



Issues, Etc.TM
Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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"Christian Joy"

Guest:

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10 March 2010

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WILKEN: I've always been intrigued by the passage in Hebrews chapter 12, the first couple of verses there, where it assigns to Jesus as His motivation for doing all that He did *joy*. "For the joy that was set before Him, He," in the words of the writer to the Hebrews, "endured the cross, despised the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." That what Jesus did for us as our Savior He did, not sadly, but with great joy. And this joy was both set before Him, but also this joy drove Him to do all that He did. What is the joy that Christ experienced in all of this? We're going to talk a little bit about that and Christian joy,

the concept of joy in Holy Scripture and all the sources of joy that God has provided for us in His Word here in this hour of *Issues, Etc.* Pastor Matt Harrison is Executive Director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, author of the new book, *A Little Book on Joy: the Secret of Living a Good News Life in a Bad News World*. Now, I want you to stay tuned, because a little later in this hour we'll be giving away copies of *A Little Book on Joy* to our listeners and our callers. Matt, welcome back to *Issues, Etc.*

HARRISON: Always a pleasure.

WILKEN: What does the writer to the Hebrews mean when he talks about Jesus enduring the cross despising the shame, seated at the right hand of the throne of God, all for the joy that was set before Him?

HARRISON: Well, there's a great and wonderfully freeing fact about the Bible. While the Bible is packed full of joy, joy over all kinds of things, unimaginable, and things we might be familiar with, nevertheless, there's a really extraordinary thing about Jesus. Jesus does not always feel joy. I mean Jesus is thirsty. He's tired at times. He weeps in John 11. He's angry in Matthew 21. He gets frustrated with His disciples. He's deeply troubled in Mark 14. He's annoyed the little children are kept from coming to Him. He mourns and feels compassion over Lazarus' death. He weeps at Lazarus' death. He's disappointed by the lepers who didn't return to Him. He feels rejection. He anguishes over Jerusalem. He's sorrowful even to the point of death, Matthew says. He felt disappointment. He felt deserted. He was abandoned by the Father. And He feels death. And there's not much joy in any of that business. Now for me the great fact is Jesus does all that without sin. And that means we have those feelings. And nevertheless, as justified people of God, it's not necessarily sinful not to feel joy all the time. Jesus didn't feel joy all the time. But yet He hangs on to faith. He hangs on to His God. And the text in Hebrews – I just looked at the Greek – it has a *hypomeinein*. That is, usually the text will say for "remain" or "endure," it will say *meinein*. And here's an intensive form—*hypomeinein*—He *endures*, He *carries on*, He remains in this joy for what was set before Him. He knew what was in front of Him. He knew His God. And in the midst of it all there's a peace there that says, "I know My God. And My God has joy in front of Me."

WILKEN: And what does this mean for us then? You said that we don't always feel joy either, and that it's not sin, not necessarily

sin, not to feel joy. I think a lot of Christians feel kind of cornered in that respect. They're told by pop-American Evangelicalism, by well-meaning pastors or fellow Christians, that the Christian life is marked by joy. It's one of the fruits of the Spirit, I think, if I'm not mistaken. And so not to feel it, not to experience it, maybe even to go long dry spells without it...

HARRISON: Mm-hmm.

WILKEN: ...they might wonder, "Maybe I don't have the Holy Spirit. Maybe I'm not even a Christian."

HARRISON: Right. Now there's a law approach to joy, and I think a lot of Christians feel this compulsion and they hear it. And as I say in the book, one of my buddies, in fact, John Pless is the one who mentioned it, he said that some of the – he noted a friend said – some of the worst harangues I've ever heard are sermons urging joy. Now the law approach says, "You must have joy." The Bible says, "You will have joy"; therefore, you must have joy.

Well, "joy" is a Gospel word. Do you know that the word "joy" in the Bible – *charas* – has the same root – *char* – as "grace"? And what is extraordinary for me, and has been my own experience, that is, dealing with the Word of God – the Word of God, as Hebrews also says, living and mighty and active and sharper than any two-edged sword – all of a sudden when you actually deal with the texts, when you investigate the texts on joy over the whole gamut of human reality, faith, etc., the Word of God begins to accomplish what it says, as a gift. And joy is given as a gift. It's a reality. And joy deepens. Like grace is present even when we don't feel it, like the Lord Christ is present even when we don't feel Him at times, nevertheless, there is a sustaining faith in Christ which is there, sustained by the Holy Ghost. And the Lord deals with, gives us joy as the same kind of gracious gift.

