

Joy: Satisfaction & Enjoyment - 29th January 2023

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] Today, we're continuing a new Sunday series that we started last week on joy, this small three-letter word with a big meaning. As we saw last week, it's intended to be at the heart of the way we live out our faith.

The words of joy are mentioned some 326 times in the New Testament in total. You can go home and count them, should you wish. Just in New Testament, no, 326, that's clearly meant to be a key characteristic of our lives with God.

And yet, as we said last week, whilst we might usually associate joy with some good time sense of happiness and pleasure, in that sort of emotion or feeling sense of the word, the joy which God has in mind for us goes far deeper than our feelings or our emotions.

Now, true joy, it's not dependent, as we said last week, on our circumstances or our emotions. But neither do we have to fake it if we're not feeling happy.

That's not what it's about. You know, God's not some demanding wedding photographer saying, say cheese when you really don't feel like it. That's not the way it works, no. There's nothing fleeting and also there's nothing fake about joy.

[1 : 15] We don't have to blag it. Instead, it's this ever-present sense of gladness deep within us that comes from knowing that whatever happens, whatever we go through, God is always with us.

So life will have its ups and downs. We will have our ups and downs through life. But joy is this sense of assurance, if you like, that God is enveloping, God is underpinning, God is present with us in and through all of those peaks and troughs.

Now, this idea of God and therefore hopefully this sense of joy being present with us in the here and now each day, is reflected in all sorts of places in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms.

So, for example, in Psalm 118, we're told this. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

God has made this day today. So let's rejoice, says the Bible. Let's take joy in the possibilities of what this day with God is about.

[2 : 27] And if that kind of get up and go in the morning is not quite our demeanor on things, well, take heart, because even someone like the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who was about as depressed as a bloke can get, to be honest, even he knew true joy in the present, since it was the fresh possibilities, if you like, of each new day with God, that causes him to declare in the book of Lamentations when Jeremiah says this.

He says, The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

They are new every morning. This idea of there being new joy to experience because God is with us each moment of each new day. Now what's interesting though is that Jesus also picks up on this idea of today being a reason for joy in a fair few places.

For example, in the story of Zacchaeus, we read that Jesus says to this vertically challenged tree climbing tax collecting wheeler dealer, he says to Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today. There's an urgency. This immediate word is in there. There's an urgency, it seems, in Jesus' mind for Zacchaeus to experience the present joy in the moment of knowing that God is with him today.

[4 : 01] And then a bit later, having gone to Zacchaeus' house, Jesus again underlines the joy of the present reality by declaring to Zacchaeus, he says this, he says, Today salvation has come to this house.

Now it's a clever little phrase of Jesus' because it works both, we might say, figuratively and literally. Because Jesus, his name means the Lord is salvation.

So he said actually, yeah, I've come to your house today, but because the Lord is salvation, salvation has come to your house today as well. In that present moment with Jesus, God is present with Zacchaeus.

God is with Zacchaeus. And that's, I would say, what gives Zacchaeus that sense of joy. I mean, imagine how Zacchaeus felt, having Jesus, God himself, come and stay at his house.

Imagine having Jesus pop around your house and sit on your sofa and share a beer with you or whatever. It's that kind of joy-inducing presence which we're talking about on a daily basis.

[5 : 10] But then also, think about another time when Jesus uses this today word, when he's on the cross. When Jesus says to the guy who's being crucified next to him, he says, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.

And again, because joy is not about emotions or feelings, it's deeper than that, we can imagine the joy that the crucified man next to Jesus would have known, even in the midst of his excruciating pain and his imminent death.

That joy of God's present promise through Jesus to be with him always. And so I guess the fact that both Zacchaeus and the man on the cross can know the joy of God's presence with them in the present today, that reminds us, I think, that joy isn't dependent on external circumstances and life's ups and downs.

