

The Spirit-Filled Life: Joy

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Preacher: Pastor Ken

[0:00] Please turn with me this morning to Galatians 5. Galatians 5, and you'll also want to be prepared in the life of the believer.

So I'd like to begin our time together by reading Galatians 5, verses 22 and 23. Galatians 5 and verse 22, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things there is no law, and those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Last time we were together last week, we began looking at the first of these characteristics, the first of the fruit of the Spirit, and love.

And ultimately we came away from that time together by saying that biblical love is not merely a feeling, but it's something that the Spirit produces in us that causes us to seek the good of others.

[1:38] All nine of these fruit is produced by the Spirit's work in our lives as we are exposed to the truth of the Word of God, and as He is working in us and convicting us and changing us and conforming us to the image of His Son, Jesus.

And as I've mentioned a couple weeks ago, and again last week, that the fruit of the Spirit, like a bouquet, you've got the individual flowers, but it's really the unity of all of them that produce the beauty that we see in the fruit of the Spirit.

All right. And as I've already introduced today, we're going to look at the second of these nine, which will take us a couple months to get through, is joy.

And that's just basic math, right? I mean, there's nine fruit, so it's going to take nine weeks, and it's a little over two months. So today we come to joy. And I think it's important to make a distinction at the outset about joy.

There's some misconceptions, misunderstandings, as it relates to that. Biblical joy is not simply happiness. It's not simply happiness.

[3:00] They can be related, for sure, but they are not the same. Happiness is largely dependent upon what is happening around us. What is going on?

Joy is dependent about what God has done within us. Happiness is largely horizontal, right? It's about our relationships, about what's going on in our lives.

It's about the experiences we have in life. But joy, it's fundamentally vertical. Again, it's related to our relationship to God. Happiness changes with our circumstances.

Now, you have a full bank account one day, and the next day you don't. You may be less happy about that, but it does not affect joy, because joy remains even when our circumstances change. That's why the Bible commands believers to rejoice, even in circumstances that would not ordinarily make anyone happy. You know, James 1, verse 2, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet various trials.

[4:08] Count it all joy when you encounter various trials. It's a joyful thing to go through trials. Not usually a happy thing, though.

1 Peter 1.8, what the song we just sang is based off of. 1 Peter 1.8, though you have not seen him, you love him.

And though you do not see him now, but believe in him, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. Notice the progression in Peter's statement there.

He says, you have not seen him. That means there's no perceptual advantage for a believer. Jesus has not revealed himself to us bodily that we would have an advantage over somebody else.

We have not seen the risen Christ for ourselves. Our circumstances are not such that we should rejoice any more or any less than the next person.

[5:14] We don't have a leg up on the competition, so to speak. I have not seen the risen Christ personally, and I would dare say you have not seen the risen Christ personally and physically touched him and seen his body raised in the way that Peter had and Paul and the other apostles.

So he says, you've not seen him, but you believe in him. You've heard the message and you've responded in faith despite not seeing him.

And as you believe in him, you rejoice with joy inexpressible. The joy for the believer is not rooted in circumstances or merely earthly hope.

Our joy is rooted in the assurance of our salvation in Christ alone. John MacArthur made a statement in his commentary. He says, joy is the inevitable overflow of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and of the believers knowing his continuing presence.

So biblical joy then begins with Christ. It begins in our relationship with him. As I've already said, it's more than happiness.

[6:36] Happiness is temporary. It's a temporary emotional response that's influenced by external circumstances. Right?

We're happy when things go well, when we receive good news, when we feel healthy, especially after we've been sick for a while. We're happy when our family is doing well.

We're happy when things are just going hunky-dory. But happiness is fragile because circumstances are fragile. Right? The problem is that we often try to build our lives around happiness.

That's the large part, a big issue in the world, even today, as we see around us. We're trying to build our lives around happiness.

What is the issue with the gender dysphoria and gender-affirming care and all that? It's about the happiness of the individual. You're going to be more happy if your external presentation matches your internal feeling.

[7:43] It's about happiness. And so we live that way. If I could just get this, if I could accomplish that, I would feel happy and fulfilled. If this relationship would work out, oh, life would be complete.

Then I would be happy. But what if you don't get what you want? What if you can't accomplish what you set out to do? What if that relationship doesn't work out the way you wanted it to?

