

June 10, 2018 sermon

“That your Joy may be complete” by Pastor Chris Myers-Tegeder

Last week Pastor Mike started us on a sermon series focused on the fruits of the Spirit. To clarify what we mean by fruits of the Spirit, the idea is that if we as Christians are allowing the Holy Spirit to move in us and through us, the end result or fruit should be the fruits of the Spirit as laid out in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. As a result, these fruits are the marks of a Christian. So if the Holy Spirit is in charge, these 9 marks which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control should be evident in our lives. And last week Pastor Mike walked us through the first one, which is love. This week we move on to joy and this morning we ask ourselves what does it mean and feel like to have Christian joy? For a look into this we turn to John chapter 16, verses 16-24. This is Jesus speaking to his disciples towards the end of his ministry here on earth:

Scripture: John 16:16-24

<sup>16</sup> Jesus went on to say, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”  
<sup>17</sup> At this, some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father’?”<sup>18</sup> They kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’?”<sup>20</sup> Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. <sup>21</sup> A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. <sup>22</sup> So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. <sup>23</sup> In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>24</sup> Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

This passage in John chapter 16 is just part of a long dialog by Jesus talking about what is to come after he ascends into heaven. Jesus is addressing the fact that he will be leaving them, but the Holy Spirit is going to join them, and he attempts to explain what they are going to experience. And as John typically is, in contrast to the other gospel writers, John is accounting for what is going to happen theologically. How does Jesus leaving and the Holy Spirit coming work in terms of understanding God and our relationship with God? And subsequently Jesus mentions joy several times in this passage. In fact John accounts for the use of the word “joy” more than the other gospels. So what does Jesus mean when he uses the word joy? What is Joy?

Recently someone sent me a list of funny church bulletin bloopers. Have you seen any of these before? These are always fun. One of them was this (show slides): “The sermon this morning: “Jesus Walks on the Water.” The sermon tonight: “Searching for Jesus.” Another read like this: “Don’t let worry kill you -- let the church help.” Here is another one: “Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.” And then there is this one from an Episcopalian bulletin read like this “The Rector will preach his farewell message, after which the choir will sing: “Break Forth Into Joy.” You may break into joy once this sermon is over. I don’t know. The Bible talks about joy a lot, we Christians talk about and sing about joy a lot, but what *is* joy?

The Webster dictionary says that Joy is “a feeling of great pleasure or happiness.” Now I am going to go right out on a limb here and say that I do not think this is the biblical definition of joy. Biblical joy is not

necessarily happiness. You do not need to feel happy in order to be filled with joy. Some of you are looking at me like I'm crazy so I better explain myself. What do I mean when I say joy and happiness are not the same thing? Well, first we have to understand how we come by joy. Where does joy come from? Is this a feeling that we generate? Do we somehow just feel joy at certain times? If I told you to be joyful right now could you do it? Some maybe yes and some probably not. And the reason is because *we* do not generate joy. Instead joy is something we receive. So number one: Joy is something we get or receive from God or from others. Think about it, when you have experienced joy hasn't it come from someplace? Watching you child graduate brings you joy right? You didn't generate that feeling. The experience of a loved one brought you that joy and you received it. Joy is something we receive.

And biblical joy is especially received. Jesus specifically says in this passage in verse 24 "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." Jesus is the source of our joy and completes our joy. This is something we receive. So number one, joy is something we receive. This verse I just read about asking anything in Jesus' name and receiving it, I will come back to this verse because I know it can perplex us at first. But let's stick with what joy is first. Joy is something we receive.

Second, you do not have to be happy to experience joy. Joy and happiness are not the same thing, although in many cases they go together. That definition in the Webster dictionary is wrong when it comes to biblical joy or Christian joy. In this passage from John Jesus clearly talks about joy and grief in the same breath. And Jesus never mentions being happy. In fact this whole passage is about Jesus encouraging the disciples to hang in there with what is to come, because it won't be easy. Yet in the midst of this he mentions joy multiple times. So joy must be something different than a feeling of happiness. In Philippians chapter 4 the apostle Paul says to "rejoice in the Lord always." Rejoice in the Lord always, not just sometimes. Yet we know and Paul knew that Jesus also said blessed are those that mourn. So if it is assumed that we will experience mourning, and knowing this Paul writes to "rejoice in the Lord always," rejoicing cannot be synonymous with happiness. Joy must mean something else.

So what does Jesus say about this? Well, in verse 20 Jesus says "You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." Your grief will turn into joy. It does not say joy will erase your grief. There is grief first, and then a transformation of some kind and then we receive joy. What does this tell us about joy? Well, for one thing it tells us that joy is not instantaneous. You don't just slap on joy. It comes out of a process. Joy comes through experience. And specifically it comes through experience with God. Throughout this whole passage in John 16 Jesus is addressing the disciples' relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as it will progress from this time on. And Jesus is telling them that there will be grief, particularly in respect to their relationship with the world, but that through that experience they will receive joy in their relationship with God.

