

Joy

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Date: 06 October 2024

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[0:00] Okay, so we are continuing on in our series, Fruits of the Spirit, looking at different fruits of the Spirit. And those of you who have been in church in a long time, it's probably one of the earliest things you learned in a kid's church.

You know, the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, kindness, self-control, and on it goes. Now, what these are, when we think about the fruits of the Spirit, they are essentially the character of God.

And they're the character of God that is being formed in God's people. So as we follow Jesus, as we spend time with Jesus, these God-like qualities are meant to bear influence upon us.

They're meant to bear influence upon our motives and desires and behaviors so that our lives begin to reflect Jesus. And Elliot kicked us off with the first fruit of the Spirit, which was love.

And he did an incredible job last week, like, going to have to call you Dr. Love from now on. But just, yeah, yeah. I don't know if he'll be okay with that, but hey, you know, I'm sorry I just did that to you, man.

[1:11] I think everybody just, yeah. So we did that, and today we are looking at joy. Now, let me say this about joy. When we think about joy, we kind of equate joy with a state of happiness, right?

But we just can't stop there, right? We just don't like to do anything that easy around here, do we? Let's dig a little bit deeper. What is joy? Well, joy is the sense of happiness, yeah, but it's also accompanied by, like, awe.

It can be accompanied by wonder or maybe a feeling or a sense of delight. Maybe it's a sense of just security. Maybe it's a sense of, like, lightness from being unburdened by something.

Maybe it's a sense of relief. When we have joy, we might also feel happy. We can feel satisfied. We can feel contentedness. We could feel safe. We can feel unburdened and fortified.

We can feel energized and encouraged. And as much as I can describe it, we all kind of know when we have joy, and we all kind of know when we don't have joy, right?

[2:16] But there's a question here. Where does one get more joy? Where does one get joy? Where does one get more joy? Because you can't just smile your way into joy. That doesn't work.

So, I want to introduce to us the Apostle John. We're going to read from a letter of his. And if you have a Bible, you can go ahead and turn to 1 John chapter 1.

We're going to read verses 1 to 4. If you don't have a Bible, hey, we got the verses up on the screen as well. And so, at the time of this writing, John has been following Jesus for quite a while.

And also by this time, the place that he would have considered such an important piece of his identity, both as a follower of Jesus, but also just as a Jew, this place called Jerusalem had already been sacked.

It already fell and been razed to the ground, and the temple destroyed as well. So, here, probably, most likely, they say either John is in this Gentile city called Ephesus, far away from Jerusalem and Judea, or he is in exile on Patmos because of his work as proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[3:33] So, he has gone through decades of being persecuted for being faithfully following this guy, Jesus. So, let's see what he writes about joy.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us.

And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is God's word. John spells out everything we need to know about joy and where it comes from in these four verses.

[4:53] And I would say this, joy is the direct product of interacting with love, beauty, and goodness. Now, as we think about this more deeply, as we apply it to our own life experience, I think we would say, actually, yeah, that is a very true statement.

And you know what? You don't even have to believe in Jesus to understand that that is a true statement. Like, we see it, and we experience that kind of joy in every wedding ceremony and the declaration of unconditional love when we behold it.

The joy fills not only the bride and groom on the stage, but it kind of fills the hearts of the people beholding it as well. Or think about the joy that we experience when we soak in a sunset's magisterial beauty.

Or when we hike to mountain peaks for the reward of the breathtaking view. Or when we read good poetry or listen to a fantastic song.

Those things fill us with joy because what we are doing is we're interacting with beauty and goodness. And the direct product of that is joy. Our souls were made for this.

[6:13] Now, we can instinctively know what is meant by interacting with beauty here, but think about goodness. So, goodness is a little bit harder to define. And since it's one of the fruits of the Spirit that we're going to talk on in the future, I'm not going to do a deep dive here.

But still, all the same, like when we talk about these fruits of the Spirit, there's some interconnectedness here. Like you, like for example, you can't say, man, I've got love, but I'm not a very gentle person.

It's like, okay, well, there's some immature, there's like, your love's going to have to become more mature than if that's the case. The two are interconnected. So, goodness that produces joy has qualities of delight to it.

