

Counterfeit: Happiness

Romans 5:1-5

Prayer...

“It’s the hap-happiest season of all.

With those holiday greetings and gay happy meetings

When friends come to call

It's the hap-happiest season of all.”

Indeed we are just half-way to Christmas

and that puts us in week 3 of our Advent Series: COUNTERFEIT

where we’re exploring the counterfeits that we settle for

over the deep hope, peace, joy and love

that Jesus welcomes us into.

We’ve identified Escape as the counterfeit of HOPE;

Tolerance as the counterfeit of PEACE;

and today we explore the counterfeit of JOY.

Well the opposite of JOY

is misery or despair.

So what do we strive toward

when we experience misery or despair?

Happiness.

Now the thing about counterfeits

is that they aren't inherently bad,

in fact they are frequently beneficial for society.

Happiness is one such counterfeit

that is not actually a bad thing,

but is not meant to become an ultimate thing.

And this is what has happened

in society today.

Happiness has become the ultimate reality

that people strive toward.

It's a society that proclaims the Pharrell anthem:

"Because I'm happy!

Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth."

We might think,

"What's the harm in the pursuit of happiness?"

Especially in the context of mental health crises,

isn't this what we want people to find in their lives?

The short answer, yes.

We want people to seek and find a *lasting* happiness

that will combat the mental health crises we find ourselves in.

But that's just the thing:

a lot of what we pursue, believing it will make us 'happy'

is only going to leave us feeling empty,

because our pursuit of happiness typically begins

with us looking inward.

New Age philosophy teaches us

that we need to look deep down into our being

in order to find true happiness;

OR we need to analyze ourselves to find where we're

out of balance so that we can make corrections

and then find happiness;

OR we need to eat healthier food,

get more sleep, do less work, play more,

breathe better, meditate more,

the list goes on and on.

Now not all of these are bad things,

but again, they aren't mean to be ultimate things,

and if we believe what the Bible says about reality —

that sin has caused a fracturing within

the human condition —

then how can the solution to our fracturing

be found within ourselves?

A broken relationship doesn't find repair

by digging deeper into itself,

but by exposing the fracture with a mediator

who can walk us through the process

of healing & building trust again.

Happiness isn't found by going inward

it's found by going to God

who walks us through the process of healing.

To emphasize again,

there's nothing wrong with happiness.

It's not as if joy is spiritually acceptable and happiness isn't.

The issue is when we make happiness ultimate

that we come to see it as a counterfeit.

Happiness cannot be ultimate

because it shifts with our mood.

And this is why it's announced to the shepherds,

“I bring you good news that will cause great ***joy for all the people.***”¹

If we make personal happiness the ultimate goal

how does that produce ***JOY for all people?***

No, what **God offers** is so much greater

than *just* my own personal happiness.

It is **JOY for ALL PEOPLE**

(which includes me, but also everyone else).

That good news — that ***JOY for all people*** —

is the point of our passage today.

As we move forward we're going to focus on

three main words that come out of Romans 5:1-5

Justified, Rejoicing, & Poured.

JUSTIFIED (w. 1-2)

¹ Luke 2:10

Paul's letter to the Romans

is the largest, complete, account of Paul's theology,
and chapter 5 is the starting point of a new section
where Paul gets extremely practical.

Paul sets out to explore:

What does Jesus' death and resurrection have to do with life here and now, today?

Paul has just referred to Abraham's faith

and that it was **counted to him as righteousness** (4:23).

He draws the connection that followers of Jesus too,
by faith, are counted as righteous
through Jesus' death and resurrection.

¹ THEREFORE, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now this word for justified is the Greek word (δικαιωθέντες)
which means "to pronounce righteous."

This word is used to connect us back
with the previous section about Abraham
to show that this is our current standing before God:

we are pronounced righteous before God.

And this is all **by faith**.

This is not because of anything we have done or said —

no good deed could earn this righteousness,

no perfect theology could merit this righteousness —

it is strictly because of **faith**

that God has done this *in Jesus for us*.

And here is where Paul gets really practical:

the result of that justification, brought about by faith,

is **we have peace with God**.

We have peace with God!

Before we had a fractured relationship with God,

but because of Jesus —

because of His death and resurrection —

we can, by faith, have a *right relationship* with God

and know, confidently, that God accepts us.

To use the broken relationship metaphor from earlier,

not only does Jesus guide us in the process of healing
the broken relationship we have with God (being our Mediator),
Jesus *is* the healing process.

Jesus is the way we deal with the brokenness
by welcoming Him into it,

allowing Him to restore us with His Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the way we build trust —

He teaches us that we can trust God

and not believe the lie that was given in the garden:

that happiness can be found apart from God.

It is because of Jesus (through and through)

that we have a restored relationship with God.

REJOICING (vv. 2-5)

Next is the word ***rejoicing***.

Paul declares there are two areas in which followers of Jesus rejoice:

in the glory of God...

and in our sufferings...

