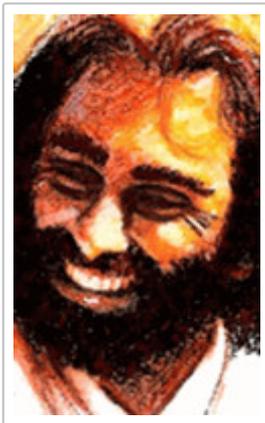


There Are Seven Reasons For Joy in Luke-Acts

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This text has been originally submitted as a part of some bigger assignment in the course that focused on narrative criticism of Luke and Acts. I found it quite tempting to publish it here, on the English part of my blog, which does not seem to flourish as much as the Czech part. The idea of tracing these seven reasons for joy and their development is of my own and I'm kinda proud of it. Nonetheless, in light of Ecclesiastes 1:9, I do doubt that this idea hasn't been delivered before by someone else, so I encourage you to accuse me of plagiarism and list some references.

The list of seven references to joy in Luke and Acts is not exhaustive as it was not intended to provide a concordance of occurrences. In Koine Greek, “joy” is addressed by a number of verbs, such as χαίρω (to rejoice) or σκιρτάω (to leap for joy), by adjectives, such as μακάριος (blessed), by nouns, such as ἄγαλλίασις (exultation) etc. For the purpose of this work, we will narrow the list down to those verses, which employ the theme of joy in a clear narrative pattern. In my search for such patterns throughout Luke and Acts, I have found seven distinct ways, in which joy is being employed. These seven ways are actually seven reasons for joy, which are relevant for various groups of people and for God (#3).

Reasons for Joy in Luke

1. The people of Israel can rejoice because the savior and his prophet are born
 - a. The angel announces to Zechariah that many will rejoice at the birth of his son (1:14)
 - b. The child in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy when it heard the sound of Mary's greeting (1:44)
 - c. Mary's spirit rejoices in God her savior, “for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant” (1:47)
 - d. Elizabeth's friends rejoice with her at the birth of her son (1:58)
 - e. Good news of great joy for all the people is announced to the shepherds by an angel (2:10)
 - The content of this news is that “a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord” is “born this day in the city of David.” Angel's phrasing of his announcement is so clearly alluding to the Israel's expectations that it can be no doubt that joy of Israel is the only possible answer to this message.
2. The disciples can rejoice, because discipleship is worth it's cost
 - a. Joy of the persecuted in the beatitudes (6:23)
 - Those who suffer as the followers of Jesus should rejoice, because they meet the requirements of the true discipleship.
 - b. Blessed is he who takes no offence at Jesus (7:23)
 - Jesus may not have met all kinds of subjective messianic expectations and to follow him means to accept him just as he is.
 - c. Some receive the word of God with joy, but they have no root (8:13)
 - The good news may be pleasing to the itching ears, but the true faith requires obedience. If one only takes advantage of the seed and fails to contribute some effort to it's growth in his life, the desired outcome will not arrive. In Bonhoeffer's words, “only the believing obey, only the obedient believe.”
 - d. Jesus tells the disciples not to rejoice at the power of his name, but at their own salvation (10:17–20)
 - Jesus doesn't say that signs and wonders are worthless, but that they are secondary, whereas the relationship with God, which is worked out through the discipleship, is of primary importance.
 - e. Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit that Father “have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (10:21)
3. God rejoices in his children that are saved and healed
 - a. The crowd was rejoicing after Jesus healed the woman bound by Satan for eighteen years (13:17)
 - b. He who lost one of his 99 sheep will rejoice once it's found (15:5f)

- c. She who lost one of her coins will rejoice once it's found (15:9)
 - d. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (15:7.10)
 - e. The father rejoices over the prodigal son (15:32)
4. The people of Israel can rejoice because Jesus is the king
- a. On Jesus' enter to Jerusalem, his disciples "praised out joyfully for all the deeds of power that they had seen" (19:37)
 - b. The disciples "while in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering" (24:41)
 - c. After Jesus' ascension, the disciples worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy (24:52)

