

Let Us Rejoice

Rick Railston
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If you look at the definition of joy—any dictionary—it basically says it's an emotion that is evoked by well-being or success or good fortune or the prospect of possessing what you want, possessing what you desire. And if you take that definition, "well-being", you know it's good to be here together. And we feel good just about being with God's people. "Success"—we've come through another year! We're in God's Church. We're still here. We're enduring. We've successfully come through a year of trials for many, for most of us. "Good fortune"—blessed by God! The world says "Good fortune" and "fortune" is kind of an interesting word in itself, but blessed by God to be here, to have the health to be here, to be in this beautiful place. And then "possessing what we desire". Well, we desire to be at the Feast. We want to be at the Feast. We want to be with God's people. We want to worship God and praise God.

But since the death of Mr. Armstrong, there have obviously been splits and re-splits in the Church. Many, many have had personal trials in those intervening years. Many, many have had health trials in those intervening years. Physical, mental and emotional pain can take the joy right out of a person's life if we let it! Yes, we have trials, and they cause pain.

Some people are in physical pain. Others are in emotional pain, and some people are in mental pain. That will remove the joy of a human being if we allow it to occur, and I'll have to personally admit to you 2007, 2008, 2009 were the three worst years I have ever had in God's Church in my forty-four plus years in the Church. And far worse than the break-up of Worldwide—far worse! And if we allow it, our joy, because of trials, because of any of these trials that come our way, our joy can be diminished. And for some people joy has been removed. I've had people say, "I don't have any joy anymore," because of trials and tribulations.

Well, let's ask the question—this is all by way of introduction by the way—ask the question: What should bring joy? Because if you ask the average person on the street, "What would bring you the greatest joy?" I bet you fifty percent of them would say, "Winning the lottery." And, of course, that tells you the mindset of most of the people walking up and down the street.

But I did a little study. It didn't take very long, but I did a little study on people who've won the lottery. Let me give you just one example. This is a guy named William Bud Post. And he lives in Pennsylvania and he won \$16.2 million dollars in the Pennsylvania lottery in 1988. And today he lives on social security. Let me quote, he said, "I wish it had never happened. It was a total nightmare!"

And what I found out was that his former girl successfully sued him for her share of the winnings. That wasn't his only lawsuit. His brother was arrested for hiring a hit man to kill him so that he could get a share of the winnings.

Other siblings pestered him endlessly until he agreed to open up a car business and a restaurant in Sarasota, Florida to make them happy. And both of those ventures lost money and strained his relationship with all of those siblings.

He even, Bud Post, even spent time in jail for firing a gun over the head of a bill collector. This is after he won the \$16.2 million by the way! And within just a very short period of time, he'd blown through the \$16.2 million and was a \$1 million in debt. He admitted to carelessness, foolishness, trying to please his family. He had declared bankruptcy and now he lives very quietly on \$450 a month in food stamps. He says, "I'm tired. I'm over sixty-five. I just had a serious operation for a heart aneurysm. Lotteries don't mean anything to me!" he said.

And sure, he had some initial joy—I have no doubt when he found out that he won the lottery—but it didn't last long. And the reason is he had the wrong focus on what really brings joy, the true source of joy. He didn't have a clue of the true source of joy. And in the end for those that look at it the way the world looks at it, joy is going to be hard to come by.

But for us, it's different because if you look in the Bible, if you do a study on the word "joy" or "joyous" or "rejoice" or "joyful", it occurs 374 times that I found in the Bible. I probably missed a few. And so it's obvious that God, as again Greg mentioned in the sermonette, that God wants us to be joyful, as we're going to see, no matter what the circumstances are! The word "rejoice", as he pointed out, in the Greek or the Hebrew—it makes no difference—means to laugh or to be glad or to be merry.

And guess when the first time the word "rejoice" is mentioned in the Bible. Just think for a second. When would you think the first time "rejoice" is mentioned in the Bible? It refers to this very day. Let's go to Leviticus 23 and look at verse 40. The very first time the word "rejoice" is used in the Bible, Leviticus 23 and verse 40, talking about the Feast of Tabernacles, it's interesting that that word would come into play that God would cause it to come into play at this time. Verse 40 of Leviticus 23:

Leviticus 23:40. *And [you] shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; [Notice the commandment] and [you] shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. (KJV)*

That is the first time that this word is used in the Bible and it refers to this time. So we're commanded here today and the next eight days to rejoice. Now Greg read Deuteronomy 16 which said, "Rejoice." It said it twice. "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles to rejoice. Therefore, you shall surely rejoice." So at this fall festival time, it seems necessary for us to focus on this sometimes lost character trait of joy, especially given the trials so many have gone through and

are going through right now. But I'm going to tell you, no matter how bad the circumstances are, no matter the severity of the trials that we go through, we're going to see that there is always a reason to rejoice and to have joy in our lives especially here, now, today!

So to start the Feast, I thought we might be well served if we focused on what we now possess as God's people that should bring joy to each and every one of us here and throughout the Feast and throughout the days to come after we go home. So the title of the sermon, if you want to use a title, is *Let Us Rejoice!* And we're going to discuss reasons for rejoicing. There's Seven Points. That's typical of what I do and Stuart's already grinning at me here. He always gives me a hard time for speaking with points, but that's the way my mind works. I'm sorry.

Point Number One, this is the big one. This is the overarching reason is that:

1. We need to rejoice in who God is and the fact that He does not change.

This we should rejoice in more than anything else of who God is and the fact that He does not change.