Well, then I'm not happy. And I walk around with a frown on my face. And I don't find pleasure in anything. Now, there's nothing wrong with being happy when good things happen.

But if happiness is the foundation of our emotional and our spiritual lives, then we have built our lives upon something that is constantly changing. There is no stability.

And you remember when you go back to Matthew 7, 24 through 27, and Jesus says, the one who hears these words of mine and acts on them is like a wise man who built his house on a rock, on the foundation.

[8:57] There's stability in life to the one who hears the words of Christ and responds in obedience to it. Our joy, on the other hand, it's an enduring sense of well-being that comes from knowing that all is well between me and my Savior.

No matter what happens. If joy was dependent on our circumstances, then our joy would rise and fall constantly. But our joy is dependent on something else.

It's something that's enduring and it's eternally rewarding. Our joy is built on the fact that our relationship with God has been reconciled through Jesus Christ. Our joy is built on the fact that our sins have been forgiven, that we belong to Christ, that the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

Our joy is dependent not on us and our circumstances, but on Him and what He has done for us.

And these realities do not change when our circumstances change.

Whether you have a lot of money or not, whether you have good health or not, that does not affect your relationship with your Savior. And that's why joy can exist in the middle of sorrow.

[10:15] Alistair Begg shares an account of he had gone out to the West Coast. He was preaching out there at a conference. And afterwards, somebody came up and gave him a note. And he read it later on.

And then he said, Dear Pastor Begg, a friend was suffering through brain cancer and its treatments. His relationship with Jesus was such that the nurse on duty wrote as a critical comment on his chart, Mr. X is inappropriately joyful.

And since then, says the writer of the note, it has become one of my goals to be inappropriately joyful. You think about that.

The nurse was essentially saying that his circumstances don't justify the way he is responding. And from a purely human perspective, that makes sense.

Cancer is not a happy thing. Right? Pain is not a happy feeling. Chemotherapy is not a happy experience. Some of you who've experienced this and seen it firsthand or gone through it yourself, you understand.

[11:35] These are not happy things. But this man possessed something deeper than happiness. He possessed joy. And he could be unhappy about his circumstance, certainly, while still being joyful in his Savior.

Looking back again at 1 Peter 1.8, we see that joy is rooted in faith and not sight. Right? Though you've not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, but believe in him, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

Peter's writing to Christians who are experiencing trials. The whole letter of 1 Peter is to those who are experiencing trials and hardships. 1 Peter was one of the books I was contemplating going through with you before I settled on the fruit of the Spirit.

But you notice, Peter doesn't focus them on the positive points of their lives. He doesn't turn their attention away from their circumstances and their hardships.

But he points them to the Savior. He reminds them of who he is. He tells them, you've not seen him, but you love him.

[12:52] You do not see him now, but you believe in him. And believing in him, you rejoice. In the midst of the trial, in the midst of the hardship, in the lull of life, in the lowest of times, you know your Savior.

You haven't seen him, but you believe in him, and you love him, and you rejoice in him. It's about him. Our spirit-filled joy is rooted in our reality in Christ Jesus.

We don't rejoice because we've convinced ourselves that everything is going to work out exactly the way we want. That would be happiness. If everything worked out the way we wanted it to work out, we would be happy people, wouldn't we?

But the reality is, in life, everything doesn't work out the way we want it to. And we can yet rejoice because we know who holds us when things don't work out the way we want or go the way we want them to go.

The world says, look at your circumstances, and the spirit says, look at Christ. The world says, determine how you're doing by how you feel.

[14:14] And the spirit says, determine what is true by what God has said. The world says, try to control everything. And the Christian says, I belong to the one who is in control.

The very differences between happiness and joy. Joy being rooted in faith and not sight. That's why Jesus could say in John 20, verse 29, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Thomas had an advantage, right? That's the account there. Now Thomas, doubting Thomas, oh, unless I see him, unless I touch the holes in his hands and put my hand in his side, I won't believe it.

Basically sticking his tongue out at the other disciples. Not a chance. Thomas. The Lord shows up. Thomas does an about face.

Changes his whole tune. Jesus says, Thomas, you believe because you see me, but blessed are those who don't see and yet still believe. We haven't physically seen the risen Christ.