...in the glory of God...

The word glory (doxa) is a misunderstood word in English.

N.T. Wright comments,

“Glory isn’t simply a quality that individuals might or might not possess in and for themselves...Glory is an *active* quality.”²

The **glory of God**, then,

refers to the sovereign rule God has as cosmic King

that brings the created order into its intended flourishing state.

This word also carries with it

ties to the Temple:

the **glory of the LORD filled the temple.**³

This is what the Temple was meant to represent.

It was the sovereign presence of God on earth as it is in heaven

and was the beacon that God’s People flocked to

in order to be guided toward flourishing.

And so followers of Jesus,

having a right-relationship with God, because of Jesus, through faith,

² Wright, N.T. *After You Believe*. (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 89.

³ c.f. 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chronicles 5:14; Ezekiel 43.

get to stand in the sovereign presence of God (**God's glory**)
and **rejoice!** (Lit. to Boast - to express an unusually high
degree of confidence in someone or something
being exceptionally noteworthy).

We boast/rejoice because in God's glorious presence
we not only feel a surge of happiness (the emotion),
we find an everlasting happiness (a joy)
because in God we flourish.

In God we don't just find the happy emotion
we find a being of happiness
because in God we are led to thrive & flourish,
because we are with the very One who created us.

Wright says elsewhere,

*"When we stand there in God's own presence, not trembling but
deeply grateful, and begin to inhale his goodness and wisdom, his
power and his joy, we sense that we are being invited to go all the way,
to become the true reflections-of-God, the true image-bearers, that we
were made to be."*⁴

This leads us to the second area of rejoicing/boasting

⁴ Wright, N.T. *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part 1*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 83.

...in our suffering...

How can we be happy (or even joyful)
if we're suffering?

This is the ultimate test to see if we have found
the joy of the LORD (which is our strength)⁵
or if we're pursuing the counterfeit happiness
that the world coaxes us into.

Paul makes sure that we recognize
by being reconciled to God

He doesn't just want to enjoy this one-to-one relationship
but to include us in His Kingdom work.

This will bring all amounts of **suffering** (lit. tribulation)

as the Kingdom rubs up against the existing culture (*thlipsis*)

which will require followers of Jesus to

“...hang on in faith and hope even when we don't sense
his presence, *even when it doesn't 'feel' as though there's
anything happening. We mustn't imagine that our feeling of
being close to God is a true index of the reality. Emotions*

⁵ c.f. Nehemiah 8:10

often deceive. Paul is summoning us to understand the reality, the solid rock beneath the shifting sands of feeling.”⁶

But this suffering is not in vain.

God uses even these difficult times

to develop us into Kingdom people.

And so it's not that we rejoice about our sufferings

in the same way that we rejoice about our hope (vs. 2).

Rather, it's because of our hope

that we are still able to rejoice in that hope

while experiencing sufferings.

It's the recognition that our sufferings don't get the last word.

It's recognizing that this storm is but a moment,

and we are in right relationship

with the God who calms storms.

Living this hope in the face of sufferings,

Paul says, produces endurance, character and more hope.

This is a happiness that is not dependant on emotions

⁶ (Wright, 2004, 82).

but stands in **the hope of the glory of God** (v. 2).

It is not found within,

but by directing our attention toward God!

POURED (vs. 5)

This brings us to our final word: ***poured***.

⁵...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

This word **poured**

is more literally referring to the act of pouring out blood,

like that of a sacrifice.

God's love is poured out into our being,

like the blood of a sacrifice pours out from the altar

and onto the ground.

Once again we have Temple language,

which Paul draws out later the idea

that Jesus' followers are a "new Temple."

Just as the **glory of the LORD** poured into the Temple

so now, by the Holy Spirit,

the hope of the glory of God — revealed in God's love —

is poured into His followers through the Holy Spirit.

And this is our future hope.

That when God redeems all of creation,

redeemed humanity will play a key role:

resembling God's wise, healing, sovereignty

over all of creation, just as

God designed humans for in the Garden.

TODAY

So I don't want to over spiritualize JOY

and de-spiritualize happiness,

but I want us to recognize there is a deep distinction

between biblical happiness/joy

and what society coaxes us toward.

Real happiness is not found

in an ongoing hunt of emotional experiences.

Real happiness is not found
by searching deep within ourselves.

**Deep, everlasting happiness — joy —
is found in God.**

God justifies us; declares we have a right relationship with Him in Jesus.

Out of that right relationship

we are able to rejoice in God's glory

(His presence, His wisdom, His sovereignty)

and we are able to rejoice in the face of suffering

(because even then God develops in us

Kingdom character),

and all of this moves us toward

our intended design as human beings:

to reflect God's love in the world

as we thrive within it ourselves.

This is where deep, everlasting JOY is found.

Living in the presence of God

who knows us so completely

that He came into the world the same way we all did.

He is coming. **Let's Pray.**