

† 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.

I would like to begin with a testimony I read concerning the church as I have been studying the text before us:

They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something, they give freely to the man who has nothing; if they see a stranger, they take him home, and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God.

This testimony was given by a Christian historian and apologist back in the second century, somewhere around 140 AD, just about 40 years after the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation. This testimony was sent to and read by the Roman Emperor Hadrian. This was then a part of the identity of the church, a people who loved one another, who helped one another, who gave to one another, who found joy in expressing hospitality to one another. Let me read to you another testimony of the church:

Brothers and sisters, we want you to know how God showed his kindness to the churches in the province of Macedonia. While they were being severely tested by suffering, their overflowing joy, along with their extreme poverty, has made them even more generous. I assure you that by their own free will they have given all they could, even more than they could afford. They made an appeal to us, begging us to let them participate in the ministry of God's kindness to his holy people in Jerusalem.

Does anyone recognize what time period this was written? This was communicated by the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 8:1-4. I just read it from a different version is all. But what is the point? What is it that was the apparent characteristic of the churches in Macedonia, modern day Greece? It was joy, **“their overflowing joy”**. They had an **“abundance of joy”** in spite of their circumstances.

And while I am grateful that there are churches today scattered across the world that might truly be characterized as having overflowing joy, the sad reality is that the testimony the churches in Northwest Arkansas to our communities might not be so characterized. Yet, as we have already noted, Jesus prays that His people, the church, might be characterized by joy, and not just any joy, but specifically His joy, the joy of Jesus.

Last week we sought to see joy explained, answering the question, “What is joy?” Remember that we said joy *is entering into and remaining in the continual experience of a complete and secure delight in person and work of Jesus*. We saw that joy must be entered into; we are invited into delighting in Jesus by God Himself. We saw that true joy is a secure delight,

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meaning that because true joy is found in a person, specifically in God, who is Himself secure, that is sure, steady, steadfast and unchanging, there is nothing to move or threaten joy as it is experienced in Jesus. Because true joy is found in the infinite, sovereign, immutable person of Jesus, we learn that circumstances, no matter how dire or difficult, can ultimately affect it. We may be unhappy about a circumstance, but no circumstance can rob you of joy, if your joy, if your security, if your delight is truly in Jesus. And finally we saw that joy is always sought in something or someone we value. So then, if we truly value Jesus above all other persons and things, then our joy is genuine and has the capacity to carry us through any circumstance. If our joy is sought in the temporary and fleeting things of this earth or in the ever-changing whims of people, then our joy can be lost. So then, what is joy? Joy is *entering into and remaining in the continual experience of a complete and secure delight in person and work of Jesus.*

Joy Experienced

But it is one thing to know what joy is – to have joy explained to us and quite another thing to have joy – that is to truly experience the joy of Jesus? And this brings us to our consideration for today, joy experienced, answering the question, “How do we experience the joy of Jesus?”

In our text, John 17:13, we find no less than three means, three practices by which we can be assured to experience joy. Let us read the text again and then examine these three means,

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.

1. True Joy is Experienced Through God

How is joy experienced according to Jesus? **First**, we find that *joy is experienced through God.* In Psalm 16:11 we read,

You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

As we noted last week, it is in the presence of God that fullness of joy is experienced. Therefore to experience joy we learn that we must come to God. We must draw near to God. And is this not what we see Jesus doing here? 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 that *true joy is a witness to what you treasure.* And who does Jesus treasure? Who does He come to first? Who 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, even if it means momentary suffering. He comes to the Father. He sets His mind upon where the Father has Him and what the Father is accomplishing in His life.

How about you? Who do you treasure? Who do you *cling* to particularly in times of difficulty? Who do you run to first? Who do you depend upon in light of your trials? Be careful how you answer this. For true joy is a witness to what you treasure. If you do treasure God and His purposes for you, then you will find joy and delight even in your trials. But if you treasure

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comfort, or personal pleasure, or possessions, then what will be your response to difficulties, to those things that might rob you of such joy? I say, if you find yourself grumbling and complaining, if you find yourself discouraged by the circumstances around you to the point that you become grumpy or even despondent, then might I suggest that you have misplaced your pursuit of joy, and are seeking joy from someone or something other than God. You are not coming, even as Jesus was coming here in our text, to the unchanging, eternal God; but rather to constantly changing and temporal things.

