

Introduction

There is at least one thing all people have in common. We all seek to be happy. Everyone pursues happiness. It is a universal human desire and longing. Our own Declaration of Independence sets forth the opinion that among certain inalienable rights of humanity are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Like the writer of Ecclesiastes, human beings try all kinds of things to try produce within themselves a sense of satisfaction that engenders happiness. We go after the things of this world, material and immaterial—money and sensual pleasure, power and approval. The world generally believes that the one place you for sure will NOT find joy is in the worship of God. Christian people are often thought of as joyless and dismal because they don't love the world or the things of the world. But Scripture says otherwise. The word of God teaches that it is the followers of Jesus Christ who are genuinely and uniquely characterized by joy. God himself produces joy within those who belong to him. He has sent his own Spirit into the lives of his people to insure in the most authentic sense possible that they are happy. We focus on joy this morning as we turn to the gospel of Luke and chapter 10.

[Read text and Pray]

We are making our way through the incredible epistle of Galatians. And we have come to the cluster of godly traits which Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit. These are the character traits the Holy Spirit of God produces in the lives of those who belong to Christ. So I thought it would be worth pausing in our study to consider each one—one by one. This morning our focus is on joy. And we are turning to a text in which joy is emphasized. We observe Jesus rejoicing rightly and his disciples rejoicing wrongly. And we learn a lot that will help us think accurately about this aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, and I trust we will experience the reality of joy produced by the Holy Spirit in our lives as well.

For the world and perhaps for some of you, true and deep joy may seem like an elusive commodity. For those who do not know Christ, indeed that is so. It's as elusive as the wind. But I want you to be assured this morning that joy is not elusive for those who follow Christ. It is clear that God desires for his people to know the rich, rich reality of plentiful joy in our lives. Jesus made this statement to his followers. He said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). His statement asserts, one, that Jesus himself was joyful and, two, that he wants his followers to be filled with his joy in them. So it is no surprise that when we come to a list of characteristics God purposes to be produced in the lives of his people, we find joy listed second. And we learn that the Lord has in fact sent His Spirit to indwell His people to guarantee that joy is produced in us as his fruit.

So let's begin this morning by clarifying ...

I. The Meaning of Joy.

You can see from the verses we are studying this morning that joy is akin to happiness. When there is joy and rejoicing, there is gladness of heart. There is a deep contentment where there is joy. Joy on the inside is reflected by a smile on the outside. In the scripture joy and happiness are hardly distinguishable.

Proverbs 23:24-25 says, "The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him. Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice." See how in this statement gladness and rejoicing are basically identical?

In Jeremiah 31:13, the Lord describes the way in which he will transform the emotional state of his people by ransoming and redeeming them. He says, "Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow." You see again in these verses God's interchangeable use of the words rejoice, merry, and gladness. The antonym is sorrow.

The seventy-two who returned from the mission on which Jesus sent them are described as returning with joy. Clearly they were happy, delighted, and glad. They were filled with a spirit of celebration. Their emotions were uplifted. They were merry. And Jesus himself shares in their delight. They were all happy and glad. On the surface you might not be able to distinguish between worldly happiness and biblical joy, but biblical joy is deep inward happiness of soul.

John Piper entertains the question, "How you define joy?" And his answer is this, "Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world." Fundamentally, he says it is a good feeling in the soul. This is what we are trying to communicate when we use words like happy, glad, content, and merry. At its simplest level joy is the emotion of gladness within the soul of person.

And Paul teaches us that the fruit of the Spirit includes joy. We must exercise care as we proceed because not all happiness, not all gladness is biblical and Spirit-produced joy. As we explore the verbal exchange between those who were returning from their mission and Jesus, we see that there is such a thing as ...

II. Misplaced Joy

When the seventy-two returned from their mission, they greeted Jesus with exuberance. They were in awe because of the experience they had. What gave them such gladness was the fact that the demons were subject to them in Jesus' name. Jesus also took delight in the demise of Satan. He said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." He noted that indeed he had given them authority over the power of the enemy and that they were under protection. Nothing would hurt them.

What a glorious truth for all believers. Satan has no ultimate power over us. We are under protection provided by Christ himself. Anything Satan can do to impact the life of a believer is under the sovereign hand and direction of God. Satan is on a leash. And the gates of hell cannot prevail in opposition to Jesus' determination to build his church.

The disciples were quite joyful over the subjection of demons to them. And while Jesus shared joyfully in the falling of Satan, he added this corrective to the thinking of the disciples: "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Jesus corrected the basis of the disciples' joy. Their joy was misplaced. Looking analytically at the initial statement of the disciples, we can observe two aspects of their joy which reveal it was misplaced. What I am asserting is that their joy was rooted in the wrong soil.

First, the joy of the disciples was wrongly rooted in their experience. Their circumstances were happy ones. The enemy was being defeated right before their eyes by their own words and the feeling had to be exhilarating. It was a slam dunk. So it is as though the team is running off the court after a decimating victory. They are delighting in their victory and celebrating before their coach saying, "did you see that? How easily we won. They were no match for us!!" The coach replies, "It was a thing of beauty, but that's not where your joy should be."

