***Joy of the Lord***

Story about the woman who received the wrong email (story is at end of sermon).

There are times when we may get out message to the wrong person or it gets presented in a different manner than we had hoped for. When you pastor called me to speak today, there was a word that jumped out in my spirit. It was the word JOY.

**Text:** Let’s read John 16:24. John 16:24, “Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

**Setting the scene:** Jesus was trying to prepare his disciples for the things to come. He knew that they were going through some very tough times and they needed something to sustain them. They could be hurt, disillusioned, persecuted, trials, and they are going to have to rely on the Lord in a different way.

**Sermon:** I know that I have looked back into my life at times and kind of evaluated where my relationship with the Lord is. I am sure that all of us have done this a few times in our life. There have been a couple of times when I discovered that it seemed as if my JOY was missing or not as strong as it was before. I have been in churches where JOY seemed to be missing. Oh, the people were nice and they were Christians, but many did not seem to walk in the fullness of God and the richness of His JOY.

We can look at the Fruit of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control…against such is no law.”

It’s safe to say that joy is one of the most elusive fruits for us as believers. It seems as if it s not a very popular fruit and doesn’t get near enough use today. Part of the problem is that joy is often misunderstood.

We tend to equate “happiness” with joy but they are two totally different ideas because they each spring from a different source. One comes from the world around me. The other originates directly from the Spirit of the Living God. Happiness is conditioned by and often dependent upon what is “happening” to me. If people treat me good, if things are going well in my life, then I’m happy. If my circumstances aren’t favorable, then I’m unhappy.

Joy, on the other hand, throbs throughout Scripture as a profound, compelling quality of life. We do not use the word, “throb” very often but it refers to the Life Source, it should be active and alive. Joy is a divine dimension of living that is not shackled by circumstances. The Hebrew word means, “to leap or spin around with pleasure.” In the New Testament the word refers to “gladness, bliss and celebration.”

Just like a grapevine produces fruit, so should our lives. If we are a Christian, there should be certain fruits for everyone to see and for us to experience. It may be good to note that as we go down a path or journey, it may take some time getting there. It takes time, diligence, patience, and hard work to make a grapevine produce grapes. Fruit is not instantaneous because it has to overcome weather, insects, weeds, poor soil conditions, and neglect. Likewise, in our journey to joy, we may face apathy, pessimism, doubt and even despair as the disciples may have felt. **There is no way we can manufacture this fruit on our own.**

Dwight L. Moody also says it well, “Happiness is caused by things that happen around me, and circumstances will mar it; but joy flows right on through trouble; joy flows on through the dark; joy flows in the night as well as in the day; joy flows all through persecution and opposition. It is an unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart; a secret spring the world can’t see and doesn’t know anything about. The Lord gives His people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience to Him.”

If we want to see this fruit ripen in our lives, we desperately need the Holy Spirit to prune away whatever it is that hinders our joy and then empower us to make some choices that move us closer to a lifestyle of rejoicing. We need to guard against **three common Joy Busters** and we need to cultivate some **Joy Builders** into our lives.

**Joy Busters**

If we can back up a little bit to Galatians 4:15, before Paul wrote to the church at Galatia about the Fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5, he asked a very penetrating question in Galatians 4:15: “What has happened to all your joy…” That question probably needs to be asked in many of our churches today. What has happened to all my joy? What has happened to all your joy?

William Barclay, a noted theologian, has said that “a gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms.” ***We have everything, we should have everything to live for and we have a blessed hope that the world does not have!***  He goes on to say, “and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces.” In counseling, I often tell people to watch this and point to their face. It often tells how we truly feel and think.

Let’s look at three common joy stealers that often give us long faces.

1. ***Unsatisfied expectations***. Have you ever felt as if you were going through the motions of life with the same routines, and unfulfilled expectations? I speak to people today that are very discontent with the way their lives are progressing. Their expectations have not been met. It could be in our marriage, with our kids, our expectation of having nicer and bigger things– a bigger house, a nicer car, and a better job.

