

Sermon A Song Of Joy

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is risen! He is risen indeed! In Christ Jesus, dear friends, Easter is a day of singing! But what kind of song shall we sing? There are many different kinds of songs, you know. There are love songs—quite a few of them in fact. There are songs about misery—we call them “the blues.” There are country songs about trains, pickup trucks, prison and Momma—you either like them or you don't. There are folk songs and patriotic songs and children's songs and church songs that we call hymns. Each song has its own special character. But today calls for an extraordinary song because we are celebrating something extraordinary. Our Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and we have eternal life! And that's worth singing about, so today we will sing a song of joy!

A long, long time ago, a man by the name of Moses sang a song of joy. He sang his song after God had delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and led them safely through the deep waters of the Red Sea. Pursued by their enemies with swords and chariots, they passed between towering walls of water and arrived safely on the other side. Moses had promised his followers, “the Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” And God **had** fought for them. After the Israelites passed through the sea, God withdrew his hand and let the walls of water come crashing down on the heads of their enemies, burying them in a watery tomb.

And so Moses sang a song of joy: He sang, “I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted...the Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God and I will praise him...in your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.” Moses' song is not only a song of joy; it is also a song that is filled with faith. God had told Moses beforehand what he was going to do and then he had done it. So Moses had learned not only that there is a God in heaven but that there is a God who loves his people and will always come to their aid. And so he sang a song of joy.

How about you? Are you singing a song of joy today like Moses did? Does knowing all that God has done for you put a song of joy in your heart or are you singing the blues? Are the woes of this life drowning out your joy? They can, you know. Maybe you're sick of being confined to your house. Maybe you're sick of hearing about the virus. Maybe you're just plain sick. The cares of this world can get us down and we can easily forget what's really important. Only three days after God parted the waters of the Red Sea, the Israelites doubted that he would provide water for them in the wilderness and they began to mutter and grumble against God.

There are lots of things that can turn a person's life into muttering and grumbling. Worry is one of them. That seems to be what happened to Martha who spent so much time worrying about cooking and housecleaning that she couldn't take time to listen to the son of God when he came to her home. Like Martha, we get so bogged down with worrying about the nits and lice of daily living that we start singing a song of self-pity.

Maybe you have to contend with a serious problem in your life—with a medical problem or with chronic pain that no doctor can heal, and it's getting harder and harder to believe that God cares about you or even knows that you are suffering. That can certainly drown out your song of joy.

Maybe the problem is that you're making **yourself** the center of your song of joy rather than God. That's the popular thing to do nowadays—to look to yourself for whatever joy there is to be had. Did you know that Whitney Houston's first megahit, "Learning To Love Yourself Is The Greatest Love Of All," was originally entitled "Learning To Love The Lord Is The Greatest Love Of All?" Her producers knew that a song about loving the Lord would never hit the charts so they changed the "Lord" to "yourself" and it sold in the millions. No surprise there: self-love—otherwise called narcissism—has always been a sugarcoated lie that sells. Just convince yourself that you're loveable and you'll be fine! And if it occurs to you that some of the things you think and say and do are sinful—not to worry! Sin isn't the problem anyway—it's the idea of sin that's the problem. All you need is self-esteem! Learn to love yourself and you can compose your own song of joy. It may feel good and it may sell, but it's a lie. Every single person is born with an innate knowledge of right and wrong and every single person knows that they often do what is wrong rather than what is right. In other words, all of us know down deep that we are sinners. So with all due respect to Whitney Houston's producers, learning to love yourself means learning to love your sins among other things and that's a formula for pathology, not joy.

On the other hand, maybe your problem is that you spend **too much** time worrying about your sinful nature. Whether we're saved or not, we have a sinful nature that clings to us all the days of our lives in this world and it can seem like the toughest and most tenacious enemy we have. It's always with us—poisoning our thoughts, corrupting our language, tempting us to think and say and do things we abhor after we've thought and said and done them. And no matter how much we try to control it, it never gives up—and it often comes out on top. And we end up wondering how god could possibly love sinners like us and we are tempted to sing a song of despair.

So there are those who don't worry at all about their sinful nature and there are those who worry about it all the time. Neither of them can sing a song of joy because they are focused on themselves and not on God.

Now listen closely because I'm going to give you the best advice you've ever gotten—along with the best news you've ever heard. The advice is: **don't give up!** I know it's a tough haul, but keep on trucking **and don't give up.** With their enemies at their back and the sea ahead, there was nothing Israelites could do but depend upon God. Only God could save them from destruction. And he did. In the same way, God is behind you to protect you from your enemies and he goes out in front of you to provide a way through that sea of troubles that frightens you. He hears your groaning. He knows that you feel like you are losing the battle again and again. But you're not losing the battle—as a matter of fact you've already won it. Just as David struck down Goliath and cut off his head, Jesus plowed the fields of hell and crushed the head of satan on the cross. Christ is the victor—not your sinful nature; so no matter how many battles it has won—you've won the war. So don't give up: you're not down in the trenches; whether it feels like it or not you're marching in a victory parade because. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion." God delivered Moses and the children of Israel out of Egyptian darkness and he will deliver you out of whatever darkness lurks in your life. Let that knowledge awaken God's song of joy in your soul and then sing it every day for all you are worth!

But remember: only God can give you a song of joy. That's why Moses' song of joy is all about God and not Moses. That is why he sings, "**The Lord** is my strength and my song, and **He** has become my salvation." If your song is about yourself, sooner or later it will turn into a funeral dirge. But if your song is about God, he will keep you singing forever. All your sins—the ones you committed when you were younger, the ones you committed last week, the ones you committed this morning and the ones you're going to commit this afternoon and next week—God has already forgiven and forgotten them! And what you have in their place is eternal life! The risen Lord Jesus Christ is your song. There is no enemy he has not conquered for you: sin, death, the devil and your own flesh. You have the victory! Christ is your salvation, your faith and your song of joy. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.