

Joy

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Date: 14 October 2012

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[0 : 00] So we're starting to work our way through this series on the fruit of the Spirit. So you look at verse 22 in Galatians 5.

And last week the minister, Derek, was here speaking on the first of those in the list, the fruit of the Spirit is love. And this week we're on the second, the fruit of the Spirit is joy.

So joy is a kind of topic I think that lots of us struggle with. When I was a teenager in an era of great music in the late 1970s, there was a band called Joy Division.

And Joy Division were a very kind of bleak and melancholic bunch of young men, whose most famous song was Love Will Tear Us Apart Again, not exactly a hopeful anthem.

And Joy Division, actually the name, allegedly, their name comes from a prostitution ring that was run in a German concentration camp.

[1 : 14] So there is a bleak irony in that also. And a sadness beneath it about human nature. And lots of people struggle with being happy or being joyful.

When I was a kid in the 70s, again, this is for the older ones amongst us, there was a TV program called Only When I Laugh, about a group of grumpy old men in hospital.

And the theme tune was I'm H-A-P-P-Y, I'm H-A-P-P-P-Y, I know I am, I'm sure I am. I'm H-A-P-P-P-Y and then they spent the whole program grumbling away.

And that's the way I think lots of people see Christians. That's some of the people, and maybe one of the objections that those of you who are not Christians, one of the difficulties that you have with Christianity, that when you see Christians you think, well, either they're just angry, bitter people, they seem miserable, they don't seem very happy or joyful, or else you've seen kind of evangelical Christians on the TV with plastic grins in their face, and superficial smiles and just highly off-putting, cheesy and nauseating people.

So there's the problem with Christian joy, isn't it? That lots of Christians actually have no joy, or other Christians can only express their joy in a shallow way.

[2 : 49] And that's because Christians, like everyone else, make a kind of crucial error. They take a wrong step, and the wrong step is this, that they put their joy in the wrong things.

So Christians, like everyone else, tend to take joy out of things that are transient and temporary, rather than things that will last and survive.

So we take joy in our own success, or we take joy in our marriage, or in our relationship, or we take joy out of making a lot of money, or a good career, or if you're a Christian, you take your joy out of a sense of what a good person you are, or how faithful you are to God.

And if you put your joy in your marriage, your success, your money, your relationships, your own goodness, you're kind of putting away on those things that they cannot bear.

They cannot be the lasting source of joy in your life. They might give you some joy, but they're also going to give you headaches and hassle and problems.

[4 : 09] You know, no marriage is perfect. It has its rocky patches. No job is perfect. Money comes and goes.

Our own goodness is a sham. So what we have to do is to find out where can you find joy that lasts and survives, even in the rocky times and the hard times.

And of course, what the Bible is teaching us, what I've said earlier in the service, was that we have to find our joy in what God has done for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's where we find joy that lasts in what God has done in Christ Jesus our Lord at the cross, because that cannot be undone and God can't change.

And so what God does and the joy that God gives is the joy that lasts. So for about the next 20 minutes, we're going to look at two or three things.

[5 : 21] We're going to look at the freedom that God gives, first of all, through the Holy Spirit. We're going to look at the fruit that God gives through the Holy Spirit. And then lastly, we're going to kind of look at the absence of joy a little bit more and think about that.

So first of all, though, if we want to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we need to have the freedom of the Holy Spirit. I'll explain that as we go along.

But this whole letter is called Galatians because it was written by the apostle Paul almost 2000 years ago. It was written to people who lived in an area called Galatia.

That's why it's called Galatians. And it's a letter about freedom. So go to the beginning of chapter five and verse one.

And there Paul gives us an insight into what this whole letter is about. And in verse one of chapter five, this is what Paul writes.

[6 : 25] He says, it is for freedom that Christ is set as free. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a Yoke of slavery. Now, if you're not a Christian, if you're not familiar with the Bible, then that might surprise you that Christianity is about freedom.

Because lots of people think becoming a Christian is about giving up your freedom. So how is Christianity about freedom?

Well, there are two ways in which Paul is talking about the freedom of Christianity here. First of all, religious people find themselves being slaves to the law.