WILKEN: There are Christians who face in their lives, and I'm not talking about us well-healed Western Christians that have few troubles compared to many others, but there are Christians – you've had experience with them, you've travelled to see these Christians – who have faced genuine persecution, some of them literally to have their lives threatened in countries controlled by Islam or hostile governments, and Christians who in their other circumstances in life perhaps famine and tragedy, have been robbed of all earthly sources of joy. There's just nothing in their life that's going to bring them this kind of joy. What is the message of Holy Scripture to them?

HARRISON: Well, I think the Scriptures say that, ironically, to really know the joy of Christ all of its weaker shadows must fade and be eliminated.

I was just in Haiti, and here this woman had an arm crushed in the devastation in Haiti. The arm had to be guillotined; it had to be removed in the operating room. Here's this woman, and she has lost everything, she's lost her home, she's lost all of her family, and yet here she is with a smile on her face, thanking the doctors who removed the arm and did so and treated it afterwards, and the only pain medication she had was Tylenol. I think, you know, when Paul says, "Rejoice in your sufferings" – "We rejoice in our weaknesses," he says – there's such a profound thankfulness about the depths, the things of life that actually matter. And so real joy really is born out of affliction that causes us to look away for a time – we can't do this because of our sinful condition – but look away for a time from those things that really get us wound up and finally don't matter at all.

WILKEN: You talk about the joy of repentance, and I think about that series of parables that Jesus tells and each one ends with "Therefore, I tell you there is more joy in heaven, rejoicing among the angels in

heaven, over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine that do not." What is this kind of joy, the joy that is born of repentance?

HARRISON: True joy comes from Christ and knowing our own horrid sinfulness. And without repentance we will push things, we will make up joy for ourselves, we'll put on a face and fake it, or we'll hypocritically demand things of other people. But repentance means that all the fake is stripped away, that, finally, I am a beggar, that's all. I'm a receiver of the Lord's good gifts, of the Lord's grace, of the Lord's forgiveness. Everything else is secondary and finally will pass away. And it is through repentance *only* that the Lord creates a sustaining and enduring joy, in fact, a joy which is eternal. And to have that repentance, then, and going about life means I can rejoice in my family, I can rejoice in my spouse, I can rejoice in my marriage, I can rejoice in my church, I can rejoice in my pastor, I can rejoice in the gifts I enjoy, I can rejoice in my genealogy, I can rejoice in my children, I can rejoice in good wine, I can rejoice in good food. The Bible approves and recommends all of that.

WILKEN: When we come back from this break, it sounds like joy abounds. And that's something that always has puzzled me in the New Testament, when the Apostle will write about this joy that abounds and even more and more, and I think, wow, I don't know if I've experienced that. Is joy more than merely what I experience? We'll answer that question right after this. Pastor Matt Harrison is in studio with us on this Wednesday afternoon, March the 10th.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. We're talking about Christian joy with Pastor Matt Harrison on this Wednesday afternoon, the 10th of March. This overabundant joy that we hear about— Paul almost sounds giddy, especially given

his circumstances—difficult to understand. And I said before the break, I don't know if I've ever experienced that. I mean I've been happy in my life. There have been times in my life when I've been very happy. I don't tend to be a person of great swings of emotion. But this overabundant joy, overwhelming joy, if you will, that we hear about from the Apostle occasionally, I don't know if I've experienced that.

HARRISON: Hmm. Interesting. Do you have the Holy Ghost?

WILKEN: I believe I do have the Holy Ghost. Yes.

HARRISON: [Laughter] I think you're...

WILKEN: I've been baptized.

