the personal encouragement and the joy of his presence, if it is his will that that's all there is, it's the necessary start. And until we learn something of that, we won't know true fellowship with those who are like-minded. Now, that's all I want to say about the first book of Psalms. Would [00:09:02] you move on, please, to Psalm 51. Psalm 51, verse 8. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Verse 12. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

We may come to this again, but I'm convinced of a principle that is illustrated, I'm sure, in Psalm 51. We have the Word of God in our hands. We have the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

[00:10:07] There is sufficient resource that in a straightforward, positive, direct, constructive manner, we can enjoy the Lord's presence in every circumstance of life, in every environment, in person, in the home, in the family, in the assembly, in the world, in our jobs, however we spend our time. There's sufficient resource available for us to be encouraged to experience the joy of the presence of the Lord in a straightforward way. However, we are such people, aren't we, that while [00:11:03] blessings are available in a straightforward way, most of the time, most of us insist in learning lessons the hard way. It's not essential. Meditation upon the Word, living it out in the power of the Spirit, will provide sufficient positive experience for everything we need to learn. Oh, but when we insist in projecting ourself and our will and the will of the flesh into everything we do, all is not lost. Even when sin occurs, it is not necessarily the end. The joy of the Lord's presence is enjoyed in personal communion with him. Sin destroys the communion, doesn't affect the basic relationship.

[00:12:15] That is established forever on the basis, the foundation, of the work of Christ, and that's sufficient for God to bring us to himself in a relationship which abides eternally. Nothing can destroy that. Oh, but what can be interrupted is our personal communion with him, and in particular, sin breaks that precious link of communion with the Lord. I have no expectation of experiencing the joy of the Lord's presence if I knowingly allow unjudged sin in my life. [00:13:04] I'm not surprised that Psalm 51 comes in book two of the Psalms, the book that's equivalent to the book of Exodus, the book about redemption, the book about the establishment and the work that was necessary to establish a vital link of relationship between God and his people. Took me a long time to realize that nearly all the sacrifices and the offerings that the Bible speaks about are not for sinners with no claim upon God. The vast majority are dealing with matters with those who are already in relationship with God. Study the sacrifices, study the offerings, [00:14:04] and you'll see how clear the picture is. David sinned

grievously. He stole another man's wife.

God judged him for it, as God will judge sin. Oh, but David judged himself. If I'm experiencing difficulty in knowing the joy of the Lord's presence, it will almost certainly be because I'm allowing something in my life which is sin, which I know is sin, and I'm content to go along with it because I like doing it. [00:15:03] David sinned grievously, but he judged himself, he judged the sin, he repented of the sin, and he confessed the sin.

He put the matter right with God. I'm not surprised then that in the second book of Psalms, we have this amazing psalm which gives the beatings of the heart of David when he sorrowed in the presence of God over his own sin. He knew the action that God had taken was necessary. He even says, doesn't he, the bones which thou hast broken. If I have a similar experience, is it because up to now, [00:16:14] is it because up to now, there's unjudged sin in my life that I haven't faced up to, judged before the Lord, repented of, and confessed. Oh, David finishes on this lovely note, doesn't he, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. Nothing could disturb the salvation itself. That was an established relationship, but what had been disturbed by sin was the joy of that salvation. If any man sin, we learn in John's epistle, we have an advocate with the Father.

[00:17:08] Because we have a faithful, righteous advocate, the link of relationship is maintained. All but what is needed is repentance, confession, restoration, that the joy of the presence of the Lord might be restored. I commend to all of us further studies in the second book, but let us turn to book three, Psalm 84. Psalm 84, we'll read the heading. To the chief musician, upon Gittith, a psalm for the sons of Korah. Verse five, [00:18:08] blessed, happy, joyful, is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose hearts are the ways of them, who, passing through the valley of Baker, make it a well. The rain also filleth the pools. If we are right, and I'm sure we are, in following the pattern laid down by the Hebrew scholars, Psalm 84 must have some correspondence with the book of Leviticus because it's in the third book of Psalms, 73 to 89. Leviticus is about drawing near to God in the enjoyment and celebration [00:19:07] of his presence. Exodus, coming out. Leviticus, going in.