We have a God who is love! As I've said before, it's not that He has love. He is love! Let's go to 1 John 4 and we're going to read verses 8 and 16. John says it twice. And we know in the Bible when something is listed twice within a short space, it's done so for emphasis. 1 John 4 verse 8, we're told:

1 John 4:8. *He that [loves] not [knows] not God; for [because] God is love.*
(KJV)

Verse 16:

1 John 4:16. *And we have known and believed the love that God [has] to us. God is love; and he that [dwells] in love [dwells] in God, and God in him.* (KJV)

We have a God who is so totally motivated by love for His children that the whole plan of salvation surrounds children, family. And everything God does is for our benefit. If it's a trial, it's for our ultimate benefit. If it's a problem, it's for our ultimate benefit so that we will learn the lessons we need to learn to be His children for an eternity. And we would have no hope, no hope at all if God was anything other than perfect love. If it was imperfect love or if it was not love at all, we would have no hope, but the prime—I even hate to use the word "characteristic" of God, because it's not a characteristic, it is what He is—is love, because of that we can be assured that everything that happens to us is motivated by His love for us and His desire for us to be His children eternally in His Kingdom. So God is love.

Also, God is a God that is full of compassion, mercy, and longsuffering. If God was not that way, we would have no hope. God is forbearing. "Forbearing" means to put with us. God puts up with our sins—not that they are excused—but

He puts up with them—our wrong attitudes, our whinings, our complainings, our crabbiness, our grumpiness, our faults, our weaknesses. He is forbearing and He gives us time to overcome them.

Look at Psalm 86 and verse 15. If anybody relied on God's mercy and compassion and longsuffering and patience and forbearance, it was David because his sins are right out there for the world to see. Ours are hidden. Ours aren't quite as completely broadcast as David's. So if anybody wanted and understood God's mercy and compassion, it's David. Psalm 86 verse 15, he says:

Psalm 86:15. But [you], O Lord, [are] a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy (KJV)

That is who God is. And again, I'm giving you reasons why we should rejoice here and now. I don't care. It makes no difference if we've lost a job. It makes no difference if we've lost family. It makes no difference if we've lost legs or limbs. God is God and He is a God of Love and He is full of mercy and compassion. And if He was not so, we would have no hope.

God is a God who is—this is so important today—we have a God who is in complete control of everything. God doesn't sleep. Nothing slips through the cracks with God. God knows everything that is going on in the universe, much less this small, tiny little earth in a backwater of a galaxy that's a minor galaxy. God knows everything. Look at Psalm 97 and we're going to read verses 1 and 12. God is in complete control and therefore, we should rejoice in that! Nothing happens without His notice. Psalm 97 verse 1, we are told:

Psalm 97:1. The LORD [reigns]; (KJV)

Now the word "reign" in the Hebrew means to be king, to become king. God reigns as King over all. And because of that we're told:

Psalm 97:1b. let the earth rejoice; (KJV)

Why? Because He is in control! Nothing happens without His notice and that is not according to His plan.

Psalm 97:1 continued. let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. (KJV)

Verse 12:

Psalm 97:12. Rejoice in the [Eternal], [you] righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. (KJV)

God is perfectly righteous. He has complete authority in all things. He is in control of all things. And if we can't rejoice over that, what on earth can we rejoice about?

People get all wiggled out and bent out of shape about what's going on in the world. And the Democrats are doing this and the Republicans are doing that. And the Taliban's over here doing this. All this stuff is going on and people just getting themselves wound up in tiny little knots about it all. And God knows. It's part of His plan. He's letting human beings play out their lusts and their evil schemes on this earth. And He knows completely. So let's understand that and let's realize and rejoice in the fact that God is perfectly righteous and perfectly in control.

We have a God that does not change! Now think about that. What if God halfway through, what if God next week decided "Well, the plan of salvation, I'm going to alter today. And we've got new rules, new commandments, new laws." Or "We're going to do away with them all." If God changed, we would have no hope, but God does not change. Look at James chapter 1 verse 17. James 1 and verse 17, I'll read it out of the NIV. And we're going to focus on the last sentence of that verse. We'll come back to the first sentence in a little bit. James 1 and verse 17 out of the NIV, it tells us:

James 1:17. *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the [the] heavenly lights, (NIV)*

But notice the last part of James 1 and verse 17:

James 1:17b. *who does not change [the NIV says] like shifting shadows. (NIV)*

Now when you think about that, let's just take a tree. You can take any of these beautiful trees out here. And in the summer with the sun overhead, you look at that shadow and it looks like a little stump on the ground. But you go out this afternoon and look at that same tree as we approach the equinox, that shadow could be thirty or forty feet long.

And so what this beautiful analogy here is that God doesn't change like the shifting shadow of that tree, because the tree doesn't change. The tree is the tree, but the shadow changes depending on the angle of the sun. But God is not like that. God never changes. God is the same. God instituted a plan of salvation eons ago, we would say. It has not changed. It is coming to fulfillment. And we should rejoice in that because if God was like a human being, like a king or an emperor, we would have no hope.

The Roman emperor Caligula, who was born in 12 AD not long after Christ walked this earth, he died in 41 AD. He was the great-grandson of Augustus Caesar. He became emperor in AD 37. And he was arguably the most immoral and reprobate of all of the Roman emperors. Now, I'm going to give you one example of his lack of character, but picture yourself as one of his subordinates in his cabinet or one of his generals and look what one would have to go through.

He told the leaders not too long after he became emperor that they must attend a banquet. He was going to have this grand banquet where the husbands and the wives of all his major leaders were present. But what he told them was that at

that banquet, the husbands and wives would have to sexually share themselves with the husbands and wives of the other attendees. And he made rooms where that would happen. And he told them that "You must go to this banquet and you must do this or you're going to die."

Now you can imagine the consternation among the leaders. And some did and some didn't. But they had the banquet and guess what? He didn't show up. But they went ahead and did this reprobate thing. Then afterward, he publicly condemned them for their sexual immorality and had some executed because of that! Now you think about it would be like to serve under a leader like that for an eternity!

