

Joy

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[0 : 0 0] There we go. So we're talking about the subject of joy today. We're hearing it everywhere. Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

And how wonderful it is to have this kind of joy. But we're also going to talk today about the challenges. How do we maintain that joy? How do we receive that joy?

But we've come together to celebrate that God does give us joy. And it's a gift in Jesus Christ. So let's pray together. Lord, as we look into your word, come and speak to our hearts, we pray.

Thank you for the joy that is in Jesus Christ. Amen. So my first question.

Next slide. And the next slide. Have you ever been really, really happy? I know you have. Happy is, you know, something has really gone right for you.

[1 : 0 7] Happy is usually based on an experience you're having. A moment of great excitement. You just won something. Or you just, you got a promotion.

Or the boss told you you're going to get a pay increase. Or you got a hundred on some exam you had. Or something really good. You were in a competition. And your team won.

Or you were, whatever it was, you were the best at something that you've been working at. All of these experiences give us a lot of happiness. But the bad thing about happiness is, it's always temporary.

When the environment changes, and that happy moment is past, our happiness can fade with it. So what we're going to talk about today, then, instead, is true joy.

Happiness is good. Joy is much better. Next slide, Mark. Let's talk about the two a little bit. We can confuse them. We can say, oh, this has taken away my joy.

[2 : 0 9] Yeah, it's probably just taken away some of your temporary happiness. But the joy of the Lord is something that resides in you. Happiness happens to you. To me, a good example of happiness, we were blessed.

You know, I made it sound like I had a lousy year and spent every moment in that house. And that's what it felt like. But only if I focus on that. We also took a great family vacation. Went to an amusement park.

Went to a water slide park. Now, happiness is, for me anyway, was going down something like at a water slide or a roller coaster or whatever.

That exhilaration. That was happy. But you don't carry that with you. That ends when that's over with. But the joy of the Lord is this reservoir that's in your heart.

That is the presence of God. And that doesn't leave you. That comes from God. That is constant. That's not based on external circumstances.

[3 : 1 1] The difference between happiness and joy, in fact, is huge. It's like the difference, if we consider happiness versus joy, it's like the difference between a collection of nice mud puddles and the Great Lakes.

That's the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness. Joy. Joy. Next slide.

The angels came to announce joy. I kind of like this particular picture of angels because you can't see them very well. And nobody really knows what angels look like.

Sometimes they appear simply as men. Sometimes they have flaming swords. But anyway, here you see them as just bright creatures that you can't quite make out in this picture.

Well, whatever it was, it certainly was shocking and scary to the shepherds. And so the angel began with fear not. But then he went on to say, I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

[4 : 22] Look at that. Good news, which is another word for gospel. I'm bringing you the gospel. This is the good news.

A Savior is being born. And that news will give you great joy. A Savior is being born. And it's for all the...

Hmm, that's interesting. When I did that slide at home, the word people was on there. So something happened to it. I bring you great joy and it is for all the people.

You see, this joy that's in God, it's not restricted to the shepherds. It's for everybody. It doesn't matter what your social status is, your job, your past history, what you've done right or wrong.

None of that matters. This joy is for everybody who will believe that a Savior of the world has been born in Bethlehem.

[5 : 18] And if you will believe that and receive it, this joy is available for all people, not limited. But then what do we do?

Next slide, Mark. Back to this one. What do we do when the joy robbers come along? What do we do when things go wrong at work?

Or the doctor gives us bad news? Or the children give us a hard time? Or the teacher at school has given us a terrible assignment we didn't like?

Or whatever it is. What do we do? Well, the answer is, if you know the Lord, then you go to God. And you go to His Word.

And you let Him fill that joy reservoir back up. Singing is also very good for it. But let's go to His Word together.

[6 : 12] Let's consider about four or five scriptures here. Mark, give us the next slide. Psalm 1611. In your presence, there is fullness of joy.

And at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Whose presence is the psalmist referring to? God's presence. In the presence of God, there's fullness of joy.

Oh, let me give you a Christmas example of that. Mary has found out. You all know the story, so I'm not going to read it to you. Mary's found out she's going to have baby Jesus, who's the Messiah, the Savior.

And she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who has found out she's also going to have a miraculous baby, who's going to be the forerunner, the announcer, prepare the way the Savior's coming.

And so Elizabeth's in the kitchen or whatever she was doing. And Mary knocks in the door and says, because they're first cousins, and they're both first-time mothers. And you know how first-time mothers want to get together and talk about it?

[7 : 18] You know, what's it like for you? What's it like for me? And they can compare notes on what it's like having a baby. And so Mary's gone to see Elizabeth, and she knocks on the door and she says, Elizabeth, it's me and Mary.

