

“Steps to Joy”
Sunday, Morning, December 16, 1962
The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City
Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor

Now will you turn to the Scripture that was read earlier, I John, Chapter 1. If it were necessary to choose one verse as a text and it is not and I do not, I would choose the 4th verse. The angels' song across the plains of Bethlehem was, We bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. (Luke 2:10) John's word in this 1st Chapter, the 4th verse was,

“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

Some had an idea that God's great desire was to make man miserable and unhappy, and that this is probably the prime effect of religion. I am not sure but what it is the effect of religion, but it certainly is not the effect of Christianity, and certainly is not the result of the Gospel having its full work in the heart and life. God knows us, He knows what is required to make us happy, He knows what we need to be fulfilled and complete. It was a great lie that Satan perpetrated on the human race when he succeeded in proving to Eve that she could only be happy if she took things into her own hands and ran her own life. He succeeded in persuading her that God was her enemy, he was her friend, that life was bad, and death was good, that sin was noble and righteousness was wrong, and so inverted the human race and destroyed the possibility of happiness or joy under his domain, and thus he has been put to it through the centuries to get some substitute for joy. And he has succeeded across the years in finding just enough to act as a panacea and narcotic to dull the senses and to lead men through life without giving them what they need or seek and out into eternal death without having discovered that he is destroying them. And while he has succeeded in poisoning their minds and prejudicing their hearts and corrupting their spirits, destroying their eternal soul, somehow persuading them in the

midst of this that he is their friend. Inconceivable, absolute beyond comprehension that it should be thus. Perhaps sometimes the friends of God have contributed to this.

You have been told, of course, about the little girl that was at her grandfather's home on Sabbath, and she was supposed to sit primly on the horsehair sofa, folding her hands and looking at a book, and not to speak unless spoken to. And finally she was excused from this and permitted to go outside on the condition she did not walk or run. There she saw the little chickens as they were clucking and chirping, and she said, You're not Christians. Then she saw the little lamb in the field, gamboling (I don't quite know what it is for a lamb to gambol, but this is what it was doing), and she said, You're not a Christian. And then she saw the little colt with its mother in the pasture, kicking up its heels and dashing and she said, You're certainly not a Christian. The rooster on the fence with his head back crowing, and she said, You're not a Christian. And she went into the barn. And there the old mule with a sad face put his head back and gave his long breigh, and she said, Now, there you are, a good Christian.

And I rather think sometimes that this is a caricature that the world has succeeded in taking. And I presume that all of us to some degree have contributed to this misrepresentation of our wonderful God and all His grace. And I believe that it is your responsibility to realize that you are not only preaching while you are talking, but you are preaching while you are walking, and while you are working, and while you are at home, while you are shopping, and all the various activities of your life.

I think this is necessary that we should be reminded at some time of the year, and perhaps more frequently than we do, that these things are written that your joy may be full. "We bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people." No one is happy, no one is joyful until he is free, and no one is free if he is doing what he does not want to do. This is why we find

today that Satan's lie is so astounding, because God wrote on the heart a law. It is called conscience. There He has inscribed not only the fact that He is, and the description of Himself, but He also inscribed on the fleshly table of the heart the code of conduct and the standards of behavior that He expects of man. And this is that light that lights every man that comes into the world, and this is the law upon the heart. And Satan has had to come and somehow succeed in erasing this, and defacing this, and proving to a man that what his heart tells him about God is not so, and what his heart tells him about himself is not so and thus his success with the human race is all the more astounding. And so he has had to lead men into blindness, and to blind their minds, and blind their hearts, and silence the continuous monitor of their spirits.

We hear today, and we see today in literature the fact that is now part of the casual philosophy that no one can be joyous and happy as long as they have moral standards. The head of World Health has said that he will consider that the world is afflicted by one of its - the World Health Organization -- by one of its prime diseases as long as there is any remembrance of Mosaic morality in human intellect. And he will consider that this is the last disease to be erased, and only then can the human race be well.