No, but it's an inner sense of gladness that we are with God and he is with us. Now, given all this, given this idea that joy is meant to be a present reality for us day by day, I guess the question I want us to think about today might be this one.

What kind of life do we need to lead in order to experience God's joy on a daily basis? What kind of life do we need to lead in order to experience God's joy on a daily basis?

[6 : 45] In order to help us consider that question, I'd like us initially just to return briefly to a passage that we looked at last Sunday from the book of Ecclesiastes.

Because if you were here or you've caught up online, you'll recall it's a book whose message seems to be that since life is fleeting, since life is like that vapour idea we talked about.

We do well to enjoy it as best we can. That's what the writer seems to be saying. Enjoyment, it seems, which comes, according to Solomon the writer, from eating and drinking and perhaps above all, finding satisfaction in how we spend our time.

So if you recall, he puts it like this. He says, a person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God.

For without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? Two key words there, Solomon says. Finding satisfaction and enjoyment. Well, there's nothing better in life, according to Solomon.

[7 : 51] And so with this idea of satisfaction and enjoyment in mind, I wonder for you, as perhaps you look back over your life so far, when would you say you've particularly felt satisfaction in your work?

When did you get that sense of being fulfilled with what you do? It doesn't matter if that work has been paid or voluntary, whether it's been time spent as a parent or a carer or a homemaker.

It's all work. But when would you say you've felt most satisfied in that work over the years? And then along similar lines, again, looking back, when would you say you've known a decent sense of enjoyment in life?

What do you look back on as a time of life you've particularly enjoyed? When were you smiling a lot? So satisfaction in work and enjoyment in life.

Now, I appreciate trying to think about those things. They're big questions. So in order to help us perhaps work out when those particular times might have been, I think it can be helpful to break our lives down into the different sections.

[9 : 14] So, for example, we might naturally be beginning to think of our life in decades these days, perhaps the older we get.

So depending on our age, we might recall what life for us felt like, perhaps in the 60s or 70s, the 80s or 90s, the noughties and so on. Could be a lot younger. You could be much older than that. You might have many more decades than others. But what was our overall sense of life in those particular decades? What do you look back on and think, that was a good decade or that was a tough decade overall?

You know, how satisfying or how enjoyable were the 1990s, for example, for you if you were around in those times? So one way we can do it is look back at our life in time sections.

Alternatively, though, we could split our lives into what we've done. You know, so perhaps times at school and then perhaps the different jobs or responsibilities that we've had.

[10:15] And again, as we look back over different things that we've done in life, what level of satisfaction, what level of enjoyment did we have in those different sort of occupational seasons of life?

Another way to think about and reflect on the life we've had so far. Still another way to do it that we might want to think about is to think about the various places we might have lived and break your life down in that way.

And I know for me, this is probably the most helpful way for me to break up my life into sort of bite-sized chunks, really. Primarily because I've lived in various different places over the years. In fact, just to fill you with me, I worked this out this week. I've lived in 22 different houses or flats in my life and I've lived with 37 different people. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. You know, you're sort of kicked out by folks. But yeah, 22 different addresses. That's a lot of administration, if nothing else, I tell you. So if I were to plot my life on a map, I've lived in places in Surrey, in East London, Essex, Liverpool, North London, Birmingham, Aberdeen, Walsall, Bristol, and then finally here in Burntwood.

[11:30] Bit of a spread, I guess, across some of the British Isles, at least. And for me, it's helpful when I look back at different places I've lived, I get a different kind of memory. I get a different sense of how satisfying or how enjoyable perhaps those particular periods of time were for me.

I'm going to take one this morning just as an illustration. Think about my time way up north in Aberdeen in Scotland, for example. And I moved there when I was 25. Now, I'm an Englishman, but my surname is Wallace and my middle name is William as well.

So I've got some kind of Scottish stuff going on somewhere, I'm sure. My accent didn't exactly endear me to the Aberdeens, I can tell you. But I moved up to Aberdeen, age 25, to become a store manager for HMV, the record shop.