Even so, the psalmist finds difficulty where he picks up the thread in Psalm 73. He's laboring in the Lord's presence. He said, Lord, I can't understand it. Why is it that the wicked prosper and the godly suffer? It all seems the wrong way around. Lord, why is it? Why do you allow it? How long is it going to go on? But when we get to verse 17, the psalmist says, ah, now I understand.

[00:20:05] I've been in the sanctuary. I've been in the Lord's presence. I can now see things in proper perspective. I can see the balance as to why certain things are allowed to produce qualities in me that wouldn't be otherwise there. And he says, now that I've been into the sanctuary, now that I know the Lord personally and spend time in communion with him, I have a better understanding of all things. Now, in Psalm 84, we have this delightful heading, don't we? Not a lot of time for it, but we'll spend a minute on it. To the chief musician. Not surprising either, is it, [00:21:01] that the heading to the chief musician occurs more often than any other phrase in the headings of the Psalms, about 55 times. Those who understand the words tell us that this phrase, the chief musician, not only refers to the one who conducts the music in symphony, but he's the one who originates and provides the music in the first place. And because he is the composer and the originator of it, he's able to conduct things in such a way that the music has the most charming possible sound. And since the Psalms give the feelings and the beatings of the heart under extreme pressure, [00:22:06] we shouldn't be surprised to have the reminder that if we take these things as from the Lord, in the sanctuary that is, it will produce a joy and a praise that nothing else could ever give. Now, I would suggest that that's

illustrated by the fact that in this lovely Psalm, in Psalm 84, that considering things, as scripture says, in the balances of the sanctuary, it leads to a joy and resulting praise that nothing else can give. Upon Gittith, well, the scholars don't all agree. We are not surprised by that. Wouldn't life be easy if the scholars agreed on everything? We only had to read what they said, accept it, and then that was the end of that. Even in this, the Lord is gracious. He gives us [00:23:06] alternatives which we have to think through, weigh up in the balances of the sanctuary, come to a conclusion, and then put it into practice. Now, some say that this term refers to a kind of a musical instrument that David came across at Gath when he was fleeing from Saul in grievous circumstances, and because of his musical aptitude, he was attracted to the instrument, he learned to play it, and it was played, we will believe, as it had never been played before. The alternative is not so very far away. Some say it refers to the wine press, refers to the fruit of the vine which only has its sweetness produced by the pressure [00:24:08] by the pressure and the bruising that's experienced in the wine press. Or they're not so far apart, are they? There is a joy that is known in the presence of the Lord when the Lord graciously conducts us through difficulties until we eventually hear his voice, this thing is from me, or that produces a joy and praise. Let's not just get bogged down with what we can get out of it and what happens to us and our portion. There's not only something for us, there's something for the Lord. When difficult circumstances are gone through with the felt presence of the Lord and the instrument is strung, it's tuned to perfection, there is joy [00:25:08] and overflowing praise to the Lord because of that which we've learned of him in whatever the circumstance might be. I only pick out, oh sorry, there's another little bit in the heading, a psalm for the sons of Cora. Wonderful people, privileged to take up the praise of God, privileged deeply to be able to go through difficult circumstances in the company of the Lord. What have these people done to deserve such favour? In what way have they qualified themselves to enjoy such blessing? They hadn't done anything to deserve it at all. They were rebels by nature and [00:26:03] by practice. When we read in Numbers 16 about Cora and his family rebelling against the declared will of God in selecting Aaron and others for the service of God, if we read it superficially, we could well come to the conclusion that the whole family was wiped out. Oh, but when we get to chapter 26 and then all these references in the Psalms, we find these delightful touches that there are those who were spared, not because of any works of righteousness as they'd done, but according to the mercy of God. Isn't that just like us? Saved not by any works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his own mercy he saved us. There's nothing like a sense of mercy [00:27:06] in every kind of circumstance that will produce praise and joy in the presence of the Lord, something for us, something for the Lord. What can better produce that than a sense that however long we live, whatever progress we make, however much time we spend in the sanctuary of the Lord's presence, it will be an abiding sense of the mercy of God that carries us through. So we get this. Two verses I read, verse 5, blessed joyful is the man who strengthened thee in whose heart are the ways of them. There's not a circumstance, there's not a difficulty wherein the Lord is not available. [00:28:05] God said to Joshua, didn't he, be strong and of good courage, be not disheartened, I shall be with thee whithersoever thou goest. And again, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. Verses we can all quote, and yet if the Lord gives us the opportunity to put them into practice, how much evidence is there that like the psalmist, that we can say blessed is the man whose strength is in thee. Nehemiah, isn't it? The joy of the Lord is thy strength. And again, happy experience as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

[00:29:02] We know the words, we know where they come from, we can quote them, but we know that the Lord we know the words, we know where they come from, we can quote them, but to what extent have we been led to put them into practice. A verse from book 4, Psalm 104, verse 15. Wine maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.