Well obviously this is part of the casual philosophy that says that when men do what they want to do, and follow their glandular impulses without any qualms of conscience, then and then only are they happy. But this is wrong, because a person is then doing something outwardly that his intellect has said is all right, but his heart tells him it is wrong. And so he has now been brought into bondage, not to any outward standard, not to the Scripture, but he has been brought in bondage to his own conscience. And so no one can be joyous, no one can be free, and no one can be blessed as long as he is doing anything outwardly that is in disagreement with what he is inwardly. And this is why the libertarianism of the present hour, the moral liberty which is

vaunted as the pathway to joy and release is but a dead end street that puts people into the swamp of disintegration and destruction of their personality and their possibility of happiness. Because God wrote the law upon the heart, and no one can be happy when he is doing what he does not want to do. And if he is murdering when God has said, "Thou shalt not kill," even though his intellect has erected a standard which says that murder is justifiable and all right, his heart tells him it is wrong, and so he is not in bondage to any outward system, but he is in bondage to his own conscience. He is in bondage to his own heart. This is the reason why we find with the decrease of morality, social morality, and the flooding of the land with pornographic literature that seems to make the wrong right and accepted standard, and with all of the attacks on Victorian morality, we find the increase in mental disease is almost geometric.

We were told a few years ago that one out of ten of the American people were going to have to have mental health therapy, but now it has been revised downward until they say it is possibly one out of eight people now living that are going to need or require mental health treatment. Now when you think of the fact that Satan has said, If you will just forget God, and forget His Word, and forget all of the standards that are there, and been brought as the heritage of history, you will be happy. And you can see what an elaborate and enormous lie this is.

And consequently, it is necessary for us to recognize that it is that a person can never be truly joyous and truly happy until he is doing outwardly what he wants to do inwardly. And our Lord Jesus Christ came to make us free. Whom the Son makes free is free indeed. He came to give us life and to give it more abundantly, and so there are two things he had to deal with. First, He had to find some way in His grace whereby He could free us from the tyranny of doing what we are told from the outside we can and should do, when it is contrast with what we are being told by the inside by the conscience. That is the first thing. And the second thing He had to do

was to bring us into a vital, living relationship with God, because we were made for God. God carved into us in this image I use, because I think this way. When God made you He carved into you an empty place so immense that only He can fill it, and you cannot be joyous in the true sense of joy until He fills it. You are made for Him, consequently you are only happy, fulfilled, and the complete being He wants you to be when He fills the place He made.

Now if you understand this, then you will realize that sin is not only sin against God, but it is sin against yourself. Sin is not only something that is going to anger God, but it is also going to destroy you. Someone has said, It is impossible for you to break God's law. You cannot break the law of God. The only thing you can do is break yourself on God's law, because God's law says, "Thou shalt not..." and when you do it, you have not broken the law. YOU HAVE just been like someone who has fallen off a cliff to the rocks below. You did not break the rocks; the rocks broke you. And you do not break the law; the law breaks you. It so fractures you, it so shatters you, that there is no possibility of happiness. I rather think that that little Mother Goose rhyme Humpty Dumpty Sat on the Wall, Humpty Dumpty Had a Great Fall, All the king's horses and all the king's men, Can't put Humpty Dumpty together again... there is in this an amazing wisdom. All the philosophies, and all the teachers, and all the panaceas, and all the psychological techniques cannot put the human spirit together again. That fall that broke you, that fall that shattered you, was of such a nature that all that man could do, and all his ingenuity cannot put you together again. The only way that you could ever be put together again was for God to become flesh, God to take upon Himself your likeness, a body like yours, a nature like yours, so that He could be tempted in every way as you were, and by thus invading life, He had the means of invading death, and He could now take the consequences of that great fall which was death. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. And so the Lord Jesus Christ could, by having

