

Easter 3 (2026)

Some of you will have sung, perhaps in Vacation Bible School, a little chorus beginning with the words:

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.

Then someone shouts, *where?*

Everyone responds more loudly than ever:
Down in my heart!

These words are good and indeed Biblical. Joy and the Christian life go together like peanut butter and jelly on a sandwich!

But that word needs to be defined.

What passes for joy in today's world is often fleeting and flimsy. It is very much associated with *my* experiences and *my* feelings.

Not so with Biblical joy. It is much more robust. I like the following definition:

“Biblical joy is not a feeling—it’s a foundation. Feelings rise and fall with circumstances, but joy is rooted deeper than what you see, deeper than what you feel. It is the quiet confidence that God is still good when life is not. This kind of joy doesn’t come from perfect situations—it comes from a steady Saviour.”

More than that, this joy, at least in some cases, comes with a burst and a dramatic turnaround.

Such a burst and turnaround was what Jesus in today’s Gospel told the disciples would happen in the future, as He spoke to them just prior to His arrest in the Garden.

And, happen it did on that first Easter Day.

As His followers discovered Jesus alive, their sorrow was turned to joy, beginning with Mary Magdalene.

She went to the tomb early expecting to find a body to anoint with sweet smelling ointment. To her amazement, the rock covering the entrance to the cave where Jesus' body had been placed had been rolled back. More than that, His body was missing.

Later, in a dazed state, she met a man whom she took to be the gardener. It was not until He called her name that she realized that it was Jesus and that He was alive, not as a spirit but as a real corporal being.

This same great turnaround from sorrow to joy took place later that day when the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples (minus Thomas) in the Upper Room. We are told **“they were glad when they saw the Lord.”** Surely, this was an understatement!

Outside the canon of inspired scripture, we find just such a burst and turnaround in C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Susan and Lucy follow Aslan to the stone table for His encounter with the White Witch. Out of view and concealed in the shadows, they remain nearby as the noble lion is cruelly put to death.

At that moment, for Susan and Lucy, things are about as dark as they can be. They have no reason for hope. They are like Mary Magdalene as she made her way to the tomb early on Easter morning clutching her satchel of embalming ointment.

But as night begins to give way to day, something happens. The two children hear a loud noise. The table which held the dead Aslan is broken in two. Then to their amazement, they see the great lion alive.

So great is their joy that they leap on him and cover his golden mane with kisses.

If you want a third example of a dramatic turnaround . . . sorrow turned to joy . . . here is one from the Old Testament. It involves Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel.

Her sorrow is over not being able to conceive and bear her husband a child. In one scene she pours out her heart to God in the Tabernacle at Shiloh. So intense is her prayer that the priest Eli thinks she is drunk.

But after returning home, her sorrow turns to joy when she finds herself with child.

In response, after the birth of Samuel, she lends him to the Lord by bringing him to Eli. At that point, she lifts her voice in a song of praise and thanksgiving, beginning with the words:
“My heart rejoiceth in the Lord.”

All of these – Mary Magdalene and the disciples in the Easter Gospel, Susan and Lucy in *The Lion, Witch and Wardrobe*, and Hannah in the Old Testament – speak of a joy that is more than a momentary flutter of feelings but a gift from God.

This same joy is available today. You and I can have it.

What is the reason for this joy?

The first is the hope and assurance that comes from the resurrection of Jesus.

“Christ is risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept,” writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20.

“Firstfruits” here refers to the first portion of the harvest offered to God in early spring. The sheath of wheat (or barley) the priest holds up

symbolizes the whole harvest that is soon to be gathered in.

In like manner, the resurrection of Jesus speaks of the resurrection of all believers when Jesus comes again. Jesus is the first instalment of this wonderful operation. What happened to Him will happen to them.

So, the first reason for the Christian's joy is that the fear of death has been extracted.

Death is still an enemy, but a conquered one.

Just as David of old defeated the giant Goliath on behalf of the nation of Israel, so David's greater son – Jesus -- has defeated an even greater giant, sin and death, on our behalf. He is our leader and forerunner and guarantee.

Good news, cause for joy! Because of the resurrection of Jesus, there are no final goodbyes for Jesus' followers.

A second reason for joy for the Christian is Jesus' promise never to leave His followers alone.

In the Great Commission recorded in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says: **“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (age).”**

The way He is with us is in and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity.

With the Holy Spirit living in us, the memory of Jesus does not recede into the mist of the past, as with the memory of other great men of history.

No, the Holy Spirit makes Jesus our great contemporary.

In the words of an American Gospel song,
**“He walks and talks with me along life’s
narrow way.”**

In times of danger and perplexity, remember
. . . say it out loud if you need to . . . **“I am not
alone. He walks with me and talks with me. ‘I
can do all things through Christ which
strengthen me’ (Philippians 4:13).”**

A third reason for a Christian’s joy is that
**he or she has been given real work to do in
the present.** Because of which, life is freed
from meaninglessness.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:6 says we are
workers together with God. We are His hands
and feet and voice on earth.

What does the work of God look like? ///
Well, it will differ from person to person, but
know this:

Whether it be preaching from this pulpit, growing food that others might eat, painting pictures that reflect God's truth and beauty, making music that inspires, engaging in public service, caring for children, picking up trash along the road . . . whatever it is . . . if done unto the Lord, it is His work and is capable of giving meaning and purpose and yes joy to life.

Here is a challenge. Each morning when you get up say:

“Here I am Lord reporting for duty. Give me not only my daily bread, but a job to do.”

A bookend to that morning prayer might be this evening prayer that comes out of New Zealand:

**Lord, it is night.
The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.
It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;**

**what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.**

**The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys, new possibilities.**

Joy is part of the Christian's DNA, but this joy is not to be clutched to one's breast and held on to.

The great 19th century London Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote:

“If the only result of our religion is the comfort of our poor little souls, if the beginning and the end of piety is contained within one's self . . . it is a strange thing to be in connection with the unselfish Jesus, and to be the fruit of his gracious Spirit. Surely, Jesus did not come to save us that we might live unto ourselves. He came to save us from selfishness.”

In closing . . .

“I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart to stay” is a good motto for a Christian, but a better one still is: “I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart **to share.**”

And to share we must. Look for opportunities this week, and God will give them.