

I am your Joy

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[0 : 00] So we are going to be taking a look at John chapter 15 this evening. And I'm just going to read a couple of verses to you from John 15 at verse 10.

Where Jesus is speaking to his disciples, it's the night before he's going to be crucified. And he's giving them some instruction and wisdom.

And this is what he says. If you keep my commands, you will abide in my love. Just as I have kept my father's commands and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

So I live in Edinburgh. And that means that often, if I'm hungry and I'm in a hurry, I don't need to stop and cook.

I can run out and get some fast food. So now and again, I am to be found in McDonald's, getting myself a burger and some fries.

[1 : 19] And I have to say that the idea of a McDonald's is always so appealing to me. And the reality is often disappointing. It's never quite as good as I think it's going to be.

It kind of leaves me dissatisfied. And I'm hungry again quite soon. And having a snack or having some fast food, I don't think that it's ever as good as taking the time to cook a great meal.

To think about your recipe. To find your ingredients. To take the time to prepare everything and cook it beautifully.

And then to season it, enjoy it, and feast on it. And that's one of God's great gifts to us in life. Is that he allows us to feast together and enjoy the goodness of what he's provided.

And in the picture that we've got in front of us in John chapter 15, it's a picture of a life of feasting and abundance and celebration.

[2 : 36] So if you're reading through the Bible and you come to a place in the Bible that speaks about wine and the vine and those ideas, then those generally, these ideas of the vine and wine, they gather around the idea that God blesses us with abundance in life.

That God allows us to enjoy the fullness and the fruitfulness of the world that we live in. So when Jesus is saying to us, I'm the true vine, he's telling us, as he says, that our joy, our delight, our hope, and our satisfaction in life is found by feasting on him.

So the picture that we've got in John chapter 15 is a contrast between a life of abundance and joy and feasting through Jesus and what we might call a fast food life.

A life where we're dissatisfied and empty and feel unfulfilled. We live in a difficult world and we all have struggles that we live with, problems that we encounter.

And a lot of the time, of course, we want fast food solutions to the struggles that we're going through. So we live in a country now where people are very stressed, they're anxious and afraid.

[4 : 19] And we live in a culture that is consumeristic and escapist. A culture where addiction is endemic. And that's because people are looking for quick solutions to their problems.

They want to go out and find an easy answer to the struggles of their lives. And we end up taking hold of shallow solutions to profound problems.

We go for the pragmatic, for the short-term fix, the thing that will make me feel good for a little while until the next crisis swallows us up.

And suddenly we feel ourselves going under the waves again. And beneath that, in our culture, beneath all this anxiety and fear and stress, people live with a tremendous amount of anger.

We spoke about this this morning. And we live in a very angry world. We're angry with ourselves. We're angry with each other. We're angry with our families. We're angry with our colleagues, our bosses.

[5 : 29] We're angry with politicians. So we've got a shallow culture offering shallow answers to profound problems.

But for those of us in the church, there's a real difficulty here because people don't think anymore that we've got a better answer.

When people who are not in the church look in and look on at us, they think that we don't have anything better to offer in this regard.

And now, of course, we live in a culture where the church is held in very low esteem. We're seen to have a checkered past and dodgy morals and dubious beliefs.

And sometimes we offer our own shallow solutions. Come to our services. Sing our songs. Be a better person and your life will be okay. And people kind of sense that it's not that easy.

[6 : 38] But Jesus here holds out an incredible promise to us. That in this hard world, with its profound struggles and problems, we can live a life where we feast in joy.

We can live a life where joy overflows. And he puts himself at the very center of that life so that his joy will be in us, as he says, and that our joy will be full.

So later in the week, on Thursday morning, maybe when you're struggling with life and feeling grumpy, and you're wondering what the point of everything is, then just remember these four simple words that Jesus is communicating here.

He's saying, I am your joy. I am your joy. We look to so many places and to so many things and to so many people even, and Jesus just wants us to hear very clearly, he's our joy.

And if we want joy in life, then it's found in him. I'm going to think about two or three things with you. I'm going to think about the pursuit of happiness. I'm going to think about the gift of joy.

[8 : 10] And then finally think about a relationship of love. Okay, so the pursuit of happiness, the gift of joy, and a relationship based on love.

Now, let's think about the pursuit of happiness for a few minutes. Every day does want to be happy. There's nobody really who fundamentally wants to go through life totally miserable.

And sometimes we pursue happiness in a kind of technical or mechanical way.

So what do I mean? Well, we know that happiness doesn't just come from doing what we want.

Okay, that is the shallowest of answers. If I do what I feel like, I'll be happy.

