

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

GREAT BIBLE LESSONS **“The Joy of Christianity”**

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

What a joy and privilege it is to be a Christian. Welcome to our study on the joy of Christianity. In the Book of Philippians, Paul discussed the joy of being a Christian (which makes this a favorite book of many people). Paul outlined four main reasons why Christians can have joy because of Christ and what He has done for us. Philippians 4:4 is very likely the verse that expresses the theme of the entire book. Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!” The setting of the Book of Philippians is one that, to some, might not seem all that joyful. Unfortunately, some Christians do not always express in their lives the joy that they ought to express. Of course, if there was ever a person who would have had reason **not** to be joyful, it was the apostle Paul. In Philippi, he and Silas had been thrown into prison for preaching the Gospel. They were in a dark, deep, dank dungeon. Yet in Acts 16:25 we see that instead of moping and being depressed, they were praying and singing hymns to God, and their fellow prisoners were listening to them. Paul and Silas were the exact opposite of someone who was discouraged. Rather, they were encouraging others through their prayers and songs. Thus, the Book of Philippians tells us how to have real joy in Christ. Hebrews 12:2 teaches us that “Jesus...for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.” Being joyful does not mean that we always have a smile on our face. Instead, it means that we have a deep, abiding knowledge and assurance of the fact that everything will be all right because of God’s care for us. The key word in this book—found sixteen times—is “rejoice” (or “joy”). The psalmist described this joy in Psalm 1:1-2 when he wrote, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord.” How does the Book of Philippians teach us to have real joy?

First we must realize that in order for joy to be ours, Christ must be the **purpose** of our lives. Christ must be what our lives are all about. We will never be happy trying to fulfill our own desires and passions. Until we find something greater than ourselves, we will never find true happiness. Notice Philippians 1:21, where Paul discussed how Christ must be the true purpose of our lives. Paul wrote, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Paul had made up his mind that life was no longer going to be about him. In fact, dying would be a benefit because he had devoted his life to Christ. If we expect to have real joy in this life, we must have complete devotion to the Lord. There is no way we can serve the Lord half-heartedly and be happy. There is no way that we can remain in the background, watch others doing the work of God, and have real joy. Real joy comes through devoting our lives to the cause of Christ. This gives us real purpose, as 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 explains: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” We die to sin and self so that we can live for Jesus. Just as He died for us, we must live daily for Him (1 Cor. 15:31). There are so many people in life who have no real purpose, and who meander through life with no meaning in their lives. They have no idea regarding their origin, and they have

no idea regarding their destiny. To have real joy, we must understand that our purpose in this life is to glorify God and to obey His commandments. Why was man created? What is life all about? In Isaiah 43:7 God said, "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him." We were created to glorify God. In Genesis 1:26, when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image," and then breathed into man the breath of life (Gen. 2:7), we see how God created each one of us so that we could give Him honor and glory as our Creator. Everything we do ought to be about glorifying God. Notice what Paul said about this in 1 Corinthians 10:31—"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Even small things such as eating or drinking must be done in such a way that they glorify God. In Ecclesiastes 9:10 we are told, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might." We must do things the right way to give God the glory. The wise man Solomon had searched for real meaning in life. Apart from God, he came to this conclusion: "Everything is vanity of vanities" and "trying to catch the wind" (Eccl. 1:2; 2:26). But when you include God in the picture, then you see real meaning. In Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Solomon made this profound statement: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." Our duty in life is to give God honor and glory in everything we do. In order for us to do this, we must place ourselves in submission to the authority of God and Christ. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus said that He possessed "all authority." We are told in Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of [by the authority of] the Lord Jesus." It is Christ's words that will judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48). Thus, in order to have real joy, we must have Christ as the purpose of our lives.

