

# † The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

## **The Praying Savior – John 17**

### **The Lessons from Jesus’ Prayer – John 17:1-26**

#### **Seven Characteristics of the Church: Joy (John 17:13)**

***But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.***

You’ve been set up! You have been set up, not for a fall, but I hope an enlightening view of what the church, the people of God, is to be according to our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember last week I set the stage for the importance of the seven characteristics of the church, of that collective community of believers committed to manifesting the character of Christ. We noted that the church at large has an identity crisis, having forgotten to be committed to the simple and straight-forward truths of what she is to be as revealed in this prayer of Jesus in John 17:13-26. This morning we consider the first of these seven characteristic, namely that this collective community of believers is to be committed to manifesting the joy of Jesus. Please notice that the joy Jesus prays for His church is referred to as “**My joy**” – it is His joy, it belongs to Him and here it is presented as the first of these seven characteristics of the church.

My goal this morning is to work through two key points as they relate to this issue of joy. First, I wish to spend some time on answering the question, “What is joy?” – that is **Joy Explained**, and then we will seek to apply that knowledge to what we find in John 17:13 to answer the question, “How do we experience the joy of Jesus?” – that is **Joy Experienced**.

#### **I. Joy Explained**

What is joy? Joy is not the easiest word or concept to define. In somewhat of an amusing way, C.S. Lewis described joy as “*the serious business of heaven.*” The truth is, biblically speaking; we find that “joy” is more described than it is defined. What I can tell you is that God intends for joy to be at the very heart of how we go our lives every day. The Scriptures have much to say about joy, joy in worship, in praise and thanksgiving to God; but interestingly enough we also find much said about people being joyful even in times of difficulties. In the Book of Psalms there is much rejoicing by those who realize the grace of God and presence of God who blesses them and saves them. But we also find in the psalms of sadness and lament an ever persistent joy. Truly the circumstances many of the psalmists faced were not happy ones. There was little laughter in theirs lives. They often were not having good days. Yet their testimony was that they had joy, because in the midst of their difficulties, they still knew God; they could still cry out go God and they always knew that God cared for them, even when at times it might appear as though He didn’t.

So then, what is joy; what is this characteristic that Jesus prays for His church to have and to manifest. The word “joy” as found in our text is used some 59 times in the New Testament and in general it speaks of “joy, of gladness heart or of delight within.” But it is also a comprehensive and intense word, meaning that there is to be nothing little or timid about joy. It is speaking of a mindset; of a way of life. There is nothing tame about joy. In this sense we might rightly say that to use the word “joy” is to speak of exceeding joy, or extreme gladness, or a superlative delight. While sometimes thought of as an emotion, as a mere response to those things going on around us, it is also more than an emotion for joy exists and is available continually and is in fact not dependent at all upon a person’s circumstances.

With this general understanding of “joy”, let me offer you an expanded definition: *joy is entering into and remaining in the continual experience of a complete and secure delight in*

# The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

*something or someone of value.* Remember, we are simply trying to get our heads around joy in general so don't jump ahead just yet as I want to consider this definition from a biblical perspective.

**First**, *true joy is entered into.* True joy always exists. True joy is continually available. True joy is always available completely. Sometime we think of joy as being “out there”; just ready to be entered into. The problem for us is this...how do we get into joy? We get into joy by invitation. We need to be granted the right and ability to experience this continual, complete, peaceful and secure delight. We see this illustrated in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:21 and 23. You remember the story; three men are given various amounts of money from their master to invest. The last one squanders his opportunity to be a blessing to his master; but the first two use what their master gave them to bless and benefit him. And what was the master's response? He said to them, **“Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21 and 23).** Here we are told that joy is like a delightful place, filled with all the benefits and blessings of the master. And the point for us is this, if we are in Christ, we've been given faith as our talent; if we are faithful with the salvation Jesus has given to us, He also grants us entrance into His joy; to experience the blessings and benefits of His presence in our lives. Once we have entered in to the joy of Jesus, the benefits and blessings are always there for us. We may not take advantage of them; we may take them for granted; we may live at times as though such blessings and benefits of delight do not exist, but the believer and the church is to enter into and remain in this continual experience of delighting in who God is and what God has done for us.

In addition to being a continual experience of delight that we enter into, I would say **second**, that *true joy is always a secure delight.* By secure, I mean to say that joy is something sure, steady, steadfast and unchanging. How can I say this? Because ultimately, joy is found in a person, specifically in God, who is Himself what, sure, steady, steadfast and unchanging. Joy is not found in anything or in anyone of this earth; it is not found in anything temporal or fleeting. Joy is not even a thing, but is a person; the infinite (limitless); the sovereign (in control of all things); immutable (unchanging) God.