It has qualities of kindness. And I would also argue that it has qualities of truth as well. Goodness has this relational reality to it, meaning it has to be given to be received.

Like you think about how God opens His Word to us in the creation account. He says, let there be light, and there was light, and then what does it say? He saw it, and He said it was good.

[7:23] I can make the case that we are born looking for goodness. Kurt Thompson, thinker, theologian, psychologist, Christian counselor says this, we are born looking for someone who is looking for us.

Think about a baby. When I think about little baby Holly Brown, she's in our community group, and it's not because her parents drop her off with us. They're there with us, you know, but she's with us. But when she catches your face and she sees you smiling and delighting in her, what is her natural response? She just goes big with a smile, right?

Every baby is born with this instinct. They look for faces. It is amazing every baby that you hold. They're not like trying to find where your feet are or anything.

They're kind of looking around, and they're looking for a response. They're looking for somebody that's looking for them with goodness and love. And what you can say is that that is how God made us.

[8:35] We were made to behold beauty. We were made for loving presence. We were made to experience goodness. And let me give you Tozer's idea of God's goodness.

The goodness of God is that which disposes him to be kind and cordial and benevolent and full of goodwill toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy.

And his unflinching attitude toward all moral beings is open, frank, and friendly. By his nature, he is inclined to bestow blessedness.

And he takes holy pleasure in the happiness of his people. If you want to know why the Psalms speak a lot about seeking God's glory, going to the place where they could be in God's glory, going to the place where they could behold his holiness and his beauty.

It's because when you and I do that, when you and I take time to ponder and look and seek and behold him, what you will find is that when you seek his glory, you'll find that his glory is looking back at you.

[9:51] And what you receive back is that you see a God who cherishes you. You see a God who delights in you. You see a God who loves you and you see a God who finds you absolutely beautiful.

Or if you're a guy, handsome. So I'm going to stop preaching before I preach the whole goodness sermon right now. But my point is joy is directly connected with interacting with love and beauty and goodness.

And now what that should make us realize is that when love and beauty and goodness are absent, that means joy is lost. When I lost my mom to cancer in 2007, that was not a joyful circumstance. When a husband and wife have conflict and say things they shouldn't, that is not a joyful circumstance. When a close friend betrays you, that is not a joyful circumstance.

When a large-scale devastation happens like what we're seeing in Western North Carolina, that is not a joyful circumstance. But if you believe that God is love and that he is beauty and that he is goodness, and if you believe that he is always with you in every circumstance, then what you have is the potential for joy on tap.

[11:11] And that is true. Joy can transcend circumstance. Think about Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail, Acts 16. They're in Philippi preaching the gospel.

They get jailed for doing that. And it says they just weren't put in prison. It says they were put in the inner prison. They were put in where the really, really bad, dangerous people go. Right? Don't think like prison that we know today.

Don't think like white-collar prison that's got a bed and a toilet that flushes. It's got a chow hall to go to for regular meals and a recreation area where you can play ping pong or whatever else.

Like think dungeon. Think underground. Think darkness. No light. Think human waste laying around and standing in it.

Think no ventilation. They put their feet in iron stocks, it says, partly for security, but actually even more than that, partly just to torture them.

[12:09] And that circumstance, you can look at that and you can say, man, that is the epitome of the absence of any love and beauty and goodness. Kind of makes solitary confinement that we know today, kind of makes it sound like Sandals Resort a little bit, you know, by comparison.

So what are they doing in that jail? What are Paul and Silas, what are they doing? What do we find them doing? Well, it says they were praying and singing hymns to God in that darkness, in that human waste, the putrid smell.

Now, if I'm in that jail, if I'm Paul and Silas, I'm having a heart-to-heart with God. Right? Why are you letting this happen to me? I have been preaching your gospel so faithfully.

And why not Peter instead of me? Like, right? Now, let me say, there is a time to complain to God. The Psalms are full of these complaints that are called laments.

They start out with a, God, where are you? Oh, how long, O Lord, are you going to let me sit in this suffering and not act? Where are you at? Those are legit questions.