If we have Christ as the purpose of our lives, it will mean that we will want to obey Christ each and every day. For Christ to be our purpose in life, we must be willing to obey Him. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15). The two go hand in hand. Jesus appealed to the wicked Jewish leaders of His day by saying, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Hebrews 5:9 tells us that Christ is "the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Look at Ecclesiastes 12:13 once more, and notice the importance of obeying God. Solomon said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandment, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." God does not want us to amend or change His laws. Rather, He simply wants us to obey Him. In 1 Samuel 15 King Saul had made some minor changes (as he saw it) to the law of God so that (as he saw it) he could glorify God. God had told him to utterly destroy the Amalekites, but Saul saved the king and some of the Amalekites' best possessions. When Samuel saw Saul approaching, he asked, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" (vs. 14). In verse 15 we find Saul's reply: "They [the people of Israel] have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." In verse 22 we read Samuel's response: "Has the Lord as great a delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." God did not want their sacrifices. He did not want them offering to Him animals that He had commanded them to kill. God simply wanted them to obey Him. That should be **our** purpose in life. If we are really living for Jesus and obeying His will, this is where true happiness will be found. We will not be trying to deceive the Lord or trick anyone else. True happiness is found in obedience to God. If our purpose in living is Christ, then death is a good thing, just as Paul said in Philippians 1:21—"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

True joy can be found in the fact that if we are really living for Jesus, then we ought to long to die and be with the Lord. Do we think like that today? Are we looking forward to the day we die? I doubt that most people are. But for the child of God, the day of his or her death should be something for which to long. Why? Psalm 115:16 says, "Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His saints." The text of 2 Corinthians 5:1 teaches us, "We know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." One day we will receive the promise of Christ, Who said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (Jn. 14:3). So today, if you do not have real joy in your life, perhaps it is because you are not allowing Christ to be the true purpose of your life.

Second, from Philippians 2 we learn another principle for true joy. Christ must be the **pattern** for our lives. If we are really going to have joy by allowing Christ to serve as the purpose for our lives, then we must pattern our lives after Christ. In Philippians 2:5 Paul wrote, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." What "mind" is Paul discussing? He went on to say that it was Christ,

"who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (vss. 6-8).

Christ had a mind of selflessness and humility—one that put others first. We learn from Romans 15:3 and Romans 12:10 that we are to look out not just for our own interests, but also for the interests of others. Mark 12:30 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." But verse 31 tells us, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus—in selflessness and humility—came to Earth to offer Himself as a Sacrifice for others. He did not live His life for Himself. Rather, He lived to serve others. If we are children of God, that is what our lives ought to be like. In Mark 10:45 Jesus taught us about the attitude we should have as servants when He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." If anyone ever had the right to be served, it was God incarnate—Jesus Christ in the flesh (Who gave up everything to come to Earth and die for us). Yet Christ said that He did **not** come **to be served**, but rather **to serve**. That is the attitude we need to have today. Our selfishness is often what keeps us from having real joy in our lives. There are so many people in this life who are upset with the world, who think they have not gotten out of life what they should have, and who were (as they see it) "dealt a bad hand." As a result, they are sad and bitter. Thus, they never have true joy. And they never will—until they realize that life is not "just about them," but instead is about patterning our actions after the teachings and principles of Jesus. Look at what Christ gave up when He came to Earth. He gave up being one with God. John 1:1 teaches us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus gave that up and came to Earth. Colossians 2:9 teaches us, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Yet Jesus left Heaven and His closeness with God in order to come to Earth. He said in John 10:30, "I and the Father are One." But do you remember what He prayed in John 17:5? He said, "Glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." Christ wanted that closeness and oneness restored. But the fact remains that He gave up that oneness for each one of us. He gave up Heaven—the very place **we** are trying to go. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." Jesus lived in Heaven, but gave it up to come to Earth to live among men. He did not even have a home to call His own. Why? It was so that we

might have the hope of Heaven. Think about how Jesus became a man. The Creator became part of the creation—to save us! Talk about “giving up.” That is what giving up is all about! Jesus not only became a man, but also gave His life for us. He “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). He died “a cursed death” on the cross, as Galatians 3:13 teaches us (“Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”). Yet Jesus was willing to go to the cross and die for each one of us.