And they use the law they find in the Bible to try and kind of climb up a ladder of goodness to make themselves right with God and win God's favor and find heaven for themselves.

And that's a slavery. The law takes hold of your life and your whole life is desperately spent trying to use the law to promote your own goodness.

[7 : 46] And it never works. Because we're not good. We read in Psalm five about the thin, the badness, the wrong there is in absolutely every person.

We can never make ourselves perfect. So that's one form of slavery is the slavery to the law as a way of saving ourselves. The second form of slavery that Jesus frees from is not the slavery that religious people have, but the slavery that rebellious people have.

So you may have rejected religion and you may have rejected Jesus Christ and thought, I'm going to live my way. I'm going to choose my path and I'll live by my own rules.

And when you do that, do you know what you do? You give up your freedom and you sell yourself as a slave, not to the law, but to sin.

Now what is sin? Well sin is any act of rebellion against what God calls us to do. And the sins that we're talking about, some of them were laid out in Galatians five, where we read at verse 19, the acts of the sinful nature are obvious, okay?

[8 : 58] It's not hard to work these things out, Paul says. Sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft. Okay, well we know their sins. Hatred.

Do you know that's a sin? Discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, those are sins. And do you see how these things can really control a person's life?

Immorality and aggression can control your life. Envy or anger or bitterness can control your life and make you a slave.

Sexual addictions or sexual obsessions can enslave you. Impurity or idolatry, worshiping money, worshiping yourself, worshiping another person, you become a slave to money or a slave to that person.

So freedom is not found in rebellion. And freedom is not found in using the law for your own salvation. Paul says freedom is found in God and in the grace that he brings.

[10 : 10] Because Jesus says you can't make yourself right with God by being a slave to the law, so I will make you right with God.

Through my life, my death, my resurrection. And Jesus says you cannot free yourself from the slavery and the power of the sins that have taken hold of you.

But by my death and resurrection, I can break the power that they exercise over your desires and your passion.

So Jesus is the one who sets us free through the power and work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And in Galatians 5, and in the whole letter really, what Paul's doing is he's saying even for those of you who are Christians, there is a real danger that you are going to give up your freedom.

And there are two ways of giving up your freedom. The people he was writing to here, one way in which they were giving up their freedom, was by going back to the law as a way of winning God's acceptance.

[11 : 24] So they thought if I'm a really good Christian, and if I obey all the laws of Moses, and if I do this and that and obey all these rules, I will be a better Christian and God will like me more.

And Paul says, sorry, here's the bad news, God couldn't love you more than he already does. And you don't make yourself a better Christian through obedience to the law.

You can't ever ground your acceptance with God on your own actions. You can only ever ground them on what Christ has done for you.

And then other Christians were saying, so let's just have a little look at verse 13. Other Christians were saying, hey, yes, I am free from the law now.

That means I can party hard. I can do whatever I want in life. So verse 13 of Galatians 5, Paul says, you, my brothers, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love.

[12 : 30] So a second way of giving up our freedom is to go back to the slavery of sin. We can go back to the slavery of the law. We can go back to the slavery of sin.

We can wave the flag of freedom, say, I'm a Christian. I'm free. And then just make ourselves slaves to sin all over again.

The Shoshank Redemption is a well-known movie. And there's an old guy in it who's been in jail for about 50 or 60 years called Brooke Hatton.

And Brooke is told eventually that he's going to be paroled. And when he finds out he's going to be paroled, he grabs somebody in the prison and puts a knife to their throat and takes them hostage because he's an absolute blind panic.

He doesn't want to be released from prison. He's become so institutionalized. And he's afraid of freedom. I've met guys like that coming out of prison who the first thing they do is they go out and they reoffend because they just want to get back inside.

[13 : 37] And you see, for Christians, freedom is a difficult thing to handle. And we're afraid. And so we go back to the law as the basis of our relationship to God, or we just go back to sin.

What does Paul say? Well, he says, don't go back to either of these things. And especially do not go back to sin. So in verse 24, what does he say? He says, you need to be the executioner of your own sin. Verse 24, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

So Paul says, look at your sin, look at the passion, the sinful passions and desires that work in your heart and drive the way you think and the things you want and the way you behave.

