

## **The Resurrection Means Joy**

Although any good in daily life can bring us joy, Christian joy ultimately comes from something far greater. The resurrection of Jesus means joy, now and forever, and the very accounts of Jesus's resurrection prove this in their tone as well as their content.

### **Joy follows Jesus around.**

Before Jesus even came to earth, He was causing joy (Job 38:7, Psalm 16:11) so it shouldn't be a surprise that His birth was heralded as "good news of great joy" (Luke 2:10). Joy seemed to follow Him around, whether it was shouts of astonished delight as people were healed, or the songs of crowds of children around Him. His critics accused him of being a glutton and drunkard because He went to parties and was the honoured guest at feasts (Matthew 11:19) but for Jesus, these celebrations were signs of what He had come to achieve (Luke 15:10). Joy is part of His ambition for us (John 15:11).

This doesn't mean that He was never serious, angry, or grieved (Isaiah 53:3) but it was also said of Him that "God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness [or joy] beyond your companions" (Psalm 45:7, Hebrews 1:8). He's the happiest person who has ever lived! The Easter weekend brings these two extremes of emotion to their fullest: the suffering and weeping of Friday, and the strange silence of Saturday, and then Sunday!

### **Joy in the resurrection stories.**

Despite the best attempts of the Romans and the priests and Pharisees (Matthew 27:60, 62-66), Jesus broke out of the tomb. Pilate's words and the priests' actions are amusingly ironic. Angels say to the first women to visit the tomb, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5) - this isn't primarily a lofty philosophical question to be asked in disinterested tones but with a funny incredulity.

This atmosphere continues with Jesus Himself on the road to Emmaus when He asks the disciples what has been happening in Jerusalem (Luke 24:18-19), pretends to be walking on so they invite Him for dinner (verse 28), then suddenly reveals Himself to them and disappears (31). The disciples run through the night back to Jerusalem, find the others who are still awake because they've seen Him too, and then He just appears in the room and says "Peace to you!" and they all scream! (Luke 24:33-37). They "disbelieved for joy" (41), barely daring to realise that the most wonderful thing has actually happened.

John's gospel tells us about some of the next stage of resurrection appearances, including Jesus asking seven disciples if they've caught anything when He knows they haven't despite fishing all night (John 21:2-5). He gives them loads of fish, and has got breakfast ready for them (12). That this is the One of whom John writes such exalted tones in 1:1-18, now offering them

breakfast. Meals in the Bible are meant to be celebrations, moments of joy and this one is no exception.

Of course there are moments of great gentle tenderness in these stories as well, there are stern words from Jesus too and a commission that would cost most of His disciples their lives - but the joy here, the sheer humour of God's victory, should not be missed.

The ironies deepen and are inescapable, designed to astonish us and even make us laugh with joy. The might of Rome, the religious fervour of the priests, the schemes of Satan – all worked together to bring about their defeat and Jesus's victory (1 Corinthians 2:8, Acts 3:13-18). A garden, like Eden which was the place of our fall, now becomes the focus of our hope. Angels no longer keep us out (Genesis 3:24) but tell us where to go to find God (Matthew 28:7). All our failures qualify us to receive all His riches and perfection and strength. The last, in fact, are going to be first. The weak and foolish have been chosen to shame the wise and powerful. Life begins at a tomb.

### **Christians are to rejoice.**

The Bible expects Christians to be joyful even amongst all their suffering (1 Peter 1:3-9, Philippians 4:4). This is not a command to cheer up, pull yourself together, find the silver lining; it's about seeing things as they truly are and forever will be, and acting accordingly.

It's also an invitation to become more like Jesus Himself: the oil of gladness He was anointed with, He will give to His people (Isaiah 61:3). This is His very self, His living Spirit, who grows this characteristic of joy in us (Galatians 5:22).

The resurrection of Jesus means joy, now and forever. Sing it, say it, pray it; laugh about it, encourage each other with it, share it; get it before your eyes and in your heart; flavour your meals with it, and your conversations. Sin has been defeated, and death has lost its power; everything sad is going to come untrue, "weeping may [last] for the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalm 30:5). Our God is risen, He reigns, and He offers to make His people breakfast.

### **Joy quotes**

"Sam lay back, and stared with an open mouth, and for a moment, between bewilderment and great joy, he could not [speak]. At last he gasped: 'Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?' 'A great Shadow has departed,' said Gandalf, and then he laughed, and the sound was like music, or water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count. But he himself burst into tears. Then, as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring, and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and laughter welled up – laughing he sprang from his bed ... he waved his hands in the air. 'I feel like spring after winter, and sun on the leaves; and like trumpets and harps and all the songs I have ever known.'" (J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of The Rings*)

"If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)

“Joy is a kind of desirable unrest and excitement about how good things are, and in considering His nature, this happens to God all the time. When you interact with God and grasp His goodness – even amidst the suffering and brokenness of the present world – you experience joy. And in the process of indulging your joy and happiness in Him, you simultaneously increase His presence in you.” (Ben Stevens, adapting Jonathan Edwards, *Why God Created the World*)  
“Holy delight and joy is the great antidote to despair and is a wellspring of genuine gratitude – the kind that starts at our toes and blasts off from our loins and diaphragm through the top of our head, flinging our arms and our eyes and our voice upward toward our good God.” (Dallas Willard)

### **What about joy when we're suffering terribly?**

This message should not be experienced as a burden on those struggling with depression, or in the midst of terrible griefs. Rejoicing in the Lord always does not mean that Christians should not experience other emotions (as Romans 12:15 specifies and the psalms imply with all the emotions they employ). You could use the promise of Colossians 1:11 as a prayer. You might want to read *Rejoicing In Lament* by Todd Billings. The Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast has an episode called “Can’t Steal My Joy: Facing Unexpected Heartbreak – Bekah Bowman” which shares a deeply personal exploration of this. The follow-up episode, “Carrying Grief” continues this discussion.

<https://www.joniandfriends.org/cant-steal-my-joy-facing-unexpected-heartbreak/>

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**Resource on the reliability of the resurrection accounts by Ian Paul:**

<https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/are-the-accounts-of-the-resurrection-contradictory/>

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### **Questions for group discussion**

- Have you ever thought about some aspects of the resurrection stories being quite funny? Why do you think we tend not to think of them in this way?
- Jesus is the happiest person who has ever lived (Psalm 45:7, Hebrews 1:8) – do you think of Him in this way? What can help you understand this about His character?
- Luke didn’t give a great deal of detail about practical ways in which we can respond to this joy – what have you found helps you to rejoice specifically “in the Lord”?
- How can you as a small group help one another rejoice whilst also taking account of the variety of emotions people experience in everyday life (let alone the challenges Covid has brought to us)?