

Melva's Corner

JOY IN MY SOUL!

August 22, 2005

Bible Text: I Peter 1:18

Central Truth: Looking for joy in all the wrong places.

"How shall I describe this generation?" Jesus asked. "With what will I compare them? They are like a group of children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends, 'We played wedding songs, and you weren't happy, so we played funeral songs, but you weren't sad.' For John the Baptist didn't drink wine and he often fasted, and you say, 'He's demon possessed.' And I, the Son of Man, feast and drink, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of the worst sort of sinners!'" (Luke 7:31-34 NLT)

I suppose everyone would like to be happy. We search for joy in so many ways. Often the search is fruitless because we look in the wrong places.

We tend to forget that Christianity was formed in the womb of Judaism. Born into first-century Hebrew culture. Received and interpreted to us by apostles and evangelists who knew Jesus in the context of His Jewishness. Yet most of us know the Christian faith as it has been passed through the vocabulary, culture, and mindset of Greco-Roman culture. So what, you say?

Some of the major "so-whats" are the way the two mindsets look at material things; look at the human body in particular and look at the pleasures of life.

Hebrew thought sees people as "living souls" in their totality. The invisible, spiritual part of a person is not trapped in a body but is made real and functional by means of it. Thus the goal is not to escape or to chastise the body but to direct its energy God-ward.

Pleasure is not wicked. Laughter is God's gift! But that is hardly the way most non-Christians see believers. They see us as a pretty

joyless crowd. Rather prune-faced. And more inclined to scowl than to laugh.

We seem to have worked hard to create that unhealthy — and, I might add, uninviting — image. Saints tend to frown rather than smile. Be austere rather than lovable; rigid and forbidding rather than humane and merciful. What a pity!

Jesus went to parties. He enjoyed life so much that His critics tried to make Him out to be a drunk and a glutton. He had friends. Enjoyed being with people. And made people feel comfortable around Him. I have no problem whatever in seeing Him raise a glass and make a toast that says, “To life”!

A long list of negatives is a poor way to define the gospel. The very idea of "redemption" is less about going to heaven when we die as it is making life here something positive and holy. Paul says Jesus **"gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age."** (Galatians 1:4) Peter reminds us **"that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you."** (1 Peter 1:18)

Steak, baseball, sunsets, music, sex, money — not one is unholy. All are given by God to meet human needs. Directed toward Him, each is both a celebration of His goodness and a participation in His fullness. Not necessarily the act, but its God-ward direction makes it holy.

In a world of wrinkled brows and wringing hands, one has to wonder if the rediscovery of godly joy might be our best advertisement for the faith we profess.

Memory Text:

"For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." (1 Timothy 4:4-5)