

I hope that you have had a really good time tonight. A lot of people have done a lot of work to make this possible. I hope also that you have seen in effect a principle that I try to live by, and that is, that a Christian can get a real blast out of life! What you hear around you from day to day, that being a Christian is no fun, is just a bare-faced lie! Of course there are always those who don't go around sour-faced and living bitter, cheerless lives. {Not a mill-stone around our necks: re beatitudes.} Now I know that it is a little hard to listen seriously to a guy who wears a pumpkin suit, but for the next few minutes I would like to talk about how the Christian can live joyfully.

First, let me define more thoroughly what I mean by 'joy'. Several things are included here. There is peace in your heart, a stillness in your soul, a 'peace, be still' which comes when you completely trust in God. There is a clean conscience which, although we all sin, comes with knowing that the sacrifice of Christ completely cleanses us continually from the guilt of our sins. I have been mean to my wife before and had to leave on some trip, and the whole time I was away I worried about whether I was completely forgiven. I shouldn't have worried, and neither should we about the completeness of our forgiveness. When we can quit worrying about that, we can have peace of mind. Then there is sort of a quiet joy, or happiness, or cheerfulness that we can have. There is contentment, or satisfaction with our physical situation. There is pure, good clean fun and laughter, like we have had tonight. And there is a deep, swift-moving passion or drive for life and living and everything that comes with it.

Now let's talk about how we can find joy. One of the great things about living in this country is that the constitution provides us with the right to pursue happiness, as long as it doesn't limit someone else's. But first, we must not let life chase us around. Life can be tough, but we must grab for it, and tangle with it, and struggle to master it, or it will simply overpower you; it will run you right over. Let me illustrate this by the game of softball. I played some softball in college with a guy who was a real giant. He would take a tremendous swing at the ball and send it rocketing over the outfielder's heads. A home run? No, because by the time he got to first, the ball had been chased down and thrown back into the infield. He could hit the ball well, but he didn't like to run. He didn't have the full speed ahead philosophy of life. I like to play that way; I enjoy tremendously trying to give my best and playing as hard as I can. Have you ever watched Pete Rose play? He's one of the best in baseball, and it's because he plays this way.

It comes down to this: there is great joy in giving 100%, in doing your best. There are no regrets in this way of life. Enthusiasm is really the key to life; and a positive attitude, a will to get things done will fill your days with joy and accomplishment. There is no boredom in this kind of life. Isn't this one of the real roots of Scouting, this idea of 'do your best'?

The question was asked me once, "How do you know that you are giving 100%?" Well, that is kind of a hard question, but I will tell you this: you know when you're giving 10%. You just have to try as hard as you can. Paul tells us in 2 Cor 13:5 to, "examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves!" Those who are in real danger of dying spiritually are those who never check on their spiritual growth. {Doctors know that the more often you check with them, the better off you are}

But you and I both know that so many times troubles come, and we feel our joy smothered and extinguished, like a candle that does not have enough air. How can we possibly counteract this? Well, let me give you an example. When Paul was in prison, in chains for the second time, shortly before he was killed for his beliefs he writes to the Phillipians in chapter 4, verse 4: "Rejoice". Now, Paul has troubles with a capital 'T', but does he say, "(whisper rejoice)"? No, he shouts with enthusiasm: "Rejoice, and again I say Rejoice!" How could he have this attitude? He says in the thirteenth verse, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." Plus, Paul knows that for a Christian, to die is gain, for it is indescribable beauty in heaven with God. Troubles always come, but for the Christian the impact is different. The Christian is not left alone to deal with his problems. He has the power from God to slap down his problems instead of letting them slap him down. His life is not one of giving up, or quitting. You know, you can't really be great unless you have overcome great obstacles; unless you have really been tested. Have you ever run an obstacle course? Life is much the same thing. Depending on your attitude, you can have a blast, or let it stop you. You can live your life with enthusiasm and gusto, or you can

let it be as blah as unseasoned food. Joy is not something that just falls on you, it's something that you have to work for.

And then I think that to be happy we need a purpose in life, some direction that will point us in the right way. Something with meaning that you actively live for each day. Someone asked me once, "Why didn't Stephen, or Paul, or Jesus run when they knew that they would be taken?" Because they had a purpose in their life that stood above even survival, and it kept them happy, and content.

We need to try to accomplish something meaningful in our lives. You may have heard of the old Alps mountaineer who arranged to have carved on his tombstone, "He died climbing." Oh, does that mean something to me! I want to die climbing, reaching out to take the hand of God. Like Winston Churchill's famous commencement address of so few words: "Never... never... never... never give up!" Never give up trying to be a true Christian, and you'll never regret it. You can be joyful as a Christian: Try it, you'll like it.

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