

SHEER JOY

By

Curtis Dickinson

The promise still holds

It is apparent on every hand that our nation is far down the slippery slope of spiritual, financial, and cultural bankruptcy.

Anarchy already prevails in large sections of our great cities, corruption prevails in government, and both depression and war threaten our nation.

Knowledgeable people are busy trying to fix the blame. But even if we lay a finger on the principal culprits — with proof — so what? God prospers a nation which honors Him by faith in His Son. In this our nation miserably fails.

What we are experiencing is the judgment of God, falling stroke upon stroke, and increasingly so as man continues to ignore His warnings. Just as Nero fiddled while Rome burned, the hedonists of our day continue to seek the “good life” of wealth and pleasure while the sodomists, pornographers, abortionists, drug addicts, criminal politicians and anti-God educators prosper at public expense.

This is not just another temporary aberration in the life of our nation. We are witnessing the disintegration of a civilization, the death-throes of a culture.

Under such conditions, can we believe that Jesus really gives joy? YES, WE CAN, if we believe all the rest of the story and remember some fundamental truths.

First, we must remember: **The purpose of our existence is to be conformed to the image of God.** God created man to be in His own image, and Jesus was the perfect demonstration of that image. He lived under the rule of the decadent Roman Empire and just prior to the judgment upon national Israel. He was bitterly opposed and persecuted. Yet none of the national calamities nor attacks upon His person kept Him from fulfilling the purpose of God, so that He could say, “I always do the things that are pleasing to him,” and scripture could say that He was the “very image” of God’s substance (John 8:29, Heb. 1:3).

Conforming to God’s way is not always easy. It is said of Jesus that He “learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). It wasn’t until He obeyed “even unto death” that He was considered perfect of complete (Heb. 5:9). Obeying God in difficult times helps to accomplish His purpose in us, also.

We can see a thousand things wrong with the world, and there are multitudes of organizations working to set them right, but you cannot build a godly world out of ungodly people. What we must do is look at **ourselves** and see how well we are fulfilling the purpose of God, to be conformed to His image. This is something that all the crime, poverty, evil, and power of the world cannot prevent. It does not depend upon our environment, the government or on any external circumstance. One may be sick, impoverished and imprisoned and still be successful in spiritual growth toward God’s image.

In fact, there is nothing against our own wills that can keep us from obeying God and fulfilling His purpose. He uses our adversities to draw us to Himself and transform

our lives. Even in the worst of times, there is joy in knowing that He is shaping us into the ultimate creatures that fulfill His marvelous and perfect plan.

Second, we must remember: **The only security is in God and not in that which is temporal.** No, not in wealth, nor in institutions, and certainly not in government. We once thought we had justice and freedom safeguarded by the constitution, but the congress, the president, and the courts ignore the constitution. Nothing is more futile than depending on a government that has rejected God and is under His judgment.

As industries fail and great corporations are shaken, millions are fearful of losing jobs and retirement benefits. But the Bible tells us not to place our hopes in false security nor in man (Psa. 146:3, Jer. 17:5, etc.).

Faith in God means that we believe and trust Him to accomplish His will in spite of whatever might stand in the way. Abraham, who by trust in God left the temporal security of tribe and nation, is our example. He had no social security nor corporate retirement program. His security was in God alone, Who said, “Fear not, Abram: I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1).

A dark cloud of fear hangs over our land. Homes are being repossessed, cities are bankrupt, and many people feel that their livelihood is threatened.

But to His disciples Jesus would say, “Don’t be anxious. God takes care of the birds, and aren’t you of much more value than they?...Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:25–33).

Joy is not derived from things. Some of the most miserable people are found among the notoriously wealthy. The most valuable things are those things which, when shared, are not diminished but multiplied, such as love, wisdom, and service. Christ demonstrated that peace and joy come from obeying God and serving others.

To look for security in career, savings, or the government is to live in fear, for all will ultimately fail. But God has said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Joy can be ours when we “sit loose” from all the things of the world. Real security is that which cannot be taken away from us against our will: the presence of God and His promises. “In their presence is fullness of joy” (Psa. 16:11).

Third, we are to remember: **We are the “ekklesia”, the community that is called out from the world.** (Greek, ekklesia — to summon forth. Usually translated “church”).

Jesus came to call out a people for God’s own possession, a people with an agenda totally different from that of the world. It is this difference that is to call attention to Christ and the gospel. “Do all things without murmurings and questionings; that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:14–16).

The gross failure of 20th Century Christianity is that Christians have been trying to build an institution that will be acceptable to the world, where people could be members and still fit in with a non-Christian society. Leaders, striving to make a good “showing in the flesh”, as Paul put it, readily accommodate to the world. Jesus said of His disciples, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:16). But His disciples have built great corporate churches and brought the world into them.

All the world lies under the curse of sin and evil, and the weight of judgment grows day by day. The worsening chaos and violence are exactly what we should expect

to see in a world where man has denied his Creator and refuses to live the way he was created to live. Those who identify with the world and are “of the world”, however loudly they claim Jesus as Lord, will also share in the world’s fear and frustration.

We who identify with Christ are the ekklesia, the “called out” of the world. We are told to “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world,” for “the world passes away...” (I John 2:15, 17). “Be not conformed to this world,” Paul writes (Rom. 12:2). And Jesus said, “because you are not of the world...therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). It is only when we see the world in its true condition — evil and condemned — that we then can see the great significance of God’s gift of His Son to redeem us from it, from our sins and its ultimate consequence of death. We are called out of the world and into a new and different way of life here and a glorious life of immortality in the resurrection. This life is already assured us by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

This plan of God is called the “eternal purpose”, because it never changes and must be fulfilled. When we make His purpose our own, then we are living for a purpose that cannot be defeated against our wills.

This is *sheer joy* which the world cannot give. But neither can it take it away, for it is strictly dependent upon God and our faith in Him through Jesus our Lord.

The promise still holds, for those who have the faith to accept it.

“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11).

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