Therefore joy is something we receive, joy is not the same as feeling happy, and joy comes through experience. What else does Jesus tell us about joy in this passage? Well, Jesus then uses this great illustration in verse 21. He says this: "A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world." So for you moms and honestly you dads too, expecting a child is an experience in which you receive joy isn't it? Children are a gift from God and when you are expecting them you do experience joy. But then there is childbirth. How fun is that? Ladies, anyone want to share how fun that is? I was talking to a new mom just last weekend and she was recounting that because it was her first child she did not realize that she was in labor until it got intense and

close to the end. So by the time she actually went to the hospital she was well in to labor and too close to the baby coming to be given the drugs that ease the pain. And she was telling the doctor “no, I’ll hold on, just give me the drugs.” Anything to relieve the pain. Yet did that pain erase the joy of expecting that child and then receiving that child? No. The joy of the gift of a child was there before, during, and after, even though she experienced real pain and suffering.

Jesus uses this example to teach the disciples and us that the joy of a relationship with God is there, even when we experience real pain or suffering. The joy is not gone because God is not gone. The joy of a God that wants to be in relationship with us stays with us through multiple experiences. This is another reason I am confident that joy does not equate with the feeling of happiness. Joy goes much deeper than that.

Jesus continues with this discussion of grief and joy in verse 22, after this illustration of childbirth, Jesus says this: “So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.” Jesus equates this coming time, when he will leave the disciples and the world will give them a difficult time with the grief part, but then the promise of seeing them again and no one being able to take away their joy. Again, remember I said earlier that joy is something we receive? Well here, Jesus tells them that the joy they receive cannot be taken away from them by the world. He says “and no one will take away your joy.”

So exactly what is this joy that we receive from a relationship with God, that is experienced over time, and cannot be taken away even with the reality of grief at time? It is the promise that Jesus is giving them and gives you and I as well. It is the promise of God’s presence through the Holy Spirit and the promise of eternity in the presence of God. The promise of relationship with God, which is intended to start in this life and then continue in the life eternal. When Paul says rejoice in the Lord, the “in the Lord” is the key part to understanding what joy is. You will not receive this joy from the things the world values. You will not find real joy in entertainment, you will not find real joy in money. Joy is received from God when we are in relationship with God and it happens over a long period of time. Even if you go back into the Old Testament this has been the promise for a long time. Nehemiah reminds the people of Israel as they try to rebuild that “the joy of the Lord is your strength.” It is key that joy is in the Lord.

Now I said I would go back to verse 23 where Jesus says this: “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” I have had people ask me about this verse, especially when they were asking God for something and it was not happening. If you read this verse by itself, it sounds like we are promised anything we ask God for in the name of Jesus. But I think we know that this is not reality. And the reason that this is not reality is because that is not what this verse means. If you look at this verse in context, the context of this passage is Jesus explaining that he is going to leave the disciples. They are no longer going to have him to answer their questions. In fact this passage started with exactly that, the disciples asking Jesus what he meant, right? Verse 17 the disciples say this: “What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father?’” And then Jesus explains himself. Then Jesus explains that the way they will get their questions answered going forward is by asking God in his name. Up to this point Jesus has been the intermediary between the disciples and God. But after Jesus ascends, they will go to God directly in Jesus’ name. So when this passage says “what you ask in my name,” it means the questions you have for God, ask him directly in my name. He doesn’t mean anything material that you ask for in my name, or events or what we want to happen. He is specifically talking about questions we have about relating to God. And of

course this is why we often say at the end of a prayer “in the name of our savior Jesus, amen.” This is where that comes from. We are asking God in the name of Jesus, as instructed, to give us the answers to the questions we have about God and our relationship with God.

And then Jesus ends this passage with this in verse 24: “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete. In other words, when you have questions about your relationship with God, ask in the name of Jesus and God will answer you and will complete the joy that you have received from that relationship with God. Jesus is leaving them, but God will still complete their joy. The relationship with God does not stop just because Jesus is ascending into heaven. They can trust God to continue to give them joy through the Holy Spirit and this is why joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Then lastly, why does a relationship with God give us joy? Well honestly, that is the effect God has on people. It is all over the Bible. Isaiah 9 [God] “You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest.” The Psalmist in Psalm 30 “Sing the praises of the LORD, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. <sup>5</sup>For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime, weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” Remember what the angels tell the shepherds when Jesus is born, even under not so great circumstances? Luke 2, you hear this every Christmas: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” In 1 Peter chapter 1 we hear this: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”

My brothers and sisters, are you filled with the joy of God in your life? Remember, joy is something we receive. You can’t generate the joy of the Lord. You can only receive it through relationship with God when the Holy Spirit is at work in your life. That is why it is a fruit of the Spirit. And this joy is grown over time in relationship with God. It is not an instant experience. And don’t expect to be happy all the time. I think we established that having joy and being happy are not the same thing. You can have the joy of the Lord even when times are difficult. In fact James writes in James chapter 1 that we should quote “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” God can fill you with his joy even when you are challenged in life, because a relationship with God, the action of the Holy Spirit, is greater than any of the things this world. Jesus told his disciples and us in this passage that even though we wait for Jesus’ return, God is there through the power of the Holy Spirit now and will continue to be in relationship with us and give us joy. So friends, I leave you with the words of the apostle Paul from Romans chapter 15, one of the most eloquent joy passages in the Bible “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.