We are into book 4 now, equating to the book of Numbers, God's ways with his people in the wilderness. Even though they insisted on spending 38 and a half years on an 11 days journey, [00:30:06] their God was with them, always available, there was always wine, there was always oil, there was always bread. Consistently in scripture, wine is a picture of the joy that can be experienced in the wilderness. Consistently in scripture, wine is a picture of the joy that can be experienced in the presence of the Lord, in relationship with him. Jotham's parable, Judges 9, the first sign in John's gospel, chapter 2, in John's gospel, chapter 2, turning the water into wine, the consistent picture [00:31:04] picked up by the psalmist here, that there is that which the Lord provides, where we go through things feelingly with him, that produces a joy that nothing else on earth can match. Marvellous, isn't it? That in this wilderness psalm, that at every turn, how many examples there are where the joy of the Lord's presence is available. Well, I think I'll have to leave that there, but lastly, Psalm 126. 126, verse 5, They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, [00:32:06] bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. We'll never ever get a better picture of the answer to Psalm 126 than the perfect example of everything that's good, that's the Lord himself. But the exercise over the weekend, certainly for this morning, is not so much to look at the perfect example in the Lord, but rather to challenge ourselves as to what extent that is replicated in our own experience. And so we are taking a very practical view of this psalm. [00:33:04] What occurs to me as I read these verses is this, is this, if you want to know anything about the joy of the Lord's presence, excuse the simplicity, get yourself a job. Far too many people, far too many brethren, have so little to do in the Lord's work that they spend all their time moaning about other people. If only they got themselves a job, did something good, if only they got themselves a job, did something positive for the Lord. But let's not talk about other people, let's talk about us. If I want to know joy, real joy, [00:34:07] or we say to the children, don't we, if you want joy, real joy, my exhortation as I close is this, if you want joy, real joy, get yourself a job in the work of the Lord. I hadn't been coming to ministry meetings very long before I was, I suppose, shocked by what seemed to me a relatively cynical exhortation. It was this, if you want joy, serve the sinner, if you want sorrow, serve the saints. Oh, I'm sure many of you will understand something of what that exhortation carries. But really, [00:35:03] deep down, it's not true, is it? If you want joy, serve the sinner, oh yes, preach the gospel, have a zeal for souls. It's a different kind of joy, but dependent upon gift and ability, it may not be our lot in a primary way to indulge or to be employed in evangelical activities. Maybe there's some service for the Lord's people that we should be busy about. He that goeth forth and weepeth, or there's much to grieve over.

We don't charge about in a flippant or apparently sanctimonious manner.

We know the difficulties, we know the problems, we know how much there is to do. [00:36:06] There need never be any unemployment in the Lord's work. Whether the Lord eventually leads you to serve the Lord relative to the world in the preaching of the gospel or supporting that work, or whether it's some activity in the assembly amongst the Lord's people. Again, as the simple little hymn says, there's a work for Jesus, none but you can do. It would be terribly serious, wouldn't it, if what destroyed my joy in the Lord's presence was unconfessed sin. If that's so, I must put it right straight away. [00:37:03] But even without that, except in the sense of the sin of unbelief, or the sin of not recognising or being obedient to the Lord when he makes it plain what I should be doing, that's a part. There is a joy that's known in the hustle and the bustle and the hubbub of every day serving the Lord in whatever sphere he makes plain to you that produces praise for the Lord. We must not practice sin, John's epistle, but if overtaken occasionally by sin, let us keep the account short. Let us judge the matter, repent, make confession, [00:38:01] and enjoy the Lord's presence again. But if in this dreary world we still feel we are missing out, whatever our age, whatever our stage, let us seek

employment in the Lord's presence. Let us get on joyfully and soberly and we'll know something of the sympathy of Psalm 126.

Oh, how delightfully this says, where intelligently, feelingly, God's work is entered into, there is fruit and there is joy. Such a servant shall doubtless come again with joy, with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.