**JOY** dkm July 2021
Have you heard the word ‘joy’ lately? How many times have you read the word ‘joy’ in the newspaper, in an email, or in any social media? If you have read your Bible you will have heard the word ‘joy’, especially if you have sung the psalms. The word ‘joy’ is found over 1400 times in the Bible. For a book that some think is all about laws and about death, this is a surprise. The Bible is first and foremost about love, God’s love, but it is also about joy, about having the joy of the Lord in our hearts. Such joy is not known by those who do not know Jesus, which is why this word is heard so little today. We hear the word ‘gay’ all the time since it was hijacked by a special group of people, but they left the word ‘joy’ behind.

Do we have to go to the dictionary for a definition of ‘joy’? I looked and found this- ‘ride for pleasure in (stolen) car’. I forgot about ‘joy riders’, who either end up dead or in prison! We do hear this word at Christmas time with songs like, ‘Joy to the world, the Lord is come’. This brings us back to the Bible and the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our salvation from sin and death is a matter of joy and rejoicing. ‘Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say rejoice!’ (Phil 4:4). We also find that joy is a fruit of the Spirit- ‘love, joy, peace’ (Gal 5:22). Joy comes from believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit and walking on the Spirit.

Such joy is independent of external circumstances in our life. ‘Count it all joy when you fall into various trials’ writes James. This joy is not related to the abundance of our possessions, or even our state of health; it is related to the abundance of the Holy Spirit in our life, to the degree to which the Spirit is controlling our lives. Many people are frustrated and have no joy because they have lost control of their lives in the current pandemic. But if you are walking in the Spirit you never had control of your life in the first place. You handed that control over to the Lord when you believed.

I have a better definition of joy than what I found in my dictionary. The words of a chorus are: ‘J O Y, J O Y, surely this must mean, Jesus first and yourself last and others in between’. Have you heard this- you have now, so let’s consider the truth of these words. Joy comes when we put Jesus first in our lives, and ourselves last. This is completely unnatural of course. We are born putting ourselves first, and we live that way all our lives, unless and until Jesus, by his Spirit, changes our hearts. It is a huge change as we see, a complete ‘upside downing’ of our lives.

Jesus said to the rich young ruler, ‘Sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me’ (Luke 18:22). The young man did not believe Jesus and went away sad with no joy in his life. Are you putting Jesus before material things in your life? Jesus also tells us to put him before family and friends (Matthew 10:37). If you want to be a follower of Jesus you must put him before everything else and everyone else in your life. Is that too hard? Will you follow the rich young ruler, or will you follow Jesus?

It’s all about trusting Jesus and believing his promise. What did he promise the rich young ruler? Treasure in heaven! In another place Jesus says, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you’ (Matthew 6:33). When we seek Jesus we will find him. And when we believe in him we are given the righteousness of Christ, which means being right before God and having peace with God. Love, joy, peace - fruits of the Spirit! When we become children of God we lack no good thing. Our desires change, but it is also true that whatever we need, God will give. All the things God ‘adds’ to us include food and clothes, so no more worry over such things.

Jesus also tells us to love others as we love ourselves, and indeed as he loves us (John 13:34). So joy means putting others **after** Jesus but **before** ourselves. Seek first, not second or third, the kingdom of God or Jesus. Then consider the needs of people around you, family, friends and those not your friends. Then last of all, look to your own needs- and you will find that God has already supplied all your needs! Why not sing this little chorus about JOY right now?