When we really have the mind of Christ, there are certain things we will be willing to do because we love the Lord more than anything else. I think that every day if we truly have the life of Christ we will strive to be more like Him. In the Book of Leviticus, God had said to His people, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (19:2). Peter referred to that statement in 1 Peter 1:15 when he said, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.” If we are going to have the mind of Christ, and if we are going to let Christ be the pattern for our lives, then every day we must grow and try to be righteous. Hebrews 12:14 says that without holiness, no one will see God. If we are not a holy people, then we will never see the Father. We are to live “soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Tit. 2:12). We are to always seek the kingdom of God first (Mt. 6:33). Part of having the mind of Christ means that we want to know what the will of Christ is. How can we have the mind of Christ, yet not strive every day to have a better understanding of the Lord’s will? The text of 2 Peter 3:9 teaches us that “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” The only way for us to be in favor with God is for us to study the Scriptures and change our lives where necessary to fit with the Scriptures. We must study to be approved of God. One of the things that is causing severe harm to people’s lives today is biblical ignorance.

But another area in which we could improve by having the mind of Christ is by living in hope of Heaven. One of the things that ought to motivate us to have real joy in our lives is to live in the hope of Heaven. Colossians 3:1-2 teaches us, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” As Christians, we must always follow Jesus.

Third, not only must Christ be the purpose of our lives (Phil. 1) and the pattern of our lives (Phil. 2), but He also must be the **prize** of our lives. What is your goal or prize in this life? What are you trying to attain? Christ needs to be that goal. Notice Philippians 3:12-14, where Paul teaches us about the prize of life.

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 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, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Paul said that he not yet attained to being everything he wanted to be. But he had a prize in mind, which was to attain the mind of Christ so that ultimately Heaven would be his goal. This means that before we can become what God wants us to be, we must forget about our sinful lives before Christ. We must realize that a life of sin will never get us anywhere. All people stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. Christ is the only way for us to have real joy. A lot of people search for prizes in life—such as money, power, possessions, or lusts of the flesh. But there is only one worthwhile prize—to change our lives so that we can live as Jesus lived and die in faithfulness to God so that we can go to Heaven. As Christians, we must never think that we are where we ought to be. Too many Christians

seem to think that they have arrived at where they ought to be, and thus they have stopped concentrating on their lives as Christians. Christianity does not have a retirement system. There is no retirement age. Instead, we are to work to the very end in service of the Lord—in hope of the joy of Heaven. We must always, as newborn babes, desire “the pure milk of the word, that we may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). We must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). In fact, the problems about which Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first epistle were directly related to the fact that some of the Christians there were immature, and thus were acting like babies. This was causing severe problems in the church. As Christians, we need to add to our lives the virtues of which Peter spoke in 2 Peter 1:5-9,

“Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

When we do such things, God will allow us to have a heavenly home—which is where our true home must be. Where is **your** home? You may think that your home is located in the state in which you live. But that is not true, for Paul said in Philippians 3:20-21, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Our citizenship is in Heaven. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom—one to which we should long to go. Christ, therefore, must truly be our prize in life. If anything else is more important to you than making it to Heaven, serving Jesus, and seeking the kingdom first, then you will never find real happiness. In Matthew 6:24 Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” We cannot serve both God and riches. We must put God first if we expect to find true happiness.

Fourth, to find true joy, Christ must be the **power** of our lives. Where do we get the power that keeps us going every day? Whence do we find the energy and desire to serve God? What is our source of power? Paul said in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Paul did not say, “I can do all things in and of myself.” The man who thinks that he can do it all on his own is a foolish person who is destined to fail. But the man who thinks that, with God’s help he can do it, is on the right track. If we place our faith and trust in the Lord, there is nothing that is beyond our capability. Paul said in Acts 27:25, “Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.” An angel of the Lord had appeared to Paul to tell him not to worry because everything would be all right. Even though a shipwreck seemed imminent, and even though people were wondering how they would make it out of the situation, Paul would end up going to Rome. Paul therefore said (by faith in God), “Take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.” That is the attitude we need to have today. It is in our faith and trust in God that we can find real power. We read in 1 John 5:4, “This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” In 1 John 4:4 we are told, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” We need to have the attitude that is expressed in Hebrews 13:5-6, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” We need to trust in the Lord with all our hearts, and “lean not on our own understanding” (Prov. 3:5). That is what it really means to let Christ be the power of our lives. If we allow that to happen, there are certain things that we will naturally do. For example, we will want to “rejoice always”