[13:22] But the Psalms, as they say, here, here's a good way to pour out your complaints, to lament to him. It moves, they move from the complaint into remembering who God is. And then it ends with laying it all before his feet and say, yet I will trust in you.

And Paul and Silas, they might have been singing some of those lament Psalms. They're good Jews. They would have known those scriptures backward and forward. They would have probably sung them most of their lives.

They might have been singing Psalm 23. We don't know, but they were singing. They did the things that brought them to the one who is love and beauty and goodness.

And that's how you can have joy that transcends your circumstance. Do the thing that brings you into direct interaction with God. And joy will flow out of that.

Now, if you and I think a little bit deeper about Paul and Silas' singing and praying, it implies something. They knew who God was.

[14:26] And they knew he cared and knew that he was with them. And so you could say their joy was increased by knowing the truth, the truth of who God was and who God is, and they were living in that truth.

And that's true for us today. Our joy is increased by knowing the truth of who God is and living in that truth. Now, let me try to prove this from the negative side.

If knowing God's truth and living God's truth brings joy, then the absence of those things must lead to joy loss. And that is my contention. Sin is joy loss.

Whenever we continue down a path of sin and disobedience, at some point, joy will be diminished and possibly lost altogether. We see this happen in Israel's history. All right?

They stop following God. And they start going their own way. And they keep doing it. And they keep doing it. And God sends these prophets to say, hey, you need to turn. You need to return to me.

[15 : 26] Stop doing what you're doing. Or impending calamity is going to come if you don't repent. But they refused to listen. And they continued on. And in one particular place, we see God speak through a prophet named Jeremiah.

And he is speaking to the people of Judah in this particular moment. And he points out that God's pointing out to them through this prophet Jeremiah that, hey, I've been warning you to change your ways, to stop disobeying, to stop sinning, and return to me for 23 years now.

Through various prophets. And still you're not listening. So God says, here's what's coming.

Jeremiah 25 10. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.

Everything that you find joy in, everything that is life and goodness, I am going to take from you.

Now that sounds harsh. But let's not forget 23 years of God's patient warning.

23 years of him crying out to them through various people say, return to me, return to me, return to me. And they just wouldn't do it.

[16 : 42] And when you and I persist in sin, friends, God's going to be patient. He's going to give each of you warnings and chances to turn. But if we don't, I guarantee you joy will be lost.

Here's the thing. Israel wanted all the good things from God's hand. They were enjoying it all. The abundant harvest, the vats of wine and oil, the mirth at their parties, the safety that they enjoyed from their enemies.

It's all those things. They were doing the kind of religious practice that seeks what is in God's hands, but doesn't really care to seek his face. Now we can look very busy with religious activity, do all the things, and live that way.

Be the very same way that Israel was like. It's very easy to slide into a place of doing discipleship on autopilot. And often it's reasons for convenience.

You know, you get to a point in your life where it just feels like too much to do all the things, right? I have to be a good friend. I have to be a good child to my parents.

[17 : 54] I have to be a good parent. I have to be a good worker. I have to be a good student. And the list kind of just grows and grows and grows. And I have to be a Jesus follower.

So we often settle. God gets pushed to the margins of our life. He's not the priority. He's somewhere down on the list. He'll understand. And then somewhere along the way we lose joy and can't figure out when or what has made us so unhappy.

Well, here is what is on offer for you and me today. We can get that back. We can get our joy back.

And the first step to regaining joy is acknowledging that joy requires you to know who God is.

Grow in the knowledge of Christ. We are told many times in the New Testament. Know who your God is. And the second step is living like that means something.

Paul and Silas knew who God was in that dark dungeon. Their circumstance could not take that away. They knew how to remain in the truth of who God is by singing and praying.

[19 : 02] It doesn't matter where you are. It doesn't matter what is going on in your life. When you got a heart full of God's truth. Now, maybe that's Psalms. Maybe that's hymns.

Maybe that's Brandon Lake on your playlist. I don't know. Maybe that is scripture memorized. That is in your heart. But when you got those in you, nothing can keep you from abiding in the truest truths of who God is.