clothed Himself with what you are, invade death in your place, and He died for you, He died for me. This was the consequences of the fall; this was the result of it. And ever since man fell, he has been having - using the king's horses and the king's men to try to patch up, and it won't work, it just won't work, because the god of this world does not know how when he has destroyed what is right and good, and meaningful, to patch it up. Oh, he plasters a few possessions on, and says, See now, you are not so bad as you were. Look, you have got money in the bank. How much money does it take to be happy? As the multimillionaire that is going twice a week to his psychiatrist and has his coffers filled with gold and feels so insecure. How many millions does it take to feel secure? And the person that has attained to the great high position in his field, the actor or actress that now has spent all their life trying to become well know, and now just trying to spend all their life to get through the day without being recognized. Isn't it amazing? Isn't it fantastic? And here they are at the very pinnacle of achievement and yet so utterly, utterly-- they have not been put together, and while they were climbing they said, If I can just get my name in 2-ft letters over Broadway, if I can just get that first million dollars, if I can just, then I'll be happy. And the god of this world leading them on, trying to put a plaster here, and a patch there, as though he can somehow heal that which has been broken. But he cannot.

The only way it could be healed was for God to have become flesh, and live and to die, and to be raised from the dead, and then to come to you because He died for you, was buried for you, and raised for you, remake you. This is the only way. And this is why John says, These things write we unto you that your joy may be full. What is he writing? He is writing about the One that was in the beginning, by whom all things were made, who became the Word, the expression of God, the revelation of God's love, and grace and mercy. And Satan has simply gone on, trying to deceive and to destroy, and to confuse, and rob of meaningful existence

during time and eternal suffering beyond time. And it is God that did something about our plight, and He is the One that left Heaven's glory, He is the One that took upon Himself our form and likeness, He is the One that invaded time, so that He could invade death, and carry us with Him into eternity. And He is our Friend. And He has said, The Son has come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly. And He said, These things I write unto you that your joy might be full.

And Christmas ought to mean above everything else that God is on your Side, and He is concerned about you, that He loves you, and He knows what you need, and for once if you have not done it before any year you ought to thank Him that He had your interests at heart, He was concerned about you, and that everything He has done He has done on your behalf and for your sake, and for your joy. This is the first problem. What about sin, what about the violations of His law and our conscience.

And of course He not only forgives the past, but He gives us a new heart, He sort of takes the rubbish off of the conscience and it begins to rise up again, and there it is, and there is that heart that has been buried under all the ideas and of axioms and philosophies, rules of practice and teachings of the god of this world; and out of that then comes the teachings that God inscribed upon the heart, and the new heart is simply the heart that He put into Adam, that has been broken and covered by sin, a desire to please God, and the knowledge of what we need to do to please Him. And so now as a Christian, with the past under the Blood, you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior, if you have, and you know that He is yours, and you can look back and say, Yes, there was a time when I knew I had no joy or peace, I was dead in my sins, but now Christ has come into my heart. You may not know when. You may not know the day. But the important thing is not the day, or the hour, but the important thing is that, that,

whereas once I was blind now I see. Oh, this is wonderful. No joy, no possibility of joy until the past is dealt with, no possibility of joy until you know you are right with God. But how often that joy is broken because you have done something that was in accordance with the laws of the past, the deep grooves that have been carved into your mind, the traits that you inherited in the disposition you developed, the attitudes that you acquired, and the learned responses to the situation that you carried with you from the old into the new life, and as a Christian you sin, led aside by your lust, your appetites, your desire, and you sin. Maybe something having to do with your time, maybe it has to do with your mind, maybe it has to do with your appetites. Perhaps it has to do with your word. But you sinned, you have grieved God, and your joy is gone.

Now thank God that He took your joy away for that little while, for if He left you in joy while you had sinned, it would be the same effect as having no nerves in your hand. It may feel a little uncomfortable when you touch the stove and your hand burns, but oh when you feel the pain, and the flash and throb goes through your finger because it has been burned, you ought to thank God that you still have nerves, because if you did not you could have left your hand right there and let it burn off. And so the nerve system of the Christian life is the Spirit of God taking away our joy and our peace. And when that peace is disturbed, when that joy is disrupted, you have grieved Him. When that happens it is to find out how you have grieved Him, and what you have done to grieve Him. And deal with it.