We all know that that just doesn't pan out. So people have a sense that happiness is something elusive. It comes at a tangent. The more we pursue our own pleasure and indulge ourselves, the less happy we seem to be.

[9 : 18] There's a lot of diminishing returns. So I read a quote from somebody called Ruskin Bond. He's an Indian author. And he says this.

He says, So I've never read anything by Ruskin Bond.

I found that in Wikipedia. But he's making the point. You see that if you go for happiness, you can't find happiness. So the wisdom then is this. That happiness is an additional benefit to life if we simply do what is right.

Now that sounds a bit more credible, doesn't it? If we live a worthy life, if we live a good life, if we live a decent life, if we try to be a good person, then we'll be rewarded with happiness.

So you could read John 15 that way. You could look at John 15 and Jesus says, If you obey, if you keep my commands, if you do the right things, you'll abide in my love.

[10 : 35] And then my joy will be in you and your joy will be full. So we might think, I can have a life of great happiness, of satisfying joy, and I will have that life of happiness and joy by obeying God, by being a good person, by keeping the rules.

That seems to make sense at a certain level, doesn't it? Keep the rules, be a good person, be happy. But the minute we sort of peel back the layers a bit more in life, we realise that just doesn't work.

You know, we think about the story of Job. You can live a good and righteous life. You can do the right thing every time. You can keep all the rules, but you might still suffer terribly.

You can keep all the rules and be a very good person and still be profoundly dissatisfied with life.

And so if that's the version of Christianity that we offer to people, be a good person, follow the rules and everything will be okay and you'll be happy.

If that's the version of Christianity we offer to people, it seems implausible. Because it's not real and it doesn't work. And at the heart of it, of course, there is something deeply ungodly.

[12 : 02] Because what we're really saying to Jesus is this. Jesus, if I do what you want, then you need to give me what I want.

And that is calculating, it is selfish, and it is using Jesus to feed your own desires.

But it's still your own desires that rule your heart and rule your life, not his. And so, that isn't where we find an answer.

Do the right thing, be a good person, and you'll be happy. And that's not the message of the Bible. Because happiness and joy is not something that we earn, it's something that's given.

So that's the second thing I want to talk about with you is the gift of joy. So happiness is not earned, but joy is God's gift to us through his son, Jesus Christ.

[13 : 15] The version of Christianity that we've thought about fails because it's not Christian, it's moralism. The try hard, be a good person and you'll have a good life is not good news because it's not true.

The foundation of the Christian life is always grace, always grace, that God gives us good things that we do not deserve and we cannot earn.

That never changes. And so when it comes to our longing for joy and happiness in life, we don't deserve it, we cannot earn it, but it is God's good gift to us in his grace.

and what we find when we start to sort of peel apart John 15 and sort of search into it a little bit more is we find that happiness and joy isn't located in what we do, but rather it's located in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

loving God and loving others are what the commands of God are all about, aren't they? This is my commandment, he says in verse 12, that you love one another as I have loved you.

[14 : 48] you. So how do we show obedience to God? How do we keep the commands of God? Not simply by obeying the rules because obedience to God is impossible without love because love to God and love to others lies at the heart of God's commands.

And so it's in this relationship of love with God and others that God grants us his joy.

If you want joy, if you want to know that great joy that Jesus promises, then you need to be willing to love God and to receive God's love.

So go back, let's go back to the kind of metaphor that we started with, which is about food. Okay?

And what I want to say to you, what I'm trying to say to you is this, that we're not trying to sort of blandly follow a recipe where if we follow the right instructions, we will get the right income, the right outcome.

It's not like a microwave dinner where you choose what you want, heat it for a few minutes and then eat as quickly as you can. it's not that kind of feast that God offers to us. I've got somebody in my church, so every week our congregation splits into small groups of about 10 to 20 people and every one of these groups meets once a week and they have dinner together and then they read the Bible together and they pray together.

[16 : 40] it's a very enjoyable time. There's a young man called Alex who's in my group and Alex is 24 maybe.

His greatest joy in life is cooking. He loves cooking and he's so passionate about it. He savours every opportunity he gets to cook.

Every ingredient, every recipe, he delights in the whole process of preparing the food. It's not just about eating but it's about giving because he loves food.

He loves this whole ambience of preparing a meal for other people and he delights in that whole process. So that's a contrast I'm trying to make that we don't just kind of follow the law because if we follow the law we get the right recipe and get the right result but rather I'm saying find your joy, your delight, your pleasure in the things that give God joy and delight and pleasure.

Savour the good things of God, relish them, rejoice in them and delight in them. It's not just following God's way, it's loving the ways of God and being thrilled by the ways of God.

