

## July 5, 2009

### Jesus, our Joy

*Scripture: John 2:1-11; Psalm 37:4,5.*  
**Pastor Ron Harris**

John the Baptist was an ascetic. By withdrawing from normal life he brought people face to face with their sin so that they would repent before God. His baptism was a baptism of repentance. He prepared the way for the Messiah by turning people's hearts to God. **Jesus however was quite different.** Jesus only spoke harshly about the conviction of sin to the self righteous religious elite. **Jesus joined in the festivities.** He turned people's hearts towards God by his love shown in his teachings and miracles, and primarily by going to the cross for us. However both received criticism. Matthew's gospel says it well; *Mt 11:16-19* "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." ' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

Some years ago many of us were helped by the book, "The Jesus I Never Knew." (Phil Yantis) This book opened to many a new, positive and exciting Jesus that we had somehow missed. We find it hard to believe that God is for us, that Jesus really forgives our sin, and that joy is the second fruit of the Spirit of Jesus. We either see only the righteous justice of God that creates distance from us, or we see him only as a God of love who forgives and reduce him to a buddy. We are a people who struggle to find balance between extremes. I think **today's scripture challenges us to see Christ in a new light. We meet Jesus at a celebration, a party,** and of all things he helps out the embarrassed host by turning water into wine. I remember one dear saint who in a conversation about alcohol made the statement, "If Jesus turned water into wine, then he made a mistake!" We may not all have her struggle yet I think many of us have trouble believing Jesus could enjoy a party.

**Do you have problem with a Happy God?** Good question, many do. We have probably been asked, "How can there be a God of Love when innocent suffer and die", or "where is the God of love in such a world of injustice?" We face devastating poverty in India. Many of you have seen it. It is the hardest reality we face in life. As much as we dislike this question about God and suffering it is not a bad question. I remember one solemn believer convicting me by asking; "How can our Loving Father God be happy in the face of the terrible ways we mistreat each other?" A happy Jesus can seem sacrilegious. Perhaps this is why the Old Testament emphasizes a stern picture of the God of Justice. But Jesus, the Messiah, made it possible to balance God's justice with his mercy. When we really understand Jesus, we can see him as the source of Joy. Jesus did face this same question; *Mt 26:6-13* *While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, <sup>7</sup> a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive*

perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. <sup>9</sup> "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>11</sup> The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. <sup>12</sup> When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. <sup>13</sup> I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." John's gospel provides interesting insight; <sup>Jn 12:4-8</sup> **But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected,** "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." Here Judas is identified as the one appearing too godly to be able to enjoy the moment. He really had selfish motives for appearing spiritual. **This convicts me when I live my spirituality under the shadow of sin rather than the light of Life.**

John's disciples also struggled with the carefree attitude of Jesus. <sup>Mt 9:14-17</sup> Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." Because of the presence of Jesus the disciples did not mourn. **Jesus is the light of Life. He is the one who makes all the difference, he brings lasting joy into a suffering and struggling world.** The kingdom of God was present in him, **he is good news!** <sup>Mk 1:14,15</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

**How could Jesus make such a difference?** Simply said, **Jesus paid the price for our sin!** There is an old theological term, 'propitiate,' which means to **appease or conciliate.** **Jesus is seen at the 'propitiation' for our sin.** Recently this has not been a popular theological idea and being an archaic word is seldom used. Yet propitiation recognizes that for God to be righteous he cannot just turn a blind eye to the suffering in this world. **Propitiation affirms that in the cross something was happening for God as well as what was happening to our sin.** If God is a loving Father he must seek justice just as an earthly father seeks for justice among his children. He would not love if he could simply ignore the way we destroy each other. Anyone who has suffered knows this. **Propitiation suggests that the cross deals with God's righteous anger as well as with our sin.** However since propitiation is now an archaic word modern versions use 'making

atonement.” Yet, ‘atonement’ can miss that in Christ God was dealing with his own unresolved wrath as well as with our sin. Notice in the NIV when there is a footnote for ‘making atonement.” *1 John 4<sup>9,10</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an ‘atoning sacrifice’ for our sins. (propitiation, see footnote ‘or as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sins’) Romans 3 is another important passage; <sup>23-26</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a ‘sacrifice of atonement,’ through faith in his blood. (see footnote; Or ‘as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin’) **He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.** This is really good news! <sup>1Jn 2:1,2</sup> *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the ‘atoning sacrifice’ for our sins (‘the one who turns away God’s wrath, taking away our sins’), and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* God needed to take care of his own loving wrath as well as our sin and he did both in Christ. He paid the price. *1Peter 1<sup>18-20</sup> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.* Jesus was not a last minute idea of God’s, he had planned for the Messiah even before the creation of the world. **We have very little understanding of what it cost God to take on himself in Christ the sin, despair of the world, and his own righteous anger.** This is grace, as when starving parents give their food to their children. Paul simply says; *...God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, nor counting men’s trespasses against them....” (2 Corinthians 5:19) RSV.**

One Scholar puts it this way. “At the cross God expresses his holy wrath against himself! And then cries out; “It is finished.” Therefore when the Holy God accepts us just as we are, God is not condoning our sin. When the holy God takes us into the family just as we are, God is not mocking us or ignoring moral accountability. When the holy God embraces us in Jesus with both arms, God is not compromising his divine character. God did what God’s character demands at the cross. All that needs to be done has been done by God to God. At the cross (as John Stott puts it) God himself saved us from himself. Or as I want to put it, **at the cross God saves us from himself for himself.**” (Darrell W. Johnson, “It is Finished.”pg.24) **Who could have ever imagined such a God! All Praise be unto him forever and ever!** He is the answer to the question, “how a loving God can see the innocent of this world suffer and die.” The frequency of this question is a sign that we often trivialize the cross and miss its full meaning.

Christ makes it possible to; <sup>Ro 12:15</sup> *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* In him we know that our worldly mourning is only for a time, so

we have hope even in our sadness. We have seen in Christ the justice of God, and we thrill to know that we can be part of introducing his kingdom to our world. **In Christ we know that one day the suffering will end, and that he desires to be with all his children. We know the bridegroom, in fact Christ is in us, he is our hope of glory. So we are called; to be joyful always, to rejoice in the Lord always. I can believe in a good God, even when my world goes wrong. I know he cares, he has paid the debt and in his presence, whatever I may face, I can find Joy!**

In India we met with the students from ACTC Seminary in a Roman Catholic retreat center. On the wall was a huge picture of Jesus and his followers. It was a happy picture as they made music under a great Banyan tree symbolic of the tree of life. Is this the Jesus you know? Is life with him a celebration? Do we have the confidence that in his presence nothing in life or death can take away his love, our joy, our hope, our strength? That is what God wants for us. *Ps 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. He is a loving yet just God; that is what the cross was all about. In Jesus we have a happy God!*