

Are you happy? I mean it: Are you truly happy? This is not a test. I wouldn't blame you if you said, "No, I'm not happy. I'm angry about the traffic, the government, and the price of a loaf of bread." I wouldn't blame you at all. This morning, I want to talk about our relationship with God and what it has to do with our happiness whatever our circumstances.

OPENING PRAYER

READ John 16:23b-27

Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. 25 I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

In this passage Jesus talked about prayer. It's hard to miss, for it includes a really big promise. Listen again to what he said, **John 16:23, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."**

How many times have you prayed to win the lottery, or the sweepstakes, or the jackpot at the casino, but your prayers were not answered! And why not? After all God promised! Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised if you have a very long list of unanswered prayers of much greater importance than winning the lottery!

But Jesus said, **"WHATEVER you ask of the Father..., He will give it to you."**

So what gives? **"Whatever"** is a mighty big word. And if Jesus' promise stopped there, we'd certainly have a reason to complain.

But, alas, there is the OTHER verse. Here's a Bible study tip: Interpret Scripture with Scripture. This means we want to look at the whole of Scripture in order to better understand a passage we're struggling with.

Jesus followed His promise to answer your prayers with these words: **John 16:24b: "Ask, and you will receive, that your JOY may be full."**

"Joy": this is the operative word, the word that shapes how the Lord has committed himself to answer our prayers, which is to say, God is going to answer your prayers so that you can be full of JOY!

Now I'm sure you'd be the first one to inform me that you'd find it mighty joyful to win the lottery!

But let's take a look at how the word **"joy"** is used in the Bible. Here's another Bible study tip: When you're comparing verses in the Bible, begin by first looking at everything the one author wrote. In other words, if you have a question about a word, a verse, a teaching in the Gospel of John, don't go looking in Romans for an answer before you dive more deeply into the Gospel of John. In John's Gospel, John the Baptist spoke about joy when he expressed how he felt concerning the ministry of Jesus.

He said, **John 3:29, "the one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, REJOICES greatly at the bridegroom's voice."**

John was talking about his relationship to Jesus as the **"friend of the bridegroom,"** and about the joy he felt in his heart, in his spirit, with the revelation of the Lord's ministry in his time. This joy was a gift directly from God. It's a spiritual joy in one's heart that comes with the presence of God's Spirit and one's thankfulness for salvation.

Jesus talked about joy in another place in the Gospel of John when he explained to the disciples the quality of his ministry to them. He said, **John 15:11: "These things I have spoken to you, that my JOY may be in you, and that your JOY may be full."**

Jesus was homeless and dependent on the charity of others for his physical wellbeing, but he had joy, the joy of heaven. This is the joy he promised to his followers. Nothing more, nothing less.

Jesus never used the word “**joy**” to describe worldly, temporal things such as money, cars, and houses, or even the lottery! Joy is a heavenly word, a spiritual word, a word that describes what comes from the manifestation of God’s saving grace in our lives.

Now let’s look at what St. Paul said about joy. He wrote, **Romans 14:17**, “**For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**”

When the Lord fills our hearts with his joy we experience a foretaste of the life to come in eternity, the Kingdom of God, which is filled with his righteousness, his peace, and his joy.

With this joy, the Lord settles our hearts and gives us peace of mind, which he calls, “shalom.”

This joy is at work when the Lord quiets our souls with his “**still small voice**” (1Kings 19:12), despite the busyness that fills our lives.

This joy is at work when the Lord fills us with hope despite the hopelessness all around us. When the Lord says that you should pray “**that your joy may be full,**” this is what he’s talking about.

Our God is the Lord of hearts, and he desires to fill our hearts with the richness of his joy unto life everlasting.

Friends in Christ, the joy of the Lord is for today. It’s not something reserved for only for heaven. Remember **Galatians 5:22-23** and the fruit of the spirit? The 2nd fruit is “**joy**”—as in “**love, joy, peace,**” etc.—it is a good fruit, indeed, a gift from God we’ve already received with our baptism in water.

In the Gospel, Jesus said, **John 16:27**, “**the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.**”

Jesus was explaining to the disciples why God answered prayers and fills hearts with joy. Was it because they had been faithful? No. Because they had obeyed the Ten Commandments? No. Because they had loved their neighbors as themselves? No. The Father loved them because they had loved and believed in Jesus.

Now if I was God I might be a little bit more demanding. You know, “Give me 20! I wanna see some sweat!” But the Lord Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, has a whole bunch more love and charity than any human being has ever been able to muster.

Jesus said, **John 16:33, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have PEACE. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have OVERCOME THE WORLD.”**

Our Lord overcame the world, though he lived without a home to call his own. Our Lord overcame the world, though he lived day-by-day on other’s contributions. Our Lord overcame the world, though the world hated him and took his life. For his heart was greater than all of the hatred, darkness, and anger in the world, and he wanted to share that heart—a heart filled with joy—with you and me.

Again, Jesus said, **John 16:23-24, “whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.... Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.**

The way we should pray, then, includes two parts: Number one, we pray in Jesus’ name; and, number two, we pray that our joy may be full. That’s it.

This is how I prayed this prayer when I once worked for a very difficult boss who made me miserable: “Dear Lord, I am struggling with my boss. Settle my heart and mind. Let me know your rest, that my joy may be full, in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

And it worked. Whenever I prayed this prayer before I went to work I had no worries. And whenever I didn’t, I was caught up in my boss’ insanity.

I think the most important thing I learned in praying this prayer was that the one who changed was not the object of my stress and frustration. The one who

changed was me. The Lord put his joy in my heart and that was enough to shield me from the darkness in this world.

So what's your situation?

- Do you have a difficult boss? Give them to God in the name of Jesus that your joy may be full.
- Do you have a challenging situation in your family? Give them to God in the name of Jesus that your joy may be full.
- Is your financial situation stressing you out? Give it to God in the name of Jesus that your joy may be full.

Please pray this prayer with me:

Dear Lord,
I give to you my struggles....
Settle my heart and mind.
Let me know your rest,
that my joy may be full,
in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friends in Christ, this week may you be encouraged to believe that God's love for you is unconditional. You have a direct, personal relationship with your Father in heaven.

This week may you know in your heart of hearts that the Spirit of the Living God awaits your prayers and He will answer them all **“that your joy may be full.”**

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.