

The Fullness of Joy

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[0 : 00] We're going to look this evening at a passage, we're going to look at Psalm 16. Derek briefed me in an email to have a celebratory and thankful theme, which was good.

I was going to aim for kind of miserable and ungrateful, so it was good to get the heads up that that wasn't really the vibe, but good to be able to kind of celebrate the fact that we're able, as God's people, wherever we're from, whatever congregation we're part of, to have that fullness of joy that this Psalm is going to speak to us about.

Just a bit of background before we turn to our passage, and one of the reasons I was keen to look here this evening, when we began Haddington Community Church back in 2017, into 2018, as I was just saying before, we spent a bit of time thinking about and speaking about our values as a church.

What is the kind of church that we want to be? What are the kind of things we would want people to say of us if they came, and if they spent a little bit of time with our church family?

We came down to really the kind of fundamentals of the centrality of the Bible, and the necessity of prayer that everything else builds on that, which I'm sure is the same for churches across the land, certainly the same here at St. Columba's.

[1 : 19] And then building on that, we spoke and we still speak about being a welcoming community that people would be brought in and find a home with us as a church, that we would be a growing community, not just that more people would join us, but that we would be growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, would be deepening our relationship with Him, that we would be a serving community, looking to use our gifts and our abilities for the good of the church, for the good of one another, and for the good of our community.

And then finally, and really over and above all of that, that we would be a joyful community. We said from the beginning of our church that if the foundation is the gospel, literally the good news of Jesus Christ, or would then we want to demonstrate that good news in the way that we live, we want to live that out in joy, that people might look on us and say, well, they must know something good, and I'd like to hear about that, that we would be joyful people and a joyful community, and I know that joy is a feature of St. Columba's as well, and something I think I really kind of recognise in the other St. Columba's church plants too, really, as part of the DNA of this parent church.

So it's really good to look at that together. I hate to break it to you. Scottish people are not renowned for their kind of outgoing displays of joy. Christians don't always have that kind of reputation as people of joy.

When it comes to kind of Presbyterians in our stereotypes, we're really kind of scraping the bottom of the joy barrel. So perhaps our expectations here are low, but actually we're going to see why the Bible says that we not only can have joy, but that we should have joy.

We must have joy. Being a community marked by joy is not an impossible goal, but it's something that the gospel moves us towards.

[3 : 09] That doesn't mean, and we'll say this again and again, that doesn't mean that we're always grinning and pretending that everything is fine. It doesn't always mean putting a brave face on everything.

That's not the biblical picture of life or of joy, but it does mean there is that deep joy that we can hold on to whatever our circumstances. And Psalm 16 helps us with that.

So let me read the Psalm now. If you do have a Bible, you can turn along their page 400 and 53, and I think it'll be perhaps on the screen as well. But this is Psalm 16, and we'll read the whole of that Psalm.

A mixtam of David. Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, you are my Lord. I have no good apart from you.

As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight. The sorrow of those who run after another God shall multiply. The drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.

[4 : 13] The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. You hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel. In the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices. My flesh also dwells secure, for you will not abandon my soul to shame, or let your holy one seek corruption.

You may know to me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Well, you might well know the book of Psalms is this incredible book of songs of poetry right in the middle, right at the heart of the Bible.

[5 : 15] And like the best songs, the best poetry is writing that really connects with the emotions. It's writing that brings truths from our minds down into our hearts.

So if we're ever tempted perhaps to think that Christianity is a bit dry and dusty, or that it doesn't really connect with real life, or it doesn't understand how I feel, or the book of Psalms is a great place to turn to put ourselves right.

The Psalms are full of joy, but also full of suffering. They're full of praise to God, but also crying out to God in times of hardship.

They're full of the truth of who God is, but also the honest distress about the Psalmist's situation. And so as we think about joy in the Gospel, as we think about the church as a joyful community, the Psalms are a great place for us to turn to encourage us because they are realistic, aren't they?

They're not going to shallow and happy-clappy. They are deep and genuine. They have the highs, but also the lows, often right here in the same Psalm. And so again, a great place to turn because that is what our lives are like, isn't it?

[6 : 28] And that is the case here in Psalm 16. If you flick over to the end of the Psalm, you'll see it finishes with those incredibly joyful verses. Verse 11, you make known to me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Now, what an incredible close to that Psalm, and that's where we're heading towards.

But note the Psalm also doesn't start in that place. Verse one, preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. Now, this Psalm really begins with a cry for help, with a cry for rescue, the Psalmist needing shelter.

And so this Psalm really leads us on this journey from feeling somewhat overwhelmed, from needing help, refuge, things that's been too much for us, to ultimately finding that fullness of joy that we're talking about.

And that is not because the challenges of life disappear. That's not what happens in this Psalm. There's no verse in the middle that says, suddenly all the bad things went away. Now, note, it's by finding hope in God through all of these challenges.

[7 : 37] So then what is this, this path to joy that the Psalm lays out? Joy which is certain and solid, a joy that is not dictated by our circumstances. I want us to see three steps in this Psalm, or really maybe three stages, three signposts.

This is not a click of the fingers, and suddenly everything will just be happy days. But this is the path laid out for us to walk all of our days, even in the midst of that struggle and challenge that comes to us all, so that still we can know, still we can live out that fullness of joy which is promised.

So let's look at these three stages. And the first one is this, the first marker laid out on this path for joy is to look to God alone for satisfaction.

Look to God alone for satisfaction. That is what David who wrote this Psalm says in verse two, I say to the Lord, you are my God. I have no good apart from you.

It might sound kind of strange or counterintuitive, but the first step we see here to joy is to give up hope of finding it anywhere other than in God.

[8 : 53] It's in recognizing that only he can satisfy us. And so straight away we see how the message of Christianity is different from the message of the world. There is that similarity, there is that common goal in some ways.

We're all looking for joy, people want joy, and yet where do we find it? Well, the world tells us to look, doesn't it, to our stuff for joy.

The whole advertising industry is geared up to show us what we need, what we'll make our lives fulfilling if we just had this product, well then we'd be happy. And obviously this all goes into overdrive at the moment, doesn't it, in the lead up to Christmas that we're in.

And yet the Bible says that we'll never find our lasting joy in these things. It says these things are basically little gods to us. It's exactly what Derek was saying to the young guys just before.

Now we try and put them in place of the true God, the glorious God, and yet they pale into insignificance in comparison, but we don't recognize that.

[9 : 59] Now that's what David is saying in verse four, the sorrows of those who run after another God, that's anything other than the true God to try and find our satisfaction. The sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply.

We can pick in our world from a whole range of gods. They can be different religious gods or they could be different secular gods of possessions, of fame, of wealth, of the new extension that we'd like to be keeping up with the neighbors.

We can choose any of those things as gods to run after is the ultimate thing we think will bring us meaning, will bring us joy, but the Bible says those paths lead to sorrow, to unfulfillment, to a lack of satisfaction that they don't provide what they promise.

There was a fascinating article in the Harvard Business Review last year. It was called Three Things That Won't Make You Happy. And the summary of the article read like this.

It said, number one, money. Most of a person's needs are met, more money rarely leads to greater happiness. In fact, too much money can lead to increased loneliness and anxiety and complicates our relationships.

[11 : 10] Number two, likes. Millions of people seek the dopamine hit of likes and views on Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook or other platforms believing that more social media friends and attention will mean a greater sense of worth.

But emerging evidence shows that social media use and happiness are inversely correlated. And the third and final one was stuff. It said accumulating material possessions doesn't improve life satisfaction and can actually lead to deeper feelings of anxiety, insecurity and emptiness.

Fascinating, isn't it? How the research there backs up. What the Psalms were saying thousands of years ago, not just that these things can't satisfy, but that these things are actually a downward slope.

The sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply. And it's important to say here that Christians and the Bible are not against all of these things.

That there are plenty of good things in our world to be enjoyed, but the problem comes when we look to them instead of God. And so the Bible says to enjoy good things, but to remember, to remember that even if they are all stripped away, that if we have God, we still have enough.

[12 : 32] We still have all that we need. Really, why is it that God satisfies and other things don't? It's because it comes down to what we were designed for, that we were made in the image of God as relational beings.

We were made to be in relationship with God. That's where our joy comes from. We weren't designed as consumers. We were designed for relationships. We might then ask that question, well, if that's the case, why can I not find all of my joy and pin my hopes in a partner or in family or in friends?

And again, we'd be keen to say, well, these are good things. And yet it is not fair on those people to put them in the place of God. People will let us down and we will let other people down.

If our joy, if all our satisfaction is depending on and resting on a person, we'll ultimately crush that relationship. We'll spoil what is good by trying to make it the ultimate thing.

It is only God who can bear that weight, only God who can truly satisfy. And that's what David says there in verse 5, isn't it? The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup.

[13 : 41] You hold my lot. And it's not God plus this nice place to live. It's not God plus all these friends who kind of like me and say positive things about me.

It's not God plus financial security. It's not God plus things going well at church. It is God alone where joy is found.

Jesus, David throws his whole lot in with God and says, you and only you are who I'm going to look to. That is his beautiful inheritance, it says, verse 6.

That is the lines that have fallen in pleasant places. David isn't speaking there about his property portfolio. He's talking about his relationship with God.

He is satisfied because he has God himself. And so there's that first step in this Psalm on the path to joy to realign our focus and our alliance to look to God alone for our satisfaction, to look to God alone for our joy.

[14 : 45] And we'll step two then and we'll be brief for here the second aspect of this journey. Remember we're not saying this is simple. Just do one, two, three and you're done. Happiness for evermore.

No, these are our attitudes. These are truths that we have to work at, that we have to pursue. We don't want to present this as a quick fix in any way.

But step two is to know that as we cast our lot in with God, as we look to him alone for satisfaction that God will guide us and he will protect us.

And this is verse 7 onwards really. It's all very well, isn't it? Saying, well, just give everything to God. Look to him for your joy. It's very easy for me to say that from here. But how?

Or why can we do that? Now David here really gives us a list of why this is a good decision. Of why it makes sense to put our focus and our hope on God and why we can do that with real confidence.

[15 : 45] Have a look at verses 7 and 8 there where we see God gives us counsel, it says. He gives us instruction. It says he goes before us. He is always beside us.

The big point is that this is a God who we can rely on. If we put our hopes in other things or when the chips are down they'll fold. Whatever stuff we have, that will seem insignificant when our loved ones are in a time of sickness.

Whatever relationships we build, there will be situations that they just cannot help us with. There will be questions they do not know the answer to. And so David is able to say these incredible words then at the end of verse 8 because his trust is not in his stuff, not in other people but in God alone.

He's able to say, I shall not be shaken. And aren't they just words that we would love to be able to say when the storms of life come, I shall not be shaken.

Aren't they words that we would love to be able to say when difficult things hit us and all the other things we realize are so shaky in our lives. I shall not be shaken.

[16 : 55] One of the commentators on this passage says that phrase can be said in two ways. The first way it can be said in pure Rivaldo really which says, well I won't be shaken. I can do this, I'm strong.

Actually the meaning here is so different. And it's not pride, it's not self-reliance, it's not about my strength. But it is due to this trust in God that David has been laying out.

It's because he is at my right hand, the verse says, I shall not be shaken. And this is a God who is with us, who we can trust. And as we read on in verse nine, the consequence of this is joy.

Verse nine, therefore my heart is glad, my whole being rejoices, my flesh also dwells secure. We have joy because God is beside us in every situation.

And will not let us down. And that's now, and this Psalm makes really clear that that is into the whole of eternity. And here's where we see even more clearly, even more abundantly, that God can offer what nobody else can.