What does the word of God tell us concerning coming to God. James 4:8 tells us this, **“Draw near to God [that is come to God] and He will draw near to you.”** If in the presence of God is joy and pleasure, then what greater pursuit can we have? And how do we draw near to God? Hebrews 7:25 tells us that we **“draw near to God through [Jesus].”** We need to see ourselves engaged in the very things that brought Jesus delight; in the very things by which He experienced joy. And what are those things?

Jesus found His greatest delight two things, first, in doing and seeing God glorified. To glorify God is to see God’s character and person revealed, made known and shown forth in His splendor and beauty through your life. We see this as Jesus’ delight 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 His Father. This is a repeated testimony in the Gospel accounts and specifically in the Gospel of John. We read statements from Jesus like the following:

John 4:34

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

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 actions of Jesus and possess the very mindset of Jesus – to always do the things that are pleasing to the Father. And let this thought blow your mind: as Jesus prays for His joy to be made full in us, He is essentially asking the Father for the joy that He has with His Father to be in us so that we would come to enjoy the

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Father in the same way as Jesus Himself does. Oh blessed thought – that Jesus prays for the church to experience the fullness of joy as found in the presence of the Father even as Jesus Himself experiences it.

Beloved, the joy of Jesus is an experience that results in all visible acts of self-denying, sacrificial love that displays to others the worth of God in one's life. The joy of Jesus seeks to 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. And our first concern, our utmost priority then is to come to the Father. Are you coming to the Father through Jesus? What is standing in your way of coming to the Father in the manner and example that Jesus has given us?

2. True Joy is Experience Through Prayer

So, joy is experienced first through coming to the Father through Jesus, but **second** we see that 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.”

Beloved, if our Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church, prayed to the Father for His joy to be made full in His people, how much more ought we to be praying for such a joy to be manifest in His church. How is your prayer life? What do you pray for? It is easy, is it not, to pray for *things*; to pray for health, or to pray for circumstances to be smoothed out? But is it not the general experience of us all that often health issue linger; that often the difficulties of life, while they may change are yet ever with us? I do not say it is necessarily wrong to pray for relief, to pray for paths to be smoothed, but our prayers ought to included what Jesus found important enough to ask the Father and that is that His joy would be found in us no matter what situations His people find themselves in. Beloved, let us remember that it is through the trials; it is through the storm-tossed seas of our experience that we learn to cling on to the Lord all the more intensely. And in our clinging to Him we find great joy. Listen to how Charles Spurgeon put it,

We need winds and tempests to exercise our faith, to tear off the rotten boughs of self-dependence, and to root us more firmly in Christ. The day of evil reveals to us the value of our glorious hope.

In other words, there is joy to be experienced in the winds and tempests of our lives. And we find Jesus not praying for blue skies and calm seas, but rather that His joy is evidenced by believers and is made evident to non-believers; that we have a great and glorious hope and that hope is our security in Jesus Christ. So, we see that joy is experienced in coming to God and also coming to God in prayer, asking the same things for God's people as Jesus asked.

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3. True Joy is Experienced Through the Word

Third, and finally then, we find that true 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 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. The people were convicted, saddened that they had not come to God, that they had moved so far from God. They were repentant, wanting to see God change them. And so, 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 our hearts are captives to His person, His promises and His beauty, then we must, we 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:

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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? Two times in this Upper Room Discourse do we find Jesus communicating that true joy comes from hearing and heeding the things He said. In John 15:11, Jesus said directly to His disciples, **“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”** Full how? Full be being delighted in the teaching of Jesus, the words of our Lord. And now again, in John 17:13, we find Jesus saying the same thing, only now He is asking the Father to fulfill it as He prays, **“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.”** Jesus desires and expects His people, His church to be characterized by His joy. Of course, before it can define a church, that collective community of believers committed to manifesting the character of Christ, it must first be found in you. Jesus prays that this joy be found where, **“in themselves”** – that is within 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

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