HARRISON: I think you're a very joyous person. I think... It's very interesting. I don't want to put any kind of a Law trip on anybody, but what I would suggest, Todd, is that you actually deal with the texts. Go home. Sit with your Bible and look through the texts. Read this *Little Book on Joy*, which is stuffed full of texts on joy, and deal with the texts. See what the texts say. And it's not about sort of learning more about joy. There's plenty of that to do in the Bible. It's really stepping into the blasting furnace of the Word of God, which, like with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, leaves you standing with Jesus.

Now there's some very interesting texts. Take Jesus refusing to heed the call of Mary and Martha to come, heal Lazarus. And the text—we usually don't catch this—it says in John 11, "Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus has died.'" And then it goes on, and He says, "And I rejoice." Ah!

WILKEN: [Chuckles]

HARRISON: Lazarus has died, and I rejoice, for your sakes, that you might believe. So, the Lord rejoices even in the

afflictions and challenges and difficulties which He brings purposefully for us, so that our joy finally may be full and complete and that He might blast away with the fiery furnace the nonsense that holds us back and, on our trip to eternity, inflicts us with a lack of joy in this world. So, the New Testament on joy...

I thought for a long time, you know, a friend suggested this topic to me, and I said, "You've got to be kidding. I mean only the kind of fluffy nonsense, these write about a topic like joy." And then I just started paging through the Bible. And what do you do with it? What does a crusty Lutheran like me, a grumpy, crusty Lutheran like me, do with this topic? Well, look, it's shot through everywhere in the Bible. It's in the penitential Psalms. It's in the prophets. It's in Isaiah. It's in Jesus and the Gospels all over the place. It's in the people Jesus touches. It's in Paul. Paul uses like a hundred and fifty cognates for "joy" in his epistles.

WILKEN: Wow!

HARRISON: The word "joy" appears like 340 times in the New Testament. And then to find out the word "joy" is connected to the word "grace." So when Paul says, "Rejoice, again, I say, rejoice," he says, "*Chairete!*" – "Grace!" There's nothing more joyous than grace.

WILKEN: One of the places we find this actually expressed is in the songs of joy that we find in the New Testament. And perhaps one of the cardinal songs is Mary's *Magnificat*, where she even begins by saying, "My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior." Who's she talking about?

HARRISON: Wow! Well, here she is. She's nothing. She's a young woman, a poor woman with nothing other than the fact that the Lord has chosen her out of His gracious mercy and provision. And she merely, simply receives what the Lord gives, and

she says, "Let it be to me as you say, Lord." And there's nothing more profoundly joyous than knowing that we are on the receiving end of what the Lord has chosen to give us. And everything is stripped away. Nothing is left but what the Lord gives, and us receiving His gifts. That's how everything is with joy. I mean even knowing Christ, you go through life with all the joys of, you know, good food. I mean to know that I am forgiven and yet I can walk along in life rejoicing in the blessings of the food that is just delightful and wonderful, and I get to taste food from all over the world. I can rejoice in the moderate use, but I can rejoice in good wine, and I know that the Psalms specifically commend it. Nothing better than to find joy in the wife of your youth, says Solomon. Nothing better than to find joy in your vocation, your daily vocation. And to know that I'm going into all of this with the blessing of forgiveness. It's a marvelously freeing way to live life.

WILKEN: So, is it that – and I want to come back to that concept that you've emphasized twice here – that the word used here, "joy," is a cognate of the same word for "grace," that the grace of God in Jesus Christ casts all of these things again in a different...so we see them, receive them, have them in a different way than we could apart from that grace?

HARRISON: Absolutely! So, you know, non-Christians can certainly enjoy, and Christians who have not yet plumbed the depths of what joy means—and I'm just starting to plumb it. You can enjoy all of these created things, and often do, and to our shame. I mean, non-Christians understand and enjoy art more than we do. I love jazz, I love bluegrass, I love Bach, I love classic rock 'n' roll, although I know it's weaknesses, to be sure—it's my generation. But with forgiveness in Christ, there's the freedom to know exactly Who this is coming from and to know that specifically the Word of God commends these gifts to us over and over and over again. Jesus shows up at the

wedding at Cana, and when they had already drunk freely, He creates another 150 gallons of wine. Amazing joy! That is to say the Lord is not only pleased with marriage; He's pleased with *your* marriage, and He wants *you* to find joy in your spouse. And He also gives us a prescription for doing so through forgiveness and repentance and love and longsuffering. And, over time, He sweetens it as we go along.