[15:30] We haven't touched his wounds. We haven't put our hands in his side. We didn't stand outside the empty tomb. We didn't see him come out. But we have heard and we believe the gospel.

And because Christ is real, because his death is real, because his resurrection is real, because his promises are true, we can have lasting joy.

So Christian joy, biblical joy, spirit-filled joy, however you want to refer to it, begins with salvation. If we want to understand spirit-filled joy, we have to understand why Christians have joy in the first place. What is there to be joyful about?

What is there to rejoice about? And ultimately, it starts with our salvation. The source of spirit-filled joy is I have been saved.

[16:36] Jesus Christ has reconciled me to himself, has restored a relationship with my creator. He's done for me what I could never do for myself. It's when we understand, when we understand and put in proper perspective and have the right view of our guilt and God's grace, we then have a

right gratitude, thankfulness for him, which then produces joy.

So think about our guilt, understanding our true condition. Guilt isn't a word that people in our culture particularly enjoy. We don't like talking about guilt, do we?

We just encounter people, talk to people, look at the news and what's in the headlines and what's being put out there.

We don't talk about guilt. We prefer words like mistakes or weaknesses or bad choices, imperfections.

We don't want to talk about guilt. We don't want to call things out for what they are. The Bible uses the word sin in talking about these things for each individual.

[17:58] It calls us to the carpet and talks about sin and the fact that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We stand guilty before our holy God.

No making excuses, no smoothing things over, no trying to get people off. from what they ought to be held accountable for. We are sinners.

We are guilty. And the problem isn't simply that we occasionally do bad things. The problem is that there is something fundamentally wrong with us.

Sin is the condition of the heart and we sin because we are sinners as I've mentioned before. when we guard our heart, we're called to diligently guard our heart because out of it flow the issues of life. We produce in our lives what is already in our heart. Circumstances merely provide the opportunity for that to be revealed. The works of the flesh that are produced because we have a sin nature.

[19:08] You go back to Galatians 5 and 19 and following. The works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger.

Why do you get angry? Why do you yell? Why do you slam doors? Punch walls? It's because it's already in your heart.

fits of anger. It's already there. It just needed an opportunity to manifest itself. A condition to manifest itself. So that argument that you had with somebody brought it on.

The works of the flesh are produced because it's what we have in our heart. And that's why God is working on us in our heart. That's why he tells us to not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

One of the greatest problems with being spiritually lost is that you can be lost and not realize you're lost. You can be guilty and not feel guilty. You can be separated from God and think you're doing just fine.

[20:23] You can compare yourself with other people and conclude, no, I'm a pretty good person. I haven't killed anybody. I don't lie to people. I'm all right. I give to the poor. I serve at the soup kitchen.

I'm okay. I'm not terrible. I'm not bad. You wouldn't get to say you're perfect. We know that. You know that's not true. But I'm good.

The problem is the Bible doesn't ask are you better than your neighbor? It doesn't ask are you doing better than that person over there? No, no. It asks are you righteous before a holy God?

The reality is no. When we see ourselves in the light of God's holiness, we realize that self-care, self-improvement, self-help, they're not going to get the job done.

We need to be saved from ourselves, not go to ourselves for the answer. And that's where God's grace comes in.

[21:27] We are guilty before God. We are sinners. We've offended Him. We are due punishment and justice because of that. He is our creator. And we have done wrong against Him.

But because of His grace, we have the answer. The answer is not you. It's not me. It's not Oprah Winfrey. Dr. Phil. I don't know who the people are today.

Some YouTube influencer, any of them. Name them. That's not the answer. Grace of God.

The answer to our guilt is Jesus Christ. Grace is, as you've heard, God's riches at Christ's expense. God's riches at Christ's expense. Grace. turn over to Ephesians 2. Ephesians 2 in verse 1.

[22:37] It says, And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you once walked following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Our natural state is a state of hopelessness. We are dead. We cannot help ourselves. What can a dead man do?

Nothing. Stink. That's about it. But then we come to one of the greatest phrases in Scripture, verse 4.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace, you have been saved.

And He raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That phrase, but God.

[24:02] God, you were dead in your trespasses and sin. You lived to fulfill the desire of the flesh and of your mind.

You're a child of wrath like the rest of mankind, but God. God stepped in despite your guilt in He inserted His grace.