And this is what John is saying as he writes, you have had fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, and we want that fellowship to go on, and these things are written that your joy may be continuous and your joy may be full. Now, he said, if you say that you have fellowship with us, and fellowship with the Father, and you deliberately walk in darkness, you lie and you do not the truth. The one thing that characterizes the people that

have been born of God is their desire to please God, and that when they do not please God they do not please themselves, and they are grieved about it and they want to do something about it. Now if you say you are a Christian and you can go on deliberately day after day, walking in darkness, then His work, not mine, says you lie, and your profession of being Christian is spurious and false and counterfeit, and it is to be disregarded by you and by others; because if you have been born of God, then there has come a new heart, and a new desire to please God, a new purpose to obey Him, to live in accord with the rules that He has inscribed upon your heart, and you do not want to walk in darkness any more than a lamb wants to get into a mud puddle.

Now I suppose it can, especially if it is careless about its gamboling, it can get into a mud puddle, and get all soiled and muddy, muddy wool. It can, but it is not its nature. Now when you see the pig walk through the fence and puts its nose under and lift it up, and squeeze through, you know where that animal is going. At least I did, when they would go through our fence, when I was a boy on the farm, you couldn't keep them in. They just would not stay, but I knew where they would go. Down below there was a little marshy place in the woods, and the rain would settle, and the water would stink, and so we wouldn't have to track them. I just knew where it was. God down, there sure, there it was, right in, the snout sticking out, you know, just so happy. It was home. Now a lamb would not be there. It may have fallen in, but it was not where it was headed, and if you have been born of God you may fall into the mud puddle, but my dear that is not where you are headed. When he says here you might be intimidated, you say, Look I once loved this, but something happened, and how am I going to get the mud off? How am I going to get the dirt out? How am I going to protect myself so I won't get back in the mud puddle again? And John says, Your joy is going to go when you do, and I am writing this so that

your joy may be full. Then he says, Because if you have been born of God your desire is to please God. And the question is, How? And what am I going to do when I displease Him?

And so he said, There is a fellowship here in our weakness. There is a fellowship in our frailty. Did you know that? There is a fellowship in our humanity. Do you understand that? Though you have been forgiven, and though you have been pardoned, you can still fall into sin, and there is no experience with God that will immunize you to that. A lot of people are asking God to do something for them so that they won't be tempted, they won't have to fight sin any more. I wish there were something in the Word of God that said that you could look forward to that, but there is not. There is no experience set forth in this Book that is going to immunize you temptation and the possibility of falling, but this Book is explicitly clear, saying, There is no temptation overtaken you but such as is common to man. And so it is this fact that we are common, and that is the same word, fellowship, isn't it? It is the same word, sharing. It is the one from which we get communion.

So you see, there is not only a communion in the Blood of Christ, and in the Body of Christ, there is not only a communion in our fellowship, but there is a communion in our humanity. There is a communion in our frailty, there is a communion in the fact that you are tempted the same way everybody else is tempted, and you have the same problems everyone else has, and sometime the enemy is going to come to you and say, Well now listen, Nobody has ever been tempted the way you have been tempted, because yours is so extreme and so unusual, and because God has just permitted you to have this terrible temptation that has never come to mortal before, it will be all right for you if you yield this once.

You see, every time a person sins, it is rational at the moment. He has had his thinking so upset and so disturbed that it seemingly becomes right for him, because we only do now always

what is right, even though it is absolutely wrong. We know it. There is a delusion. And so you, as a child of God, have been led aside by your appetite, and you got mad, and you sassed, or you told a lie, or you were angry, or you sinned, whatever it was.