[17 : 59] Why? Because God's law is an expression of his glory and his good character. nature. And in his law we find his love, his goodness expressed to us.

And so there is a good, good thing to be found here. That as we move towards God, as we seek to live a life of love towards him, that he meets with us in himself and his person and it's him meeting with us that is our joy.

Okay? So the joy is not something additional that he gives us. The joy is him. and he gives you himself.

He says, love me. And he gives you himself and that is your joy. When we want to live in this relationship of love and joy with God, then we will abide in his love. love. That's what it says to us. That whoever abides in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. In verse five. Verse seven, if you abide in me, my words abide in you.

[19 : 37] Ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. And so there's this idea of this life together. That we live in God and that God lives in us.

that we begin to share his heart and his joy. So sometimes our idea of Christian obedience is kind of a reluctant prisoner who has to obey the rules in a prison camp so that he can be rewarded with a clean bed and warm food and find a little happiness.

So we're reluctant to obey the ways of God, God, but we think we'd better. So you know, somebody may wrong you in a terrible way and you feel like revenge, but you think I need to forgive because if I don't forgive then God will not make me happy, he'll make me sad.

God. And so the heart is out of step with the heart of God. But what Jesus is describing here is a life that is so in step with God, so in sympathy with who God is, that as God wants us to forgive, so we too also long to forgive.

our desires, our lives, our loves, our character are all being reworked and reshaped by the power of his love and his grace at work in our lives.

[21 : 27] And this is his gift to us. It's not earned, it's undeserved, but it's what he gives to us.

So, there's a kind of gift of joy joy, that we can receive from God and that gift is rooted in a relationship of love.

And that's what I want to think with you about next. So, there's the pursuit of happiness, trying to find that reward, there's the gift of joy, there's the relationship of love.

And it's this relationship that is the source of joy. I read a very good quote a number of weeks ago by a Dutch priest, a man called Henry Nguyen.

This is what he said, he said, telling someone I love you in whatever way is always delivering good news. Nobody will respond by saying, well, I knew that already.

[22 : 46] Words of love and affirmation are like bread. We need them each day, over and over. They keep us alive inside.

So, if we have a relationship of love with God that promises joy in all the circumstances of life, then that relationship of love needs to be nourished and fed.

That's why Jesus says, abide in me and I will abide in you. That's why Jesus says, let my word abide in you and you abide in me. That's why Jesus says, walk in the way of my commandments. love and love and love and love. So, we need to nourish this relationship so that we can hear from God again and again the good news of his love for us.

So, what is it that the gospel declares to us? Well, it declares to us that we are loved. God says to you this evening, whoever you are, whatever your life's like, whatever your struggles, whatever your failings, whatever your shame, whatever your guilt, whatever your problems, then God says he loves you.

[24 : 15] God says to you, I love you. And as the church, whoever you are, we say that we love you. And that whole idea is so important to us as human beings that we are loved.

And it's that idea of being loved that allows us to endure with joy in so many hard circumstances. When we look at the life of Jesus, he doesn't pull away from people who are difficult.

He doesn't marginalize or ostracize those who are unpopular. Instead, Jesus seeks them out.

He makes them his friends. He eats with them and feasts with them. He has dinner with them and he pours love and grace out upon their lives.

us. And so in the gospel, as Jesus comes to us, he is here saying to us that we can feast with him, that he will pour out his grace and his goodness on our lives.

[25 : 36] Jesus is inviting us all to his table in that sense, to his feast. And saying, let me nourish you with my love.

So if we want to be nourished by this love, then we want to give Jesus the most important place in our lives.

Jesus is using an organic metaphor, the metaphor of the vine and the branch. And that metaphor of the vine and the branch, what it's saying to us is this, that all true spiritual life flows from him.

I'm the vine, you're the branches. All true spiritual life flows out of what we call our union with Christ. And so if you want spiritual life, if you want the joy of the Lord as your strength, then it's going to

flow to you only from Jesus.

If we want spiritual life, if we want joy, we will find it in Jesus and in no one else. And so we need to nourish and nurture our relationship with him.

[27 : 03] we need to live in him and him to live in us. We need to hear his words of love to us in the gospel and we need to speak words of love back to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so in the Christian life, there's this huge importance to focusing in on Jesus every day and nurturing and nourishing our relationship with Jesus.

How does this happen? Let my word remain in you. Let me remain in you. So we feed on Christ through the word of the gospel and Christ nourishes and feeds our soul.

Now you might say I don't really have a lot of time in my life. I'm so busy. I have a demanding boss, demanding children, demanding career.

I've got my hires coming up. I've got so much studying to do. I've got little children. My health is terrible. It might be so many things that cause us to struggle to find time to nourish ourselves spiritually.