Can we not rejoice in the fact that God is God and He is love and He does not change? Notice Hebrews 13 and verse 8, Jesus Christ is the same way. Jesus Christ is the same way! God and Christ have the same spirit the same nature. They are two separate beings, but They are in total unity. Hebrews 13 and verse 8 tells us:

Hebrews 13:8. *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. (KJV)*

And, as I said, we would have no hope, no hope at all if God was anything other than love. And if God changed, we would have no hope at all.

So let's rejoice—summing up this First Point—let's rejoice that God is God! And He is a God of love and He does not change! And that is irrespective of our health. It's irrespective of our job situation. It's irrespective of whatever trial we are going through. Let's keep that in mind.

Point Number Two, another reason to rejoice:

II. We need to rejoice in God's gifts to us.

We just read James 1 and verse 17. Let's go back there and read the first part to emphasize the first part. Because human nature likes to think that "Hey, I've worked for this. I'm due this. It comes from the sweat of my brow or my brilliance or my intelligence," but we're told James 1 and verse 17:

James 1:17. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and [comes] down from the Father of lights, (KJV)*

The place we live, the homes we have, the health we have—all comes from God! We didn't earn any of it. This body, these marvelous bodies that we have, were given to us. It comes from God and not from ourselves or from our abilities. Austin's piano playing ability is in part a gift and in part hard work, but he capitalized on the gift. It comes from God.

Now we are encouraged to rejoice in what God has given us. Let's go to Deuteronomy 26. We're going to read verse 1 and then jump to verse 11 just to get the context. Talking about going into the Promised Land and the Promised

Land was a type of God's Kingdom in that regard, a very weak type in that sense because they failed. They didn't do what God wanted them to do, but we look forward to the Kingdom and that is our Promised Land in a spiritual sense. Deuteronomy 26 verse 1, Moses is reminding, looking back on his life, reminding the Israelites.

Deuteronomy 26:1. *And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God [gives you] for an inheritance, and [possess] it, and [dwell] therein; (KJV)*

Now when they come into the land, notice his commandment to them in verse 11.

Deuteronomy 26:11. *And [you shall] rejoice in every good thing which the LORD [your] God [has] given unto [you], and [what He's given] unto [your] house, [and what He's given unto you], and [what He's given to] the Levite, and the stranger that is among you. (KJV)*

Rejoice in that! And we need to rejoice in the gifts that God has given us.

First of all we need to rejoice in the spiritual gifts. They're far more important even than the physical gifts. But the biggest spiritual gift we have is the promise of eternal life. I mean think about that! How many people that have ever lived have been promised eternal life at this point? And we know ultimately everybody will. But who have been promised eternal life based on their life today?

We won't turn there, but Psalm 13 and verse 5, David says, "My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation." And the gift of salvation, the gift of eternal life is ours for the taking. It's handed to us. It's in our laps. And we need to be grateful for that and rejoice in that. Rejoice in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He paid the penalty. We don't have to pay the penalty. He did it for us.

Rejoice in our calling. You do the math on the number that God has called versus the number of people that have ever lived. We are such a tiny, tiny, miniscule number of people and yet, we're here. And God has blessed us with a calling that is beyond anything any human being could ever hope to dream of!

We need to rejoice in God's holy spirit in us. Now when you think about that, it's a miracle! We're going to have a baptism here at the Feast. And we're asking God to keep His promise of a miracle of His spirit coming and dwelling inside a human being. And for that to have happened and to have had that happen to us in our lives, should we not rejoice in that every day of our lives? That God has given us His very nature, His very spirit? And yet we bop through life and we whine and complain and snivel and cry. And "This didn't work out to my satisfaction," and "This didn't happen the way I wanted." And yet we completely blow off the fact that God and Christ are living in us. And we should rejoice about that!

What about God's Word? The Library of Congress has hundreds of millions of documents, but there is one book in there that tells us how to live life. It's the

only one that's ever been written. God has given us that, but more importantly, He's opened our minds so that when read it, it makes sense! And we can count on it. It's the rock! It's the foundation and we have it!

And we have multiple copies of it! And we have translations and we have Hebrew and Greek that we can investigate it even further, more so than any generation that has ever lived! I mean at the time of Christ, if you wanted to read the Bible, you had to go to the Temple and have somebody unroll a scroll for you almost. Look at that compared to what we have today.

We have His Word. David said in Psalm 119, he said, "I rejoice in your word!" Do we? Do we rejoice in God's Word every day? Do we rejoice that we have a Bible that we can go to every day and read for comfort and advice and counsel and inspiration?

We should rejoice in these spiritual gifts every day of our lives and not take them for granted. And again, it is independent of our health. It's independent of our wealth. It's independent of what the color of our skin is. It's independent of where we live. It's independent of whether we're going through a trial right now or not. We should rejoice in that—spiritual gifts.

What about physical gifts? We're a family. It feels like a family here to me. And we're a big family. Yeah, we got the Cheese Heads, and we got the Texans, and we got the Canadians and all that. And we're all different in that sense, but we're a big family. And we should rejoice in the fact that we have a Church Family, that we have a spiritual family. You can look right next door to the person sitting right next door to you right now and they have the same mind as you do. They have the same goals you do. They have the same morals that you do. They have the same hopes and dreams that you do. What a gift that is!

What about our mates? The love and the companionship! We should be thankful for that gift, those who have mates. Now this year many have lost their mates and that's a sad thing, but they hold dear memories of their mates. And if we have mates, the companionship and the love and just the joy of living together, it's wonderful. Every day wonderful!

