

MORAVIANS ARE JOYFUL

His grandmother, who was a Pietist, raised Count Zinzendorf, the leader of the Moravians, in Germany. What on earth was a Pietist? After the initial enthusiasm of the Protestant Reformation had cooled, the churches became increasingly cold and rigid. Protestant theology became enmeshed in a series of squabbles around small points of doctrine. Controversies raged around freewill and predestination, the manner and mode of baptism, and the precise manner in which Christ was present during the sacrament of Holy Communion. Pietism was a reaction against this cold, logical, petty approach to the faith. The Pietists were not so much concerned with the finer points of doctrine, as they wanted people to experience their faith. It was largely a movement away from the intellectual elite, which sought to empower the common believer. Lay led Bible study and prayer groups, which met in homes, were encouraged. Jacob Spener, a leader in this movement was a good friend of Zinzendorf's grandmother and he served as the godfather at Zinzendorf's baptism.

His grandmother taught young Zinzendorf to know and love Jesus. He was writing letters to Jesus as a 6 yr. old and sailing them out of a window. Later he was sent to a Pietist school. But, when he grew up, Zinzendorf separated from the Pietists. He felt they were too strict and made their religion much too solemn and gloomy...

Zinzendorf called the Moravians "The Savior's happy people". We see this reflected in the words of our hymns: "Jesus makes my heart rejoice"

"How great the bliss to be a sheep of Jesus"

"Bliss beyond compare, which in Christ I share"

Zinzendorf said the Moravians and the Pietists looked at the cross with different perspectives. For the Pietists, their sins were in the foreground and the cross was in the background. For the Moravians, the cross was in the foreground and their sins were in the background. In his book, 'Power from on High,' John Greenfield tells the story of a Moravian shoemaker who lived and worked in Eastern Russia. In that same region there lived a well-connected and beautiful Countess. She was a sought after dinner and party guest and a witty conversationalist. Yet, in spite of all her advantages, she was plagued with depression. By chance, or perhaps the foresight of God, the shoemaker came to her home to measure her for a pair of custom made shoes. As he went about his work, she was struck by the man's joyful countenance. At last she said, "You seem to be a very happy man." "Yes," said the shoemaker, "I am happy every day." "You are much different from me," replied the countess, "For I am most miserable. Please tell me, sir, what is the secret of your happiness?" "For this I thank my savior," said the shoemaker. "He loves me and forgives my sins and stays with me every day..." With that, he finished his business and left. But his words burned in the heart of the Countess and led her to seek this savior as her own. She put her faith in Jesus and became a powerful witness to the nobles at the court of Alexander II.

As Christians, where does our joy come from? How can we experience true joy? In GALATIANS chapter 5, Paul says that joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. Let us then ask, "How does a fruit grow?" When a tree is healthy it produces fruit. It is not necessary for the tree to work, or attend parties, or watch movies, but the tree produces fruit naturally. In the same way, when we are spiritually healthy, when we stay close to Jesus and are filled with his

Spirit, one of the fruits, which come naturally, is joy. Joy does not come from seeking it! Joy is the fruit of loving and following Jesus....

I believe you already understand that there is a difference between joy and happiness. Happiness comes from the outside but joy comes from the inside. This difference is similar to the difference between outer beauty and inner beauty. Happiness is like outer beauty. It comes from the old English word "hap" which means "chance". Human happiness depends upon the chances of life, which can be changed in a moment. I'm having a good day, so I feel happy, or I am having a bad day so I feel grumpy. It all depends upon what happens to me. Happiness is like the Christmas balls on a tree. They do not grow from the tree but must be placed on the branches from the outside. Joy is like apples on a tree. It grows naturally from the inside.

Why are Christians joyful? How can we find true joy?. Pastor Samuel Shoemaker in a sermon titled, "The Surest mark of a Christian," wrote,

"Why are Christians joyful? Surely not because the world is a perfect enough place to call for no concern on our part. Surely not because we can shut out its anguish from our hearts and be left in peace. And surely not that we are doing so well ourselves that we can settle down in complacency and be satisfied. Where does our joy come from? "Christian joy comes, as I see it, from just one thing, and that is gratitude. And the gratitude arises out of an over-whelming need which has been met by a staggering answer!"

In ROMANS 5:8 the apostle Paul writes, "*But God demonstrates his love for us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" Do you see the staggering answer? The staggering answer is the bloody, sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. What then, is our overwhelming need? It is the need for meaning and purpose in life. It is our need for forgiveness when we fall, and hope for our future. It is our need to find something beyond ourselves. It is our need for God! The 17th century French philosopher Pascal observed that there is a God shaped hole in the human heart. And, people today try to fill that hole with everything else but God. This is like trying to fill a triangle shaped hole with square pieces. It does not work very well....

We Americans have more to make us happy and joyful than any other people who ever lived. But how joyful are we? About thirty years ago there was a hit country song with the title, "*Looking for love in all the wrong places....*" I could paraphrase this to describe our contemporary condition as "Looking for joy in all the wrong places." There is a host of popular books on this subject:

"The joy of cooking..."
"The joy of painting..."
"The joy of baking..."
"The joy of sex..."

We could make up our own list: "The joy of money"
"The joy of shopping"
"The joy of eating"
"The joy of getting a new car"
"The joy of getting a new house"
"The joy of playing bingo"
"The joy of winning the Lotto..."

When we see it listed like that it seems pretty silly, doesn't it. Yet, we continue to spend our time and money looking for joy in all the wrong places!

In JOHN chapter 14, verse 11, Jesus makes this promise to his disciples, "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." In JOHN 10:10, Jesus claims that he came that we may have life and have it more abundantly. When we lived in New York City I saw this joyful and abundant life take root and grow in the lives of our neighbors. In response to a request from the Elders of our church, they wrote:

"Before our walk with the Lord we drank much too often. We found that ninety percent of our friends were fair weather friends. We had no love or concern for each other within our house, and jealous and selfish motives in most of our dealings with each other. We did not go to church, nor Bible study; no praying, praising, or walking with the Lord. We seldom talked or communicated with each other. We lived in a nine room oversized house that we could not afford. We were heavily in debt because we didn't sit down and figure out how to live within our income. We loved worldly goods and spent too much money to keep ourselves entertained and happy.

After Christ came into our lives and our home two years ago we have a new life. Neither of us needs to drink anymore. We now find that ninety-five percent of our friends are Christian brothers and sisters who express love and concern about our well being. Our friends in the church help us move, send us meals when we are sick, and share their time and goods with us. Within our home there is a feeling of love in everything we do...We sold our oversized house and moved into a smaller home that we could afford. We paid off our debts with profits from the sale of the house...We no longer have a "dog eat dog" attitude in our association with other people... It is no longer necessary to spend large sums of money to be happy. We are happy with each other and the blessings of the Lord."

Brothers and sisters, isn't this what our world desperately needs? Have you discovered this kind of joy in your own life? Are you willing to share this discovery with others who need it?

*"Jesus is my joy, therefore blest am I,
O His mercy is unbounded,
All my hope on Him is founded,
Jesus is my joy, therefore blest am I."*

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