And Elizabeth says that the baby, John the Baptist, jumped for joy in her womb. That's kind of amazing.

You see what it is? In the presence of Jesus, even an unborn baby had the joy of the Lord.

Joy comes in the presence of God. Not when you're focused on your problems, but when you get into God's presence. It worked for an unborn baby.

And that made me wonder, by the way, I think that's the best scripture in the whole Bible for me, on why we should be pro-life. If an unborn baby could recognize the Messiah, then let's not take the lives of unborn babies.

[8 : 24] Well, and how wonderful it is. It made me wonder if an expecting mother is worshiping God. I'm talking about one of you, if you're expecting and you're worshiping God, I wonder if your baby experiences joy.

We know that if you are going through great stress and you're expecting that it can affect the baby. And we know if you're alcoholic or drug addict or it's affecting the baby, maybe the joy of the Lord is also doing a wonderful thing on that baby.

Well, so, first thing, something's trying to rob your joy from you, get into the presence of God. Second Bible verse, Mark. Psalm 35, crying may last all night, but joy comes in the morning.

The sad times don't last forever. They come and they go. It's going to last for however long, for a night.

The joy will come in the morning. If you know the Lord, if you're walking with the Lord, that joy is there for you. As soon as you get your attention back on the Lord.

[9 : 39] By the way, I was really thinking about, I wonder if you could take that scripture very literally. And so I did some Google stuff about when do people tend to commit suicide.

And guess what? Between midnight and 6 a.m., the suicide rate is three times higher than the whole rest of the day put together. But you know what that tells me?

If I'm ever really feeling blue, I better just go get a good night's sleep. In the morning, I'm probably going to feel a whole lot better about it. Because you know how it is in the middle of the night. If your toe hurts, it hurts worse.

If you're having to worry about something, it totally takes over when you're laying in bed. No matter what it is, it seems like it's when you're in the bed trying to sleep that these things can drive you crazy.

But then joy will come in the morning when the sun comes back up and you realize, oh yeah, life goes on. Let's look at another scripture. Psalm 126, verse 5.

[10 : 42] Those who plant with tears shall harvest with shouts of joy. A lot of life is planting with tears. You parents among us, all of you, most of you have been parents.

Some of you will be. Some of you are in the middle of it right now. Well, changing diapers, that's like planting with tears. Staying up in the middle of the night with a crying young'un.

Cleaning up somebody's vomit. I mean, you've had to do it all if you're a parent. That's planting with tears. The times you've had to correct a child to have to inject some discipline in their life.

You're planting with tears. But one day there's going to be a harvest from that. One day because you took the time to do all that.

That child's life is going to be so much better than it would have been if you hadn't done it. You've been doing that with tears, but there's a harvest coming. Just hang on.

[11 : 53] Maybe you haven't seen the harvest yet, but it's coming. The same thing at work. Whatever you're doing at work, the reason you're having to do it and the reason they're paying you to do it, it won't happen by itself.

So when you're down there, you're having to work and sometimes you don't like it and you wish you weren't there. And things are breaking and going wrong. And somebody's got a bad attitude and they're not showing up for work.

And things are going wrong. And you are planting with tears. But if you'll stay at it, one day that will all get fixed.

One day you may get to retire or see the end of that project or whatever's going to happen and you'll be shouting for joy. It applies to every bit of life.

Sometimes in marriage, things get a little rough. Just keep on doing what you should be doing. You're planting, sometimes with tears. But there's a joy that comes from that.

[12 : 54] This is a principle all through life. And even Jesus followed this principle of joy. And that is, sometimes you do the hard thing now because you're waiting for the joy.

Look at this next verse. Hebrews 12.2. Jesus, who is the author and the perfecter of our faith. So he's our example. Look what he did.

For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross. And now he's got the harvest. He's seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hallelujah. So Jesus could even endure the cross because he saw the joy coming. He was willing to take your sin on himself and die in your place and suffer for you.

Because he saw the joy that you would be forgiven and that you would become a part of his family. And that he would sit at the right hand of God the Father with this whole kingdom of people.

[14 : 00] And he could see that joy by faith. And he did that for the joy set before him. But he had to plant with tears. It wasn't fun to get the beating of your life.

Spit upon, ridiculed, nailed to a cross, bleed to death, suffocated. That was a very difficult thing. He endured it for you and the joy he would have in you.

Let's look at another scripture. That last one there, John 16, 22. Jesus said this to you and me. You have sorrow now sometimes.

But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice. And no one will take that joy from you. We're going to see Jesus again. That's a wonderful thought.

