

Joy

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- [0 : 00] Galatians 5 and 22, but the fruit of the spirit is joy. We're trying to practice saying it like Cory, but I can't do it.
- Joy. No. Now it suggests that I should begin tonight by dealing with what somebody this morning called the elephant in the room, which is the question that might be in some of your minds.
- Why have they chosen that miserable old person to do the talk on joy?
- I volunteered. We were sitting around a table, a group of us, and Derek was looking for volunteers to take one of these fruits, and I said, I'll do joy.
- And he went pale. And he said, I think I'll do that one. And I said, no, I can do that one. And the strength that sort of drained out of him, and he didn't really argue, so he just left it.
- [1 : 14] So please don't blame Derek for the fact that this grumpy old man is doing joy.
- Now this is the second in the list of the ninefold fruit of the spirit. I came across somebody this week calling this our nine a day.
- Christians are called every day to seek that the Holy Spirit might cultivate these nine qualities which make up his fruit.
- Now I'm supposed to begin with a definition. My favorite definition story, nothing to do with joy, which I read recently is from the Bruins joke book, which I think is actually the only book I've read this calendar year.
- And I read it in black wells. So anyway, the Bruins joke book, the brainy one asks a younger sibling, define the difference between ignorance and apathy, a dinnaken, a dinnaker, which is actually an accidental definition of the difference between them.
- [2 : 31] Now I went to the source of all wisdom this time. I don't know Tim Keller, but I hear him quoted every week here. So I thought, you know, a desperate effort to feel I belong.
- I went to a book called Galatians for You, and Keller talks about joy. And he says, first of all, it's not a matter of natural temperament when someone has just always been bubbly and extrovert by nature.
- And then he defines joy in this way, a delight in God for the sheer beauty and worth of who he is. A delight in God for the sheer beauty and worth of who he is.
- And he says that its opposite is hopelessness or despair. Then he also says that its counterfeit is an elation that is based on just experiencing blessings, mood swings.
- So you feel joy when God is giving you what you want, and you never have that joy otherwise. It's all based on circumstances.
- [3 : 43] That's what he calls the counterfeit. Now I want to do three things tonight. Maybe we'll have to skip over one of them largely.
- But I want, first of all, to think about the joy of God, then secondly, the joy of Jesus, and then thirdly, the joy of the Christian.

So I want to begin with divine joy, just for maybe five minutes or so, and ask you to think with me about this. Now, this may give apoplexy to some of the theologians among us.

I don't know, but I'm just using the language that the Bible uses rather than theological language. I think it's important to begin with this, because we're talking about the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit who is himself God, and this Spirit who is God communicates joy to us. Now I suggest to you that the divine Spirit is communicating joy from the God who is himself joy, from the personal God and the passionate God who is the joyful God, the blessed God.

[5 : 07] Four things about the joy of God. Just quickly sketch them, as I said. First of all, God has joy in himself.

He has joy in his own holiness. God knows himself totally and exhaustively, and he can find nothing to spoil his happiness in himself.

I mean, we know sin and failure and disappointment and tension and struggle with ourselves, and they spoil our joy. But God knows none of these things in himself.

And he also has joy in himself in his fellowship, perfect communion from all eternity. The perfect fellowship, the intimate fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, loving one another and serving one another, this blissful communion that has always been.

Though God never needed anyone else for his joy, his joy in himself is perfect.

[6 : 17] Then he has joy in his creation. There was joy in his making of it, where he looks at each stage and says, that's good.

Then he looks at the whole thing and pronounces it very good. Then there's a day of rest and satisfaction when it's all made.

And I think he also has joy in his upholding of it. The end of Psalm 104, a Psalm that's lyrical about the wonders of the natural world, says in verse 31, May the Lord rejoice in his works.

May the Lord continue to rejoice in the beauty and variety and rhythm of this world that he has made, this blue planet and this green planet which God enjoys.

We know that the heavens declare the glory of God to us, but does God not also rejoice in the display of his own glory that the heavens declare to those who see?

[7 : 32] So God has joy in what he has made. Then thirdly, he has joy in his servant's son.

You think of the delight of the Father who in the Old Testament speaks of the servant in whom my soul delights. And then you have the joy of God expressed at baptism and transfiguration as Jesus hears the words from heaven, with whom I am well pleased.

The Father had total pleasure in his Son and what his Son was doing. Every aspect of the character of Jesus and the obedience of Jesus and the mission of Jesus, the Father was thrilled with and in all that Jesus was and was doing, there was nothing in his life ever to grieve the Holy Spirit.