If your joy is in your circumstances, it will soon evaporate. Every day of our lives cannot be a slam dunk. Surely we all know it well. In fact, for most of us it may seem more like the days where we fall on our face are far more than the days in which everything, even from a spiritual perspective, goes without a hitch. The apostles faced many days when they were assaulted by unfriendly circumstances in their lives. The Apostle Paul was constantly in the throes of dreadful circumstances. Over and over we find him in prison. We find him in stormy tempests of the sea. He was shipwrecked. He faced the harshest of enemies in the Jews. He was stoned and left for dead. And he was buffeted by a messenger from Satan. But he remained joyful. Recall his words from 2 Corinthians 4: "We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed." This is the Paul that instructed the Thessalonians to rejoice always and in everything give thanks.

Paul was able to rejoice when he was afflicted because his circumstances were not the ground of his joy. Jesus corrected the disciples who returned to report with joy because the root of that joy was in part their circumstances. You and I must not ground our joy in our circumstances because circumstances change with the tide. One day circumstances are happy and the next day not so much. I am not saying that you should not enjoy the good days, but I join with Jesus in warning us all not to plant our joy in that soil. Then it may be here today but gone tomorrow. Do not plant your joy in your circumstances.

But there is a second aspect of the disciples' joy that was problematic. Not only was it rooted in their circumstances, it was also misplaced in themselves. Did you catch the emphasis of the disciples' excitement? They were ecstatic because, as they said, "The demons are subject TO US in your name." It in fact seems that the emphasis was on the words, "TO US" as opposed to "in your name." It comes out in what Jesus said. He said, "Do not rejoice in this, that the spirit are subject to you." The joy of the disciples was in part a rejoicing in themselves, what THEY had been able to do, what THEY had achieved, even if it did involve Jesus' name.

Jesus had to remind them that in fact it was he who gave them the authority they had seen at work. They must not think so highly of what they have been able to do. Today may seem like a great day and tomorrow you may fall flat on your face, particularly when you begin to think of what YOU have been able to do. This is a tendency we all have. We celebrate our accomplishments or even God's accomplishments THROUGH US! Paul has a helpful warning for us. He says, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." If our joy gets placed in what WE are DOING, look out, that joy is headed for a collapse.

When we are focused on ourselves, we easily slide down the slope of disappointment into despondency and find ourselves soon the threshold of hopelessness. Maybe we are not all the way there yet, but we can see it from where we find ourselves. Joy that is the fruit of the Spirit does not ground itself in circumstances. Neither does it ground itself in self. It remembers that apart from Christ we can do nothing.

Next, I want you to see ...

III. The Meditation of Joy

Jesus not only reproved the disciples for basing their joy on matters that were shallow and inadequate, he also indicated the proper foundation of true and lasting joy. He said, "Do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Here is where your mind must be if your joy is to be stable and enduring. Here is the true and solid basis of joy that is rich, deep, unshakable, and enduring. Your name is written in heaven. He is speaking of

what is called in the book of Revelation the Lamb's book of life. It is the list of the citizens of the kingdom of God. God has a book with names. The names in this book are the names of those whom he foreknew, whom he chose, for whom he gave to his Son to die. He will raise them up on the last day. It is these that he loves uniquely and wonderfully and sacrificially and eternally. It is these who love him and are the called according to his purpose.

This group is a subset of the human race. If you belong to this group, you are among the chosen, the blessed, those dealt with in mercy and grace rather than justice. Do you know that you belong to this group? Would you like to belong to this group? If you would then it's likely that you do or are about to. From where you are now, the way in (so to speak) is by faith. The way in to the kingdom is through Jesus. God gave his one and true Son so that even though human beings are dead in trespasses and sins and deserving of eternal condemnation, they might be forgiven and cleansed through the price Jesus paid and the blood he shed on the cross. Whosoever will may come to Jesus. Turn from sin and self and trust in Christ Jesus and you will be saved. You will find that your name was written in heaven even before the ages.

Just think of what it means that your name is written in heaven. This meditation will produce joy in your soul. If your name is written in heaven, it means that God LOVES YOU. This is the most profound theological truth there is: Jesus loves me; God the Father loves me. And he has loved me from the foundation of the world. He loved me at my absolute worst and he loves me at my lowest. If my name is written in heaven, then I know that God has plans for me, plans for a future and a hope, for welfare and not for harm. It means he works all things for my good. It means he began a good work in me and he will bring it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus. If your name is written in heaven, it means the great and infinite God of the universe is bringing you into fellowship with him. It means he is your Father by adoption. He will not give you stones when you ask for bread; he will not give you harm when you ask for what is good. And if your name is written in heaven, then your relationship with God is permanent. It does not change from day to day.