And I moved up to Aberdeen on my own, not knowing a soul, but I was willing to take the opportunity that I've been given to pursue what at the time was my dream job, you know, that of running a record store.

Now, in terms of enjoyment, outside of work, I joined a band up there, played drums and joined a band. In Aberdeen, I made friends, had some good nights out with people from work, you know, sort of work hard, play hard mentality.

[12:47] Didn't find a church, but to be honest, that didn't really sap my enjoyment at the time. And the highlight, though, was that I started to go out with Gemma when I was living in Aberdeen as well.

Although Gemma was living in Bournemouth at the time, so 500 miles or so, as the proclaimers would say. And talk about distance relationship, that's a whole other story, we'll go there one day. But enjoyment for me in Aberdeen, I think it was generally there. In terms of satisfaction at work, though, at HMV, Well, I think, looking back, whilst I learned a lot about retail and management and the staff team were great, and it was a busy, kind of vibrant, buzzing environment to work in, my abiding memory, as I look back at that time, is that I hated the HMV business model.

You know, customer service wasn't driven by a passion to share the joy of music with people, which is what I went into it for, and as outsiders are encouraged to believe, HMV music specialists, we're all about the music and that kind of thing.

But instead, it was the most cutthroat business environment, maximising the margin on products in order to maximise profits for its owners.

[14:07] And I know it's a business, but that didn't sit well with me when we were charging outrageous amounts for CDs and DVDs back in the day.

You know, 17, 18 quid, 20 years ago for a CD that, you know, really, I just couldn't justify it when people came to the till and they're paying that kind of money for things.

Now, other retailers I know often have a different kind of ethos, more socially aware, perhaps, than that. So I'm not knocking retail per se, as good customer service and being involved with that can make it a hugely satisfying line of work to be involved with.

But for me, it was a formative experience, I think, because it focused my mind on what I did want to do, and did want to spend my time and working life on.

And simply working for profit for some anonymous corporation, that wasn't it for me. Instead, when I left HMV, that set the ball rolling in a way for me to become a church youth worker back in the Midlands and in time to become curate and in vicar here.

[15:13] And in terms of work here, it is hard work here, but it is also a line of work here that gives me a great deal of satisfaction as well. So when I look back at Aberdeen, that time there, that's my association with that.

But as I think about each place I've lived, they each remind me of different times in my life where my sense of enjoyment and or my sense of satisfaction with work, or how I spent my time, has varied in all sorts of ways.

So I wonder for you, I wonder for you, perhaps you find it helpful to split your life up into a sort of timeline, years, decades, seasons, that kind of thing, significant milestones maybe.

Perhaps you find it easier to split your life in kind of like a CV and think about where you've worked, what you've done, different roles that you've had. Maybe if you've moved around as much as me, you find it helpful to split life into where you've lived, houses and towns and so on.

Whatever framework is helpful for us to reflect on our lives, I guess the question this morning is to think on when we felt particularly satisfied and particularly we've enjoyed life.

[16:27] And this is where the piece of paper comes in that you'll have found on your seat, hopefully, or around you. What I'd like you to do, just for a few minutes this morning, and you can do this on your own, so it's a private kind of thing. What I'd like you to do, take your pen and paper, and whatever way works for you, maybe draw a little grid, if you like, or a timeline or something to split your life into sort of bite-sized sections.

And once you've done that, try and identify where and when you experienced particular satisfaction in your work or your activity, but also times of life you especially enjoyed.

So, we'll take a few minutes to do that. Again, as I say, you can do this on your own, so you can spend a few minutes reflecting on things. Times of life that were particularly satisfying for you in terms of work and activity, and times of life that you felt actually, that was enjoyable.

I had a good sense of enjoyment in life then. And then we'll come back together in a few minutes.

So, take a few minutes, perhaps, to do that. It's hard to gauge how long you might need on this.