Now this is a common temptation, and a common possibility, and not necessity, but possibility, John says, I want you to understand something, If you say that you are not capable of sin, you lie. If you say, Well God has done something in me so I won't be tempted any more, you lie, and if you say that you cannot sin, you lie, because you are still of common clay. And there is no experience of God's grace that is going to insulate you and immunize you against being tempted. Did you hear me? You will be tempted, because if there ever came a time when you were not tempted any more, you would be holier than your Lord was. Because He was tempted in all points like as you are. And so this is not what the Word teaches. But what it does teach is that you do not have to yield to the temptation. We will talk about that another time, a little later. But you have, we are dealing now with the fact that you have yielded, and you are in trouble. You are in trouble because your joy is disturbed. You are in trouble because your peace is disrupted. You are in trouble because the fellowship you had with God is broken. You are in trouble because prayer is not as it used to be. You are in trouble, because there is not the blessing on your testimony and witness there had been. You are in trouble because you have opened up the door to the enemy to come in. You are in trouble. Your joy is disturbed. What are you going to do? Throw in the sponge, throw up your hands? There is nothing to this. No! There is a fellowship here, a fellowship that continues, not only did the Lord Jesus Christ die for you, not only was He raised from the dead, but you see He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them. And so we find here in this first verse of the 2nd Chapter, If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus

Christ the Righteous. And so at the right hand of the Throne on high is seated the Son of God who knows you. He loved you when there was nothing lovable about you, when you had nothing to offer Him, He loved you not for what was in you, but for what was in Him, and He died for you, and He has risen from the dead, and He is seated there, and your name is written right on the palm of His hand; that is, He sees you when He looks at those nail-pierced hands, and knows it was for you He died. And so you have yielded to temptation, you have fallen, and your joy is gone, and your peace is gone, your blessing is disturbed and the Lord is there, waiting for you to come. And His Name is written there.

Now He can only act in your behalf when you do certain things. These things you must understand if your joy is to be full. The first thing you have got to do is to judge what you did to be sin. You have got to be the judge. God gave you the law book, now you be the judge. And you judge; that is, you bring yourself as the culprit before the stand, and you open the Book, and you say, Now John Doe, and that is you see, that is what they say. I do not know who Mrs. John Doe is, but you bring yourself and you stand there, and you read out what the Book has to say about you, and you are guilty. You did this, and you are talking to yourself. And there is no excuse for it. God provided grace. You have sinned. But you have got to be specific. You have got to be specific as to what it was, and when it was, and you cannot just say, Oh, you terrible sinner. You were, and God loved you, and God saved you, and so let us not stop... let's be specific. Let's talk about what it was. And so it is going to come out something like this, Yesterday, or this morning, when they were talking, you discovered that you were envious. You envied that person their position, you envied them their personality, you envied them their place, your heart is an envious heart, it was a feeling within you, it was deep within you, and God's

Book, the law book, says, it is murder and envy. There is no excuse for envy. You have sinned. Now who are you talking to? Yourself. You judge yourself.

And then the response that has to come from your heart is; Now envy is a sin, and I have sinned, and I am through with it. I won't defend it, I won't excuse it, I won't pardon it, and it is a sin. Well now, you have done two things: You have judged it, and you have forsaken it.

Now the next thing you have to do is go in through the rent veil, into the Holiest of all, into the Presence of the Father, and on His right hand, the Son, and you have got to say, I have just come from the law court where I have judged myself to have sinned with envy. O God, yesterday I discovered, that this has colored my thinking, and this has affected my attitude, and this has influenced my words, and I have sinned with the sin of envy.

Now immediately that you do that, you release your Advocate. Now the Lord Jesus can say, Father, you have heard his judgment, you have heard his confession, and now hear Me, I have his name written on My hands, and I was nailed to the Cross for him, and My Blood was shed for him, and I plead the merit and the virtue of that sacrifice for him. And He is faithful and just to forgive you your sin, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

But it requires this brokenness. It requires this judging of yourself. It requires this forsaking of sin. It requires this confession. Now suppose that the sin has involved others. What are you going to do?