Nothing. Which means joy is always available because it is a person to dwell in and a person to behold. And it's there for each of us.

Do you believe that? And I hope you're beginning to see what's at stake if you don't. That slide into compromise is a slide into a joyless existence.

Now, that's reason enough for us to take this seriously. But there's another reason. Especially if you are a disciple of Jesus. If God's beauty and goodness aren't your main joy source, you probably won't bother sharing it with others.

[20:09] Joy in God motivates us to share him with others. You know, we have some great restaurants in New Bern, downtown New Bern especially.

But one of them has these things called Nashville Hot Chicken Tacos. And they are just about the best thing I've ever put it, I've ever eaten in my life. Right?

The combination of all the flavors. They put pickles on these things. And I just want to say, I'm a pickle hater. I've been a lifelong pickle hater. I'm like, I'm the kind of guy that if you put a pickle on my plate, you've just ruined my day kind of guy.

But the pickles on that taco, like somehow it would be anathema to even think about not including that as part of what's going on there. And I've gotten lots of joy out of that dish.

I have. And if you've been in conversation with me at all over the past three months, no doubt you have heard me talk about those tacos. But here's, I'm making the point.

[21:11] We love to share our joy sources, don't we? Like, see new parents. New parents, new baby. They love to share their new joy source, don't they?

And they should. The point is, we want others to share in the joy that we have. We want that. And this is what motivated the guys that walked with Jesus.

These apostles that were sent out after Jesus was ascended into heaven. So let's reread the verses we started with because the apostle John nails the point.

Verse 1, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.

That life was made manifest. We've seen it. We testify to it. We proclaim it to you, this eternal life, which was with the Father who was made manifest to us.

[22:06] And that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. Can you hear the apostle John's joy in Jesus and who He is? It is just, it is just flowing off the pages.

We saw, we heard, we beheld, we touched, not just another dude, the eternal word of life that came and made Himself in the flesh and walked with us.

We spoke with Him. He did amazing things. He ate with us. He said some cool things. Blew our minds. We saw Him heal people and raise the dead. We saw these things.

I'm not going to keep that quiet. How can I keep that in? It's like, Jeremiah, I have a fire burning within my bones. It's got to get out. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We say that so you can know this too.

[23:07] You can know this Jesus. Then we have fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and we want you to have that fellowship with us too. This is too good to be quiet, to keep quiet. This is way better than Nashville hot chicken tacos, friends.

John is writing it down. He's saying, man, I'm going to be gone one day, and I'm writing this down so that this good news about Jesus is going to carry on, and carry on, and carry on.

John can't stop talking about Jesus. He has to know that we know what he knows. Why? Because in that way, his joy was made complete.

You want your joy to be made complete? Don't keep Jesus to yourself. John's pretty confident that they're going to experience Jesus the same way he did.

And that's kind of an important thing for you and me to recognize, right? I can boast in those tacos, but I'm assuming people are going to have the same exact experience as me.

[24:18] I'm hoping that they go to that restaurant, and they're still on the menu, and the chef isn't going to botch it up, right? But those are all real possibilities.

John's confidence in sharing his joy is knowing that this Jesus that he knows, that he proclaimed, that he experienced, that he is never going to change, and he will always be available.

And don't take that for granted, friends. An unchanging, ever-present God means unbreakable joy is possible for everybody. The Jesus that John experienced in the Judean countryside 2,000 years ago is the same one you and I experience today.

It's not a different person. Jesus has not changed. His message has not changed. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He is still love, goodness, and beauty. And there is joy to be gained as we grow in the knowledge of him and remembering what he has done for us.

[25 : 22] There's a guy who's called the Einstein of psychiatry, Dr. Alan Shore, and he's concluded this.

Joy is the fuel on which the brain was designed to run. He went on to share that you can increase joy in the brain by meditating on memories of goodness and beauty.

It's a case of science catching up with theology again. A central part, think about this, a central part of the healing path in bereavement is to share pleasant memories of the one who passed away. Right? We stop and we take time to recall stories and memories about their, showing their love and their goodness and their kindness. All the things that made them so beautiful to us.

