

# Joyful Life

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[ 0 : 00 ]     Good morning, Sir Pauls. I join you live from the living room of the rectory. Well, actually, it's not live. This was filmed last week. Right now, James and I are in Indianapolis for the Gospel Coalition National Conference.

We met with the brothers and sisters at Mosaic Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, yesterday to look at what they do as a multi-ethnic church. So we send you our love from the United States, and we're praying for you that you're having a great morning of fellowship as you gather and discovering joy in the Lord.

That may not also be the case because there was an article in the Sydney Morning Herald a couple of years ago that was just titled, Cheer Up Sydney. The article suggested that we Sydneysiders possess a legendary preference for complaint.

Whether it's property prices, Saturday morning traffic, or the cost of living, few things appear to escape the gloomy outlook through which we as citizens see the world.

A recent survey concluded that Sydney is not only unhappy with present circumstances, but quite cynical about the future. Things like the cost of living and traffic and housing affordability were the most pressing concerns, and yet nearly one-third suggested it was just a general frustration with the pace and the stress of life when you've got things like laundry and children to raise.

[ 1 : 21 ]     Ironically, Sydney, however, is ranked as among the ten most liveable cities in the world by a whole range of different organisations. There's a lot to love about our city.

There are more jobs and higher wages and good education opportunities and strong support services. And then there's the cultural bounty. Maybe not quite as much as Melbourne, but we've got festivals and beaches and parks and sport.

It is, in fact, objectively Australia's number one city. Psychologist Susie Green, who's the CEO of the Positivity Institute, says that Sydneysiders have plenty of reasons to cheer up, and she put it really simply.

She says, we live in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. We're not living in a war-torn country. So it can be a little confusing that we live in one of the top ten liveable cities in the world, yet we appear to be pretty much a miserable bunch of people.

What about you? Is your life characterised by joy? If circumstances are the issue, that's how we get joy, then we should be, frankly, happier than most, and yet the reality is we're not.

[ 2 : 34 ]     And I'm pretty sure this morning that no matter where you are on the joy scale, none of us would complain about getting a little bit more joy in our life. I'm pretty sure all of us would be keen to increase in some level of joy.

So we'll see in John 16 today that encountering the resurrected Jesus guarantees joy. In chapters 14, 16, and 17 of John, Jesus is repeatedly telling his disciples that he has a joy to give them.

Now, this is just before his execution, and he knows it's coming. And this is when his disciples are distraught with the news that Jesus is leaving them.

So this is a profound joy in the midst of dark circumstances. So this morning, there are three things that I want us to see from John 16.

Firstly, the promise and reality of joy. Secondly, the nature of joy. And thirdly, how is it possible that we might be growing in joy?

[ 3 : 47 ] So firstly, the promise and reality of joy. And I've got these outlines in your St. Paul's app, if you can open that up now. Jesus Christ says that if you meet me and come to know me, you'll have a joy that is deep and powerful and is now.

He says that joy is inevitable when you meet him. Notice in the text, in verses 16 to 19, we have this phrase, in a little while.

It's repeated a number of times. And it's all to do with what Jesus says in verse 16. In a little while, you will see me no more.

And then after a little while, you will see me again. Now, there's a few different layers of meaning here. But essentially, Jesus is talking to his disciples about his death, his burial in a tomb, and resurrection on the third day.

He's saying, I'm going to die, and you're going to be distraught. But when you see me again as the resurrected Lord, you will rejoice.

[ 5 : 04 ] All of them. Not just the more emotional ones of them, or the ones with the better lives. But all of them will rejoice.

Let me just emphasize something here. Just bear with me for a little bit. Jesus isn't saying that you rejoice at my second coming, although they will.

He isn't saying when you die and you go to heaven, you will then rejoice, although they will. Jesus is saying when you see me resurrected, you will rejoice.

This is not just a promise for the first disciples. This is for us now, today. This is so essential. Just indulge me just a little bit more.

You may not be aware of this, but to this day, no one knows the location of the tomb where Jesus was laid for three days after his crucifixion.

[ 6 : 05 ] No one. There's a few guesses. By 120 AD, Christians were not even sure where it was anymore. Why is that?

Why is it when the tombs of every religious founder and prophet have been venerated and turned into a shrine, that is, they are places of pilgrimage to this day, why is it that we don't know Jesus?

When Osama bin Laden was finally found and killed, he was immediately buried at sea because the United States government didn't want his burial location turned into a shrine, a pilgrimage place for radical Islamists.

So how come the Christians forgot about the tomb of Jesus? The reason is, when you have Jesus, you don't need his tomb.