I’m convinced that a spirit of discontentment can rob many of us of joy. Listen to how Paul discovered the secret of being content with what God had given him in Philippians 4:12: “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. In other words, he knew what it was to be in need and to have plenty. He says he has learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”

In this secret that seems mysterious to many, Paul had to “learn” how to live with perhaps “unsatisfied” expectations. But the secret was not learning to live but to accept without having that feeling of being entitled or unsatisfied. Likewise, we must learn to live with plenty or with little.  **Listen to me.** Contentment doesn’t come when we have everything we want but when we want everything we have.

2. ***Unresolved conflict***. Our joy evaporates when we allow conflict between ourselves and another person to go on. When someone’s offense against us occupies our mental and emotional attention, we have little left over for the Lord. Anger clouds the eyes of our heart and obscures our view of God, draining away our joy.

*Hebrews 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: 15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; {fail...; or, fall from}*

This scripture challenges us to not allow relational issues to fester because bitterness can set in: “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. Looking diligently means for us to see to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

We can’t keep records of the wrongs or mistakes by others in the church or in our families. If we do so, the fruit of joy will be squashed in your life. Paul recognizes the link between joy and unity in Philippians 2:2: “Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

3. ***Unconfessed sin***. This third joy buster is perhaps responsible for driving away more joy out of lives than any other. Guilt can tear-out your joy faster than anything I know. Sin can send joy far away. Sin, of course, will separate us from God.

David understood this very well when he attempted to ignore the promptings of the Spirit. Take a look at Psalm 32:1-5: “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’ -- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

I love how this Psalm ends. After David owns his sin, his joy returns. Notice verse 11: “Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” Did you catch that? He was not able to rejoice and experience the joy of the Lord until he confessed his sins!

Before we move on to some **positive joy builders**, let me ask a few questions:

• Do you have any unsatisfied expectations that have led to a spirit of discontentment? If so, we need to learn the secret of wanting everything we have and not necessarily having everything we want. When we do, we’ll begin to experience joy even in the small things of life.

• Are you involved in any conflict with someone? If so, we need to confess it to the Lord and make plans to meet with those to reconcile, preferably face-to-face. We need to get back on our journey to joy.

• Is there any un-confessed sin in our lives? Sin will separate us from the joy of the Lord. We need to get back to the right kind of relationship with Him. David boldly prays in Psalm 51:12, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation…” God honored his prayer, and He will honor yours.

**Joy Builders**

Billy Sunday once said, “The trouble with many men is that they have got just enough religion to make them miserable. If there is not joy in religion, you’ve got a leak in your religion.” God not only wants to restore our lost joy, He also wants us to cultivate those things that will build lasting joy into our lives. The Bible gives us at least six ways to experience this joy.

1. ***Recognize God as joyful***. God is joyful and He delights in us. Zephaniah 3:17 says, The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest (or be silent) in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

God delights in you and breaks out into song when He thinks about you! Isn’t this amazing. It is kind of hard to believe. I love how the Living Bible paraphrases this verse: “Is that a joyous choir I hear? No, it is the Lord himself exulting over you in happy song.”

**I want you to hear me today**, if we have little or no joy in our lives, it could very well be because we don’t know God well enough because joy is one of His character qualities. He has created us to be His delight. He finds great joy in you!

2. ***Rehearse God’s attributes in worship***. God delights in us and finds great joy in His creation – then when we celebrate His attributes in worship we allow our joy to flow back to Him.
Psalms 66:1-4 says, Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: 2 Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious. 3 Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! through the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselves unto thee. 4 All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name.

David goes on in chapter 28:7, “The Lord is my strength and shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to Him in song.”

3. ***Reaffirm your commitment to others***. The first two joy builders are vertical and have to do with how we view God and how He views us. If we’re serious about drinking deeply out of the rivers of joy, we must also make sure that we are doing everything right on the horizontal dimension with others. We can’t do it alone. We need each other. Romans 12:15 challenges us to “rejoice with those who rejoice…” We’re not able to do this unless we’re connected to others. If you’re not in fellowship with believers, your joy will leak out. That is why so many pastors stress the importance of church attendance, not just Sunday mornings. It helps keeps us built up.

Here’s the point. As I connect with you and you connect with me, our joy will overflow. When we live in loving relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we’ll be more joyful and we’ll be helping others increase their joy. Don’t you like being around joyous people?

4. ***Reignite your passion for evangelism***. One of the best ways to build joy into your life is by talking to others about Jesus. Philemon 6: “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.”