Children and grandchildren—I see Harold Lee in the back with a grin this wide because he's got his grandkids wandering around and coming up "Pa Pa" and hanging on his leg and everything. What a joy! What a joy to have that happen.

We have our health. Now granted, some of us are sitting here hurting. Some are recovering from operations and procedures. Some may be facing operations and procedures, but you know as they say, "We can fog a mirror!" We're here. We can breathe. We're taking sustenance. We can think. We can move around. What a joy!

And I grieve for Walter Bond who is the patriarch of the group in Sooke. He's not here because he hurts so bad. And I grieve for Gary Klar who has done yeoman work there as the elder there in Elkhart. And yet, he hurts every day of his life 24/7. And yet, Walter and Gary can rejoice because of everything that we've

talked about. And even though we're in pain and even though we have handicaps and even though we hurt, we can rejoice because it can always be worse. There's always somebody who hurts worse or has something worse than we do. And we can rejoice about that.

So think about what we have here at the Feast and think about what we have at home. One of the Sooke brethren, she said, "When I went up to the room," she said, "I cautiously opened the door because in the past you hear all these glorious descriptions of what the Feast site's going to be like. And you open the door and you're underwhelmed when it opens." And she says, "I wasn't underwhelmed. I was overwhelmed!"

And what a beautiful place this is and looking out and seeing the trees. When the Gaetzmans and Dorothy and I went to check this place out months and months ago, Greg was standing out on the balcony breathing in the mountain air and he said, "This is millennial! This is the way it ought to be! This is millennial!" And it is. We should be thankful for that.

We have rooms here and at home that are warm in the winter and that are cool in summer. We have food that is just a few steps away. Think about that! Prepared food that's a few steps away! We have warm and dry and comfortable beds. Yet, we whine if the bed just isn't quite right, but compared to the rest of the world who sleeps on the ground, we have warm and dry, comfortable beds. We have closets full of clothes. We have multiple automobiles that take us to and fro. And the reality is the average North American lives better today than kings and emperors lived millennia ago. No question about it! We are so blessed!

Look at Ecclesiastes 5 and verse 19. We need to rejoice in these things, these gifts from God. We didn't earn them! We didn't earn a living in the most prosperous nations in the world, but we should rejoice and be thankful. Ecclesiastes 5 and verse 19, I'll read it out of the NIV.

Ecclesiastes 5:19. *Moreover, when God gives any man [or any woman] wealth and possessions, (NIV)*

And compared to the other eighty percent of the world, we are wealthy. We live as kings.

Ecclesiastes 5:19. *Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, (NIV)*

"Enjoy" means to rejoice.

Ecclesiastes 5:19b. *to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. (NIV)*

And indeed, it is a gift from God!

We need to rejoice even in the little things. We need to learn to rejoice in the little things. That first cup of coffee in the morning, for those of you who like coffee—Harold Lee. I'll mention again. He sent us some Long Bottom Coffee from Oregon. And I can remember the first pot that I brewed of the Long Bottom—we're kind of Starbucks fans ourselves—but it was a morning and it was frosty outside and the sun was just coming up. And you take that first sip of coffee; you know life is pretty good! It is pretty good. And what does a cup of coffee cost? And you can rejoice in the little things.

There's a canyon that the Yakima River runs down from Ellensburg to Yakima. It's the Yakima Canyon. And I ride my Harley up and down that canyon, I hope twice a week, and see it, the changing seasons, the changing lights, the different times of day. And I'm rumbling up that canyon on the back of this motorcycle looking at the canyon walls and the streams and the trees and the change of colors this time of year. And you can see pelicans soaring over the river. And you can see bighorn sheep upon the side of the canyon walls.

And when you think of that, you could never create a canyon like that. You could never buy a canyon like that. And yet, rumbling up that canyon is just one of the biggest joys in the world. And it's a gift! It's a gift from God. And it doesn't cost much. You could walk up the canyon. It doesn't cost anything.

Taking joy in little things, kids have learned this. You look at the little kids around last night. You'll see it during the Feast. They take joy in just about everything! They're holding hands and they're talking and they're playing with toys. And the little tiny things, they're taking great joy.

I remember the Parade Magazine a number of years ago had a picture. It was on a hot summer day and it a picture of a lawn with a house kind of out of focus in the background. And it had one of those twirly sprinklers. You know just spraying water—the old sprinklers. And there was little girl. She was probably five or six years old and the photograph captured her in mid-flight. She had her arms splayed out; her legs splayed out and she was jumping over the sprinkler. And she had this look of pure joy on her face. If I was ever to write a dictionary and put a picture next to the word "joy", that would be it. And what does that cost?

And a little kid takes great joy in just so many things. And we, as adults, need to relearn that. We focus, as Greg said, sometimes we focus on the negative. But when you look at it, how many positive things do we have in this life? And human nature is so easy to get spoiled. It's so easy to take things for granted.

So Point Number Two:

II. While we're here at the Feast, let's start relearning how to take joy in all that God has given us.

Take joy in everything, every little thing. We'll walk out there and just take a deep breath and smell the mountain air. Learn to do that! So Point Number Two.

Now Point Number Three:

III. We need to rejoice in keeping God's Law.

Rejoice in keeping God's Law. Why? Because God's Law is self-rewarding. The blessings and the cursings: if you keep God's Law, you will be blessed; if you violate God's Law, you will be cursed. Let's go to Leviticus chapter 26. We call it "The Blessing and Cursing Chapter." We're going to read the first three verses just to set the stage. God's Law is self-rewarding. And God has opened up our mind to see His Law for what it is and given us the power through His holy spirit to obey His Law. Leviticus 26 verse 1:

Leviticus 26:1. *[You] shall make no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall [you] set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God. (KJV)*

Everything starts from that. Don't put anything between God and you. God comes first. Not a man. Not a woman. Not a possession. God comes first.