And he says, take these things, man, and just strike them hard, kill them off, crucify them, execute them. I've been reading a book recently called A Greater Place of Safety by Hilary Mantel.

It's about the French Revolution and the reign of terror and the guillotine. And the guillotine was introduced as a way of swift execution.

[14 : 46] Just whacked the head off nice and clean. The problem was they were executing so many people that they couldn't keep it sharp enough. And okay, so that created a few problems with the execution process.

Well, you know, when you kill sin off, you want to kill it good and proper. The crucifixion left no life. It extinguished life completely. And that's the way it should be with us in our sin. We kill it off. We extinguish it. We don't let it grow new green shoots in our life.

So are you living in the freedom of the Holy Spirit? Are you enslaved again to either the sin or the law?

Because what verse 22 does when it talks about the fruit of the Spirit? I hope it describes, and I think it probably does describe, the kind of life you would really want for yourself and for your family and for people around you.

[15 : 48] Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Who wouldn't aspire to that? The problem is that we want all those things, but we also want the things in verse 19.

Impurity, sexual immorality, bitterness, hatred, selfish ambition. And as always, we're trying to have the best of both worlds and God saying, sorry, you need to make a choice.

You can't walk two roads in two different directions at the same time. If you've just left home to come to study in Edinburgh, then you know that there's a breaking point. You have to leave home. You have to walk out the door with your bags and get in the train or the plane or whatever it is and go to a new place. And you just have to take that step and make that commitment.

And you may be torn between missing home and being here and enjoying here and enjoy being at university or whatever you're doing.

[16:55] And lots of Christians or people find themselves torn in the same way. I want to be with God and I want to have all God's blessings and joys and I want to be a bitter angry selfish idolatrous sexually obsessed person as well.

God is saying, how on earth is that going to work in your life? So you need to choose which path you're walking and which road.

You're going to live in the power and the freedom of the Holy Spirit. You're going to walk with the Spirit. Are you going to let Him change you? And are you going to cooperate in that process?

Let's move on to the fruit of the Spirit, which comes to those who are living in the freedom and the power of the Holy Spirit. And the first thing I want to say is there is only one fruit here.

It doesn't say the fruits of the Spirit are, it says the fruit of the Spirit is. So these nine things that are set out here, it's not like going to a fruit bowl and saying, okay, there's nectarines, there's peaches, there's apples, there's bananas and there's tangerines and pears.

[18:01] I fancy a banana and a pear and take that away and that's what you have. There is one fruit, one big, delicious fruit. And that's the fruit you have to take, that one fruit, but it's filled with all kinds of different vitamins and nutrients.

And that's the fruit of the Spirit. It's filled, it's one fruit, it's one thing, but it's filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness.

Now what does that mean? It means you can't pick and choose the fruits of the Spirit and say, well, I want peace and patience and joy, but I'm not going to bother with self-control or goodness.

So you can't pick and choose. You can't say, well, those are the two fruits that I have and it doesn't matter if I don't have the rest. It's one fruit. So if you lack any of these things, then you lack them all. So you see, you may think your problem may be, I lack joy. Well, the reason you lack joy is because you probably lack faithfulness and self-control and gentleness.

[19:14] And you can't have the joy if you're not going to have the faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. And in the same way, to have patience and self-control and gentleness, you need to have joy.

So it's a package. And you think, well, how can I work out that in my life? That's too complicated to cultivate all of these different things in my life. And of course, it's too difficult for you to do because I work at God.

It's a miracle of the Holy Spirit in your heart. And so you cannot produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit on your own. You cannot become this person that you want to be without the work of God and grace in your life.

So if you want the joy, you need all the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit too. And you can't neglect them. What is joy? Well, joy is happiness, gladness, delight.

It's an emotion, something that we're often afraid of. If we're Scottish or if we're Presbyterian, then joy or emotion and so on, scary places.

[20:24] It's an emotion that varies in degree. So sometimes the Bible just talks about joy. Then sometimes it talks about great joy.

Then it goes as we're doing and talks about pure joy. And then it talks about joy unspeakable and full of glory. So there are degrees of joy in our lives.

There are sometimes when there's a little joy, sometimes when there's much greater joy. And of course, there will be times when we find no joy. I'll come to that in a minute.

