

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT- JOY

Text: Isaiah 65:17-19; John 15:1-16; Galatians 5:22

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The story is told of a Supreme Court judge in the United States. He had been on that court for 30 years and was regarded as one of the really great judges. The judge explained his choice of career by saying 'I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like dour undertakers.' Somewhere people have gotten the impression that Christians are not to have fun. We are supposed to be those who seldom indulge in the pleasures of life. We are often regarded as dour and judgmental. May be that's because we speak a lot about sin and focus on the cross of Jesus. Well we should be serious about sin. But our lives are supposed to be characterised by joy.

When we look at the fruit of the Spirit we see that 'joy' is very high on the list. It comes right after 'love'. We saw that love is listed first because it is the key thing that comes about as a result of the Spirit being at work in us. And joy comes next because it's the first result of God's love in our lives. Knowing the Father loves us brings a deep sense of joy into our lives. The problem is that we Christians do not always display that joy. We might be dour or gloomy. With the result that people around us are not sure they want to relate to God. Because if they look at certain Christians then God must surely be a 'kill-joy'. But he certainly is not that at all. We have said that the fruit of the Spirit reveals the character of God. And the same is true here. God is the source of joy. God is filled with joy. Psalm 104 speaks of God 'rejoicing' over everything he has created. And no wonder God rejoices and enjoys the creation. Think about what he has made. Would you really say God is a killjoy when he is the maker of all the things we enjoy in life? Fruit and food in a vast variety of colour and taste and texture. [POWER POINT PICTUREx2] Animals and plants in such exotic variety we seem the dour ones in our lack of appreciation. "*Wine that gladdens the heart*", as the Psalmists says – whose idea was that? The playful love making of a husband and wife, whose idea was that? Think of God's creating all things new again. Isaiah 65:18-19 has God encouraging his people "*Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth... be glad*

and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people." In Zephaniah 3:17 we read "*The Lord your God is with you, / he is mighty to save. / He will take delight in you, / he will quiet you with his love, / he will rejoice over you with singing."* In Luke 15 Jesus tells three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. In each of these stories there is exuberant joy when the lost were found. Says Jesus "*I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God."* When Jesus was born the angels sang in an awesome choir over Bethlehem to celebrate. The angel said to the shepherds "*I bring you news of great joy that will be for all the people."* God is a killjoy? Rubbish. Joy and delight are his characteristics. And he wants to see them in us.

It needs to be made clear that 'joy' is not the same as 'happiness'. In our day and age, I don't hear a lot of people outside the church talk of joy. The emphasis is more on being happy. Everyone '...has the right to be happy.' The difference, in terms of meaning and also life experience, is that happiness depends on what happens. Joy does not. The word 'happiness' comes from the old English word 'happ', which literally means 'chance'. It corresponds to the Latin word 'fortuna' which means 'luck'. These words suggest that if things happen the way we want them to happen, then we are happy. The magazine 'Psychology Today' polled 52,000 Americans and asked them what happiness meant to them. For some happiness was simply being able to pay the bills, finding a mate, having children, having a good job, good health. The implication being, that if these things were not 'happening' in their lives, they would not be 'happy'. Some wit has said, 'If happiness truly consisted in physical ease and freedom from care, than the happiest individual in the country would be neither a man or a woman. It would be a cow.' It's been said 'Happiness comes when things are going our way, which only makes it a front runner to the unhappiness that inevitably follows when things stop going our way...' Joy, on the other hand does not come because something is happening or not happening, but arises from our faith within. We see this distinction when we read in John 15 about Jesus eating his last meal with his disciples. It's the night before the crucifixion. He is in the upper room with his disciples. Soon he will be arrested and tried and convicted of crimes he did not do. Soon they will put a crown of thorns on his head and mock him. They will slap him and spit on him and whip him. His body will be nailed to a cross and be abandoned by the Father as he suffers hell. He will die. Jesus knows all this. He can in no way be happy. And yet what he says to his disciples is more precious than happiness: "*These things I have*

