

## 14 March – the 4th Sunday in Lent (Mothering Sunday)

### JESUS: THE MAN OF JOY (Hebrews 12:1-3)

#### 1 What do you think brings Jesus joy and happiness?

What increases his happiness? We might think of a number of things

- Jesus rejoices when his followers leave everything to follow him (Mk 10:21-23, 29-30).

- He rejoices when a Christian is faithful in a little which prepares them to be faithful in much (Mat 25:21,23).

- He rejoices when his Father reveals spiritual truths to the childlike rather than the intellectually able (Lk 10:21).

And doubtless he rejoices in many other circumstances too.

#### 2 An unexpected response

Believers perhaps instinctively know that Jesus is pleased and happy when they listen to him and obey him. ***But what would you think if it were true that Jesus' heart and joy were increased by our failures and weaknesses?***

#### 3 An illustration

Imagine that a doctor travels into a jungle to provide health care to a tribe with a contagious disease. But as he seeks to provide care, the sick people refuse. They want to take care of themselves and be healed on their own terms. However, a few of them do volunteer to receive the care being freely provided. What does the doctor feel? Joy. This increases to the degree that the sick come to him for healing. That's why he came. But how much more if the sick are not strangers but his own family?

That is how it is when we come to Jesus.

***'He does not get flustered and frustrated when we come to him for fresh forgiveness, for renewed pardon, with distress and need and emptiness ... It's what he came to heal. He went down into the horror of death and plunged out through the other side in order to provide a limitless supply of mercy and grace to his people.'* (p.37)**

Jesus wants us to come to him continually for his grace and mercy because it is who he is. *'He drew near to us in the incarnation so that his joy and ours could rise and fall together – his in giving mercy, ours in receiving it.'* (p.37)

#### **4 Jesus is our heavenly mediator**

He is the one who clears away any reason for us to be unable to enjoy friendship with God; his death cleanses us from our sins which were a barrier between us and God.

Beware of holding back in coming to Jesus out of fear or failure. If we do this, we miss out not only on our own increased comfort and joy, but on HIS increased comfort and joy. *Jesus loves to do this.*

***'When you come to Christ for mercy and love and help in your anguish and perplexity and sinfulness, you are going with the flow of his own deepest wishes, not against them ... Christ's heart is not drained by our coming to him; his heart is filled up all the more by our coming to him.'* (p.38)**

This what Jesus wants more than anything, according to the Scriptures. What is the biblical basis for saying all this? Look at **Heb 12:2** – *"...for the JOY ..."* What joy? What was Jesus waiting for on the other side of the cross? **The joy of seeing his people forgiven.**

#### **5 Jesus as our High-Priest**

Why is the letter to the Hebrews in our Bible? To tell us that Jesus is the High Priest to end all high priests! He has made the final sacrifice and completely covers over all our sins 'to the uttermost, completely, for ever' (**Heb 7:25**).

See how, after Jesus died and rose, he ascended to the *right hand of the throne of God* (**Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12**). Jesus' seating at God's right hand is connected with his work as a priest. The priest in the OT was the bridge between God and us, connecting heaven and earth.

And Jesus did this finally and for ever through his climactic sacrifice of himself, cleansing and purifying, once and for all, everyone who comes to him.

**'It was the joyous anticipation of seeing his people made invincibly clean that sent him through his arrest, death, burial, and resurrection ... When we come to Christ for forgiveness, communing with him despite our sinfulness, we are laying hold of Christ's own deepest longing and joy.'** (p.40)

## **6 We see this in the gospels too**

We see it in eg **Lk 15:7; John 15:11; 17:13**. The Lord wants us to draw strength from his love – but the only ones eligible to do this are sinners in need of undeserved love. *'And he doesn't just want us to be forgiven. He wants US. How does Jesus speak of his own deepest desires? "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me" (John 17:24).'* (p.40)

## **7 Caution in coming to Jesus?**

Do we feel a little reluctant to seek Jesus' mercy in this way. Or even presumptuous. Should we not be a bit more careful or measured in approaching him? *'Would a father with a suffocating child want his child to draw on the oxygen tank in a careful, measured way?'*

We are Christ's body – he is the head, we are his own body parts. How does the head feel about his own flesh? "He nourishes and cherishes it – just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body." (Eph 5:29)

How do we care for an injured body part? We nurse it and protect it: that body part is part of us. *'So with Christ and believers. We are*

part of him. That is why the risen Christ asks Saul, a persecutor of his people, “Why are you persecuting ME?” (Acts 9:4)

‘Jesus Christ is comforted when you draw from the riches of his atoning work, because his own body is getting healed.’ (p.41)

The Message paraphrase of Hebrews 12:1-3

**Do you see what this means – all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we’d better get on with it. Strip down, start running – and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed – that exhilarating finish in and with God – he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s *there*, in the place of honour, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he ploughed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!**

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Heb 12:1-3 say about Jesus? And what does it say about the way we live our lives?
2. What are the main characteristics that comes to your mind when you think of what God is like (his attributes)?
3. When you come to Jesus with your sins, what do you think his reactions are?
4. Do you think about Jesus’ comfort and joy when you come to him with your sins? Which verses describe this?
5. What do you need to bring to Jesus? A recurring sin or something you are struggling with? What is Jesus’ reaction to you doing this?
6. Read Rom 6:1,2. What is Paul warning us against?
7. Read John 15:9-11. What aspect of his joy do you think Jesus is speaking about?
8. What do the three parables of Luke 15 say about heavenly joy?

These studies are based on the book *Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund.