

If I were a genie and I had the power to offer you one wish, and you had to choose between unlimited joy and a million dollars, which one would you ask for? How about unlimited joy or 5-million dollars? 100 million dollars? Let's cut to the chase: a trillion dollars or unlimited joy? You blinked. Anyone can be bought.

In our hearts we know what the virtuous, idealistic, godly choice is. We know where money and power lead to. But in reality we make choices every day that fly in the face of our godly ideals, and we settle for a lot less than a trillion dollars!

This morning we're going to talk about Jesus' instruction about prayer and what this has to do with our pursuit of the good life which he has promised us.

OPENING PRAYER

READ John 16:23b-27

Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. 25 I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

In the Gospel, Jesus talked about prayer, and he made a really big promise. Listen again to what he said, **John 16:23, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."**

How many times have you prayed to win the lottery, but your prayers were not answered? And why not? After all God promised! Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised if you have a very long list of unanswered prayers of much greater importance than winning the lottery!

But Jesus did say, **"WHATEVER you ask of the Father..., He will give it to you."**

So what gives? **“Whatever”** is a mighty big word. And if Jesus’ promise stopped there, we’d certainly have reason to complain.

But there is that OTHER pesky verse. Here’s a Bible study tip: Interpret Scripture according to Scripture, meaning, when we have an issue with a passage, we look at other passages for resolution.

Jesus made his promise to answer our prayers, and then he said, **John 16:24b: “Ask, and you will receive, that your JOY may be full.”**

“Joy”: this is an important word, for it shapes how the Lord has committed himself to answer our prayers, which is to say, God is going to answer our prayers so that we can be full of JOY!

Now I’m sure you’d be the first one to inform me that you’d find it mighty joyful to win the lottery! But let’s take a look at how the word **“joy”** is used in the Bible. Here’s another Bible study tip: When we’re comparing verses in the Bible, begin by first looking at everything the one author wrote. In other words, if you have a question about a word, a verse, a teaching in the Gospel of John, don’t go looking in Romans, which was written by St. Paul, for an answer before you dive more deeply into the Gospel of John.

In John’s Gospel, John the Baptist spoke about joy when he expressed how he felt concerning the ministry of Jesus. He said, **John 3:29, “the one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, REJOICES greatly at the bridegroom’s voice.”**

John was talking about his relationship to Jesus as the **“friend of the bridegroom,”** and about the joy he felt in his heart, in his spirit, with the revelation of the Lord’s ministry in his time. This joy was a gift directly from God. It’s a spiritual joy in one’s heart that comes with the presence of God’s Spirit and one’s thankfulness for salvation.

Jesus talked about joy in another place in the Gospel of John when he explained to the disciples the quality of his ministry to them. He said, **John 15:11: “These**

things I have spoken to you, that my JOY may be in you, and that your JOY may be full.”

Jesus never used the word “**joy**” to describe worldly, temporal things such as money, cars, and houses, let alone the lottery! Joy is a heavenly word, a spiritual word, a word that describes what comes from the manifestation of God’s saving grace in our lives.

In the last verse of Jesus’ sermon which we didn’t hear in the Gospel reading, Jesus said, **“These things I have spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).**

Our Lord overcame the world, though he lived without a home to call his own. Our Lord overcame the world, though he lived day-by-day on other’s contributions. Our Lord overcame the world, though the world hated him and took his life. For his heart was greater than all of the hatred, darkness, and anger in the world, and he wanted to share that heart—a heart filled with joy—with you and me. This is the joy he promised us. Nothing more, nothing less.

Jesus never promised us the things of the world for our joy. Indeed, he promised the opposite. He said in this world we would experience suffering, that we would be the victims of persecution, and that we would die. He said that we might be the victims of disease and poverty, heartache and tribulation. Jesus promised that principalities and powers from the pits of hell would take up arms against us.

Jesus’ promise to answer prayer is not for the things of this world, but they are for the things of his kingdom, namely, his joy.

Let’s take a look now at what St. Paul wrote about joy. He wrote, **Romans 14:17, “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and JOY in the Holy Spirit.”**

When the Lord fills our hearts with his joy we experience a foretaste of the life to come in eternity, the Kingdom of God, which is filled with his righteousness, his peace, and his joy.

With this joy, the Lord settles our hearts and gives us peace of mind, which he calls, “shalom,” a spiritual peace, a sense of contentedness which permeates our souls, a gift from God, a gift from heaven to us here today.

This joy is at work when the Lord quiets our souls with his **“still small voice” (1Kings 19:12)**, despite the busyness that fills our lives.

This joy is at work in us when the Lord fills us with hope despite the hopelessness all around us. When the Lord says that we should pray **“that your joy may be full,”** this is what he’s talking about.

Our God is the Lord of hearts, and he desires to fill our hearts with the richness of his joy unto life everlasting.

Friends in Christ, the joy of the Lord is for today. It’s not something reserved only for when we go to heaven. Remember the “fruit of the Spirit” in **Galatians 5:22-23**? The 2nd fruit is **“joy”**—as in **“love, joy, peace,”** etc.—it is a good fruit, indeed, a gift from God we’ve already received in our baptism with water.

In the Gospel, Jesus said, **John 16:27, “the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”**

Jesus was explaining to the disciples why God answered prayers and fills hearts with joy. Was it because they had been faithful? No. Because they had obeyed the Ten Commandments? No. The Father loved them because they had loved and believed in Jesus. Now if I was God I might be a little bit more demanding. You know, “Give me 20! I wanna see some sweat!” But the Lord Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, has a whole bunch more love and charity than any human being has ever been able to muster.

What do we pray for then? We pray for the things that bring forth joy from the heart of God, a joy that cascades into our own hearts, that joy which is salvation, that joy which is eternal life, that joy which is the redemption of men and women, boy and girls from the grips of the devil and the evils of this world.

Such prayers are relevant in our day to day life. I once worked in a corporate setting for a very difficult boss. He was quite insane, and he made everyone’s life

very difficult, including mine. For weeks I prayed for him, but nothing changed. I began to wonder if God was punishing me for some prior misdeed, it was that bad. But then I read these words of my Lord Jesus, and I decided to pray them.

Again, Jesus said, **“Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:34).**

So I prayed, “Dear Lord, I am struggling with my boss. Settle my heart and mind. Let me know your peace, that my joy may be full, in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

And it worked. Whenever I prayed this prayer before I went to work I had no worries. Christ’s joy was in my heart. It was a miracle. I don’t know how else to explain it. On the other hand, when I forgot to pray, I would again get crushed by my bosses insanity.

I think the most important thing I learned in praying this prayer was that the one who changed was not the object of my stress and frustration, that is, my boss. The one who changed was me. The Lord put his joy in my heart and that was enough to shield me from the darkness in this world.

So what’s your situation?

- Do you have a difficult boss or teacher? Give them to God in the name of Jesus that your joy may be full.
- Do you have a challenging situation in your family? Give them to God in the name of Jesus that your joy may be full.
- Is your financial situation stressing you out? Give it to God in the name of Jesus that your joy may be full.

Please pray this prayer with me:

Dear Lord,
I give to you my struggles
Settle my heart and mind.
Let me know your peace,
that my joy may be full,
in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Friends in Christ, this week may you be encouraged to pray with faith for the joy of the Lord in all your relationships and experiences.

This week may you know this joy more deeply than you ever have before.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.