spoken to you, that my joy may be complete in you, and that your joy may be full." The writer to the Hebrews looks back at this time and writes (Hebrews 12:2) "*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross and scorned its shame.*" Jesus' joy comes from knowing how delighted God will be when sin has been dealt with and the way of reconciliation and restoring the creation is made possible. Joy is something that comes from within. It is something generated in us by the Holy Spirit as we draw strength from our relationship with God. Nehemiah says, (8:10) "... *the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" The joy Nehemiah spoke of was based on the feeling of communion with God, on the people's awareness that God was gracious and long suffering. Their joy in God was for them a 'strong citadel, a strong refuge, their strength'.

Is joy important to God? Well think of this. The NIV translation of the Bible gives 355 different references where the word 'joy' or a derivative. 'Happiness' is only mentioned 26 times. 77% of the books of the Bible make 'joy' and 'rejoicing' a topic of discussion. If we have a look at the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament we see a number of different words to express the joy that is mentioned here as a fruit of the Spirit. When David returned home after defeating Goliath, he got a hero's welcome as the women greeted him with 'singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes." (1 Samuel 18:6) The Hebrew word used is 'simchah", which has the connotation of bright and shining. Think of the sparkling eyes of the two year old on Christmas morning. Or think of the bride walking down the aisle to meet her man shining with a brightness and sparkle that testifies to the joy of the moment. Another word for 'joy' is 'masos' which means 'leaping' or 'jumping'. The lame man who was healed as he sat at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple is a good example of leaping and jumping for joy (Acts 3:1-10). 'Rinnah' is yet another word that conveys the idea of exuberant expression of joy, with particular reference to shouting. And then there is the word 'gil' which has its roots in the idea of 'moving around in a circle.' It implies a kind of joyfulness that expresses itself in funny behaviour. E.g. a dog that has been shut inside for too long can celebrate getting outside by trying to bite its own tail and chasing himself round and round. Such a dog has a solid dose of 'gil' joy. So we see that Old Testament joy can be shown in the quiet shining of the eyes, the boisterous leaping of the extraverts, the noisy exclamations of deep felt thrill, or even the funny capers that clearly show emotional delight.

In the New Testament there is a beautiful connection between the Greek words for joy and grace. 'Charis' is the word for 'grace', which is the basis for our Christian life. It is only by the grace of God, through what he has done in Jesus, that we may know forgiveness. It is by grace that we may know that now we are God's children loved and cared for. It's by grace that we have a sure hope for the future. 'Charis' also has the connotation of that which is 'delightful'. To experience God's grace is indeed a delightful thing. Now the Greek word for 'joy' is 'chara'. In other words it is by 'charis' that we experience 'chara'. The delightful joy in our lives, our exuberance and delight comes because of grace.

It's because 'chara' is based on 'charis', joy is based on God's grace, not on what is happening around us or to us, that we can understand Paul writing in Philippians 4:4 "*Rejoice in the Lord always. And I say again rejoice.*" Note carefully what Paul says; not 'rejoice for everything.' There is no pleasure in sickness, or job loss, or family tension. There is no pleasure in knowing a loved one is dying. Paul says "*Rejoice in the Lord always.*" As we have said, it's not the outward circumstances that determine this rejoicing. It is our inner relationship with the Lord. We rejoice "*in him*". It is the relationship with Jesus that gives us pleasure and strength, even in the most difficult of circumstances. In Romans 5 Paul writes that we "*rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so but we also rejoice in our sufferings.*" Again it is our knowledge and experience of God that gives us joy, especially our hope in the wondrous things that are yet to come.