Reasons for Joy in Acts

5. The church can rejoice because it is the Lord's community both inside and outside
- a. All believers in Jerusalem "ate their food with glad and generous heart" (2:46)
 - b. Peter and John "rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name" (5:41)
6. Gentiles can rejoice because the word of God has reached them
- a. After his baptism, the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (8:39)
 - b. A maid named Rhoda was overjoyed on recognizing Peter's voice (12:14)
 - The maid's name Ῥόδη is feminine of the Greek word Ῥόδων (rose). I believe that the Luke's point here is not that this Gentile woman was very plain while failing to open the door, but that both her joy and her faith at Peter's return was even greater than that of the apostles!
 - c. The gentiles at the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia were glad when they heard Paul saying that he turns to the Gensiles (13:48)
 - d. Paul and Barnabas were cast out of Antioch in Pisidia, but the disciples were "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (13:52)
 - e. Paul points out before the Gentiles in Lystra that in the past, the living God used to provide them with food and filled their hearts with joy (14:17)
 - f. Philippian jailor and his entire household "rejoiced that he had become believer in God" (16:34)
7. The church can rejoice because the Gentiles obey the word
- a. Barnabas rejoiced when he saw the grace of God among the Hellenists (11:23)
 - b. Paul and Barnabas are bringing great joy to the believers in Phoenicia and Samaria while reporting the conversion of the Gentiles on their way to the council in Jerusalem (15:3)
 - c. Members of the church in Antioch "rejoiced at the exhortation" when they read the decision of the First Church Council in Jerusalem (15:31)

Is There an Overarching Purpose Behind the Luke's Use of Joy?

If we accept the reference list of joy motif in Luke-Acts as assembled above, we will gravitate towards a conclusion very similar to the following one: The author was highly intentional in utilizing joy as a narrative component. He employed joy motif as a close companion to his overall literary purpose which was, in very simple terms, to craft the true story about God's descent to his people and powerful commissioning of his disciples.

This may explain why usage of joy is so predictable throughout both books. But why the joy motif? What makes it so useful to the author of Luke-Acts? In his recent dissertation, David Wenkel suggests that joy as an emotion provides the "emotional and rhetorical power."¹ This power is exercised in order to shape the reader's identity by inviting him into the authors worldview,² which is nonetheless completely upside down. The rhetorical power used for it's propagation is hence a power of reversal. Wenkel does a good job demonstrating how this reversal of "normal" worldview works. For example, the shepherds are told the "good news of great joy for all the people." But considering their social status, they were the last of all people to hear it, weren't they?³ Very important moment of Wenkel's thesis, however, lies not in his intricate/sop-

histicated hermeneutics, but in his contention that it is nothing else but the cross that provides the reason for sincere joy, because it turns the human situation upside down.⁴

Conclusion

Let us conclude with a simple synthesis. Firstly, we demonstrated that Luke uses the motif of joy intentionally and predictably. Secondly, we acknowledged that Luke employs joy motif as means of rhetorical power for the shaping of the reader's worldview. What does that mean for us today? Let us recall that Luke's literary concern is to describe God's outreach to all the people of this world. Let us also remember that joy is predictably and consistently used in accord with Luke's literary concern. This points us to the first conclusion: Joy is an inherent part of God's plan of salvation. Every next step towards the fulfillment of God's purpose leads inevitably towards joy. On the other hand, we should not forget that this exceeding joy operates within an alternative set of values, which often seem to be in contrast to the values of this world. If I were a pastor, I would put it this way: Christian must triumphantly rejoice in every situation. But if the true discipleship is to be joyful despite any inconvenience, if God rejoices in the found, no matter what they've done, if we must rejoice over Jesus' kingship despite the dissent of many and if we are the church which endures persecution with persistent joy, then our faces must be set towards the cross, which turns the world upside down.

1. David H. Wenkel, "The Emotion of Joy and the Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke-Acts: A Socio-Rhetorical Study," (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2011), 201, <http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?...>

2. Ibid., 198

3. Ibid., 78

4. Ibid., 198

<https://selah.cz/theology/there-are-seven-reasons-for-joy-in-luke-acts/>