This is the basis for true and lasting joy. These are the truths that sustain you when you are afflicted and the world is against you even when you are against yourself. These are the truths that sustain you when you are tempted to despair at your own weaknesses and failures and brokenness. These are the meditations that fuel abiding joy in your heart and mind. Do not rejoice in your temporal circumstances. Do not rejoice in yourself. Rejoice in the Lord. Again I say, rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice that he has written your name in heaven as though inscribed with a stylus in stone.

Now, a look at biblical joy requires that we look at ...

IV. The Master's Joy

Look down to verse 21. "In that same hour he [Jesus] rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and have revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.'"

Jesus was/and is joyful. Do you think of him in that way? This text says, "Jesus rejoiced." When we think of Jesus, one of the characteristics that should come to mind is his joy. He was/is glad. God the Father makes a profound declaration about Jesus in Hebrews 1:9. Of the Son he says, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." Jesus is the happiest human there has ever been. He is the God/man and his joy is God-sized joy.

Now let's observe a few details about the joy of Jesus right here in this encounter with his disciples. First, the joy of Jesus was in the Holy Spirit. He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. That is to say that it was the Spirit at work in even Jesus to produce joy. Jesus though he was the God/man lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself walked in the Spirit. He rejoiced in the Spirit. And it was the operation of the Spirit in him that produced the joyous exultation of Christ we observe here. It is helpful to us to know that Jesus lived as he calls us to live. The Spirit fructified his life, and that same Spirit he has made to dwell in us that our lives might produce fruit as well. It is assurance that the possibility—the inevitability—of joy in our lives is real. It is not because of us but because of him who indwells us.

Second, the joy of Jesus was fueled by gratitude. He rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank you Father." He is glorying in what God has done. He is captivated with God and the marvels of his working and it leads him to rejoice in the Spirit. As you and I grow in our knowledge of God and his working, our frame of mind is informed by deeper realities than the mere surface. We begin to process events and occurrences in light of the providence and spiritual purposes and working of God. And the more this is true of us, the greater will be our gratitude to God. We will glory in his ways. We may not always understand them, but we will trust Him and joyously rest in him. I believe that gratitude is a key catalyst to joy in our lives. We should be geared to be a people who constantly say thank you. We should thank others, but we should especially thank God—all the time.

If the sinless Jesus—the Son in whom the Father was well-pleased—if Jesus was thankful, how much more should we sinners be oriented at all times toward thankfulness to God! What do we have that we have not received? We are not God. We are stewards of what belongs to God. We are poor stewards. And yet he loves us! And yet he blesses us! We should be living in awe of the goodness of God to us. And such an awe will produce thankfulness. And such thankfulness will result in gladness and joy. We regularly need to stop and count our blessings. We need regularly to stop and survey the goodness and wisdom and glory of God in all things and be thankful. Thankfulness and joy go together. It is beautifully illustrated before us in the Apostle Paul who said, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content ... I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." What's that secret? I think it is gratitude—never being surprised that I might encounter need, always amazed if I should experience plenty. Oh, brothers and sisters, walk in the Spirit and be grateful. There is always more to be grateful for than we can count!

Third, the joy of Jesus is rooted in the will of God. And the will of God about which he is speaking is what we call sovereign grace. He "has hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children." This was his gracious will. And the Son corroborates this approach for he says that if anyone knows the Father it is because he chooses to reveal him. The upshot of this truth for those who believe is that if you see and know these things, you are blessed. You are happy. You for no humanly explicable reason have found favor with God. Jesus rejoices because of God's sovereign grace. He wants his followers to know it. Knowing God's will in this way humbles us, but it also leads to joyful gratitude—what Peter calls joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

Let us follow the example of Jesus. Walk in the Spirit. Give thanks. And glory in God's sovereign grace. By this we will abound in joy.

Finally, we should not overlook ...

V. The Mandate to Rejoice

In this text Jesus issues a directive to his disciples to rejoice. Paul issues such a mandate to the Philippians. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice." So here we have it. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Yet we are commanded to rejoice. Here again, we are told to do something that we cannot do apart from Christ. It is inconceivable apart from the work of the Spirit of God in our lives. Again remember this, "It is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Don't sit there waiting for a mystical force to make you an observer of what he is doing in you. Rather realizing you depend upon the Spirit, pray. And act in obedience. Walk in the Spirit. Rejoice. If you belong to Christ, choose to delight in the fact that your name is written in heaven. Delight in all that it means. Ultimately, delight in God. This is joy as fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

John warns in his letter that we not love the world or the things in the world because these things are passing away. To bank on this world to provide your happiness is a losing proposition. It may give momentary exhilaration, but like other lies from the devil, it will deceive those who are set on instantaneous shots of pleasure. Genuine joy is not without pleasure, but its pleasure is grounded in gratitude and hope and the love of God, faith in Jesus Christ and delight in the glorious will of God. And that is why you can rejoice even in the midst of trials and even in the midst of grief.