And God has created every human being with the desire to experience joy. Ultimately that means that man was created with the desire to experience God, but because of sin, because of sin in us, we find that we are easily derailed, jumping the tracks and seeking for joy from a myriad of other lesser things. We seek for joy in our possessions. We seek for joy in a bigger salary. We seek for joy in our health and comfort. We seek for joy in our relationships. We seek for joy in our families. Now, none of these things are bad in themselves. But there is one huge problem, they are temporal, they are but momentary. Such things might make you happy, but they will not bring you true joy. Just this last week I spoke with a man who because of the downward spiral of the economy had his salary cut by 50%. Think about that. Think about whatever you are making right now and cut it in half. What I am saying to you is that jobs and income are momentary and while losing half your income or even losing your job would not make anyone happy, there is for the believer the reality of experiencing joy, knowing that God is in control, that God has your back and while you may not immediately see how He will provide and while you may seemingly suffer in the short term, you are secure in Him. Can we say with Job, **“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him”** (Job 13:15 - NKJV)? Do we hold with confidence the promise of God's faithfulness as expressed in Isaiah 54:10? **“For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken,” says the Lord who has compassion on you.**

# The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

And this brings us to a **third** truth concerning joy. True joy is never based upon circumstances. At this point it might serve us well to be reminded that joy and happiness are two different things. A person can have joy without happiness and a person can be happy without joy. Remember that happiness is dependent upon happenings; upon those things that are going on around us. When things are good or going well, when the happenings are pleasant, then we say we are “happy.” And if the happenings around us are bad or not going well, then we say that we are unhappy. The world likes to equate happiness and joy. Why? Because if I have the ability to make myself happy in my own pursuits, then I can have joy without God. But beloved, joy is to be and can be experienced in both good times as well as bad times. Is this not the truth of Philippians 4:4, that there is never to be a circumstance in which you cannot have joy, in which you cannot delight in God? In fact, it might be said that on this side of glory, joy is best experienced in hardships and trials. Remember the exhortation of James 1:2 which says, **“Consider it all joy; my brethren, when you encounter various trials (happenings), knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”** We are to count it a blessing, we are to consider ourselves as possessing and dwelling in a secure and sure delight, knowing that regardless of our circumstances, if God be for us, who can be against us; knowing that it is God who works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:31; 28).

Let us look at another biblical example of this idea, that joy is not based upon circumstances, but rather upon a confidence in who God is and what God promises, and therefore dwelling with or walking with God. Turn to Habakkuk 3. Let me give you some context. Beginning in the year 606 BC a Babylonian King by the name of Nebuchadnezzar would begin a twenty year campaign against Judah and the city of Jerusalem with the first of three invasions and attacks, the last of which would end with the destruction of the Temple of God and the final deportation of Israel to Babylon.

Just a few years before this, about 610 BC, a prophet by the name of Habakkuk was commissioned by God to give Judah a final warning; calling Judah to repentance; to return to living after God. And of course, as is so often the case with the prophets, Habakkuk writes envisioning what things will be like as Judah refuses to heed this exhortation. So we have Habakkuk, this righteous man of God, one who desires to see God glorified and God’s people living righteously after God, who because of his faith ought to expect God’s blessing; who ought to expect that God would allow him to live without trial or difficulty, right? Wrong....Habakkuk understood that there would not be much to make him happy. Let us read his response in Habakkuk 3:17 –

***17 Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls...***

That is some bad happenings. Let’s put ourselves for a moment in Habakkuk’s shoes. You live out in the country. All around you are fields filled with fig trees, grape vines, and olive trees. You wake up and all you can think about it eating is a fig. You walk outside and come up to the tree and find that it dead...no figs. So you walk over to the grapevines thinking that a big juicy grape will do only not to find one single grape. Well, maybe an olive would do in a pinch, but as you see, even the olives are gone. Then, to make matters worse, you realize how quiet everything is. There is no lowing from the cows and no bleating from the sheep. Why? Because they are all dead. No crops, no cows, everything lost. Surely this would be a moment to be

# † The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

without joy, right? The equivalent for us, might be those times when the car unrepentantly breaks down; when the children seem to be acting out causing you to pull your hair; when your boss makes those unreasonable requests at work; when you hear a friend say something about you that whether true or not, pierces your heart; when your parents ask you to take out the trash or do the dishes while your in the middle of something important, like a video game; when you realize that there is not enough money at the end of the month; when we get disturbing or bad news. Surely, such circumstances dictate a reasonable defense for joylessness. Right? Let's read the next statement of the prophet.

**18 Yet [in spite of the circumstances] I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.**

Habakkuk was experiencing difficult days, but he knew something that every believer in God is to know; that the circumstances of this present life are only temporary. He knew that temporarily his fields were barren and his flocks dead. But what does he still have in all of this? He still has the Lord who has granted to him salvation. The believer's joy is not based upon the circumstances of his life, but rather upon the confidence he has in the Lord.