He made us alive together with Christ. His grace means that He's given us what we could never earn. Jesus did what we could never do.

He lived a life of perfection that we could never live. Perfect obedience to the Father. And He took our place. He took our place at the whipping post.

And He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. Because blood is the cost of forgiveness.

[25:20] And the one who had no sin became the sacrifice for those who had nothing to offer Him. there's nothing we can give Him. We have no good deeds of our own.

We have nothing of worth to give to God in and of ourselves. And yet, God shows His love for us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He died for us while we were still sinners. not when we cleaned ourselves up, not when we became respectable, not when we became religious, not when we finally got our act together.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That means Jesus isn't something that we add to our lives to make an already life a little better, an already acceptable life a little better.

Jesus is our Savior. Savior. He saves us from the best possible life we can give ourselves, which does not measure up. He has done what you could never do.

[26:33] He offers you life that you could never have apart from Him, eternal life. And when we rightly understand grace, we become grateful.

It produces thankfulness in our hearts. Jesus, think about this. If you believe that salvation depends ultimately upon you, then there isn't much reason for joy.

If you can save yourself, what do you have to be joyful of? But if you understand that salvation is God's gracious gift, then every day becomes an opportunity to say, thank you, Lord.

Every day, every circumstance, that's gratitude. And gratitude produces joy. When I understand the seriousness of my sin, I appreciate grace.

When I know what my sin earns me, I appreciate grace. And when I appreciate grace, I become grateful. Words cannot express the gratitude, the heart of a repentant sinner.

[27:50] And when my heart is filled with gratitude toward God, joy begins to come out, becomes the overflow. Because joy is produced, it's not manufactured.

We can manufacture the appearance of joy, we can smile, we can laugh, put on a positive attitude, we can tell others, oh, I'm going to be joyful today, oh, it's great, God's blessing my socks off.

We can put on the appearance of joy and be dead inside. But Christian joy goes deeper than emotional self-management.

It's the work of the Holy Spirit. That means biblical joy isn't try harder to be happy, it's walk with Christ. Believe the gospel, remember God's grace, set your mind on eternal realities, and as the Spirit works in us, joy grows.

Sometimes we see the growth, sometimes we don't. Sometimes other people see it before we do. But the presence of the Spirit produces fruit.

[29:12] joy is not pretending. And here's the warning. Christian joy is not pretending. We don't deny pain or grief or suffering or death or disappointment or the seriousness of sin.

We don't deny the fact that sometimes life is incredibly difficult. But biblical joy actually gives us the ability to face those things honestly.

we can be honest with people and say, yeah, life is hard. I'm not really happy at the moment. I'm dealing with this problem or that issue.

But biblical joy allows us to look directly at that reality and say, yeah, death is real, but Christ conquered death. Yeah, sin is real, but Christ forgives sin. Yeah, suffering is real, but Christ is with us in the suffering. Yes, the world is broken, but Christ is redeeming his people. That's why spirit-filled joy can survive suffering.

[30 : 21] It's not based upon denial that there is suffering. It's based upon truth that despite the suffering, God is in control and he delivers. It all sounds easy.

Look to Christ. Believe the gospel. But I would be amiss if I did not warn you of the joy robbers. There are many things that can rob a Christian of their joy, but none are more obvious than forgetting what we should remember and remembering what we should forget. joy robber. Number one, forgetting what we should remember. Psalm 103 verse 2 says, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Why would David tell himself not to forget his Lord? Why would David remind himself not to forget the benefits of his God? Because we forget. Right? [31 : 39] We do. We lose focus. We forget what God has done. We forget about his faithfulness, his promises. We forget the gospel.

We forget answered prayers. We forget his provision, his forgiveness, his grace. the whole Old Testament. What is that about?

God's people, Israel, forgetting and needing to be reminded. How many times have you read the Old Testament? Man, I can't believe it. God brings them out of Egypt, delivers them across the Red Sea, miracle after miracle, provides manna, walking them through, giving them victory after victory. How in the world do they forget about him? How could they turn from him? Well, let's ask the question of ourselves. You stand guilty before a holy God and in his grace he sends his son to take the punishment you deserve for your sin.

He dies on the cross for you, calling you to repentance and faith in him. You don't have to be, you don't have to stand in the judgment and expect to be punished, but he took it for you.

[32 : 54] How could you so easily forget when you turn away from him and you seek your own way? When you do that which displeases God?

The only difference between us and Israel is they were millions and we were one. We were one individual still forgetting God.

and when we forget what God has done, our circumstances begin to dominate our thinking. And eventually the problem becomes bigger in our minds than the God who is sovereign over that problem.

It gets to be too heavy, too much to bear. scripture scripture repeatedly calls us to remember God in all that he has done.

That's the purpose of communion, right? We do communion once a month and you can become complacent because of how regularly we take the Lord's table.

[34 : 04] people. But the whole purpose of communion is to remember Christ and what he has done for us. When you eat this bread and you drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

It's to be remembered. Joy robber number two. The opposite end of forgetting what we should remember is remembering what we should forget.

we forget what we should remember but we also remember what we should forget. Some of us live in the past. We remember our failures, our sins, our regrets.

We remember the things that people have said about us, mean things, maybe truthful things, and they hurt. Remember things we wish we had done differently.

Maybe decisions we made that let us down the wrong path. We may know intellectually that Christ has forgiven us, but emotionally we continue carrying the guilt of our past.

[35 : 15] We continue carrying the guilt of our mistakes, of our failures, and we keep going back to the garbage pile of our past and digging through it again and again.

And if we stare at ourselves long enough, we become overwhelmed. the answer is not to stare harder at ourselves. It's not about going on a deep journey in yourself to find yourself.

You don't need to find yourself. That's the problem. The answer is to look away from ourselves and towards Christ. Yeah, I'm guilty.

You're guilty. But Christ died for us. You failed and I failed, but Christ is our righteousness. righteousness. We are not worthy, but he is worthy.

You can't save yourself, but Christ has saved you. The gospel does not tell us that we are good enough. The gospel tells us that Jesus is enough.

[36:18] There's a fad out there somewhere. I haven't followed it, but I've encountered it from time to time. People with their bumper stickers or their shirts, you are enough. It takes the kindness of God not to approach that and tell them, no, you're not.

Because the truth is, you are not enough, and I am not enough. Christ is enough. So where does that leave us?

If your joy is dependent upon your circumstances, then your joy will always be fragile. But if your joy is rooted in Christ, you possess something the world cannot give and circumstances cannot take away.

So remember what you should remember. Remember God's grace and Christ's sacrifice. Remember the forgiveness that has been given to you. Remember your salvation and his faithfulness.

But also, remember what you should forget, or forget what you should forget. I don't know which way to term this one for you. But forget your past failures, forget condemnation, forget the sins that Christ has already forgiven.

[37:39] Christian joy isn't pretending that life is easy. It's looking at the difficulties of life through the truth of the gospel. You may not be happy with everything happening around you today, but if you belong to Christ, you can still rejoice.

Your circumstances change, but Christ does not. Your feelings change, but God's promises do not. And the gospel doesn't tell us that we are good enough.

It tells us that Jesus is enough. And when Jesus is enough, we can have joy and we can rejoice.

And the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Father, we are thankful for your grace. Lord, we confess that so often our joy rises and falls with our circumstances, that we allow our problems to become bigger in our minds than the God who is sovereign over them.

Father, forgive us for forgetting what you have done. Lord, thank you for sending Jesus Christ to save us from our sin.

[39:00] Thank you that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That our salvation does not depend on our goodness. It doesn't depend on our performance.

It doesn't depend on our ability to hold everything together, to get our act right, to make ourselves righteous in your sight. Our salvation is holy on the finished work of Christ.

And for that, Lord, we are truly grateful and thankful. And it is in that that we have true joy and we can rejoice. Lord, help us to remember what we should remember and forget what we should forget.

Lord, when we are discouraged, please remind us to turn our eyes toward Christ. When we're burdened by our failures, Lord, remind us that Jesus is enough.

Lord, when we walk through suffering, remind us that you have not abandoned us. And Holy Spirit, pray that your fruit would be produced in us.

[40:11] Grow the genuine biblical joy in our hearts, not a joy that denies pain, but a joy that is grounded in truth, one that causes us to look to our Savior and rejoice.

And we ask all this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, our Lord, our source of joy. Amen. Amen.