



THE JOY OF THE LORD
PART TWO

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30 OCTOBER 2005

In the first message of this series, Oscar Sanchez shared on the parable of the two sons. The younger son wasted his inheritance in riotous living, later returning to his father. His father rejoiced when he returned, and threw a party for him. Oscar shared that God loves to celebrate, because there is always a party in heaven when someone repents. God rejoices when any sinner returns to him. He is not a somber God.

But Oscar focused on the older son, and we'll now come back to him. *Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. 29And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: 30But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. 31And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 32It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.* (Luke 15:25-32)

Really, this older brother was the prodigal son. Even though his whole life he'd been at home, obeying his father, working hard in the fields, his heart was closed towards his father. He proved himself to be full of anger and envy. Meanwhile, although the brother who left spent everything and sinned greatly, in the end he came back. He opened his heart to the father unconditionally.

When we were preaching on the street yesterday, I spoke with a well-educated 19 year old. He told me, "I haven't accepted Christ. I've been to church two or three times, but I need to sort my life out before I can attend church. I need to stop sinning and then I'll be able to go to church and accept Christ." So I said to him, "Listen, when you're ill, what do you do? Don't you go to the doctor? So he can prescribe something to make you better?" "Yes, of course," he replied. "Well," I said, "wouldn't it be strange if you fell ill and said, 'I need to wait until I'm better before I go to the doctor.' That would be a really weird way of looking at things." "Ah," he replied, "now I understand your point." I continued, "Listen, Jesus is the only doctor who can cure us of our illness, our slavery to sin. We need to come to him just as we are."

Then I shared one of Jesus' parables with him, about the two men who went to the temple to pray. A Pharisee, who was a very religious man; and a publican, who was 'very sinful.' While the publican stayed at the back of the temple, the Pharisee stood at the front, lifted his eyes to heaven and said to God, "Thank you, Lord, that I am such a righteous man, so holy; that I pray every day, that I fast, that I tithe, and so on. And thank you that I'm not like that man behind me." I think that in his heart he saw the publican as a piece of rubbish. And Jesus said that the other man, the 'sinner', didn't even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat on his chest and asked God, "Have mercy on me. I'm a sinner." And Jesus asked, "Which of the two left there justified before God?" Well, we know that it was the publican (Luke 18:9-14.) And this older brother was like the Pharisee. He'd worked hard but didn't want to open to open his heart and rejoice with his father over his brother's return.

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In fact, he'd never been able to rejoice in his father's love. He'd served his father, he'd worked hard, but he'd never chosen to receive and enjoy his father's love. Never. And he was upset because he felt his father was unjust. He got very angry with his father for throwing a party for the other son. But the father wasn't unjust. His son was angry basically because he couldn't see the blessings that were his in his father's house. He didn't take advantage of them.

**FORGET NOT
ALL HIS
BENEFITS**

At times we lack joy. Why? Because at times we also don't take advantage of who God is, of what He's done for us, of the benefits that He's given us. **At times we don't take advantage of the relationship that we have with the Father.** For this reason we lack joy. And so, we come to feel disappointed and discontent with God in certain areas of our lives. **And we complain, instead of rejoicing in Him.** Isn't that true? Have you experienced that? I have. At times I realize that in certain areas I'm not content in God. I'm disappointed with Him. Because I'm not seeing, considering, and appreciating God, nor what He's given me and what He's done in me.

What medicine can we take to cure us of this lack of joy? The Bible speaks of a powerful medicine. *Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.* (Psalm 103:2) Elsewhere the Bible tells us that good news brings health to the bones (Proverbs 15:30.) If we recall the benefits that God has given us, we'll find the joy of the Lord becoming more real in our lives. Amen?

So let's begin to recall those benefits now! What benefits has God given us? The Bible says that every good gift and every perfect gift that is ours, has come from God the Father (James 1:17.) I have a list of some of these benefits, but I'm not giving it to you yet. I want you to stop for a moment, right now, and write down or think of a benefit that God has given you. Something that God has done for you or that He's given you; some benefit in your life.

Ready?

Good. Here are some benefits that people in Ministerio La Fuente mentioned when asked to do the same thing.

"*Salvation.*" That's an enormous benefit, isn't it? "*Peace with God.*" "*Jesus Himself.*" "*The Holy Spirit, who makes what the Bible says real in my life.*" "*Life itself. It's a gift from God.*" "*He's always ready to receive us and guide us, and so we have hope.*" That's a huge benefit. Most people don't have hope. But thank God that as children of God, we do. "*God's love.*" He loves us. That's a benefit, isn't it! He's not a hateful or uncaring God; He's a God of love who understands us even when no-one else does. "*There are so many benefits, but one that stands out to me in my walk with God is that when I go through difficult times, I don't give up, but I always say, 'Let's go to God, because all things will work out for our good,' so I've learnt to be patient in the Lord, so that however tough the situation, I hope and trust in Him continually.*" "*Good health.*" "*One of the benefits I feel God has given me is having a heart that's open to him. Even though at times I pull back, at least I have something of that openness towards him.*" The Word says that God is the one who works in us both to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13.) If we have a desire to follow Him, even that, even our faith, is something that God has given us. "*He looks after us.*" Excellent. I believe when we reach heaven God will show us times that He took care of us without us even realizing it. "*Faith.*" "*The things that God gives us to enjoy.*"