WILKEN: You mentioned just a moment ago something on your list that kind of stuck out to me, and maybe our listeners as well might find it odd: to take joy in a faithful pastor. In fact, you devote an entire chapter on what it is to have joy in a faithful pastor. First of all, Matt, what is a *faithful* pastor, and then how is this kind of one of those cardinal sources of joy for the Christian?

HARRISON: This passage from Hebrews 13 is wonderful: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with *joy* and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." It's no advantage for you to make life terrible for your pastor. A faithful pastor stands in an office he's been given by Christ through a congregation to speak the Word of God clearly. And so many pastors today, because of the wretchedness of our culture, because of the lack of understanding of the Bible, because of the unfamiliarity with the Catechism, so many pastors just stand in the face of unbelievable challenges.

I know myself; I've experienced it myself. I came to a parish and I had eleven live-in couples in my first parish, and I simply started with the first one and I said, "This is not God-pleasing." And my goodness, it was like a nuclear explosion hit that little town. And we all learned through it. We learned that I wasn't just about saying "No," but I was about helping people come to a greater experience of love and joy. And that young couple I first dealt with in that situation

became my greatest advocates. And I'm happy to say, almost twenty years later, they remain married and cannot thank me enough for telling them that living together was not right.

Pastors in these kinds of situations, and these situations come up all the time, have such struggles. And these kinds of struggles, the wrath of the community, challenges internally, lack of charity, and pastors are capable of all this stuff, too, in the other way around, but all these things can drain the joy of a pastor. They can cause him to stay up at night, cause him to worry. Think if your pastor is not an extrovert or just doesn't have 100% of the communication skills. Or, you know, think about what happens in a pastor's family when he suffers this kind of stress and difficulty. It's all for good for him. He learns to grab hold of Christ all the more deeply indeed. But it can sap a pastor. It can sap his preaching. It can make him cease praying for his congregation. It can make him become a recluse in the community. It is very important to support your pastor so that he can have greater joy in you, and joy in his vocation. That's the best thing for the Gospel and the Church in a place.

WILKEN: When we come back, we continue our conversation with Pastor Matt Harrison. Something that we don't usually associate in Christian circles with joy is humor. I love to laugh. I love good jokes. I love comedy. And maybe as Christians we ought to lighten up a little bit, not take ourselves so seriously. We'll talk more about that after this.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: We're talking about Christian joy. Pastor Matt Harrison is our guest. I'm Todd Wilken. This is *Issues, Etc.* This email from Frank in Cary, Illinois: he says, "I always felt guilty over not being joyous at times when I was a Pentecostal. I actually turned it into a plague that I thought something was wrong

with me. I felt that I was needing to be delivered from it. I was so self-focused I did not know any better. I thank God that I am a confessional Lutheran now. I realize that life is tough at times but temporary. What Christ objectively did for us is historical and unchanging, not based on feelings. It gives me joy to know each week I am a beggar at church and confess my sins and failures along with everyone else. This brings me joy to know that God sees me in Christ as righteous—Christ's righteousness instead of my own. *Treasury of Daily Prayer* is helping too," he says. Your thoughts there, Matt.

HARRISON: Well, that's it. You know, David confesses the great penitential psalms, I think [32] and 51 and he confesses his sins. He doesn't feel any joy at all. He says, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation." That's it. That's to know Christ. And so the path to joy is through repentance and knowing who Christ is. And then after that the Lord sends joy as a gift of the Spirit. He certainly does, and it's there. I'm saying step into the blasting furnace of the Word of God and see what the Word of God actually says about the issue of joy, and you will be blown away.

WILKEN: Okay. You've said this several times, and I agree with you in principle, but when you say that, this is my fear. My fear is, this personally and then I imagine others have this same fear, yes, I could go in there, and I could start to deal with these passages, the blasting furnace of God's Word, but I know what that will mean. I know that will mean the devil is going to redouble his efforts against me, and he might make things hard for me, and that God is not going to spare me any kind of hardship either. And life, I like it the way it is right now, Matt.