Some people spend ages. Some people can crack it in 30 seconds, I know. So, having maybe done that majority of that reflection on your own, what I'd like us to do now, feel free, you don't have to do this, but if you'd like to, it could be helpful.

[17:52] Do you want to just share with someone next to you a little bit of where you found the most satisfaction and or enjoyment in life? What period of time was that? Where was it? What were you doing? But more importantly than that, perhaps, at this stage, can you try and identify why, why you felt those times or those periods were particularly satisfying or particularly enjoyable?

And all of this is relative. You might feel, well, I haven't really lived a very satisfying or enjoyable life at all. When was the most satisfying or enjoyable? Even if it's a fairly low bar. But think, why?

What was it about those times, those periods in life that gave you that sense of satisfaction or enjoyment? Why? What was it? Nice to hear the conversations going on.

And it's one of those questions, I guess, you could go on and on about, if you wish. The kind of conversations we could pick up over coffee or at house group as well, perhaps in the week.

But I'm not going to ask for feedback for too long. But I wonder if there's perhaps two or three folks who might want to just share a little bit of their story. Just briefly, a couple of people maybe who might want to say, yeah, this particular time was satisfying for me in my work, or that particular time I felt I enjoyed life, and it was because I think of this or that.

[19:14] A couple of people perhaps want to be brave and just share a little bit of what they've been talking about with those next to them. When were you satisfied? When did you find enjoyment? And why was that, do you think?

No right or wrong answers with this, so you can't get it wrong. It's your take on where you're at. You brave souls want to put their hands up. Yeah, Neil. I'd say, it sounds a bit, don't tell her, because she's not in here at the minute.

But especially for sort of home life and stuff like that, and private life and outside of work, I was never that satisfied until I met Helen. And then it all clicked into place and made sense.

So it was the companionship, the friendship, the partnership? Yeah, yeah, and she kept me on the straight and narrow as well, which always helps. Okay. Good stuff. Thanks, Neil. Thank you.

Sian, over here. What have we got? Just to be awkward, I've done it the other way around. There wasn't a particular place. It's what the theme that came out from the whole lot.

[20 : 16] Is that okay? Yeah. So I've realised that spending time with people and friendship is just so important to me. And also the work.

So I was a music teacher, but I also worked in mental health. But it wasn't the, I loved doing the teaching, but I loved just that light bulb moment when you had a child who really struggled, couldn't do it, and then they got it.

And it was just that, that's what it's all about. So it was just, and I get really emotional because when we came down from Inverness to Rugeley, Simon.

Come from Inverness, beautiful countryside, dolphins, you know, to Rugeley. Steady. No offence. Rugeley was great, but I had no friendships. I didn't have a car. I had nothing.

And I was stuck in the house and I got so, so down. Until I got randomly phoned up and said, you're a teacher, aren't you? I said, yes. Or can you come and teach in the primary school? No, I'm not primary school.

[21 : 13] Well, there's a flu epidemic. We haven't got anyone. Please come. And then that started me back teaching again. So, yeah, it's really interesting when you realise. Well, anyway, I just took it a different way because I'm just random. No, no, that's helpful.

Thanks, John. Thank you. So people, friendships, that sense of belonging. And then seeing a tangible difference that you're making in children's lives with the way you were teaching, yeah, that's great.

One other person. Anyone else want to share? Josh at the back. Yeah, a couple of ironies that I noticed in terms of satisfaction and enjoyment, both slightly different. With enjoyment, the irony was, I looked at some of the different periods of my life and things I've been doing.

Some of the greatest periods of enjoyment were right off the back of some of the greatest trials and some of the greatest periods of kind of not enjoying. And I think those difficult periods gave a paradigm shift and a different perspective.

So when you go into a new situation, you approach it slightly differently and you kind of find the beauty and the joy in some of those times. And it's quite interesting that the one almost has to happen for you to enjoy the next part.