[28 : 26] So what I want to really say to you is this. It's about what place Christ has in your heart and in your life.

So it's not just about how much time you give but even when you can only have a little time to pray and read. It's that you're making this time the most important time.

But you're saying to Jesus in some way you come first for me Jesus. I love you. You are my feast. You are my joy. You're the thing that gets me through the day. You're the one who nourishes my soul. You're the one that gets me through the hard weeks.

you know we all feast on something in life don't we? We all have something that keeps us going that we look forward to.

[29 : 30] Some of us say to money money you are my feast you are my reward you are my delight. For some of us it's family time if I get time with my family that's my reward for all my hard work that's my delight.

For some people it's a glass of wine at the end of the day. That's where I rest and relax. That's my reward for a hard day.

That's my delight. But when Jesus is your feast when Jesus is your joy you are saying to him you're the one that makes everything worthwhile.

You are my feast. And so when life is difficult when life is bitter when life is hard when we struggle when we're weary we go to Jesus to rest and to be refreshed in his joy.

We go back morning and evening to Jesus to hear him say I love you. this is the gospel word isn't it?

[30 : 43] This is the word that makes us clean in verse 3 already you're clean because of the word that I've spoken to you. This is the word of the gospel it cleanses us it refreshes us and renews us.

The gospel word is a word of love isn't it? Later in these verses he says greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends.

He's reminding them that he's going to lay down his life for their forgiveness and their salvation not because they deserved it not because they've earned it but out of love.

The cross every day we go back to the cross because when we go back to the cross we go back to God's words of love.

You know you and I can often doubt God's love in the circumstances of life and when we do we look to what Jesus Christ did for us.

[32 : 03] Christ died for us while we were still sinners by this God demonstrates his love to us. That's the great fact that anchors our lives that preaches the gospel of love to our weary souls and tells us yes in that love in that perfect good giving generous sacrificial love there is joy for me in Jesus Christ so as we turn to Jesus each day as we hear the words of love that nourish our soul as we remain in him and walk with him and as we seek to live a life of obedient love towards him then we do have this hope that our life can be a life of joy because of Jesus because we have him

I think it was Saint Augustine who said he who has Christ plus all the world has no more than he who has Christ alone do you get that he who is Christ in all the world has no more than he who is Christ alone because he is everything and if you have him you have it all and if you have him you have eternal unbreakable undying love if you have him he will be your joy and so this is the picture isn't it of joy and happiness and fruitfulness of the grape and the wine and it's a good picture of

overflowing goodness and joy that nourishes others that's what Jesus says here isn't he says in verse 11 I've spoken to you these things that my joy may be in you that your joy may be full what happens with the joy of Jesus it overflows from his life into the lives of the broken the blind the lame the sad and the bleeding people of his generation and these people met Jesus and they went home rejoicing nourished and healed by the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ and so we can share in that joy and as the joy of the Lord overflows in our lives then it nourishes and blesses the lives of others you know a great chef is not just feeding himself is he the delight of a great chef is in sharing his food with others a great cook wants to give other people joy joy Jesus wants to give us his joy and when we have his joy then we want that joy to overflow from our lives to others too we're not just looking for something in a selfish way to make me happy we're looking for the overflowing joy of God in our lives so that our lives will be a light and a blessing a delight to others around you know without God in our lives we walk around the world looking at everyone else pointing the finger at them and saying make me happy make me happy we look at our children make me happy we look at our spouse make me happy we look at our friends and our colleagues and we're saying all of them you need to make me happy but when we have Jesus we don't need to say that anymore do we he is our joy and so we can say to others let me make you happy and we can pray to God let my life be a joy and overflow in my life so that their lives can be joyful also we want to be a source of joy for our families we want to be a source of joy for our friends we want to be a source of joy for our colleagues we want the joy of the Lord to overflow in our lives so that they can also delight in the goodness of God and one of our callings as the church is to be a community of joy a place of rejoicing so that as [37 : 33] God's joy overflows among you then your whole community is blessed by the pouring out of his goodness on your lives so we can seek joy in a kind of selfish pursuit of happiness but it doesn't work joy is God's gift to us and God's joy is gifted to us in a relationship of love with Jesus Christ Christ and you and I need to nourish that relationship through living in the gospel and hearing the gospel again and again and again and Jesus will give himself to us in the gospel and when we get Jesus we get joy but he doesn't give himself to us so that we can have a selfish delight in his goodness he gives himself to us so that we can have his joy and that others might experience his joy through us let's conclude there

I'm going to say a word of prayer then we're going to sing our last psalm