

Join in the Joy of Jesus

Anticipating that Special Gift in Revival

By Brad Bush

When the English hymn writer Isaac Watts penned the immortal words to the song “Joy to the World,” he was not thinking of Christmas! He was thinking of the consummation of Christ’s Kingdom on earth: “He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness.”

Revivals—these extraordinary movements of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ Himself—are a foretaste of that final consummation of His coming Kingdom of righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The Gift of Joy

Do you know the feeling you get when you give someone a gift you know he or she truly needs or desires?

You’re feeling the joy of giving. Have you ever anticipated the joy you would have by giving that special gift?

In a similar way, when you become the recipient of that kind of gift giving, you’re experiencing the joy of receiving. Praying for revival is asking for the gift that brings joy to Jesus. There is joy in giving God our hearts through prayer, and there is joy in receiving the gift of His

Spirit in revival. But praying for revival also requires understanding the joy that motivated Jesus to endure the cross, motivated His despising the shame, and motivated His taking His rightful place at the right hand of God the Father.

Our journey into the joy of Jesus and prayer for revival begins by realizing that joy is a big deal in the Bible. The words joy, joyful, joyfully and joyously are referenced more than 240 times in Scripture. These words carry the connotation of gladness, delight, pleasure, happiness, and rejoicing. We might think of joy as a deep, settled, satisfying sense of being really glad inside our souls. For believers, this deep, settled joy is an evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence and work in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23).

Joy also characterizes the work of the Holy Spirit in revival. When the Holy Spirit profusely pours Himself out upon God's people, as He was upon Philip in Samaria in Acts 8, what is the result? "There was great joy in that city" (v. 8).

Can you imagine the angelic joy over Samaria! Jesus said, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7).

Jonathan Edwards' description of the effect of the Holy Spirit's outpouring upon Edwards' town of Northampton, Massachusetts, concludes with this description: "In the spring of 1735 the town seemed full of the presence of God, it never was so full of love, nor of joy and yet so full of distress, as it was then."

The Welsh preacher William Williams in 1762 records a testimony regarding the Spirit being poured out upon a listener during a revival: "While you preach the Word of Life, I do my utmost to restrain myself . . . and often cannot stop my tongue from crying out, 'God is good!' . . . While Christ's love burns within me, and I give vent to my spiritual

emotions, it is inevitable that I shout the Lord's praises; I bless and magnify God, I leap and shout for joy in so great a salvation."

Hallmark of Joy

When the Holy Spirit is poured out, the Kingdom of God rapidly advances—through the empowered proclamation of the gospel and through the Spirit-filled lives of His saints. One of the hallmarks of God's Kingdom is—you guessed it—"joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). Stories of revivals and spiritual awakenings delight us today. In a similar way, when Paul and Barnabas stopped by the churches on their way to Jerusalem, their reports of the Holy Spirit's activity "brought great joy to all the brothers" (Acts 15:3, ESV). Earlier, even Jesus was, in essence, jumping for joy when He heard the reports of what His disciples did as the Spirit empowered them (Luke 10:21). The text suggests He actually "twirled around" as He was "full of joy through the Holy Spirit"! But what was the joy set before Jesus that motivated Him so that He "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2, ESV)? What did He anticipate would happen when He took His rightful place beside His Father? And what does this have to do with prayer for revival?

One explicit statement in Scripture answers these questions: Peter proclaimed, "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

This was the joy set before Him! As His first official act as the sovereign Lord, who was made "head over everything for the church" (Eph. 1:22), Jesus received from His Father His divine right to pour out the Holy Spirit on His Church!

This was the moment the Church was literally waiting for! The race He ran resulted in the first revival under the New

Covenant. Pentecost would give the pattern and the proof of the promise of the Spirit for all generations of believers. Can you imagine His joy to see His people move forward with the message and ministry of the gospel in power as He did—and now even more so! “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12, emphasis added). Can you imagine His joy at seeing multitudes now receiving Him as their Lord and Savior through a Spirit-empowered Church? Can you imagine His sheer delight at seeing the love and unity among His people as they worship and serve Him through a Spirit-filled community?

Imagine Jesus crossing the finish line of His earthly race. Imagine the victory laurel placed on His royal brow and the scepter of His dominion placed in His omnipotent hand. I can imagine a conversation between the Son and the Father at that moment:

“Father, now grant me the privilege of pouring out the Spirit upon My people” (based on Luke 3:16; Acts 14-5). “Father, now may I have the joy of pouring out the Gift of the Spirit upon those who believe in Me that they may know Your ‘incomparably great power’?” (based on Eph. 1:19). “Father, I taught them to ask, seek, and knock for this gift of the Spirit. There is no longer delay. The last days have begun. Their faith in Your promise must not be disappointed” (based on Luke 11:9-13; Acts 2:17-20).

And the Father, with utter loyalty and infinite loving honor for His beloved Son, responds, “Yes, My blessed, true and only Son; You have been my faithful Servant (based on Matt. 12:18). Enter now into Your joy. Do now what You have been longing to do, what You have earned the right to do. Receive from Me the promise and pour out the Holy Spirit upon Your inheritance. Do it now and continue to do so until the day of Your return” (based on Acts 2:16-21).

Joy-filled Expectation

Will you join in the joy of Jesus and begin to pray for the outpouring of His Spirit? Oswald Chambers wrote, “The joy that Jesus gives is the result of our disposition being at one with his own disposition.” We can have this same mind that was in Christ Jesus, and pray for the Gift that gave Jesus such joy to give!

Enter into the joy of Jesus and pray for the Spirit to be poured out, that the Church may experience the joy of receiving the reviving influences of the Holy Spirit. Share in what satisfies the Savior’s heart, and pray for such a revival that towns will be “full of the presence of God” as Edwards wrote about. Pray with joy-filled expectation for a revival that raises a “shout for joy in so great a salvation” over our cities as Williams witnessed!

In revival we can sing, “Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!” In revival we can shout, “Let heaven and nature sing.” In revival we can proclaim about the Holy Spirit, “He comes to make His blessings flow.” In the blessings of revival we get a foretaste of that future glory.

Enter into the joy that motivated Jesus. Pray for revival. And every time He sends the Spirit in reviving power, we’ll “repeat the sounding joy”!

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