And God is pleased with the work of Jesus on the cross and the resurrection and the ascension are a sign of the pleasure and joy of God in the achievement of his own Son.

It was all very good. Joy in his servant's son. And then fourthly, joy in his people. Joy for one thing in conversion.

[8 : 58] God rejoices when anyone becomes a Christian. Now you'll want a verse for that. Luke 15 and verse 10.

Joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Joy in the presence of God over one sinner who repents.

Now you look at the commentaries and they talk about the joy of the angels or the joy of heaven. But the point of the verse is that in the presence of the angels was a Jewish way of speaking about God.

It was ultra-reverent language for God. So when you said there is something in the presence of the angels, you were talking about God.

So the joy in the presence of the angels is God's joy over someone repenting. And that interpretation fits into these two little stories in Luke 15 that Jesus has told about the woman looking for her coin and the man looking for the lost sheep.

[10 : 12] Because you notice in each story when the person finds what they're looking for, they invite others to rejoice with them. So the picture is of God rejoicing over a repentant sinner and inviting the angels to rejoice with him that someone has come home.

And then we don't have time to think about God's joy in our own Christian lives, but we read often about God having pleasure in his people and God rejoicing over his people.

And we know how God is well pleased with what we offer him through Jesus Christ. And God looks at us and has pleasure in us in the work that he's doing in our lives as we reflect his own Son and are more and more conformed to the image of Jesus.

So God rejoices in people coming to know him and he rejoices in people growing more like Jesus. And in the amazing words of Zephaniah, not a book we often read, Zephaniah 3.17, the Lord will rejoice over you with gladness.

He will quiet you by his love. He will exalt over you with loud singing. It's like the joy of a parent in a child.

[11 : 40] God loves his children. So divine joy, God having joy in himself, joy in his creation, joy in his servant's son, and joy in his people.

I believe that all of that is important for our gospel, because for many people this universe is cold, impersonal, unfeeling, and doomed.

But we say in the gospel that there is joy at the heart of the universe, that behind the universe, before the universe, and still behind the universe, and in the future of the universe there is joy at the center of everything.

And what we want to do is connect people up with the ultimate source of joy that is there at the heart of the universe.

To connect people up with God is to connect people up with eternal joy, and so then we can have joy, the joy of the Lord.

[13 : 03] So the joy of God. Secondly, I wanted to think about the joy of Jesus. Let me just begin this and move on.

I think it's important to also think about the joy of Jesus and connection with our theme, because it's often been said that the ninefold fruit of the Spirit is a ninefold description of Jesus.

Because in his incarnate life on earth, Jesus was the ultimate man of the Spirit, and the beauty of the human life of Jesus is through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Think of it, Jesus never grieved the Spirit. Jesus never quenched the Spirit. Jesus was always filled with the Spirit.

Jesus always kept and stepped with the Spirit, and so the Spirit bore his perfect fruit in the perfect life of Jesus.

[14 : 10] As I once heard somebody say about the fruit of the Spirit, it's a beautiful picture, isn't it? And Jesus sat for this portrait.

Jesus sat for this portrait, and that includes joy. Now, of course, we normally think of Jesus as the man of sorrows. He experienced all the sorrows associated with human life, and he experienced all the special, intense sorrows, the unique sorrows associated with sin-bearing.

But while he was the man of sorrows, he was also the man of joy. Now, I don't think now I have time to work through this topic, but there were four things as well.

One, his joy in life, because he wasn't a hermit or an ascetic. Two, his joy in communion with Abba, with the Father.

Three, his joy in mission, in teaching and healing and feeding and delivering and forgiving and raising and all the rest of it, what joy that would have given him.

[15 : 20] And fourthly, his joy in anticipation of what lay beyond, for the joy set before him, he endured the cross.

And I just refer you to one verse in the Joy of Jesus that we had read earlier and ask you to think about it in its context perhaps later. Luke 10 and 21.

In that same hour, Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, I thank you, Father.

An explicit reference to the spirit, joy of Jesus. Jesus exulting in the spirit and the joy that came to him from the spirit, he returns in prayer and in praise to the Father.

So we have the joy of Jesus right through his story. But let's come thirdly to the joy of the Christian, which I guess is what I should be talking about mostly.

[16 : 29] And I want again to sketch a few reasons for joy according to the Bible. All of these connected with the work of the spirit. So if I don't remember in each case to say this is about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, I think you'll all know anyway that all of these topics are from the spirit.