Verse 2:

Leviticus 26:2. *[You] shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: (KJV)*

Have reverence where the services are held in the sense that we reverence the time. We respect the time in our dress, in our conduct.

It says:

Leviticus 26:2. *[You] shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the [Eternal]. 3) If [you] walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, [to] do them; (KJV)*

Notice verse 4:

Leviticus 26:4. *Then I will give you rain in due season, the land [will] increase [for you], and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. (KJV)*

Several people were remarking in the drive over from the west, you go by these fields and you see the farmers out there just cultivating and reaping the harvests. And we had the apple orchard across from us. They picked the apples three or four days ago. And you see the bins loaded with apples. And you just look at the abundance of this land. And we're doing our best to destroy it, but despite that, look at the abundance of this land that we can be thankful for.

Verse 6:

Leviticus 26:6. *And I will give [you] peace in the land, [if you obey Me] (KJV)*

Verse 9:

Leviticus 26:9. *For I will have respect unto you, [if you obey Me] (KJV)*

Verse 12:

Leviticus 26:12. *And I will walk among you, and [I] will be your God, and [you] shall be my people. (KJV)*

So God's Law brings us joy if we keep it. Why? Because all of a sudden when we keep God's Law we're in harmony with God. We're in sync with God. We're walking side-by-side with God. We're not at cross purposes with God if we keep His Law. And that brings us great joy. And we feel good and we feel right when we say "No" to sin and temptation. We feel ugly and horrible and guilty when we yield to sin and temptation. So when we keep God's Law, we feel clean. We feel joyous because we keep God's Law. So let's understand that.

We're a group I think that is known by the fact that we stress God's love for his children. We're known as a group that stresses love for God and love for the Brethren. That's one of the things that we emphasize. It's so basic. Love God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself. And we try to live that, not just talk about it, but we try to live that.

But the thing that we can't ignore is obedience to God's Law. It's not an either/or thing. Love and then you can go do what you want. That's not what the Bible says. You love God with all your heart. You love your neighbor as yourself and that is the keeping of God's Law. That's the epitome of God's Law. That's the completeness of God's Law. We need to not forget proper Sabbath keeping, Holy Day keeping, tithing—first and second. And as James 1 and verse 27 says, we need to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." Reject the world and its morals and its ways.

We're in Leviticus chapter 26. Let's read verses 14, 15 and the beginning of verse 16. Leviticus 26 verse 14, God says:

Leviticus 26:14. *But [look] if [you] will not [listen to] me, and [if you don't] do all these commandments; 15) And if [you] despise my statutes, or if your [life abhors] my judgments, so that [you] will not do all my commandments, [and] that [you] break my covenant: 16) I will do this unto you; (KJV)*

At the beginning of verse 16 and then He goes on to say what's going to happen. And so we need to understand that God is serious. God is love. God loves His children, but He's serious about keeping His Law and keeping His way. And because we love God with all our heart, we want to keep God's Law. We want to please Him. And because we love our neighbor as ourselves, we want to do good to one another and be kind and gentle to one another as God is to us.

But we can't ignore the fact, the principle we read in Galatians 6 and verse 7. There is a bottom line. God is patient and kind and gentle, but if we continue to

walk contrary to Him, there is an end to that. There is a time. There is a drawing of the line in the sand so to speak. Galatians 6 and verse 7, we are warned:

Galatians 6:7. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man [or a woman sows], that shall he [or she] also reap. (KJV)

And Leviticus 26 says, "It's your choice. You can reap blessings or you can reap cursings." God's not going to wink. God's not going to hide or turn His head from sin from those who know better. He winks at the world now because they are not called. I say "wink". They're not held accountable. But we are held accountable! So it's important, under this Third Point of *Rejoice in Keeping God's Law*, we need to be very careful that we don't diminish or water down God's Law.

Also, this is an aside—I don't know if you've ever thought about it. In Luke 15 we're told that there's great joy in heaven when a sinner repents. Luke 15 verse 10, we won't turn there. There's great joy and the angels of God in heaven if somebody repents. It is astonishing to think that we as human beings can cause God great joy—this Being that has everything, this Being that is ultimate intelligence and wisdom and love and all of that! He has everything. God doesn't need anything, particularly from us. But what He says, "When My children walk in My way," it brings Him great joy! And for this God who has given us everything, isn't it wonderful that we can bring joy to God and the heavenly family—the angels and the elders in heaven—when we say "No" to sin? When we turn our backs on temptation and we walk in harmony with God, I'm just overwhelmed that we have the capability of making God happy! We have the capability of bringing our Father joy.

So Point Number Three:

III. We should quietly rejoice when we do what is right and pleasing to God.

Not toot our own horn. Not blow the trumpet, but rejoice quietly that we're doing what is pleasing to God.

That leads us to the Fourth Area that we can rejoice.

IV. We can rejoice in answered prayer and we can rejoice in deliverance from trials and troubles.

Answered prayer and deliverance! Notice what David said in Psalm 5 and verse 11. Psalm 5 and verse 11, we're told:

Psalm 5:11. But let all those that put their trust in [You] (KJV)

And that should be every one of us!

Psalm 5:11. let all those that put their trust in [You] rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, (KJV)

Why?

Psalm 5:11 continued. because [You defend] them: let them also that love [Your] name be joyful in [You]. (KJV)

Thelma Campbell called not long after we sent out the prayer request. Remember she was told that "If you don't show up for this training session, you're going to be fired." And here she is in her seventies! And she works in health care taking care of people that are disabled and have to stay at home, provides a valuable service to the community, supports herself. She's not on the dole. And yet, this "Pecksniff" person that oversees her told her, "You don't show up tomorrow, you're gone. You're history. You're toast." And so we sent out the prayer request and she went into work the day after Trumpets not knowing. And she reported to the office and the person said with a smile on her face, "Keep working. Everything's fine. Just make up the training schedule later." Now only God can change the hearts and minds of human beings.