There is a community, there is a participation, there is a fellowship in frailty. There is nothing that anyone has ever done that I could not have done, nothing that anyone has ever done that you could not have done. And if you and I have not, it is but the grace of God. And consequently, when someone comes to you and says to you, My dear, God has shown me that I have sinned against you, instead of being highly indignant, rearing back and looking down your

nose and saying, Oh, I suspected it all the time, so breaking fellowship and destroying the possibility of reconciliation, there ought to be but a dropping of your head and heart, and saying, My heart is grieved that I have grieved you, and I assure you that I forgive you, but I want you to know that but for the grace of God it could have been me in your place.

And John is thus telling us that the joy that comes is not that we have fellowship in sin, for he has told us that we are to sin not, we are to sin not. We do not have fellowship in sin. We have fellowship in our common frailty, our common weakness, our common possibility of sin. And so you can become the priest to another, and another to you. Not that you encourage people to tell you of their sin. That is not the idea. But that you recognize that we are sharing a common death, for we were under the sentence of death because we had sinned, a common nature subject to temptation, a common or a shared salvation for the Lord Jesus Christ died for you and for me, each of us have the necessity of confession, of brokenness in some place in our pilgrimage, and so when it comes to the time when it is necessary for you to go to your wife and say, Dear, forgive me, I have been inconsiderate, I have been impatient, my words have been sharp, she is going to look at you and forgive you, and realize that perhaps she has been inconsiderate or could have been. We share a common humanity, a common frailty, a common susceptibility to temptation, and to sin.

And so fellowship includes understanding and sympathy. Someone has said and well said, A Christian ought to be unshockable, as well as unshakable. And this is true. And so John, writing to you and to me today, I want you to understand that God has known your need, He has known all about you, and so He has made provision not only to save you from the past with all its guilt and violence, but to save you from the present, so that your joy can be unbroken and continued.

Perhaps I speak to some that would with all honesty have to say, It has been years since I have known the joy of which you speak. Once I knew it. But it will go back to broken fellowship with God, or broken fellowship with some person. Perhaps you are praying for revival, but really what you are praying for is to make it easy to do the thing you ought to do, and know you ought to do. If right now on the basis, not of what others are going to do, but on what He is doing, you would judge it to be sin, and forsake it, and confess it, then you would know the advocacy of your High Priest, His cleansing, His pardon, His joy restored, and then when you go to the other you are not testifying to your sin, but you are testifying to His grace, to His love. And so it is that our joy might be full, He brings us face to face with God's grace and mercy in Christ, face to face with our utter dependence upon the Lord, and upon each other. Might it be therefore that because of what you have heard your joy may be full.

Shall we bow our hearts in prayer. Think with me just a moment before we pray. Do you know that fullness of joy? Have you known that fullness of joy? Would you like to know it again? Then this is the path. This is the path. These things have I written unto you that your joy might be full. You see God knows you, and He knows about you, and He knows that you need to be free, doing outwardly what you want to do inwardly, and that which you want to do inwardly He wrote on your heart, so when you have broken that law upon your heart, then there has got to be confession, cleansing, and restoration.

Our Father, before Thee is a thoughtful people, a people that have heard through the years of Thy love, and grace, and mercy, peace through the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet so often we have characterized, and misrepresented our Lord Jesus because our joy has not been full, and He made every provision so that it could be. We remember the joy when we knew our sins were first forgiven. But, O Father, how Thou dost want that joy to continue, to increase, and abound

more and more. We pray that this may become a joyous people, not because of happenings, not because of possessions, not because of promotions, but because of a relationship to Thyself. O God, make us a joyous people, joyous not in our failure but in Thy grace, not in our sin but in Thy pardon, and in Thy power released in our lives. It is the joy of the Lord. Grant our Father that our joy may be full as we realize Thine understanding, Thy grace to us, every provision for every need, do Thou, Lord, make this church to be known in this great sad community as a place where the joy of the Lord is the strength of His people. Might our joy be full. May it be glad tidings of great joy that come to our hearts during these days. Now bless the needy. If there are those that should stay, Lord, prompt them to stay and seek for counsel and help and prayer even now. Dismiss us with Thy blessing. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Let us stand for the Benediction. Thy grace, Thy mercy, Thy peace from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be and abide upon us now and until we meet again. Amen.