HARRISON: But for the joy set before Him He endured the cross, the blasting furnace and the devil's wiles and nonsense make the joy all the greater. You know, Luther says in commenting on John 15, the vine

and the branches, the Lord throws, or the vinedresser throws the manure finally on the vine and the vine screams out, says, "You're going to kill me." And he says, "No, that's just to produce all the more wonderful grapes, and you're going to make the sweetest wine." So...

WILKEN: All right, let's talk a little bit about humor. I know you like to laugh. I've heard you laugh many times. If you're laughing a quarter mile away, people will hear it. I told you during the break that in my latter years with my former employer I was just having the life sucked, sapped out of me on a daily basis, and I would go home and find solace in the stupid little things like watching babies laugh on YouTube or kittens roll around on the floor on YouTube. It became like therapy to me, Matt. Just to laugh, to find something humorous, and I said, you know, I think if I were not doing this, I would probably be on some kind of prescription drugs. To find joy in simple laughter, the simple humor of this life. Your thoughts there.

HARRISON: It's fundamental to life and being. We know that laughter has all kinds of—and this is all in the book—laughter has all kinds of therapeutic and positive things. It releases positive pheromones in the brain. It gives you an anaerobic workout. It helps increase the antibodies in the blood. It reduces blood pressure. It increases the number of T-cells and B-cells that are sort of disease-destroying antibodies. It has all kinds of positive things about it. And on top of that the Word of God is for it. Luther had a wonderful take. There's a great book by Gritsch on the wit and wisdom of Martin Luther, which I refer to in the book, and he said: Because Luther understood life eschatologically, that is, the big stuff has been covered by Christ, we know the end. We know the end is in the Lord's hands. My life is in the Lord's hands. It doesn't depend on you! It doesn't depend on me! And the outcome is sure, so lighten up a bit, and laugh a bit. So Luther could laugh at his

opponents, laugh at himself, joke, and it was a profoundly theological reality. And just as grace comes from outside so also humor comes from outside. It comes from dealing with friends and enjoying time with family and friends. It's a profound reality, and I think I as a synodical bureaucrat am profoundly, deeply shallow, but this reality is something I think that covers all people.

WILKEN: We don't picture Jesus crackin' jokes or laughing. I mean we generally picture Him in kind of a state of quiet serenity and maybe the disciples might yuck it up a bit, but He would be above all that. Maybe too sophisticated for it. Although, on the other hand, I kind of bristle at the pictures of Jesus yucking it up too. So...

HARRISON: I do too, because those pictures tend to carry with them the whole weight of American Evangelicalism, which is a theology of glory. But Jesus smiled. Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son, and what happens when the son returns? The father says, "Let's sacrifice and let's celebrate. Let's have a celebration, a party." What do you do at a party?

God gives wine to gladden men's souls, Psalm 104:15 says. You have a party. Jesus is for having a party. He provides the wine. And you don't need to have alcohol to have fun or joke or anything like that. We want to certainly be—I've had my, as a pastor dealt with alcoholics and know what a tragedy it is—but nevertheless Jesus approves of celebrating and humor and joy. And there's something profoundly healthy about it.

You know, Bryan Salminen told me about a story about a young person here in St. Louis who, a young teenager, was out hunting with his buddy and he accidentally shot and killed his friend, and he was so overcome that he soon after took his own life. At the funeral, which was at a church somewhere over here in Illinois, I believe, but at the funeral a man showed up quietly in the

back. I think he was a farmer who owned some of the property near where this happened or something. This guy shows up and he's got bib overalls on. And at the end of this tragic, horrid experience he comes up and he hugs members of the family and the bibs unhooked from the shoulder straps, and his bib overalls dropped to the floor to reveal the fact that he was wearing these loud, flowered, red and white boxer short underwear. And the sight was so humorous that everybody just fell apart laughing. Now the mother said later, "From that moment on I knew I would always have pain. I knew the pain would never go away of losing my son. But I knew from that moment on I would be able to laugh again." And that's the way it is with tragedies and difficulties. I think that's why, you know, during death a lot of families deal with that with sort of off color humor.

WILKEN: Oh yeah.