And she called, I'm telling you she called and she was so overjoyed. She says, "God is so good to me! God is so kind to me! God has been so great with me. I have...." And then she told me about a time with jury duty where she received favor. And she was so thankful and she was just jumping up and down with joy because God heard her and delivered her. And we need to be thankful for that!

We're in Psalm 5, let's go to chapter 63 and read verse 7. Psalm 63 verse 7, rejoicing in answered prayer, rejoicing in deliverance!

Psalm 63:7: Because [you have] been my help, (KJV)

God is our help!

Psalm 63:7b. therefore in the shadow of [Your] wings will I rejoice. (KJV)

We have quail in our neighborhood and you see these little ones. They're just about that high. They're just running around trying to catch up with mom and she'll put her wings down and they'll all just kind of come in and disappear under her wings for refuge and for safety. And God is drawing this very analogy.

You know ten days ago James Smyda sent me an e-mail saying, "I can't make it." He was so down, had this big abscess and he says, "It takes minimum, minimum of two weeks, but most of the time a month or longer to heal." Sent out the prayer request and within a few days that thing started healing up! And it got better and better and then about four or five days later, he sent an e-mail saying, "I might be able to be there if this keeps going up." We were talking on the phone too. And he's here! Now he comes just to let you know that if you don't see him during services, he's up laying down because sitting for a long period of time aggravates that and it's still not totally healed. So he comes and fellowships, runs up and he's listening right now—"Hi, James"—over the internet and is lying down. And then comes back immediately after and fellowships. So we have to cut James some slack because he's not sitting here.

But we rejoice because God is our help! And that was a miracle. That was an absolute miracle! People say, "God doesn't heal. God doesn't perform miracles anymore." That was a miracle. You prayed. God heard. God answered. God delivered. Thelma Campbell; many, many others!

And if we really are honest with ourselves, we can look back on any day of our life—pick a day—any day of our life! God has answered our prayers. God has taken care of us. He has delivered us from adversity. And some day, we're going to be astonished at God's intervention for prayers that we didn't even utter because we didn't even know. And yet God intervened and took care of us from situations that we were totally unaware of. And God will say, "You, remember that time," and He will probably run at light speed a thing in our head that shows us and He said, "You were here. And this was coming there. And we intervened and took care of you!" We didn't have a clue. We didn't know.

Because in Matthew—we won't turn there—Matthew 6 and verse 8, what does Christ say? He says, "Your Father knows what things you have need of even before you ask." And an intervention occurs.

So Point Number Four is:

IV. We need to rejoice in every answered prayer, large and small.

In every, daily deliverance from Satan and from this world, we can rejoice on that. As I said, it doesn't depend on our income level. It doesn't depend on the color of our skin. It doesn't depend on what part of the country we live in or what country we live in. We can rejoice in that.

That leads us to the Fifth:

V. We can rejoice in the middle of very severe trials.

Many have gone through terrible trials in the last few years—horrible health trials, job trials. We've had certain situations in the Church of God. And it just seems common.

But the fact is we can rejoice in the middle of such trials. How do we do that! How can we rejoice in the middle of a trial, severe trial? I mean Joe Clarke's facing death. Carol Schmidt's facing death right now. How can they rejoice in the middle of such a trial? Not being at the Feast like we are, sitting at home or in a hospital, how can they rejoice?

By focusing on the end reward! It makes everything worthwhile if you focus on the result, the end. Not here, not now.

But we need to have God's vision. We need to have His vision, not our vision. We look at the world through soda straws. And we're looking like this and we can't see squat! And God's looking at eternity like this and He sees from the

beginning to the end. And we need to have more of His vision where we focus on the end result. And that will carry us through any trial, any difficulty we have.

Look at Luke chapter 6. We're going to read verses 20 through 23. When you think about Christ coming to this earth as a man, giving up His divinity and coming to the earth knowing that the end of His physical life how horrible it was going to be, how painful it was going to be, keep that in mind when we read beginning in Luke 6 verse 20:

Luke 6:20. *And he [referring to Jesus Christ] lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, (KJV)*

He's talking to His disciples now.

Luke 6:20b. *Blessed be [you] poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. (KJV)*

"You're poor now, but you're going to have the Kingdom of God."

Luke 6:21. *Blessed [be you] that hunger now: (KJV)*

"Your stomach, you don't have enough to eat!" We don't have that problem but they did and many in the world do. He says, "Blessed are you that you have a knot in your stomach because you're so hungry: you're going to be filled. There will be a time when you will be filled."

Luke 6:21b. *Blessed are ye that weep now: (KJV)*

You know Marie DeSalvo lost her husband. Many others have lost their husbands and they weep at that time. He says, "You're going to weep now, but you shall laugh." There's going to come a time when you laugh.

Verse 22:

Luke 6:22. *Blessed are [you], when men hate you, (KJV)*

And we've had hate—all of us, recently.

Luke 6:22b. *men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and [they] shall reproach you, and cast [you] out ... as evil, for the Son of man's sake (KJV)*

For Christ's sake, trying to do what's right, trying to obey God.

Verse 23, it says—when that happens.... When people are saying horrible things about and just casting stones at you so to speak. Verse 23:

Luke 6:23. *Rejoice [you] in that day [while that is happening], (KJV)*

He says, "In the day that it's happening, I want you to rejoice."

Luke 6:23b. *and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: (KJV)*

The reward is not now. It's not in this life. It is great in heaven.