There's more, isn't there? Heaven awaits us. Everything that heaven represents. As we've shared various times, heaven is not a place where we will be disembodied spirits, floating in the air. We'll have bodies, we'll eat, there will be a wedding feast, a party, when we marry Jesus; we will chat, we'll enjoy the animals... All these things will be in heaven. In fact the Bible speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. Many times we say, "When I die I'm going to heaven." That's only partly true. We'll dwell in both the new heaven and the new earth. I imagine that the new earth is like this earth, but without the problems.

Benefits, benefits, and more benefits. New heaven, new earth... and God's forgiveness. As we know, in many religions there are people who punish themselves severely, trying to achieve a sense of being forgiven. But we don't have to do that, thank God, because His forgiveness is a benefit, a free gift of God.

He's set us free from the slavery of sin. Some people say, "I would rather keep sinning, it's so enjoyable." But these people are slaves. It's like eating a candy that is sweet on the outside but inside is very bitter. We are free from the slavery of sin. I don't know about you, but my sin used to enslave me. I wasn't free until Christ set me free.

Someone mentioned peace with God. Being able to wake up in the morning and know that whatever happened yesterday, and whatever will happen today, I have peace with God; not by my own efforts and works, but through Jesus Christ; a peace that no-one can steal from me. That is an enormous benefit. We have peace with God!

The Bible says we can even rejoice in our trials, because we know that through them God is working something good in us; most of all patience and hope. And even when God is disciplining us and we can't rejoice, because it hurts, deep down we can walk in joy knowing that "at least He loves me and that's why He's disciplining me."

There are so many benefits! And we need to enjoy them. At times we need to think and meditate on them. "God, I have peace with You!" That's worth so much! "God, you've forgiven me!" "God, you have an eternal heavenly home prepared for me!" "God, you've given me relatives or friends who I love!" "You've blessed my life!" These are benefits, and like it says in Psalm 103:2: *Forget not all His benefits.* At times when my son is complaining about something, I say to him, "OK, but let's look at the benefits you have in your life," to give him another perspective; and suddenly the complaints don't carry weight anymore. They're just not so important. "Oh God, I feel lousy today. But I'm forgiven! I have eternal life! I have Your love, I have hope!" Amen?

Let's read Psalm 103, which has a lot to do with what I've been sharing with you.

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

*2Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not **all** his benefits:*

*3Who forgiveth **all** thine iniquities; who healeth **all** thy diseases;*

4Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

*5Who **satisfieth** thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

6The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

7He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

*8The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and **plenteous** in mercy.*

9He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. 14For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

15As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

16For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

17But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

**BENEFITS,
BENEFITS, AND
MORE
BENEFITS.**

18 *To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.*

19 *The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.*

20 *Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.*

21 *Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.*

22 *Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.*

What we just read is a list of benefits that are ours in God our Father.

Do you desire to walk in holiness? I do. At times when we think of holiness, we think of not smiling, of the need to be very serious. But let's see what God's word says about that.

*And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; **mourn not**, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: **neither be ye sorry**; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. 11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; **neither be ye grieved.** (Nehemiah 8:9-11)*

Three times the Nehemiah and the Levites tell the people not to be sad! And the reason they gave? **Because** the day was holy! And because the joy of the Lord meant strength for God's people.

*And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and **to make great mirth**, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them. (Nehemiah 8:12)* The people did what? **They made great mirth!** Why? Because they understood the words that were declared to them. Do you understand what we are teaching? The joy of the Lord is our strength and He wants us to be joyful in Him, like these people who went to enjoy their food and drink, their time together sharing with one another.

And the rich food that is ours to eat is the knowledge that we have peace with God and can therefore know Him. It is remembering and thinking on the benefits that He has given us, and enjoying them. It is Jesus Christ Himself. Basically, joy means satisfaction in God. We must find our satisfaction in Him.

I'm going to leave you for now with one more verse.

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. (Philippians 4:4) Paul repeats it again, twice, like Nehemiah repeated three times to the people that they shouldn't be sad. He says twice, "Rejoice in the Lord." Always. 'Always' means we should be joyful in the Lord all the time. As we think on the benefits He's given us, yes, it is possible to live in joy and therefore walk in the strength that this joy brings to us.

Do we want to be strong or weak in the Lord? Strong. So we're going to rejoice in the Lord. Please, during this week, take time to remember and think on the benefits that God has given you; and on the greatness of His presence in your life as your Father. Enjoy those benefits! Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say, Rejoice!

**THE PEOPLE
WENT THEIR
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"IF ANYONE THIRST, LET THEM COME TO ME AND DRINK"- JESUS
(JOHN 7:37)