HARRISON: And you as a pastor know from riding in the hearse with undertakers who have some of the best senses of humor you've ever heard. You know that reality full well. Laughing at ourselves, laughing at our circumstances: profoundly healthy and profoundly Biblical.

WILKEN: You mention the father in the story of the prodigal son who is undoubtedly, though it's not described in these terms, deeply hurt by both of his sons in this story, and then in the end is celebrating and inviting the other son to celebrate too. This is God the Father. And I want you to talk about that fatherly joy that God has at repentance, at the return of prodigals, at calling those who aren't repenting back into the celebration.

HARRISON: Well, maybe you could think of it this way. Virtually all of us have had families, or we've had internal challenges with family members, aunts or uncles or cousins or a father or a mother or something like that, and to live with that broken relationship knowing every day

that... It's almost worse. I've talked to friends or family members who have undergone divorce, parents of children who have divorced, and they love the divorced spouse like their own children and all of a sudden at the divorce it's like that child no longer exists. It's, as one person told me, it's worse than death, because I know that person whom I loved and continue to love is still there, but I have no relationship.

The joy of the Father is to have the table set and the places open and to have everybody show at the table and to be reconciled. I think the Bible is so full of meals, from the Lord's Supper and other meals, and eschatological meals at the end times and eternal life as a great banquet, all of that demonstrates that life at it's best is being reconciled, to eat and to find joy in one another, in one another's company, to be able to joke, to smile, to enjoy eternity. That's the way the Lord has created us, for community, for fellowship, with Himself and with others.

WILKEN: When we come back, that's a great place to go, to the meal that Christ invites us to every week, to the community and the communion that is there, and that we rejoice together as a community, and that we have an objective reason to rejoice. Pastor Matt Harrison is our guest. We're talking about Christian joy on this Wednesday afternoon March the 10th. I'm Todd Wilken. Stay tuned.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: All right, let's talk about, since we went from the prodigal son to the party to the feast, the fatted calf has been slaughtered and the feast is ready. I can hardly read this without thinking about the feast that Christ provides every Sunday and the kind of joy that is there. Talk about the joy that is unique to that Table where Christ gathers sinners.

HARRISON: “In Thy presence is fullness of joy, at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore,” Psalm 16. And you can find those texts all over the Psalms. The presence of the Lord produces joy. Why? In repentance He invites us to approach Him to receive His wonderful, marvelous, delightful gifts. There’s no looking down your nose at anybody else next to you. There’s no self-centered reason to justify yourself. You’re all sinners; the whole lot of you are sinners, every one of you. All in the same... It doesn’t matter, your economic status. It doesn’t matter, the level of kookiness in your family or your own sins. Everybody comes as sinners. Everybody leaves forgiven and reconciled with one another, restored in relationship to one another, and then freed to live in joy also to one another, to extend love and forgiveness and joy to the other.

St. Paul says that the works of the flesh are enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions. That’s an LCMS voters’ assembly. [Laughs] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. And that’s what the Lord gives with forgiveness. Living it out, well, we’ve always got to go back to the Sacrament again next week, don’t we? Because we’re sinners. We lack joy. We fail at it. We don’t show it to others. We fail to rejoice in the Lord’s gifts. But, wonder of wonders, He just keeps inviting us back to Supper and gives us the strength to go at it all again the next week.

WILKEN: One more question on the prodigal son, and that is, we picture eternal life often as Christians as joyous for us, but God’s kind of, again, aloof in this. There’s the Father. He sits on His throne. And while He might have a bemused smile on His face, Christ is there at the right hand of the Father. The prodigal son parable would suggest that the greatest joy in heaven is not even ours, but the Father’s and the Son’s and the Holy Spirit’s.

HARRISON: Oh, absolutely! “He will rejoice over thee with gladness,” Zephaniah. I think you’ve put your finger on what is the most incredible joy of the whole Bible. The Lord rejoices over sinners. Oh! And so you turn it all on its head. Normally, we’ve got this compulsion. “Well, be joyous. Well I should be joyous as a Christian. But I’m not joyous. Well, I need to be more joyous. Okay, I’ll work on being more joyous.” The Bible knows none of that. What the Bible shows us is that the Lord takes pleasure. The Father rejoices in the prodigal. For the joy set before Him, the Lord lays down His life for the wayward, for the sheep, and then repeatedly the Lord delights in His flock. He delights in giving salvation. He delights in *you*, maggot-sack sinner that you are. He delights in you. And that might even, that might even cause you, Todd Wilken, to rejoice a bit.