First of all and particularly, joy and forgiveness, the joy of the gospel, the joy of coming to know a Savior in all the beauty of His grace and mercy and pardon and peace.

In Luke chapter 2, when the news of the birth of Jesus is announced to the shepherds, the angel says, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people, for unto you is born in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

The birth of Jesus is announced as good news of great joy because he is the Savior.

And the relief and joy of forgiveness is the testimony of the whole Bible. I mean the Psalms are full of it if we had time to go through their testimony.

[17 : 54] The prophets are full of it as well. Let me just read one verse from Isaiah 61. I will rejoice greatly in the Lord.

My soul will exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

And in the New Testament, when Jesus preaches forgiveness and people experience it, joy follows. And then when his people in the book of Acts preach forgiveness and people experience it, joy follows.

Peter in Acts 8, the story of Philip the Ethiopian, he responds to the good news about Jesus and we're told he went on his way rejoicing.

Or the Philippian jailer in 16, he asks, what must I do to be saved? He's told to believe in Jesus and he and his family are baptized and we're told that they were all filled with joy.

[19 : 03] And this is our basic reason for joy, that God has come to me and God has forgiven me all my sins.

And God has forgotten all my sins, all because of the perfect work of Jesus. And God has declared forgiveness over my life and God has promised that he will never go back on his gospel word to me.

That's the most profound reason for our Christian joy, that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus. And that gospel joy is offered to anyone and everyone who will trust in Jesus.

Now, some of these people read about joy and galatians here and they've read the first part of the book. They're surprised that Paul, who writes about joy, isn't always so joyful as he speaks to these Galatians and the things he says to them, no messing about the gospel.

And they say, why is this man who's calling for joy speaking this kind of way to these people? Because there is a heresy in Galatia that is saying Jesus plus and it's robbing people of their joy in Jesus alone.

[20 : 39] And Paul is angry because people are being robbed of their joy. And hearing about this heresy is robbing him of his joy.

So he's not angered because he's an angry man. He's angry because people aren't enjoying the fullness and free-ness of the gospel as they should in Jesus alone.

And he won't have it. He wants people to enjoy the pure gospel of Jesus, where everything is in Jesus and nothing else and no one else can add anything to the work of Jesus.

The Christian finds his or her joy in Jesus, in the gospel of Christ. Now sometimes we lose our joy because of our sins.

And I want to say to you that joy is recovered through repentance. Again the Psalms, a couple of references, Psalm 32.

[21 : 51] The Psalmist in Psalm 32 is miserable in most of the psalm when he's silent about his sin in the earlier part of the psalm. He says when I was silent, well, everything was wrong.

But everything changes when he stops trying to cover up his sin and he confesses his sin and he recovers his joy in the Lord.

And in Psalm 51, you know, David's great penitential psalm, David's great sin is now acknowledged and his great longing is expressed in verse 12, restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me again with a willing spirit.

Restore the joy of your salvation. He'd had a very serious and dramatic sin and therefore he'd had a very dramatic sense of loss in his joy.

He's come back to God and he wants to know the joy restored as God bathes him in his forgiveness once again.

[23 : 09] And I want to say that that's a general principle in the Christian life. In the daily Christian life, that repentance is the way back to joy.

We repent every day and so we experience the joy and peace of the gospel afresh because the blood of Jesus goes on cleansing us from all our sins, so joy and forgiveness.

Then there's joy and worship in the Bible and in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As in worship, we celebrate the wonder of the God of the gospel who has been so gracious to us in Jesus.

We want to celebrate him and in that we're called to rejoice. Now joy is a very prominent theme in communal worship in the Old Testament.

For example, we could have looked at the festivals of Israel, these occasions of celebration, community, party time, festival joy.

[24 : 21] It's almost a definition of these feasts in Deuteronomy when God says, you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. That's what it means to worship.

To get together, have a party and rejoice before the Lord. Again, we could have looked at the Psalms full of joy and corporate worship.

I think one thing that's very important about joy in the Psalms is that they give us a reason for joy.

The Psalms never have a chorus, just four lines where you're told to repeat this ten times, joy, joy, joy, joy, joy, joy.

The Psalms are, rejoice in the Lord who is this, that and the other. Rejoice in the Lord who has done this, that and the other. Rejoice in the Lord who will do this, that and the other.

[25 : 20] It's always reasons for joy. So it's never irrational. It's never just try and make yourself be joyful for no good reason.