Luke 6:23 continued. *for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. (KJV)*

Horrible trials, horrible deaths, and yet, they could rejoice in the middle of it!

Look at Hebrews 12 and verse 2, looking at Jesus Christ and what He has been through and the example He's set for us. We can rejoice in the middle of a trial looking at His example. Hebrews 12 verse 2, He says:

Hebrews 12:2. *Looking unto Jesus the author and [the] finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him (KJV)*

Oh, the joy of hanging on a cross? The joy of being scourged? The joy of being spit on and slapped around?

Hebrews 12:2b. *For the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (KJV)*

What got Christ through it was God's spirit in Him and his focus on the end result. But you see we have to understand the now, here, now is not our ultimate goal. The homes, the cars, whatever excites us, that's not the goal. That's not the end result.

Look at John 16 verses 21 and 22. Christ is using the analogy of a woman in labor. And as we approach the end of the time that we have on earth, whether we die or whether Christ returns, it's like labor. There's a lot of pains! Notice what Christ said, John 16 verse 21:

John 16:21. *A woman when she is in travail [has sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she [remembers] no more the anguish [the pain], for joy that a man [or a young girl] is born into the world. 22) And [you] now therefore have sorrow: (KJV)*

There's a lot of sorrow if we focus on it among God's people—trials, tribulations, health problems and so on.

He says:

John 16:22b. *but I will see you again, (KJV)*

He was talking to them and He's saying to us by extension, "I'm going to see you. It's not that far off." He says:

John 16:22 continued. and your heart shall rejoice [in that day when we see Christ], and your joy nobody [can take] from you. (KJV)

Now when you think it's all over and Christ calls us to be with Him, however that happens in detail, you think the relief and the joy and the tears of just relief that this whole thing is all over with that He's finally here. He's here now. He's coming. It's going to be a new world, a new way, a new government, a new Kingdom. You think we might shed some tears of joy? I think so! And what we have to do is keep that in mind while we're going through the trials now. Many have died in pain and misery, but they rejoiced that they would see God in Christ.

And I still to this day remember Betty Tomage. And I've said this example a couple of times. She was a deaconess in Midland, Michigan when I first came into the Church. And later she died of brain cancer. And my brother and I went to see her shortly before she died. And she looked like the Phantom of the Opera. You know where one side of her face looked normal and the other side was all cancerous. And it would scare young children. And the smell in the room was overwhelming—the stench of that. And the room was dark because she couldn't stand light.

And you go into that room and we're kind of bug-eyed thinking "What can we say? What can we do?" And she had a smile on her face and she said, "How are you doing?" Then before we could ask her how she was doing, she started asking how we were doing. And then finally, she said, as many have said, "I'm in God's hands. I'm not worried about it. God's going to take care of me. My future is assured." And we came away a couple hours later elevated and cheered up because of her! Because she was rejoicing in this trial—this horrible trial that we wouldn't wish on anyone!

And so understand that when we go through different trials, God knows what each of his children need in order to be in His Kingdom, what each one of us needs to learn in order to be in His Kingdom. And trials come upon us and we whine and moan and complain when God is saying, "Look, you need to learn this lesson so you can be My eternal child." And yet we're complaining about the lesson we have to learn. And God is saying, "Keep the end result in mind! Keep the goal in mind. The trial you're going through today is going to equip you to be My child for eternity. So don't say 'No' to the trial. Don't whine and complain about the trial. It's a vehicle to get you where I want you to be spiritually."

So we have to understand that. God is far more interested in developing holy righteous character than giving us physical blessings. And there are many protestant churches in the world that preach physical blessings. You know "Obey God. You get physical blessings." And sometimes in God's Church when we have trials, the first thing people think of is "Why me? I must be sinning. Something must be wrong." No, God is trying to teach us lessons that equip us to be His children and helpers in the Kingdom of God. That's all. There are things we have to yet learn and sometimes the only way we learn is through a trial or through a little bit of pain. So let's keep that in mind.

So Point Number Five is:

V. Rejoicing in trials makes no sense to the world. It makes perfect sense to those who understand God's plan. Therefore, we can rejoice in the middle of a trial.

The Sixth Point:

VI. We need to rejoice in what this time symbolizes.

We're here to celebrate the Feast. We're here to look forward to the Kingdom of God. Isaiah 35, let's rejoice in this time. Let's not just think about the food and the drink and the beautiful place, but let's look forward to the day when Isaiah 35 verses 1 through 6 will occur. Isaiah 35 verse 1:

Isaiah 35:1. *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. 2) It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: (KJV)*

So this is an analogy of the land—the earth rejoicing at what's going to happen.

Isaiah 35:2b. *the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the [Eternal], and the excellency of our God. 3) Strengthen [you] the weak hands [during this time], (KJV)*

Ever think of who might be doing that?

Isaiah 35:3b. *Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. (KJV)*

We're going to have an essential part in doing that, but before we're able to do that, we have to learn some lessons. We have to learn some lessons. Verse 4:

Isaiah 35:4. *Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, [Don't fear]: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with recompense; he will come and save you. (KJV)*

Now how can we say that to others if we haven't learned that ourselves? Think about that when you go through a trial.

Verse 5:

Isaiah 35:5. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. 6) Then the lame [shall] leap [like a deer], and the tongue of the dumb [shall] sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. (KJV)*

You see it's all too easy to get caught up in the physical stuff here at the Feast. And I'm not saying we shouldn't. We should rejoice in that—absolutely! But we

can become dominated by the food and the fellowship and the drink and the socializing and all of that and during the Feast, we will forget to think why we're here. We're here to celebrate the coming Kingdom of God. We're here to look forward to a time when the world is made right! We're looking forward to a time when tears and sorrow and hunger and wars and fightings will be eliminated. So we need to remember that.

