



# JOY

## The Joy of our Circumstance

By: Chris Williams

*Make me hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have crushed rejoice! - Psalm 51:8*

During my middle school years, our youth group would gather in the church library. I was usually aloof, preoccupied with trying to balance on the back legs of my metal folding chair. It was thrilling. The margin of error between looking cool and looking like a buffoon under a heap of dusty cloth-over-board books was pretty thin, though well worth the risk. After all, there were girls in the room. But on a December evening, one conversation planted me back on all four legs of my chair, pulling one eyebrow up, and both elbows to my knees.

The leader asked us to describe the joy we have as Christians. I knew better than to blurt out an answer. That was *not* cool. So I listened to the eager Eddys call out words like *happiness*, *pleasure*, and *bliss*. The leader was not satisfied. He went on to explain that our joy was *something* that rested outside of circumstances and feelings. It struck me as curious that he kept calling it *something*, but not really describing what that *thing* was. What was it? And why did the feeling I got when balancing on the back two legs of a chair not qualify?

I won't say that night was the start of my quest for the meaning of joy. I was far more curious about whether or not the apocalypse was going to begin at the end of 1999, because of the clocks and stuff. The truth is, joy eluded me until the last several years - even as a believer. It would come and go. Joy was the friend that came to stay when certain things were going on. Once the action died, it would go visit someone else. This troubled me because we are commanded to rejoice. We are *supposed* to be filled with joy. Always. This friend isn't called to visit, but dwell. One shift in my thinking has helped me see and experience joy differently. I once viewed our joy as an emotion that was worked up in *spite* of our fickle circumstances. But experiencing the believer's joy is *not* about merely retreating from circumstances or finding silver linings. It is grasping which circumstance to always be grounded in. And for those who hope in the coming of Christ, our circumstance is sublime!

Jesus uses several parables to flesh out a certain aspect of our circumstance that ought to bring us joy as believers. We are found! He places us in the home of a woman who loses and then finds her coin. We hear of a man discovering a hidden treasure and a merchant procuring a pearl of great worth. We are the coin, treasure, and pearl of great worth that has been found and bought with a price. We are the sheep, once lost, cold, and afraid, now on the warm shoulders of our Shepard who dances with joy. We are the son walking uphill with bricks for feet who sees his father

sprinting from far off. First, unsure of his countenance toward us after all we have done and become, but then, his joy coming into view, we brace for the embrace, then rest under his arm.

There are many other elements of our circumstances that ought to bring us joy. We have hope. We have peace. We are loved by God and His people. We are saved and set apart for good works.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul reflects on the sufferings of our circumstance while recognizing they do not displace the object of our joy, but works to achieve it. *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NIV). The weight of today’s sufferings do not outweigh our blessings in Christ. Our circumstance is eternal. We *ought* to be filled with joy.

We must not take a narrow view of our worldly circumstances. Zoom out. Take in the full picture. We are more than OK. We have experienced pain, but it is passing away. We don’t fear death any more than we fear sleep because we know what the morning brings!

In Advent, we find ourselves waiting, full of hope, and resting under Christ’s arm in peace. This hope and peace is the substance of the circumstance we are grounded in. One day, like the Magi in Luke 2:10, we will come across a star in the sky. But this time, it will not rest over an infant. This light will descend in the same way it went up in Acts 1. And our joy will be made full.

## Questions:

1. How would you describe our circumstance in Christ?
2. We tend to have wandering eyes and feet. What worldly circumstances tend to steal your perspective and joy in Christ?