But there are degrees of joy. And where do we find our joy? Well, I'm going to just run through a few slides, a few Bible verses. And the first joy that I want to connect to, because it connects to this passage as well, is what I've called the joy of freedom.

So here is a reminder right from the Old Testament from one of the law books of the Old Testament, which we think are dry and dusty and boring. But actually, they call people to celebration.

[21 : 29] So here's a call to celebration from the book of Deuteronomy in the Feast of Tabernacles. And be joyful at your feast and celebrate together.

What are they celebrating? Well, what they are celebrating in Deuteronomy is freedom. They're celebrating the Exodus. They're celebrating that God set them free from slavery in the land of Egypt under Pharaoh.

And what are we celebrating? Well, Galatians is a letter about freedom. So we are celebrating the fact that through the cross, God has set us free from the slavery of the law and from the slavery of sin.

Next slide, if we bump onto the next slide. What's this? This is about David and Goliath. This is the celebration, the joy of victory.

And David has killed Goliath and he's coming back. And the people are delighted. The victory is great. And they're singing, dancing, and praising God with joyful songs.

[22 : 38] Psalm 20, there's a slide for Psalm 20 after this, which is another Psalm that says, we will shout with for joy when you are victorious and lift up our banners in the name of our God.

So they are celebrating the victories of God. What victory do we celebrate? Well, do you remember the cry of Jesus on the cross? It is finished.

He is won. He is victorious. Why? He has defeated sin and death. He's broken their power. And so we celebrate the freedom and the victory that Christ has given.

What other joys do we celebrate? Well, the next slide is Psalm 16. It's the joy of knowing God personally.

You have made known to me the path of life. You fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasure at your right hand. This is the joy we get from knowing another person, except that person is God.

[23 : 47] Eternal pleasure at your right hand. Here we're talking about living by the Spirit, walking with the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit.

What does that tell us? It tells us that in the Christian, God lives in us through the Holy Spirit, that we have God in our lives in the most personal way of all, and that's a great source of joy.

Last one, Eccl. Okay. So this is Psalm 90. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you've afflicted us for as many years as we've seen trouble. This is the joy of being loved. Isn't it amazing to be loved?

Isn't it amazing to be loved unconditionally and unbreakably forever?

[24 : 46] And so through the cross we know that we are loved by God. He loves us so much that He sent His one and only Son to die in the cross so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus says in John 14, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. We can't imagine a more perfect or great love than the love that God the Father has for God the Son.

And Jesus says, I love you exactly the same way. That's a thing that gives us joy.

So sources of joy are all around us through what God has done. The joy of our freedom, the joy of victory, the joy of knowing God personally and intimately, the joy of knowing we are loved by God forever.

But there is the absence of joy and I've spoken about sometimes why joy is absent from our lives. Sometimes it's because we've given up our freedom and gone back to the law or to sin.

[26 : 01] Sometimes it's because we are neglecting other aspects of the fruit. We're not bothered about patience or self-control or gentleness or kindness.

But sometimes of course it's because of the circumstances of life. We're ill. We've got the blues. We've faced a tragedy.

I heard a programme in the radio last night about the sinking of the Solway Harvester, a fishing boat from Kirkcubrie that sank off the Isle of Man in the year 2000.

Seven men on board, two of them were only 17 years old. All of them were lost at sea. And they spoke to people in Kirkcubrie and just the pain in that community.

At losing those seven men, it absolute horrendous and left a great cloud of depression over their lives for a long time.

[26 : 57] And that's reality, isn't it? Tragedy strikes, illness comes and joy evaporates.

We can't kid ourselves on that that doesn't happen. But what does really matter is how we respond.

Because sometimes we can respond by just going on walking with the Spirit and letting the Spirit produce peace and patience and kindness and goodness and hope in the storm.

But often we don't do that. Often we kind of revert back to the passions and desires of the sinful nature when things are bad.

And so we're jealous of people who haven't suffered the loss we've suffered. We're angry with God or with people that we blame for our problems.

[28 : 16] Or we give ourselves over to drink and drugs and sex to try and blot out the pain.

And so that's another wrong step we take. We need the Holy Spirit even more when things are bad to produce fruit in our lives.