[22 : 18] And then with satisfaction, it kind of struck me that some of the most satisfying times are also some of the most difficult times. And actually when things were really easy, it didn't necessarily make it satisfying.

It was in the difficulties and the trying to overcome the trials and working towards something and trying to achieve something that increased the satisfaction. So I suppose the lesson for me personally is to not grumble or complain through the difficulties and realise that actually off the back of some of these difficult times might come some of the greatest periods of satisfaction and enjoyment.

Yeah. Great. Thanks, Josh. Thank you. Yeah. So often when we're stretched, that's when you get that sense of fulfilment. Looking back often, it's helped you to grow and be more productive.

It's a bit like Blu-Tac, I suppose, isn't it? You don't stretch Blu-Tac. It's pretty rotten. When you stretch it, it becomes far stickier and more useful. And maybe that's a good little metaphor for our lives as well. Thank you.

Thank you for those. I think as I was thinking about this, just a couple of thoughts really this morning on it. And these are not rocket science, okay? They're pretty simple kind of thoughts. But I think in their simplicity, there's something probably quite profound which can come out of it.

[23 : 33] So my hunch is for me personally that our satisfaction in and our enjoyment of life are generally based on two key principles. And they've come up already with what has been shared.

So firstly, I think, thinking about satisfaction with what we do. If you recall that verse in Ecclesiastes, it says, A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own work. And I'd say in my experience, we find satisfaction in our work, whether it's paid or voluntary roles, whether it's as a parent or a carer or a homemaker. When we feel like, as Sian was saying, that we're making a positive difference to other people.

When we sense that we're doing something for either the individual good or the greater good of others, we find purpose and meaning in that use of our time and our energy.

We feel fruitful. We feel fulfilled. Now, I think we can find fulfillment and satisfaction in all sorts of work, as long as we're given or we have the ability to see that what we do is making a difference to someone else.

[24 : 46] So if you're totally detached and divorced from what you do, you never see it, actually, the difference that it makes to someone in their home. It's hard to find satisfaction. If you're just production line the whole time, but you never see that product in people's homes, you won't be satisfied.

But if you can see the little things that you do on a mundane, day-in, day-out basis actually makes a huge difference to the practical life of someone day by day. That's where I think the satisfaction can come in all sorts of work.

So whether we're in manufacturing or retail or catering or the arts or teaching or caring for others in fixing things or delivery driving, if our role is predominantly listening to people or praying with people or whatever, we can find satisfaction if we can see the difference that our time and effort is making in someone else's life.

And when we do what we do, so it's whether with customers or clients or service users or children or vulnerable or the lonely and so on in mind, that brings us satisfaction.

We get, if you like, a sense of calling, a sense of vocation. And the satisfaction that comes with a fulfilled sense of calling, I think it's that which can bring us joy.

[26 : 01] That's one thought. But then secondly, we think about enjoyment. Again, my hunch is that enjoyment usually peaks when we feel like we belong to a wider community.

You know, a group of people who know us and who appreciate us, you know, who like us. Group of like-minded people who share the sense of satisfaction that comes with working for the common good, yeah, but who also see us as someone worth caring for and worth spending time with.

You know, that sense of belonging, of friendship, of mutual vulnerability, of enjoying being in community, however large or small that community is.

And that, in my experience, is actually what God brings real joy to our lives through. As Solomon in Ecclesiastes, he references this, I think, when he says this.

He says, Two are better than one, but they can help each other succeed. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

[27 : 12] So, whether it's friendships or partnerships or wider community, they also bring us joy. But then at the end of this verse, Solomon adds a further bit of wisdom.

He says, Yes, two are better than one, but three are even better. For a cord of three strands is not easily broken. And the three strands, well, that's you, me, and God.

The presence of God with us, intertwined and woven with us in both our work and our friendship, in both our sense of calling, what we do, but also our sense of community in what and who we enjoy.

And I think it's this truth, which probably brings us back to that question that we asked earlier, which was this. What kind of life do we need to lead in order to experience God's joy on a daily basis?