And let us never forget what circumstances Jesus was going through as He offers this prayer – that His joy may be made full in His disciples. He was completing three and a half years of grueling ministry. He had travelled by foot from town to town in Israel, preaching and teaching, healing and comforting. He had been in frequent arguments and debates with religious leaders, threatened with death. He had numerous encounters with the dark spiritual forces of the demonic realm. He had His share of trials and triumphs, but the greatest trial was in front of Him. In just hours He would be betrayed and arrested. Most of His disciples would scatter, one would deny Him. He would be falsely tried before men, eventually mocked and scourged, that is have His flesh literally shredded off His back by the use of a whip adorned with pieces of bone and rock. A crown of thorns, sharp thorns would pierce His brow. He would be made to carry a heavy beam through the Via Delarosa to the place called Golgotha. There, He would be stretched out on that beam and through His wrists, two heavy, rusty iron stakes would be driven through. Another iron stake would be hammered through His ankles. Lifted up on that cross, He would sit on a splintered board that He would push against as He labored to breath. At the end of it all, He would be pierced with a sword. But before that, the greatest suffering would be when God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Yet, in spite of all this, we are told that Jesus “who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the same...” In other words, Jesus entrusted Himself, He had confidence in the plan and promise of God. This gave Him joy.

There is so much more to say about joy than what we have time for, but let me give you a **fourth** and final thought before we move on as it seems clearly linked to what we have just said. True joy is a witness to what we really treasure. In our definition of joy we said that joy is a *secure delight in something or someone of value*. Of course true joy drops the idea of “something” and understands that our greatest delight is found in valuing or treasuring God above all else. I love how John Piper states this,  
*God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, this one God – is the only Being who has no beginning, and therefore everything else and everyone else is dependent upon Him for existence and for value, and is, therefore, less valuable than God.*

# The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

In other words, our joy begins when we see everything else, every relationship we have, every possession we own, every ambition of our hearts, indeed even our very selves as being dependent upon God and therefore immeasurably less valuable than He is. And here is an important truth I would have you consider. The truth is - **we will search for joy in those things we most treasure.** So let me ask you, what do you treasure? Do you treasure God more than your wealth? Do you treasure God more than your reputation? Do you value Jesus more than your possessions and more than your accomplishments? Beloved, let me say this not to be pithy, but to have you really think about it, show me your checkbook and your bank statements and I will tell you what you treasure most. We need to learn how to be enthralled with the beauty and the glory of God so that we treasure Him more than anything and find in Him alone that which He alone invites us to experience; that in His presence is what? The fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11).

## II. Joy Experienced

Having looked at what joy is, that is joy explained, let us now turn our attention to the text itself and answer the question, how is joy experienced? Let us read our text again and then I will offer you three means by which the joy of Jesus may be experienced. We read,

***But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.***

From these words of Jesus, let me give you three means by which we experience the joy of Jesus. Some of what I say here will be directly related to what we have already learned about joy.

**First**, joy is experienced through God. Now, we have already established this that in the presence of God is fullness of joy and therefore to experience joy we must come to God, but consider this in light of what Jesus prays. He says at the beginning of verse 13, ***“But now I come to You...”*** As Jesus is faced with His own death; as He is faced with the difficulties and trials that are to be experienced on the cross, Jesus demonstrates that who He values most in such times is God the Father. Remember we said earlier that true joy is a witness to what you treasure. And what or who does Jesus treasure? Who does He come to first? He is He depending upon in light of His trials? He treasures the Father. And specifically we find that the joy of Jesus is found in His doing the will of the Father. Jesus found His greatest delight two things, first, in doing and seeing God glorified (that is revealed, made known and shown forth in His splendor and beauty); we see this in verse 1 of John 17 where Jesus said, ***“Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...”***; and second, we find Jesus delighting in being glorified with the Father (that is, being once again in the Father’s presence, only now as both the Son of God as well as the Son of Man); we see this in verse 5 of John 17 where Jesus said, ***“Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”*** The joy of Jesus, the superlative delight of His soul, was to do the will of the Father

### **John 4:34**

***Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”***

# The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

## **John 6:38**

**“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”**

## **John 8:29**

**“And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”**

Why is all this important? Why must we know what brought Jesus joy and of what that joy consisted? Because, beloved, Jesus prays that we might have His joy as our joy and so if we are to experience joy, we must be resolved to be engaged in the very mindset of Jesus – to always do the things that are pleasing to Him. As Jesus prays for His joy to be made full in us, He is essentially asking the Father for the joy that He has in His Father to be in us so that we would come to enjoy the Father in the same way as He does. Oh blessed thought – that Jesus prays for the church to experience the fullness of joy as found in the presence of the Father ever He Himself experiences it.

