

Calling the Bride



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"And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" – John 8:32

And Sarah said, "God has made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me." Genesis 21:6

Years ago I was doing a presentation at a church in Virginia. It was at a Valentine's Day dinner and the guests were asked to dress up as famous couples. As I was ministering and looking out at all the rows of faces before me, it was all I could do to maintain a straight face and keep going. I especially had to avoid looking at the sun and the moon, who never removed their shiny metallic masks through my entire presentation. The aging pastor and his wife had come as Abraham and an extremely round with child pregnant Sarah.

When the presentation was over, everyone was moved, and the pastor's wife decided to sing a solemn hymn. Watching this senior sing with her expanded pillow stuffed belly was almost more than I could handle. I did manage to restrain myself from giggling at the sight. I know the others may not have possessed my sense of humor, it's just the way I am. Everybody else seemed to be maintaining their composure and perhaps I was the only one who saw the humor in this event. At least I have some idea of what it must have been like to see an old woman round with child.

I know the miracle that was bestowed upon the one hundred year old man and his younger ninety-year old wife had to have produced a smile every time they walked around their camp. The incongruity of a senior with an expanded tummy was a joyful testimony of God's miraculous ability to produce something out of nothing in answer to faith and prayer. It's also an indication of God's sense of humor. Sarah got the punchline and she roared with laughter at the thought of this aging woman giving birth to a long awaited son and heir.

I always pictured Sarah in her tent, looking up in surprise to see her ancient husband standing in the entrance, holding a bouquet of flowers he picked for her, beaming with a frisky gleam in his eye that indicated to her she was about to be the recipient of a miracle. She had to have smiled then, and even giggled, knowing what was about to take place for two aging wonders.

They named their miracle child Isaac which means

Laughing with Sarah

laughter. And Sarah proclaimed, "God has made me to laugh so that all who hear will laugh with me." – Genesis 21:6

The offspring of this miracle did multiply as God had promised, filling the world like the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore. But more importantly, this lineage produced our Messiah Jesus. As we think of the miracle of His life and the miraculous new life He births in us, how can we keep from smiling and expressing our joy in Him to others?

We know that no matter what this life sends our way, we can keep our eyes fixed on the God who can produce light out of darkness and fill the womb of our hearts with joy, laughter and even a few giggles.

Joy

You will show me the path of life: in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore.- Psalm 16:11

My husband and I used to own a wooded camper lot in New England. It was 70 feet wide by 300 feet deep. In the back was a lovely spot nestled at the base of a tall granite wall where I would go to pray.

One day while I was praying, I was suddenly engulfed by an intense spirit of the Lord's joy. It was overwhelming and I had never experienced anything like it before. There were no words to describe it. I was reminded of the Apostle Peter's mention of joy that was "unspeakable," (I Peter 1:8).

When the joy finally dissipated, I excitedly ran to find my husband so I could tell him what had happened to me. I found him at the front of the property on the driveway, and I blurted out a quick description of the miracle. To my surprise, he told me that he experienced the exact same explosion of joy at the same time it had descended on me. We were both amazed and extremely blessed. It was an experience that we will always remember.

The scriptures tell us that there is joy in God's presence - *You will show me the path of life: in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Psalm 16:11)*. We were

privileged to have tasted a small measure of what it must be like being in God's presence in heaven.

When the angel of the Lord announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, he *brought "good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10)*. The joy that the Messiah has arrived is for all people, Jew and Gentile. That joy is the doorway to a greater joy to all those who have received Him by accepting God's plan of redemption. Through Jesus, we step through the portal of His sacrifice for us into the presence of God when our souls are released from our bodies in death. That is when all who believe will be immersed in the joy of the Lord. Hold onto this promise as you travel on through the stormy landscape of this life. No matter what hardships you may face in the future, the promise of overwhelming joy is waiting for you up ahead, and coming closer with every step of faith you take. In the meantime, let the joy of the Lord be your strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

Joy and Rejoicing

Your words were found and I did eat them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart...Jeremiah 15:16

...The joy of the LORD is your strength.

Nehemiah 8:10

The Holy Bible chronicles Israel's descent into rebellion and disobedience to God which resulted in a seventy year captivity in Babylon. After their sentence had been fulfilled, so to speak, they were permitted to return to the holy land. It was there during the process of the restoration of the city that the scriptures were rediscovered.

The people were assembled and Ezra the priest read God's word to them. As a result, the people became very sorrowful because they realized how far away they had transgressed in departing from God's commandments. This repentance turned their hearts back to the Lord.

Then Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites who were instructing them in God's word and gave them the understanding of it, encouraged them to be joyful because the restoration of God's word to the people was an occasion to be celebrated.

Then he said to them, *"Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy to our Lord: neither you be sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength."* – Nehemiah 8:10

Knowledge of God's word brings joy to the seeking heart. The people at that time recognized that the words God had given them were for their benefit and protection. They understood that His law was an expression of His love and care for them, which contrasted with their own callousness toward Him. The tears of their repentance mixed with tears of joy, because God's words were found and became the joy

and rejoicing of their hearts.

If the Bible has been a neglected book in your home, I encourage you to rediscover the beautiful truth it contains and let it produce joy and rejoicing in your heart.

Collage

I will assemble for you a collage;

Picture an ark filled with a wild assortment of every animal imaginable

and one family of eight bewildered souls all wondering where they'll finally end up when the rain stops...

A fire so hot that it burns up everyone and everything that gets near it -

except the three men who are thrown into it...
A room full of hungry lions that will eat anybody except the devout Jewish guy...

A fish who swallows a man for the fun of it and spits him out at his appointed destination like a taxi...

The miracle of waves parting for a chosen few, and slamming shut on an army of irate pursuers who thought faith was something they weren't going to need...

A dead Man who comes back to life again, walks out of His tomb to bestow eternal life on anyone who has a child's faith to believe that miracles do happen...

And a God who orchestrates such contradictions of time, nature and human experience for the sheer joy of confounding the wise, humbling the proud and proving to the solemn that in chaos there is a plan - and it's okay to laugh!