Rejoice in the Lord because of who he is, because of what he has done, because of what he will do. He deserves our worship.

The New Testament too, the New Testament church was born in worship and in joy. Remember at the end of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus ascends to heaven and we're told, and they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and we're continually in the temple blessing God.

And they have a Lord's day to celebrate the resurrection with joy and we could go through every aspect of their worship in the New Testament and connect every element of it with joy.

But I think above everything else, something you find in several places, especially towards the end of Hebrews and in the book of Revelation, find it in Paul as well, was that New Testament church's sense of when they worshiped, they were joining with the worship of heaven.

[26 : 37] It was a very real sense that they had. When they worshiped on earth, they were adding their voices to the chorus around the throne in heaven and they felt connected with that world of doxology and joy and so they were able to worship on earth because they were part of a church on earth and in heaven that was celebrating the same God and worshipping the same lamb in the midst of the throne and rejoicing in the same spirit that God had done so much for his church, militant and triumphant.

Another theme for us is joy and fellowship. We often hear that there's such a problem in our society of loneliness and isolation.

The Bible says very early on, it is not good for a man or a woman to be alone. And recently I read somebody who'd done some research in this country saying that the loneliest place to be is the city.

So many people around, but so many people in teeming cities feeling isolated and alone and the church is called to offer community.

Now the New Testament Christians found joy in fellowship and they also welcomed other people in to their fellowship and looked for them to find joy too.

[28 : 18] I mean this is true from the very, very beginning. The church after Pentecost acts to 46 and 47 and day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts and the Lord added to their number.

The New Testament church, people loving to spend time together and sharing food, sharing their homes, sharing worship together and wanting other people to hear and wanting other people to come in and wanting other people in their homes and wanting other people to enjoy the same joy of the same gospel and the same community together.

It's there from the very, very beginning as they rejoice with those who rejoice and then mourn with those who mourn. So go back to Galatians, very important context as we've seen already previous weeks of our text on the fruit of the Spirit to see the enemies of fellowship.

In Galatians 5 verses 19 to 20 you have the works of the flesh and there are 15 works of the flesh and eight of them are to do with relationships.

Enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy. Why are these so horrific?

[29 : 53] Because they are fellowship killers. They are murderers of fellowship and therefore of the joy that fellowship should bring.

They make a congregation miserable and they rob a congregation of its joy. And Paul hates the things that spoil fellowship and so that rob us of the joy we should have together in community, sharing and loving and serving one another, joy and fellowship.

Then there's also the theme in the Bible of joy and obedience. For example in Psalms 19 and 119 where the psalmist rejoices in the Scriptures, the book of the Spirit.

If you read these sections or the whole of Psalm 119 you'll see that his joy is found in putting the book into practice.

It's not just a joy in knowing the book or reading the book. It's a joy in listening to God as he reads the book and putting that book into practice to the glory of God.

[31 : 13] I'm not going to say anything more about that theme of joy and obedience. There's a lot about it through the whole Bible and in the teaching of Jesus. But just to apply it in terms of our own reading, I felt guilty during the week.

I'm not sure if I'm at the same stage that everybody's at with these daily readings. But beginning to get into Leviticus and I read two or three chapters of Leviticus.

I was doing two days reading together and I was sort of glad to tick and tick the Leviticus readings and I thought, I've done them and by the end of the next week I'll have done Leviticus.

It's not the way to do it. We are to read these chapters. We are to tick that we've read them. But above everything else we're to try every time we read to take something out of that reading that's relevant to our daily lives and put it into practice.

It's not suing Leviticus but maybe next Sunday Derrick or Corey will read the passage from Leviticus that encourages all as a community to come together and enjoy bacon rolls, we shall see.

[32 : 34] Joy and obedience. Then there's joy and service. Now again, this is connected with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the gifts with which we serve God.

We've heard from Derrick tonight of the joy that they experienced in serving just for a brief time in another country. We all know something of that joy even here in our own lives, in our own church community.

The joy, the satisfaction of knowing that I am using my gifts and serving Jesus. Is whatever I'm doing in my home, in my work, in my community, in my church, that I am serving Jesus.

It's a wonderfully satisfying thing. Sometimes of course the service is very difficult and actually the joy comes afterwards like the Psalmist in Psalm 126.

His service is done in tears. It's such hard work and a lot of it is so heartbreaking. But then afterwards comes the joy of harvest time and God through what he wept about is bringing joy to his heart as the harvest comes home.