That's joy today, in the same way that Jesus promised salvation to come for Zacchaeus, for example, today. What kind of life do we need to lead in order to experience God's joy today, or on a daily basis?

[28 : 20] Well, if, as Solomon suggests, enjoyment comes from finding satisfaction in our work, and by spending time eating and drinking in the loving company of others, then that enjoyment opens the door for us to experience the ultimate joy of knowing God's presence with us in those moments.

And then I'd say it's through satisfaction in our work, it's through enjoyment of community, that I'd say we experience the joy of knowing God with us day by day.

Yes, we can worship and we can pray, no doubt about that, and that helps us experience God's joy.

But on a practical basis, it's satisfaction in our work, what we do, and it's enjoyment in each other that God also regularly can bring us that deeper sense of joy.

And my hope is that the opportunity, perhaps, to make a difference to each other, is with how we spend our time, and the chance to enjoy community. Well, I hope there are things which are on offer here at St. John's.

And yet, in order to find satisfaction in work and enjoyment in a community like this, in order to know God's joy in our lives on a daily basis, when I ask what do we need to do, I think the simple thing is we need to get stuck in, you know, we need to go for it, if you like.

[29 : 45] You know, I was struck, where's Barbara? There's Barbara. Peachy cardigan, looking good, Barbara. I was struck by what Barbara said the other week when we had that little time of sharing. When she said she was excited about joining the little friends team, and I'll quote her here, she said, it's given her a new purpose in life.

So Barbara, I would say, is a great example of what I'm talking about. You know, a sense of satisfaction with her voluntary work, in this instance, but also a sense of enjoyment in the community, which she's become a part of, and the friends that she's making here.

Did I say that sense of both satisfaction and enjoyment? I don't want to speak for Barbara at this point, but it ultimately means, I would say, that she's experienced something of the true joy of knowing God in her work, and her rest, and her play.

Now, each of us, I know, not everyone can help with little friends. I appreciate that. I know everyone's got the inclination, or the time, or the energy, or the availability. I get that. All of our circumstances and opportunities and pressures are different.

And we'll each need a way up, I think, what's possible and what's important for us. I know as well, many of us filled in those ways to serve forms a while back now. And whilst we've identified, and it's been great to have lots of people doing certain things now because of those forms, there's still some to go, and other initiatives that will be launched when the time feels right on those.

[31 : 16] But those forms are useful. We've still got them available. But equally, if there are ways that you think, I'd like to do the equivalent of little friends, but I'm not around. What is there available for me to get stuck in and feel fulfilled in through St. John's?

And do come have a chat. And if you'd like to get involved with anything, we can give you the options that might be available. So I guess in some ways today, in some ways it's quite simple, and it's a reflective kind of thought.

But really, I guess it's a kind of joy, MOT, if you like, time today. And as I say, do continue to have these conversations. I have a copy at house groups, in a pub club.

Or whatever that we've been thinking about, because it's an ongoing thing. But I think perhaps our prayer for today might be that God would help each of us to identify new ways for us to find satisfaction in our work, whatever that looks like, and enjoyment in our community.

New ways which might just involve us getting stuck in, perhaps in different or new ways. But generally, trust in God to bring us joy through both of those important elements in life.

[32 : 33] I don't know how you want to remember this. Enjoyment and satisfaction is one. You could talk about calling and community. You could talk about service and friendships. You might want to go talk about purpose and people.

That's perhaps an easy one to remember. It's all about satisfaction and enjoyment, because they often go hand in hand. And it's through these two strands, I would say, satisfaction and enjoyment, purpose and people, that we can experience the joy of knowing God as that third strand in the midst, the joy of knowing God with us.

And would you like to see you■■■■ you could see about following those of the things that you have to be able to help. And that's kind of good. That's just interesting. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Innovation. Please.

Thank you. The ■ Eventually in the Ji Tuesday