

Christian Character Building Messages

Finding Joy In the Midst of Life's Struggles

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I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In this series of messages we have been looking at how we can develop the Christian character that is necessary to live successful and productive lives in the here and the now.

In this message today I want to share with you on the subject of finding joy in the midst of life's hardships

James 1:2-4 *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

How many of us really take this verse seriously? We laugh and say, "Yea oh sure uh huh!" But the truth is; if we really desire the liberating power of God's Spirit and kingdom in our lives, we must find joy in life's hardships.

There are a number of things that cause hardship in our lives – things such as sicknesses, family tragedies, out of work, financial difficulties, family problems, major calamities such as earthquakes, floods etc., business failure etc.

Some of these things are a given, but Jesus says, "be of good cheer". He is saying that we must learn how to find joy in the midst of life's hardships, because He has overcome the world.

John 16:33 *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

Hardships and trials are necessary in our lives. They are as follows:

- The Storms of Life Help to Keep Us on Track with God.
- It Takes Hardship for God's Kingdom to Fully Emerge in Our Lives.
- Struggles and Hardships Sift Out the Impurities in Our Lives.

II. HOW TO FIND JOY IN THE MIDST OF HARDSHIP.

With this in mind let's look at some of the kingdom principles of faith as to how we can successfully with joy draw water from the wells of salvation in times of difficulty.

Isaiah 12:2-3 *Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and my song; He also has become my salvation.' "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."*

1. We Must Completely Let Go of the Past.

Philippians 3:13 *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...*

Until I am really free from the past, I will never have the joy that is needed to deal with today's problems and trials.

Paul recognized the weight of the past was a great hindrance to him, so he let it go. We must do the same. There is so much for us to reach forward to with a sense of anticipation and hope, but we must let go of the past before the joy and hope of the future can really settle in.

2. We Must Have a Vision that is Greater than the Struggle.

Proverbs 29:18 *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.*

It is vision that sustains us in the midst of life's hardships, because it gives us the ability to see beyond that which is taking place in our lives momentarily. It enables us not to lose heart in the midst of the problem. As we continue to focus on our vision of what God has in store for us as well as the blessing of eternal bliss we are able to see that whatever we are going through is only a momentary affliction.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

In one of Germany's famous art galleries, a painting called "Cloud Lane" hangs at the end of a long dark hall. It appears at first to be a huge, ugly mass of confused color -- unattractive and foreboding. Upon closer examination, however, you see an innumerable company of angels.

Theodore Cuyler writes, "How often the soul that is frightened by a trial sees nothing but a conglomeration of broken expectations. But if he analyzes the situation from a position of faith – he will soon discover that the cloud is God's wonderful chariot of providence, full of angels of mercy."

- **The example of Joseph - Genesis 37:5-11.**

Joseph is a good example of a person who experienced his share of hardships. His brothers hated him because of his dreams, they sold him into slavery, he was put into prison for something he didn't do and yet in all of this he was able to find joy. The reason was because he had a vision that was greater than any of the struggles he was going through.

Genesis 39:22 *And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.*

Because of his un-waning attitude of joy in the midst of difficulty, Joseph saw his dreams come to fulfillment. Joseph had some choices he had to make. He could have taken on a victim mentality by feeling sorry for himself. He could have gotten bitter towards those who had done him wrong or he could find joy in the difficulty because of the vision that was yet before him.

Genesis 50:20 *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*

3. We Must Focus On The Growth That God Desires To Bring Forth.

God has always desired to use the hardships in our lives to teach us to rely on Him and to use them as an opportunity for growth and maturity. Our growth and maturity comes out of the hard lessons of life, not the easy ones.

Romans 5:3-5 *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

- **Illustration: Handling the Bumps**

There's a story of a man who was driving down a bumpy country road when he saw a bag of cement beside the road. It appeared to have fallen off a delivery truck as it hit one of the bumps in the rough road. Being a person who does not like to see anything wasted, he stopped to pick up the lost bag of cement. When he reached down to pick up this heavy bag, to his surprise, he discovered it was not soft and limber, as he had expected but had solidified into an immovable piece of cement.

Often our lives are like that bag of cement. They take on shapes that were not intended and become hardened in that shape. That bag of cement was meant to become a part of some beautiful structure but, because it did not reach its place of service, it became a useless rock in the form of a bag of cement. God wants to make something beautiful of your life. Don't let this purpose be thwarted by a bump in the road of life.

Often times, when trouble comes, our natural tendency is to focus on self and the problem and to turn inward which only leads to losing our joy. As a result we develop a survival mentality rather than an overcoming mentality. The overcoming mentality is what leads to spiritual growth and maturity in the Lord as well as success in our lives.

4. *We Must Trust In The Lord In All Things.*

Psalms 5:11-12 *But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You. For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous; With favor You will surround him as with a shield.*

Our ability to continually trust in God is a very strong key element in our ability to find joy in the midst of life's hardships, because trust enables us to know deep within our heart and soul that everything is really alright. It enables us not to get anxious.

Psalms 37:3-4 *Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

Philippians 4:4-7 *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your*

gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Psalms 125:1 *Those who trust in the LORD Are like Mount Zion, Which cannot be moved, but abides forever.*

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS.

As we conclude, I want you to know that you can have joy in the midst of life's hardships and that your joy will give you the strength to be an overcomer in all these things.