Boy, if I'll just stay focused on that, I'll be joyful all the time. We're going to see Jesus again. He's going to come back in person to this world to rescue all of us, to do away with evil, to set up his kingdom.

[15 : 08] His kingdom of the new earth, which is also heaven. The scripture refers to heaven more often than it does to the new earth. But heaven will be when God recreates the earth.

And we're here with him. And Jesus is ruling over all. And your hearts are going to rejoice. And if you'll focus on that, I love this last phrase. No one can take that from you.

Nobody. It won't matter if the house doesn't get built on time. It won't matter if the grandchildren wander off. It won't matter if the car breaks down.

It won't matter if the bills don't get paid. It won't matter too much if you lose your job. Because no one can take away your joy when you're really walking with the Lord and in his presence.

Then let me end with just a thought or two. The question being, next slide, how can we receive God's gift of joy? It sounds like a good thing, but how can we receive it?

[16 : 10] Well, let me tell you how. I'll tell you a story. Suppose, just use your imagination. Suppose you were guilty of a crime.

A really serious crime. I don't know what it is, because I don't know what we have in this kind of sentence. But it's such a serious crime. You've been arrested. You've gone to trial.

And the jury of peers have heard the evidence. And they've said, guilt, guilty is sin. And then the judge says, okay, well, you're guilty, so I'm going to give you a choice of your sentence.

Either life in prison the rest of your life. Or, for \$20 million, you can make complete restitution to these families and these people you want.

Well, if you're like most everybody I know, you're going to have to say, your honor, I'd love the \$20 million, but you're going to have to put me away.

[17 : 11] There's no way I could ever raise \$20 million. So he says, okay, life forever in prison. And they put the hangers on you. And the guards are leading you out of the court.

And then a complete stranger that you've never seen walks up to you in court and says, wait a minute. I'm a very wealthy person. I'll pay that \$20 million for you.

And they say, why? What do I have to do? What's in it for you? And he says, all I ask is that we become like best friends.

And I'd like to live with you and teach you how to live this life so you won't keep making these kind of mistakes. Well, most people are going to say, yes, I'll take that deal.

There might be a few idiots who would say, I am everything myself. Give you money. I'm a man.

[18 : 17] And go to prison for the rest of your life. Well, this is a very good analogy of what Jesus has done for us. You've been sentenced under the law of Moses.

That you have not always loved God above everything else. You have not obeyed your parents. You have lied. I know you have.

Because you're human. You have stolen things. You have cheated. You have worshipped false idols. You have committed sexual sin.

If you're old enough, you've, I mean, just you may. And so the great judge says, well, there is the law. And you're guilty. And so the sentence is, solitary confinement in a place called hell forever.

And as you're going to be dragged off to that, here comes Jesus who says, I'll pay it for you. I've already paid it.

[19 : 19] With my blood on the cross, I've already paid it. And you say, what do I have to do? And he says, accept this gift. And let me become your good friend.

And let me live in your life and teach you a better way to live. And the Bible uses the word fool and says, you are a fool if you don't accept that offer.

But there are people who say, I don't need religion. That's just a crutch. And I say, yeah, give me that crutch because I'm a spiritual cripple.

And a crippled person needs a crutch. And I'll take all the crutch God will give me. And you're a fool if you won't accept that offer. This is how you receive God's gift of joy.

You receive what he did in Jesus Christ. All you have to do is accept it. And when you do, next slide, Mark.

[20 : 20] If God becomes the source of your joy, your joy can never be taken from you. That's what Jesus had just said in that verse we read a minute ago.

It'll never be taken from you when he's the source. Happiness will pass. Come and go. Joy won't. It's going to stay with you because joy is the presence of God through his Holy Spirit in your life.

Happiness is good. Joy is a whole lot better. Happiness is kind of fun and exciting. Joy is knowing that the king of the whole universe is right here.

Right here in me. Living through me. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. So, would you like to have more joy?

Raise your hand if you'd like to have more joy. Joy. Next slide, Mark. Then this Christmas, to receive God's gift of joy, let's just open our hearts more completely to God.

[21 : 27] Have more of his presence. And the joy of the Lord will be your strength. We're going to sing our closing song, and we don't always do this, but this morning I've presented the good news pretty clearly.

That you need to receive Jesus personally. You need to receive this offer. So, John or I will be down front here. And if you'd like to come, and maybe you've never said, I really want to give my heart to the Lord.

I want to open my heart to God and receive Christ as my Savior and know this joy of the Lord. Then I'll be down front. So, come folks to do the music and I'll lead in a prayer.

Thank you, Lord, for your joy that is available, free. Help us to...