[17 : 59] Verse 10, there is security even beyond death. Verse 11, there are pleasures forevermore. There is no end to the joy that comes when we throw our lot in with God.

Because there is no end to his care and his protection of us. And again to emphasize here, we're not talking about pretending everything is fine. We're not talking about just a surface level kind of veneer of happiness.

We're saying even in the deepest and darkest times, even in the times when we weep for ourselves and we weep with others, the gospel gives us a joy that continues through our weeping.

Because it shows us a God who is with us in the midst of those times. And who promises that he will bring us to his eternal home with him where weeping will be no more.

God will lead and protect. So this Psalm says we find our joy from moving our security, our hope, our focus from things to God. And as we do that, knowing that God won't let us down.

[19 : 03] God will lead, God will protect. The final thing I want us to look at this evening, really, which is the key, which holds all of this together, really the key to this Psalm about the journey from being kind of overwhelmed to finding joy.

And that key is this, the third thing, to look to the risen Lord Jesus. Third and finally, look to the risen Lord Jesus.

Because actually it is Jesus who is the fulfillment of this Psalm. How do we know that? Well, it's because the New Testament actually tells us specifically that this Psalm is about him.

In the book of Acts, as the apostle Peter speaks to the crowds about Jesus, really his first great sermon recorded after Jesus had ascended, after Jesus had returned to heaven.

Peter quotes this Psalm, Psalm 16. He says this, I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, that I might not be shaken. Therefore, my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced.

[20 : 05] My flesh also will dwell in hope for you have not abandoned my soul to hares or let your Holy One seek corruption. You have made known to me the path of life.

You will make me full of gladness in your presence. Peter picks up on this Psalm 16 and then he asks the question, well, who is this Holy One who didn't seek corruption?

Who is this one who didn't remain in death? He says it's not David who wrote the Psalm because he is dead and gone and we can show you where he's buried.

But he continues. Verse two, verse 31, he says of David that he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ.

It is Jesus. Jesus is the one who was brought back from beyond the grave, whose soul did not see decay. He is the fulfillment of this soul.

[21 : 03] Jesus truly is the only one who fully trusted and looked to God rather than the things of this world. And so we want to strive to do that. We can grow in doing that.

But there will always be these times when we fail. There will always be times when we find ourselves looking elsewhere. We sang that great line at the beginning of that song we've just sung.

Minor days that God has numbered, I was made to walk with him, yet I look for worldly treasure and forsake the king of kings.

We know that is not the way to joy, but we still do that. And so we fail. And so we fail. And yet when we turn to Jesus, the fulfillment of this song, we see he did that perfectly on our behalf.

And so that means that our joy is found ultimately in trusting in what he has done and not our own efforts. And that is why, more than anything else, that is why this joy is so secure.

[22 : 00] Because when we have a bad day, when we find ourselves looking in the wrong places, this is not all out of the window, but it continues because it is grounded on what Jesus has achieved.

We keep on looking to Jesus, the one who perfectly looked to God alone for his satisfaction. But not only did Jesus look to God perfectly in his life, he also then died of death in our place that he did not deserve.

And again there we see really the second aspect of what we were looking at this evening. We see the ultimate display of God's faithfulness, that God is one who will lead us and guide us, that he is one that will not let us down, that he will not abandon those who look to him, that God truly does lead and protect.

And he has done that through Jesus, who has opened that door and who will lead and guide and protect us all the way to our heavenly home with God the Father, where there is joy forevermore.

Again, Peter says in Acts, God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. Ultimately to find joy, to find joy in a difficult world where we go through difficult circumstances, where we need refuge, and we look to the risen Jesus, we identify ourselves with him, we put our trust in him, because he perfectly looked to God alone.

[23 : 31] And through him God has shown us his perfect faithfulness and opened that door to a perfect eternity with him. We can have that proper joy, whatever our situation, whatever is going on in our life, because if we're following Jesus, we know that we too will be raised just as he was, that he was the first born from the dead, but that we follow in his footsteps.