[33 : 59] So we find joy regularly in our service, but sometimes the joy is after the service is done.

Then there's joy and creation in the gifts of God's creation, good things to be enjoyed. No Christian should ever be ashamed or embarrassed about enjoying the good gifts of our Father in his world.

If you want to connect this with a Holy Spirit, let me read just one paragraph from 1 Timothy 4. Listen to how it begins.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith. Then it talks about the teachings of demons, liars.

What do these demonic preachers say? They forbid marriage and they require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving.

[35 : 04] But everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving. And over the page Paul says, God richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

So the Bible is talking about God's gifts to us in the physical, material creation and in the gifts of marriage and the food and feasting and the rest.

And to deny these things or to be ascetic about these things is to grieve the Spirit who expressly says that to have that kind of attitude to the created order is the teaching of demons.

Or we find joy in creation and ourselves being personally creative. We're made in God's image and like God we can have pleasure in unsatisfaction and accomplishment.

But that's a theme all in its own joy and creation I guess. And then there's joy and sorrow, which I need just to mention.

[36 : 17] I don't want to say too much about suffering and sorrow. So the New Testament does connect them and cause us to find joy even in suffering.

Maybe that's a theme for another time because it's such a big issue. But I have a horror of the kind of teaching on joy, some of which I've read over the last couple of weeks, that almost denies sorrow to Christians, that casts suspicion on the Christianity of someone who's going through the dark tunnel of depression in a place where they find no joy and out of which they fear they will never emerge.

And I just want to say that the Bible has a big place, especially in the Psalms, for lament. We are not called to smile all the time and sorrow is real and lament is given to Christians so that we can sing it in the dark and difficult times.

But you can have joy even in sorrow. Let me tell you a story I'm almost done, which horrified me when I heard it from a friend a year or two ago.

He had been in another church and come to the free church and he was talking about the church he'd been in and something that had happened a little before.

[37 : 50] Somebody had been leading the service before somebody else preached just like we're doing tonight. And this man said as he introduced the morning service, now here we are filled with the joy of the Lord and I'm not going to start till everybody here shows me on their faces that they're full of the joy of the Lord.

So let's see you all smile. And there was a row of people here and everybody else was smiling but they weren't. And he said, oh we've got one row at the front.

They're not smiling yet. We're not going to start till they're all smiling. So all of them smiled except one. And he said, there's still one person not smiling, one person without the joy of the Lord, let me see you smile.

And the guy managed some half-hearted grin. He said, okay let's start the service. After the service they found out that that row of people had come back to their hometown for a funeral.

And the man who was struggling to smile had just bedded his mother two days before. And he had the trauma of all of that plus he was the person who was dealing with all her affairs and would continue to deal with that until everything was sorted.

[39 : 16] And he couldn't smile, he couldn't grin. He was very, very close to his mother and he was deeply, deeply distressed by her death and the pain of the cancer and of the dementia that she'd been through in her final months.

He was exhausted with the grief. That's no way to say in church, let's see the joy of the Lord. But interestingly that man when he bore test me later on about it said, but I had a deep joy at the same time.

He said I knew that my mother was a Christian. I knew that she had gone to be with her Lord. I knew that she was now free from pain and the dementia.

I knew that she was now with my dad who had gone before and they were together in heaven. And he said I knew that I would meet her one day in the future and so on.

So he had all kinds of reasons for deep joy even in the sorrow. But he couldn't obey the call to just smile and laugh and pretend to be happy.

[40 : 31] And I think that is just cruel. So we call for having a joy in God but we're also realistic about the difficulties of life.

But we seek to find a deep and lasting joy in the Lord himself and in the gospel. Lastly I was going to talk about the joy of heaven.

But I guess heaven is a good place to finish. Maybe finish with this verse also which was read earlier from our Nehemiah reading.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. Find our joy in God himself. And in the gospel of our God is what gives us strength and it will always make us strong.

Amen. Well, I'm going to ask you to bow in prayer just for a few seconds.

[41 : 34] As I read a prayer to you which is only three sentences, John Stott used to pray this three sentence prayer when he woke up every morning, first thing.

It's a morning prayer. We can pray it tonight. You can pray it tomorrow morning. Here it is. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in Your presence and please You more and more.

For Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow You. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day You will fill me with Yourself and cause Your fruit to ripen in my life.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Amen.

That's truly a wonderful Trinitarian prayer to begin every day.