In various places in the New Testament, I'll just mention one of them for the sake of brevity. But in various places in the New Testament, it does talk about joy and suffering.

The two don't need to be totally divorced. Consider it pure joy, my brothers. James says in chapter 1 verse 2, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance, perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

You see, so God enters into our suffering, our darkness, our pain, our despair. And if we allow Him to, He will work in that to produce patience, perseverance, hope, and even allow us to worship Him.

[29 : 33] I've got friends who lost a baby at six months. He was born with cancer, the little boy.

Some of you know who I'm talking about, baby Oliver.

And there was no doubt it was the most devastating circumstance and painful for them beyond all belief.

Their fervent wishes that life for a little Oliver would have been different. But their theme song through all their suffering, they had two theme songs.

One was the 23rd Psalm. The other was a song called Praise in the Storm. And that's what Christians have to learn to do, is not just give up on God and go back to the sinful nature when things are really, really miserable, but to find the help and the power of the Holy Spirit, to go back to the cross and see the love of God Christ crucified, Christ in our suffering and Christ suffering for us. So you may be that person who has no joy. It may be because you're a slave to sin, maybe because you're a slave to the law, or it may be because of your own personal circumstances.

[31 : 06] And to each of you and to myself I say, well, there is joy, and it is found in the unchanging God who loves us and gave himself for us.

I want to say three quick words of application to finish with. One is this, that we need to be a community that celebrates God together. That's why we gather for worship.

And as the community of God, we should be marked by celebration. Paul wrote to another church, the Philippian church, and in chapter 4 verse 2 of that letter, he said to them as a community, rejoice in the Lord always and again rejoice.

You know what? We often forget to rejoice, don't we? And Paul had to remind them, rejoice. I had a guy who used to coach me in one of the jobs I did for the church.

And he lived in Seattle, or just outside Seattle, and we did our coaching sessions by Skype. So this was a work coach, not a sports coach.

[32 : 08] And the first thing he would ask me in every Skype session was, what evidences of grace are you celebrating today? Because he knew that our natural tendency is to whine and complain and focus on the negatives.

And he always wanted to orientate me back to the evidences of God's grace in my life and the things I should be thankful for. So you need to ask each other, in your city groups, in your friendships, in your prayer groups, in your Bible studies, what evidences of grace are you celebrating today?

What are you thankful for? You need to remind each other that we are a celebratory community and that we rejoice in God together when we gather on a Sunday, when we gather for Bible study, when we gather in the old ladies' fellowship and the young women's Bible study, and in identity and impact and all the stuff we do in church life, let us be celebrating so that people outside the church know we are a celebrating people.

So that's one thing I want to remind you of, be a celebrating community. And then I'll do one last thing, which is this. Where, well, put it this way, will you be celebrating in eternity?

That's my real last. And I hope searching question for each of us, because heaven is a place of celebration.

[33 : 33] In the book of Revelation, chapter 5, we read about heaven celebrating. So heaven is a great joyful, celebratory place and it's full of singing and joy.

And so we read, I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands, they encircle the throne of God and the living creatures and the elders sing with a loud voice, worthy as the Lamb who was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom and strength, honour and glory and praise.

Then I heard every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them singing to him who sits in the throne to the Lamb, be praise, honour, glory and power forever and ever.

Heaven is celebrating. What is heaven celebrating? It's celebrating Christ crucified and risen. It is the Lamb who was slain. That is the worship of heaven.

Well if you want to celebrate in heaven in eternity, you need to begin by celebrating Christ in your life today.

[34 : 42] There needs to be that connection and that continuity. Do you worship and love and adore Jesus Christ today?

Well you need to if you want to worship, adore and love Him in heaven. And if you don't have an eternity of celebration with Jesus Christ, then the Bible reminds you you will have an eternity of grief and the darkness of hell without Jesus Christ.

And you're choosing today what path you're on by whether you're willing to celebrate and rejoice in Christ and across.

Let's conclude after 30 minutes or longer rather than 20 and say a prayer. Lord Jesus Christ do enable us today to see what Christ has done for us and to celebrate in Him, to rejoice that He was crucified and rose again and that He has done this for our salvation.

Amen.