WILKEN: [Laughs] You write at the end of your book about the joy of what you call a generous and faithful Lutheranism. What is that, and how is that a source of joy? Because Lutherans, often painted by pop-culture, Garrison Keillor, even themselves, are a joyless lot. It’s not my experience, of course, but that’s the stereotype we get pinned with. What is the joy of generous, faithful Lutheranism?

HARRISON: Well, there’s kind of a contradiction, it would seem, that if we’re to follow the Bible strictly and Martin Luther’s Catechism, the Lutheran Confessions, then we narrow and constrict God and we don’t recognize salvation outside of Lutheranism and our particular narrow interpretation of it, allegedly. The great paradox of the Bible, and the Bible’s full of paradoxes—like God is man, man is God; the righteous are sinners, sinners are righteous; God justifies the ungodly, etc., etc., etc. The great paradox is: when you recognize the truth of the New Testament, and particularly those truths of the Small Catechism, and the importance of holding faithfully to them, Law and Gospel, the full Creed, prayer as the

Lord would have it be, the Lord's Supper, Holy Baptism, Confession-Absolution, as you hold to those things and are more steadfast and intense about them as a Lutheran, and refuse to compromise by the same token you recognize that wherever those gifts are, and they are way beyond Lutheranism – Thank God! – you recognize that Christ is there also. And so at the same time we're stodgy and hardcore and intense Lutherans, we also recognize to the very same extent and even more that the Church is well beyond us. It is wherever Christ is.

WILKEN: You didn't write this, but the person you chose to write the afterward for this book – and I like books with afterwards, they kind of put a bow on everything – wrote this: "Matt kept his promise and didn't try to give us a 'joy-o-meter' in this little book, or 'Ten Sure-Fire Ways to Put Joy into Your Life.' What he gave us was a gift because he gave us, again, the Gospel." So, there are so many books that you could find on Christian joy. How does delving in to those texts and finding the Gospel there become the real source of joy that doesn't need ten steps or a joy-o-meter? About thirty seconds here.

HARRISON: All of life viewed from the advantage of the Gospel, just the vantage of the Gospel, is just delightful. It's like a diamond. It's like looking into a diamond. At the heart of it is a bright, shining treasure and you turn and look at the Gospel from the vantage point of the Father, the joy of the Father over us. You turn from the vantage point of the Son, and look at Jesus' joy over going to the cross. You turn from the vantage point of the Spirit and see the joy of the Spirit. You turn and look at the facet from the vantage point of the joy of

repentance, from the joy of being forgiven, from the joy of being part of a community of joy, the Church, from the vantage point of looking at this wonderful gift, from family, from humor, worship, life, from creation, from the joy of the texts that talk about a joyful pastor and having joy in your pastor, the joy of giving, joy in our weaknesses, joy in suffering, all those things. It makes the Gospel just pop. It just shines in every aspect of our lives, every single one. And it's profound. I needed to do this for myself more than anything. I didn't write this for anybody else; I wrote it for myself, and I can't tell you how profoundly thankful I have been for this experience.

WILKEN: Pastor Matt Harrison is Executive Director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care. He's author of *A Little Book on Joy: The Secret of Living a Good News Life in a Bad News World*. Thanks for being our guest.

HARRISON: Thanks, Todd.

WILKEN: First, the Father has joy in us. From before the foundation of the world for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, He rejoices in the world He has made. Even at creation, knowing that it would fall into sin, He rejoices even as it falls into sin, He rejoices to give the promise of Christ to this world and to us, and He rejoices over the long centuries to bring that promise to its fruition. He rejoices to put to pain and suffering His own Son for our sakes. He rejoices to raise Him from the dead. He rejoices to send Him again to bring us to Himself. And then in the end, only joy. I'm Todd Wilken. Talk with you again tomorrow. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