(1 Thess. 5:16). When Paul said in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always," he could say that because Jesus was his true source of power. Paul did not have to accomplish everything on his own. If we have Christ as the power in our lives, it will cause us not to worry, but to instead turn to God in prayer. In 1 Peter 5:7 we find a passage that teaches us not to worry or give up, but to pray. Peter wrote, "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." That is something about which we can rejoice. God does not want us to worry because He is capable of handling all of our problems and anxieties, since He cares for us. Isn't it wonderful to know that the God of Heaven cares for **you**? In Luke 18:1 Jesus said, "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart." Christians can look up to Heaven and say, "Our Father who art in Heaven." We know that "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jas. 5:16).

Having Christ as the power of our lives also would cause us to want to concentrate on doing holy things in our lives so that we can be the kind of people God wants us to be. The writer of Proverbs said that as a man "thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). If we truly come to understand that Christ is the **purpose** of life, the **pattern** of life, the **prize** of life, and the **power** of life, that will change our entire outlook on life. Regardless of the situations in which we find ourselves, if we are following the principles of the Bible, then we can know that everything will be all right. When we follow biblical principles, we can know that God **will** take care of His own. In Philippians 4:19 Paul said, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." God will take care of all our needs so that we will not have to worry about such things. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus told us to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Today, then, I want to ask you if you are experiencing real joy in life. Or, is your life depressing, discouraging, meaningless, or vain? If so, then I can promise you that if you will let Christ into your life, and if you will give your life to God, your life will have more meaning than you could ever imagine. You must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn. 3:16), repent of those things in your life that are not right so that you turn from sin (Lk. 13:3), confess the name of Jesus (Rom. 10:10), and be baptized in water (Acts 2:38), you can become a faithful child of God. In Acts 2, Peter had preached the first Gospel sermon. Peter said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." The Jews then realized that they had crucified their Savior. Verse 37 says, "They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" Verse 38 contains Peter's reply: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." In Acts 2:41 we learn that "those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." Those people received the Word of God with joy and put it to work in their lives. When they did that, their lives took on real meaning. It is my hope and prayer for you today that you will find true joy and meaning in life by giving your life to Jesus Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE JOY OF CHRISTIANITY”

1. Philippians 4:4 contains what many believe to be the theme of the book. What is it?
2. Where, according to Acts 16, where Paul and Silas while in Philippi?
3. How, according to Acts 16:25, did Paul and Silas react to their unpleasant situation?
4. Hebrews 12:2 describes something that Jesus joyfully did on behalf of each one of us. What was it?
5. The last part of Psalm 1:2 explains how we can be blessed. What does the verse urge us to do?
6. What did Paul mean when he said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain”?
7. According to Isaiah 43:7, for what were we created?
8. According to Ecclesiastes 12:13, what is our duty while on Earth?
9. What does Colossians 3:17 teach us to do while we are here on Earth?
10. What did Jesus tell us to do if we love Him (Jn. 14:15)?
11. What important principle is contained in 1 Samuel 15:22?
12. What wonderful promise to Christians do we find in 2 Corinthians 5:1?
13. What does Philippians 2:5 tell us to do?
14. Paul said in Philippians 3:12-14 that he was “pressing upward” to a certain prize (or goal). What was that prize?
15. What characteristic of Christ is contained in Mark 10:45 that we today should embody in our lives, too?
16. According to Titus 2:12, how are we to live each and every day of our lives?
17. What important principle is contained in Philippians 4:13?
18. What important principle is contained in Matthew 6:24?
19. Colossians 3:1-2 tells us that Christians should be seeking something. What is it?
20. What promise did God make in Hebrews 13:5 to His faithful children?
21. In Philippians 4:13, what did Paul say permitted him to “do all things”?
22. What do 1 Thessalonians 5:16 and Philippians 4:4 have in common?