And isn't that amazing? Isn't that incredible? That God made us this way. It's like he knew what he was doing. And as uplifting as that is, when we think about the loss of a loved one and engaging and sharing about them, Jesus isn't just the one who was with John.

[26 : 35] He is with us now. And we have this assured hope that he will be with us forever. And what this means for you and me is that we have the ability to abide in unchanging, ever-present love, goodness, and beauty.

We can have unbreakable joy. I love how the Apostle Peter put it. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him.

And rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. Now, as much as I'm claiming this is available to everybody, it doesn't come without you doing something.

You and I can choose to disengage from it by disengaging from Jesus. We can choose not to remember who God is and the things that he has done for us.

We can choose not to look to him in the present. We can choose not to behold his love and beauty and goodness on a regular basis. So, if you want more joy, what I'm saying is spend time doing the things that bring you into his loving, good, beautiful presence.

[27 : 56] This is the spiritual disciplines we talk about. It's things like worship and prayer and scripture reading, silence and solitude, being together in community like this.

It is in things like taking communion. It is engaging in things like the media fast we're going to be doing. It is doing the things like packing a little shoe box and sending it on its way.

And what will happen is that you will start to be filled with this thing called gratitude. As you engage in these practices, you will start to be filled with this thing called gratitude.

And practicing gratitude leads to joy. In a moment, we're going to take communion. And communion is a gratitude practice. Some churches call it communion.

Some churches call it the Lord's Supper. Some call it the Eucharist, which sounds really like old and outdated and really uncool. But we shouldn't snub our noses at it because it just sounds too boomer for our ears.

[28 : 56] Because that idea of Eucharist has deep abiding Christian roots. That word comes from a Greek word. And I'm not trying to like impress you here.

But like it comes from a Greek word, Eucharistio. And that word is used often in the Bible to convey something like joyful thanksgiving. And it's typically in the context of properly acknowledging that God's grace works well for our eternal gain and for His glory.

And so when we do Eucharist properly, a.k.a. the Lord's Supper, a.k.a. communion, what we are doing is we are cultivating joy through gratitude, joyful gratitude.

And so we're going to do that in a moment here. And as you prepare to come to the table today, I want you, as the song says, to ponder anew what the Lord God Almighty has done for you and what He can do for you, what He is doing for you.

Ponder anew, friends. As the band comes up and we seek to respond, I want to say to you, if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, I want to say there is an unbreakable joy in knowing and following Jesus.

[30 : 10] But there is something very scary if you choose not to. If you walk away from the salvation He is holding out to you today. Jesus called hell this place where there is darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And we often equate hell with fire and pain. And maybe that's true, but you know what hell is going to be also? The absence of joy. The absence of goodness.

The absence of beauty. And the absence of love. It's going to be a miserable existence. That's never going to end. And Jesus is holding out to you.

You can go this way. Or you can join me in unbreakable joy. Friend, don't go away from today. Not taking Jesus at His word and His offer of salvation to you.

Come to Him. Come and believe. Come and trust. Come and put your faith in Him. And there's going to be a prayer up on the screen that you can pray. While we are taking communion.

[31:18] Come to Him. And I want to say to the rest of us in the room. If you're already a follower of Jesus. We're about to come and partake of something that points us to the sacrifice of Jesus.

His blood that was shed for you and me. His body that was broken for you and me. We get to behold His beauty and His goodness and His love. Because He took in our brokenness and our sin. Let that stir you with thanks. Let that fill you with awe and wonder afresh and anew. Ponder anew what the Lord God Almighty has done for you.

Pray with me. Lord, we thank you that you are a God of unbreakable joy. That you are a God of love and beauty and goodness.

Thank you, Lord. For inviting us to come to your table. You say as often as you are together. Do this in remembrance of me. And that's why we do this.

[32:28] We come to your table to ponder anew and remember and be amazed once again. And Lord, I ask you to bless this moment with your presence. Stir in us gratitude.

Stir in us thanksgiving as we come and partake. His blood shed for you. His body broken for you. Go to the table. And take of your joy. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.