So Point Number Six, let's understand the future is guaranteed. Joy will break out over the entire earth! And we should have joy now thinking about that, looking forward to that! So:

VI. Let's rejoice in what this time symbolizes.

Last Point—this is the most important one!

VII. Joy is a fruit of God's spirit.

We cannot forget that! It is a fruit of God's spirit. Galatians 5 verse 22, we won't turn there. "The fruit of the spirit is love." And then what is the very next one? It is joy! It is a fruit of God's spirit. Now understand it's not a gift! It's a fruit. There's a difference between a gift and a fruit.

If you look up in any dictionary the definition of the word fruit, it says: "That which originates or comes from something else." It's an effect or it's a result. An apple doesn't come from itself. And apple comes from a tree. And after months and months and months of growth and development and miracles that we don't understand, this tree brings forth an apple. And we pick it and we eat it. That is the fruit. The apple doesn't come from itself.

So let's understand that a fruit takes work. An apple takes a lot of work. There's an orchard right across the street from us and the owner is out there many, many hours doing all that he needs to do to produce a crop. It takes work.

And we need to understand that one measure of the holy spirit in us is the amount of joy we have in our life. Did you ever think about that? It's a litmus test. If we don't have much joy, what does that say about the amount of holy spirit that is in us? On the other hand, if we're joyful and just rejoicing and happy, rejoicing in spiritual gifts, physical gifts, the little things in life, what does that say about the amount of God's spirit in us?

And, as I said earlier, joy is independent of our circumstances. It is independent of our circumstances. We can have joy regardless of our circumstances. And that is because joy comes from Christ in us!

Look at John 15 and verse 11. Christ was telling His disciples, "I'm going to leave. These horrible things are going to happen. And within a few hours, I'm going to be gone." And He's trying to encourage them, but notice what He says in John 15 and verse 11. He says:

John 15:11. These things have I spoken unto you, (KJV)

Now He's summing up what He has been talking to them about on the night He was betrayed. He says, "I've spoken these things unto you for a reason." He says, "That reason is":

John 15:11b. *that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. (KJV)*

So what Christ is saying is that we can have His joy, the joy that He had going through what He did because it is a fruit, a development, a result of God's spirit. Christ had God's spirit without measure. And He's saying, "The Comforter's going to come. My spirit is going to come. And if you exercise that spirit and develop fruit from that spirit, you will have joy in your life." And He's telling us, "Because I'm living in you." So let's think about that! If we don't have enough joy in our lives, maybe we don't have enough Christ in our lives either. So let's think about that.

We know love is outgoing. Mr. Armstrong said, "Love is outgoing concern." He said that so many times! The same is true with joy because I'm telling you we are happiest—this is from personal experience—we are happiest when we are bringing true joy to others. When we look on kids and grandkids and brothers and sisters, wives and children, when we bring them joy, we are most joyful. Joyful is not a selfish thing. We are most joyful when we're bringing joy to others.

Let me give you an example. Let's go to 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and we're going to read verses 19 and 20. Now this is relative to the joy that a minister has, but in principle it applies to everybody. 1 Thessalonians 2 and we're going to read verses 19 and 20. Paul asks the question—the very question we're talking about now. He says, 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 19, he says:

1 Thessalonians 2:19. *For what is our hope, or [our] joy, or [our] crown of rejoicing? (KJV)*

That's a good question. What is our joy? What is the source of our joy? He says:

1 Thessalonians 2:19b. *Are not even [you] in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20) For [you] are our glory and joy. (KJV)*

He's saying, "There is no greater joy for a minister of God than to see the flock walk into the Kingdom of God and have a crown of joy put on everyone's head as part of that flock!" There is no greater joy.

And the same holds true for all of us. There should be no greater joy than bringing joy to others, serving others, and helping others, but above all behaving in a way that leads others into the Kingdom of God. Setting an example brother-to-brother, sister-to-sister setting an example, so that you help your brother or sister or wife or children or grandchildren be in the Kingdom of God.

And do you think when that supper happens and the crown goes on your brother's and sister's head or your children's head or your parent's head that you've had a hand in helping them through some hard times, there is no greater joy than that! So let's understand that joy is a fruit of God's spirit. And here at the Feast, let's exercise that spirit in joy and begin working on having this spiritual fruit of God's spirit.

Now, let's summarize:

As we begin this wonderful Feast, first day of the Feast, in this beautiful place, beautiful mountains, beautiful air, beautiful facility that we have here, beautiful rooms we have, let's remember the command that we read in the very beginning that Greg read during his sermonette. "You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days. You shall rejoice in your Feast." So let's commit during these eight days to growing in joy, learning from the little kids, taking joy in the small things, in the physical things, but especially the spiritual things. Let's take great joy in that.

And let's commit ourselves to providing the most joyous Feast for our brothers and sisters. Greg mentioned that again of what we could do to help others have a joyous Feast. Let's commit ourselves to make the Feast joyful for everybody here.

And then we hope and we pray that Christ, after this is all over, that our time on this earth is over—we don't know when that is going to be; it could be tomorrow for some of us; we don't know—when that time is over, let's look forward to the time when God and Christ will say the following to us. Let's turn then in closing to Matthew 25 and verse 21. And joy is an integral part of Matthew 25 and verse 21. And this should bring us the ultimate joy when we are present and we see God saying this to our brothers and sisters and our moms and dads and our children and grandchildren.

Matthew 25:21. *His lord said unto him, Well done, [you] good and faithful servant: [you have] been faithful over a few things, (KJV)*

And one of those things is God's spirit in us and exercising God's spirit in us.

Matthew 25:21b. *I will make [you] ruler over many things: enter [you] into [What?] the joy of [the] lord. (KJV)*

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