

People of Joy?

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Ever watch joyful people? Eyes twinkle. Smiles crinkle. Laughter erupts. Don't have any experts to verify it, but I've always believed that joyful people have smoother skin with less wrinkles than grouches do. Grouch lines are highly visible on the grouch's forehead and mouth, and they only deepen when grouches get grouchier. Laugh lines, however, disappear when laughter occurs.

Is it possible to be joyful? Today? In this society? With evil lurking around every corner? With cancer and illness and death? With constant political turmoil and lying politicians?

I guess it all depends on your source of joy, doesn't it? Is our joy coming from our temporary existence with its terrible doom and gloom? Or does our joy come from our eternal existence with its terrific destiny and glory? Are we obsessed with worried predictions and wince with fear in our hearts? Or are we possessed with worthy praise and worship with peace in our souls?

We need to take a lesson from Jonah. God said to Jonah: "Go to Ninevah and preach." Now when God says, "Go," He's usually got something joyfully good in mind for someone. However, Jonah choose not to go. He boarded a ship heading away from Ninevah. (Did Jonah forget that it is impossible to hide our actions from God?) Soon, a storm came up and the sailors were throwing stuff overboard trying to lighten the load. Jonah, completely clueless and joyless, went below decks and fell asleep! The captain gathered everyone on board, and God revealed that Jonah just might be their problem. Finally, Jonah realized God was in charge of the storm and requested he be thrown overboard so God would stop the storm and save everyone. They obliged, and Jonah become fish food. Literally.

While he was being digested by this huge fish, Jonah prayed: I cried for help, Lord, and You heard me. You banished me to the sea," etc., etc., etc. (Notice how many times Jonah said, "I," "I," "I." He only mentioned God when he was blaming God for the bad things that had happened to him.) When Jonah promised God he would obey, the fish got a bellyache and vomited Jonah onto the sand. Yuck.

So, Jonah went to Ninevah and preached an eight word sermon: "Forty more days and Ninevah will be overthrown." The people believed, turned from their evil ways, and Ninevah was saved. But Jonah was angry. How dare God save this evil people! How dare they praise and worship God! Jonah could have been joyful with the Ninevites, but he ignored God's compassion and rescue and had himself a temper tantrum because God had not done things Jonah's way.

Romans 15:13 says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him." May that be the prayer of each and every one of us. We are God's people, so let us be people of joy.

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