

New Hope Sermon Weeping for Joy

Introduction

If you have ever faced a huge financial burden, you know the stress this creates. There are the worries of both future and present sustainability. For those in the grip of poverty, there are even the tormenting issues of whether there will be enough money to feed your family or pay your rent. In fact across the globe these issues have led to excruciating decisions to do and be things, legal or not, for the income. Turning to selling drugs, prostitution, servitude, staying in abusive relationships all stem from the desperate need to have money to pay one's bills.

My situation was worlds above that level of poverty and desperation. But Keith threw away his \$1,900.00 hearing aid by mistake last week when he took off his mask, and I had to buy a new hearing aid to replace it. The stress of that unexpected financial cost (equivalent for me to 2 months rent) created palpable stress that ricocheted through my mind and my body. In addition to that, the day I had to pay for the new hearing aid, Keith also had a bad Alzheimer day and was adamant in his refusals to cooperate in his care. Monday August 9 was a very bad, awful day!

So imagine the sense of deliverance and gratitude I felt when our financial burden was lifted through two friends. They sent a gift for the exact amount of my unexpected financial bill.

And I wept.

Wept for joy. And relief. Joy at the amazing gift. Joy that the financial cost was totally reimbursed. Joy that I was loved and cared for so sacrificially by my friends. Joy. Pure joy.



The Cost of our Salvation

It occurred to me that my story is a simple microcosm of what's behind Christian salvation. Everyone in the human race bears the enormous stress of sin. Our guilt and shame has broken our relationship with God and we have a debt to pay before a holy and righteous God. A debt we cannot pay.

John Bunyan in his classic book *The Pilgrim's Progress* pictures this literally as a heavy burden that the main character carries on his shoulders. It was a burden he couldn't shed on his own until he came to the cross of Calvary:

“Just as Christian came up with the Cross, his Burden loosed from off his shoulders and fell from off his back and began to tumble...into the mouth of the Sepulcher where it fell in and I saw it no more....Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, ‘He hath given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death.’ Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the Cross should thus ease him of his Burden. As he stood looking and weeping, three Shining Ones came to him and saluted him with Peace be to thee. The first said to him, Thy sins be forgiven: the second stript him of his Rags and clothed him with Change of Raiment; the third also set a mark in his forehead, and gave him a Roll with a Seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran and that he should give it in at the Celestial Gate. So they went their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy and went out singing” (John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, NY, E.P. Dutton and Sons, 1927, pp. 39-40).

As Romans 3 says ²“This righteousness is given through faith in^[a] Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,^[b] through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.”

Through Christ's sacrifice those who believe in Him are justified – seen by God as though we had never sinned. We are redeemed by his blood – the word redeemed means “to deliver by paying a price.” We are ransomed by his death for us – ransomed means to be bought back, as in buying the freedom of slaves from slavery. Hebrews 9:15 says “He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. “

So, for those who believe in Jesus Christ, the burden is lifted. The burden of that guilt and shame has fallen off our shoulders and it is cast into the sea and remembered by God no more. Instead we are given Christ's righteousness.

Christian salvation is totally a gift of God, beloved. And this should make us weep.

Weep for joy at our deliverance. God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col.1:13). Weep at the relief of our burden from guilt and shame. Weep because of the great love of God who thought all this up. We are free; we are made sons and daughters of the Most High. We have been forgiven. We have been stripped of the dirty clothes of our sinfulness and given Christ's righteousness; we are marked as God's by the promised Holy Spirit; our names are recorded in the Lamb's book of life and we are sealed for eternity.

That's the fullness of the gift we have received. It IS amazing grace.

But I wonder if we have lost our sense of eternal gratitude because of what this gift cost Jesus. I wonder if we have forgotten to weep in gratitude and no longer dance for joy and go on our way light-hearted with singing.

Whenever I think of the great sacrificial gift given to me to repay the cost of the hearing aid, my heart is singing. I have a lightness and joy I never had before. On that note of singing, I want to close with two songs – a classical hymn *O the Deep, deep love of Jesus* and the contemporary song: *The power of Your Love*.

“O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free, rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me. O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best. Tis an ocean vast of blessing; tis a haven sweet of rest.”
(words: Samuel Francis, music: Thomas Williams)

“Lord, I come to You, let my heart be changed, renewed, flowing from the grace that I've found in You. And Lord I've come to know the weaknesses that I see in me will be stripped away by the power of your love. Refrain: Hold me close; let your love surround me. Bring me near, draw me to your side. And as I wait, Ill rise up like the eagle and I will soar with you, your Spirit leads me on in the power of your love.”
(words and music: Geoff Bullock)

Prayer: Lord, forgive us for taking our salvation for granted. Light a fire in our hearts anew and help us weep for joy at Your free salvation. In Your wonderful name. Amen.

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August 18 2021