That gives us the clue in answer to the question: how do we get to experience the kind of joy that is the fruit of the Spirit? It comes first of all by having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Coming back to John 15 (5,6) Jesus says "*I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers...*" So as long as we are attached to him we will bear fruit, the fruit of the Spirit, including 'joy'. Now this being attached to Jesus comes about through reading and believing the Bible. Joy comes from rightly understanding and appreciating theological truth, the things the Bible teaches. Do I understand and accept that if I come in repentance and put all my trust in Jesus, God looks at me as if I had never sinned, and receives me and loves as his own child? Do I understand and accept the promises of God in the Bible that God uses suffering in my life to help me grow and mature, to test and prove my faith? Do I believe that when I die I go straight

home to God? Do I believe and long for the return of Christ, when all sin and suffering, war and evil will stop? Do I believe and pine for the new earth, our eternal home? Knowing these things, trusting daily in God, is what nurtures our joy. Too often even we Christians, especially the young and immature, think only in terms of being happy, hoping all our circumstances will be good. And when they are not, we lose the job, we battle financially, there is tension in the house, we sink into despair. To have joy, we don't need some super spiritual experience. We need to get back to the Word. We need to understand more and more what God has done and has promised in His Word. As someone has put it 'To nurture carefully the appreciation of such truths through disciplined worship and devotional exercise is to feed the soul with the fuel of joy.' Joy in the Lord always is built on hope- "*rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*". We can be full of joy and contentment, no matter our circumstances because we see the great things coming. And hope brings the joy of that future time into the present. The reason Jesus could be full of joy the night before he died was because he saw what would come later. He saw the resurrection, the ascension, his coming again, the creating of the new earth. So it is for us.

The other key thing to have joy is to focus on others. If you are looking for joy watch joyful people. You will discover that most joyful people are those who invest their time in others. The unhappiest people are those who are waiting around, wondering if someone will make them happy. A psychiatrist was once asked how a lonely and unhappy person should deal with their unhappiness. He said 'Lock the door behind you and go across the street, find someone who is hurting and help them'. It's what God has always said "*Love God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself.*" Nothing is more joy inspiring in yourself than to talk with others about Jesus, especially when you see them respond to his love. So bear fruit. Keep in step with the Spirit by word and prayer. Reveal the character of God and show some of the delight and exuberance, the joy, that is God's. It's the most attractive thing to bring people to Jesus.

Joy is not in things; it is in us

Joy is the echo of God's life in us

Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God

Joy is the serious business of heaven

The joy of the heart colours the face

The joy that you give to others, is the joy that comes back to you

If there is no joy in your religion, there's a leak in your Christianity

A grumpy Christian an oxymoron

JOY

Joy, haven't we all experienced it?

*Joy and happiness are not the same,
happiness is used to cover our pain.*

*We joke and we laugh, we laugh so loud,
often because we are too proud.*

*Too proud to kneel in front of our saviour,
to confess our sins and change our behaviour.*

*Real joy comes from knowing deep inside
the reason we live is because Jesus died.*

Now we can live with joy in our heart.

*To strive for our king does set us apart;
singing a song with a smile on your face,
or out with your wife in that special place.*

*At work with your friends let people see
that discovering God will set you free.*

*Happiness is a feeling, it comes and goes
joy lives inside you, it grows and grows.*

*Joy is vital for the Lord's soldiers to carry;
it cuts through the surface of the tough and the weary.*

*When the Lord says to you "Let my light shine bright"
joy is the flame we use to ignite.*

*So remember in life when it all seems so bad,
when work never ends or the dishes drive you mad;
ask God for joy, it will lighten your load
or at least bring peace to your humble abode.*

Joel Douma 2003

Questions for reflection.

These questions can be followed up personally, with a Christian friend, in your small groups, or in discussion after the service. Reflection is important because too often we hear a good sermon and soon forget it without actually growing spiritually or changing in attitude or what we do. The reflection questions are meant to be challenging, because our spiritual growth and the salvation of others is so important.

1. How does the Bible demonstrate that joy is a characteristic of God?
What gives God great joy?
2. What is the difference between 'happiness' and 'joy'? Why is it that joy can continue even in difficult circumstances?
3. Think of the Hebrew and Greek words for joy. What sort of picture do they give of the Bible's idea of joy?
4. How do we get to experience joy in our own lives? How does focusing on Jesus and others develop joy in us?