Beloved, the joy of Jesus results in all visible acts of self-denying, sacrificial love that displays to others the worth of God in one's life; acts that visibly reveal God's character and glory; His person and His promises. If we treasure Jesus, we will treasure the Father and we will treasure everything Jesus did to please the Father.

**Second**, joy is experienced through prayer. It might seem a bit obvious, but it is clear that joy is experienced through prayer. Jesus prays, that is, He asks the Father that He would make His joy complete in them. I believe this then to be an example to us, that we might continue with the prayer of Jesus and pray for ourselves and for the church that His joy might be made full, complete, manifest in us. How might such a prayer begin? It would begin with the thoughts we have already considered, praying in effect, “Lord, help me to treasure you more and more above all things. I confess that I cannot manufacture such a joy, but I know you can grant it, that you have invited me to enter into it. By your grace, enable me to live in light of Your joy.” Let us pray that the joy of Jesus is increasingly made evident in our lives.

**Third**, joy is experienced through the Word. The final means I would offer you this morning, which again is painfully evident, is that we need to be a people of the Word. We need to be a people of the Book. While we may not realize it, there is a correlation between reading, understanding and applying the Word of God and experiencing the joy of God. The more you read, understand and apply the Word, the more joy you will have. And conversely, the less you read, understand and practice the Word, the less joy you will have. Look at what Jesus says here in verse 13, **“But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.”**

Do you see the connection Jesus makes? He said that He spoke “these things” in the world for a purpose, so that joy would be realized, that joy would be fulfilled in His people. In verse 14 He continues with the importance of God's Word saying, **“I have given them Your word...”** Hearing and heeding, pondering and practicing the Word of God is a sure way of experiencing God's joy. Let me show you this from the Old Testament. Turn to Nehemiah 8. In Nehemiah 8 we find Israel about 150 years the destruction of the Temple and the deportation of Israel to Babylon. The people were allowed to come back only to find the walls of Jerusalem in disrepair. Under the leadership of Nehemiah and through some great trials, the people repaired the walls of the city of Zion in 52 days. As they marveled at God's grace, they also realized they had been neglectful of hearing and heeding God's word. And in Nehemiah 8:1, the people asked

---

## The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

Ezra the priest to “bring the book of the law.” In Nehemiah 8:2 and 5 we are told that all who could “listen with understanding” including men, women and all who could understand, stood as Ezra opened the book and read Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (and you thought my sermons were long). After Ezra read the book, we are told in verse 7 that the Levites “explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place” and in verse 8 that the Levites were, “translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.”

And what happened next, joy? Well, according to verses 9-10, the initial response was that of mourning, weeping and grieving. But what did Nehemiah say to the people at the end of verse 10, **“Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”** The people were grieved because they knew they had sinned against the Lord; they understood their sin; they understood that in their own strength they could not be right with God. So Nehemiah reminds them, that the willing and working to do the will of God in one’s life comes from the Lord. And notice how the people respond to the hearing of the Word and the application of Nehemiah in verse 12, **“All the people (the congregation) went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival (joy), because they understood the words which had been made known to them.”**

If we want to grow in our joy and in our faith in God; if we desire to see God glorified in us and ourselves glorified in Him so that your heart is a captive to His person, His promises and His beauty, then you must, you must read, understand, and apply His Word. Beloved, it is a fight. In his book, “When I Don’t Desire God, How to Fight for Joy”, John Piper wrote:

*We must put the evidence before us that reading, pondering, memorizing, and studying the Bible will yield far more joy in this life and the next than all the things that lure us from it.*

Wow! Do you believe that? There are so many things that we spend our time on and many may be good, but if truly devoting yourself to reading and understanding God’s Word is not at the top of this list, if the best you can do is but glance over God’s Word when it is convenient, then is it any wonder why God’s people are not known as a people of joy and why the church is not recognized at a gathering of truly and biblically joyful people? Jesus prays for God to fill us with a joy in Him, a joy from Him, and a joy that overflows from our lives and becomes a witness to all that our greatest treasure is Him. This is to be a defining characteristic of the church. How are we doing? Of course, before it can define a church, the collective community of believers committed to manifesting the character of Christ, it must first be found in you. Are you experiencing the joy of Jesus? It begins by giving up on yourself and giving yourself over to Jesus. It begins by acknowledging that you were made by God to experience your deepest joys not from being superior yourself, but rather from enjoying the superiority of God; over you; over Satan; over your sin; over death. Let us treasure Him and rejoice in the fullness of His joy.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

---

Copyright © 2009 Edward K. Godfrey. This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, and 2300 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Rogers, AR 72758.