Through him we are brought into the very presence of God now and for all eternity. And as we said as a Psalm 16 concludes, in his presence there is fullness of joy at his right hand are pleasures forevermore.

We have access to that place through Jesus. And so we have real reason to be joyful. And notice, as we said before, nowhere in this Psalm has it ever said, has it even hinted that life will be easy, that if we get these steps right, the things that we find difficult will just fade away.

And actually as we draw to a close perhaps our metaphor we've been using even isn't quite right. This isn't a journey from joy, sorry, from suffering to joy. It's actually signposts to joy even in suffering, isn't it?

It's a real joy as through Jesus we are brought into the presence of God and it's there and in seeking him above everything else that true joy is found as we cast our lot in with God recognizing only he can satisfy.

[25 : 03] As we know that he is faithful he will protect and stand by us. And as over and above everything else we look to the risen Lord Jesus who has done this perfectly for us and brings us into the presence of God and the joy that brings now and forevermore.

Now let me just finish then with two kind of quick thoughts about how we might apply this, the difference this might make to our lives this week.

Number one, to think about this as we look out and I'm just so struck as we look at this Psalm as we think about that joy. What a brilliant message this is for us that we get to share with other people.

So often I'm sure I'm not the only one who finds it hard to speak about Jesus, to speak about what I believe, to speak about my faith. We're not sure what to say, do we have to tell people these kind of complicated bits of theology, is there lots of rules and things like that involved if you're here this evening and you're not a Christian you might think well what is it that these Christians really want from me?

Actually we have a message that says do you want a joyful life? Not in a simplistic way, not in a naive way, but do you want this life where even if everything was stripped away from you you'd still be able to say at the deepest level you have pleasures forevermore.

[26 : 29] Do you feel that so much of what the world has offered has flattered to deceive and has failed to bring the satisfaction it promised?

And we have that incredible privilege of being able to say well here is someone, Jesus Christ, who brings that joy. What a great message that is for us to be able to share.

And then secondly I suppose looking in thinking of ourselves as church congregations. So important that we don't ever feel this message of being a joyful community means that we cannot share our difficulties or our sorrows with one another, that somehow that would make us a failure that we're not doing it right if we're not kind of grinning from ear to ear.

So important we remember as we close the whole point of the joy the Gospel brings, the thing that sets it kind of head and shoulders above anything else is that it is a joy that can deal with sorrow.

It is a joy that goes through sorrows, that goes through difficulties, goes through sadness. It is a joy that lasts through the storms of life because it isn't based on what's around us but it's based on the certain and unchanging truth of who God is and what is done for us through Jesus Christ.

[27 : 46] And as a community of believers we're able to joyfully spur one another on to that joy by pointing one another to Him, pointing one another to Him in the good times when we celebrate.

But also pointing one another to Him when things are hard, when times are tough, but when God is unchanging and Christ remains the same for us.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we thank You for the joy that You have made possible for us through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We thank You that in Him You have opened the way for us to return to You, to enjoy the fullness of joy that we find in Your presence, sharing with You in the relationship that we were designed for.

And we thank You that it's not a joy based on our circumstances or on things that come and go but that it is based fully and finally on what You've done for us.

[28 : 46] We confess that so often we wander, so often we look for joy in other places. But we thank You that because of Jesus' perfect faithfulness and obedience that still we can return to You time and time again.

We pray we will continually look to the risen Lord Jesus as the demonstration of Your victory and of Your faithfulness to Your promises, of the eternal life promised to all those who trust in Him.

We pray that our hope and our joy would be in Him and that would be a certain hope and that would be a joy that we're eager to share with others and that we would live out boldly in our lives, in our relationships, in all the places that You put us.

We pray that we would be Your people and that as Your people we would be marked by that joy that only the gospel can bring. And we pray all of these things for Your glory and in the precious name of Jesus Christ, Amen.