Luke 15 records for us how much rejoicing takes place when the lost are found. When the lost sheep is recovered, verse 5 says that the owner “joyfully puts it on his shoulders” and then goes home and calls his friends and neighbors together and declares in verse 6, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep. I tell you in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents…”

5. ***Release your problems to the Lord***. One of the hallmarks of Christian joy is that it can be experienced in the midst of intense sorrow and loss. Often we define happiness as the absence of something undesirable, such as pain, suffering, or disappointment. But Christian joy is the proper response to the presence of something desirable: God Himself.

So many times in working with those who have lost a loved one and are grieving, I speak of the joy and peace of the Lord. Even Christians look puzzled when I mention the Joy of the Lord is your strength.

In Acts 16, the authorities beat Paul and Silas. After they were severely flogged, they were thrown into prison. In order to make sure they didn’t escape, they were put in the inner cell and had their feet fastened in stocks. Verse 25 says that Paul and Silas “were praying and singing hymns to God…” This word for praying is not the word used for making requests but rather the word used for praise, or worship. Instead of asking God to get them out, they turned this tough situation into an opportunity for rejoicing.

This reminds me of what Matthew Henry, a Bible scholar from the 1700’s wrote in his diary after some thieves robbed him and took his wallet: “Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because, although they took my wallet, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because, it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

Even through the darkest hour, we can be thankful that it may not be worse. Even in trials, James 1:2 challenges us to “consider it pure joy…whenever you face trials of many kinds.” How is our attitude and where is our joy and victory?

6. ***Remain close to Jesus***. To discover joy we must abandon the search for it and go looking instead for the one who is Himself is joy. Joy is the flag that flies over the castle of our hearts announcing that Jesus is in residence today.

John 15:10-11 puts it this way: If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full (complete).

If we want the kind of joy that is complete, lacking nothing, then we must remain close to Jesus. Apart from Him we cannot bear any fruit. Jesus said it clearly in John 15:4: “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

Conclusion

Let me say this. The world can never provide a lasting joy or any other type of joy, it only takes away. The only real joy we have is through Christ Jesus. Please do not allow the world to steal away your joy, especially in this season. Whenever a world needs to see a real Christian with joy unspeakable and full of Glory, it is today.

Let me briefly mention three application steps.

1. Guard yourself against those joy busters that crash into your life like a tidal wave. Be vigilant. Ask someone to hold you accountable so that you learn the secret of contentment, forgive others easily, and keep our hearts free of sin.

2. Identify one joy builder that you need to work on. Pick one that is weak for you.

• Recognize God as joyful
• Rehearse God’s attributes in worship
• Reaffirm your commitment to others
• Reignite your passion for evangelism
• Release your problems to the Lord
• Remain close to Jesus

3. Read through the Book of Philippians every day for a week. The word “joy” or “rejoice” is used 19 different times in this short book. As you read it, ask God to ripen the fruit of joy in your life.

In closing, allow me to read Romans 14:17. Allow it to penetrate your life: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Altar Call:

With heads bowed and eyes closed, I wonder if there is anyone here who may have lost their joy. It does not mean that we are lost or we are not a Christian, but you may be going through some tough times and it seems as if there is no joy. Perhaps in our Christian walk, we have lost a little joy or we take everything so serious that the joy is pushed aside.

I would like to pray with you. There is nothing to be ashamed or that we are less of a Christian if we admit this. The fact be known, all of us have felt this way at times. Again, with heads bowed and eyes closed, I wonder if there will be those who can raise their hands and say, I need joy.

John 16:24 says, Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. I am a firm believer today that joy will be restored. Please remember these steps.

***Story of a Woman receiving the wrong email:***

A couple going on vacation but his wife was on a business trip so he went to the destination first and his wife would meet him the next day.

When he reached his hotel, he decided to send his wife a quick email.

Unfortunately, when typing her address, he mistyped a letter and his note was directed instead to an elderly preacher’s wife whose husband had passed away only the day before.

When the grieving widow checked her email, she took one look at the monitor, let out a piercing scream, and fell to the floor in a dead faint.

At the sound, her family rushed into the room and saw this note on the screen:

Dearest Wife,
Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.

P.S. Sure is hot down here.