In the same way that when I have my daughters, their rooms, their things, their artwork, and it's just, it's not as important. If I've got my daughters, their shoes and their clothing and their toys and their exercise books are just not as important.

[ 7 : 18 ] If, however, one of my daughters goes away or leaves for a very long time or dies, then all of a sudden their scribbles become important.

The photos, the exercise books, the letters, their favourite toys, all of a sudden they take on a great more meaning because it's all I've got left.

The reason the tomb didn't matter to the early Christians is because they had Jesus. Real Christianity is to meet the risen, reigning Lord Jesus.

Friends, we don't need a relic because we have him. There is an alive and active relationship with Jesus now available to everyone. See, Christianity doesn't just promise incredible joy at the end, pie in the sky if you like.

It promises it now. When you meet the risen Lord, you rejoice. This is as true for us now as it was for the first disciples. In fact, the illustration of the woman giving birth in the middle of the text declares it too.

[ 8 : 25 ] Jesus says, Joy is like a woman in labour. When the time has come, she has the child. Now, I've watched a woman give birth on three separate occasions.

It's Natalie, just in case I need to clarify that. Now, one thing I do know about childbirth is that when it's time, it's time. There's no stopping it.

Now, and I'm pretty sure that I would have suffered physical violence if I had said, can you just hold on, honey, until tomorrow? You know, like I'm looking for an early night tonight.

Just, you know, put it off until tomorrow. The reality, you can't even hold it for five minutes. I remember running to cars and running through hospitals. When it's time, it's time.

And what Jesus is saying here is that if you meet him, you will have joy. It's inevitable. It's got to be there.

[ 9 : 27 ] We are not Christians without this joy. I wonder whether, if you've ever noticed how much the Bible, in fact, speaks of joy.

Here's a, here's a sample. I won't give you all the references, but here's just a sample. Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say, rejoice. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

Serve the Lord with gladness. You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace. The Lord will rejoice in doing you good.

Rejoice, for your names are written in heaven. I bring news of great joy. These things I speak, that your joy might be full.

The disciples were filled with joy and the Spirit. Rejoice in hope. We rejoice in our sufferings. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

[ 10 : 30 ] The fruit of the Spirit is joy. What is the essence of Christianity? What does it mean to be part of God's kingdom?

Paul tells us in Romans 14, verse 17, what the mark of being in the kingdom of God are. It's, strangely, not what you eat, it's not how you dress, not rules you keep.

He says, the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus says to his disciples in verse 20, you will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. Joy is the inevitable when we meet the resurrected Jesus who is alive and reigning now.

Jesus promises joy. It's real. If joy, therefore, is inevitable for the Christian, how can it be that so many Christians are just morose?

[ 11 : 42 ] Remember in Luke 1 when the pregnant Mary and the pregnant Elizabeth come together and at the sound of Mary's voice, the baby John the Baptist in Elizabeth's womb, it says, jumped for joy.

Just at the sound of her voice. Psalm 96 says that when Jesus Christ comes back, the trees of the forest will sing for joy. So if the trees and the babies in the womb and anything else that gets near Jesus leap and sing for joy, then why aren't we?

joy is like a tree. The Bible isn't commanding us to have a feeling here. It isn't calling us to force our feelings. The Bible's not saying two plus two equals five.

The Bible is, however, searching us. Is there something that we are doing that's stopping joy in our life? There are certainly times of grief.

But joy is like a tree. It's not always green. It's not always flourishing. Joy can grow in the drought in the same way a tree can grow in the drought.

[ 12 : 57 ] But is there something that is stopping you from seeing what you have in Jesus? Is there a comparatively small thing causing you to be upset and stopping you to see what you have in Jesus?

is something else more important than Jesus to you? This leads me to the second point. What is the nature of Christian joy?

Have a look at what Jesus says about Christian joy in verse 21 of John 16. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come.

But when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. It doesn't say that the anguish is gone.

When the child is born, the pain isn't gone. It hasn't just all of a sudden stopped. It hasn't just disappeared. It says here she remembers the pain no more.

[ 14 : 05 ] It's similar. In Isaiah 43 verse 25, God says, I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions and for my own sake and remembers your sins no more.

What does it mean that God isn't aware of our sin? Has God got some sort of divine amnesia and just momentarily forgotten it? No, he is fully aware of my sin and yours but my sin and yours doesn't control the way he reacts to me and to you.

Love has captured his heart, not my sin. So here is this woman who has given birth, she's all beaten up, but she isn't in denial. She isn't saying, ah doctor, I'm fine, don't need any painkillers, you know, don't feel a thing, it's all, pain's all gone.

Instead, she is furiously and lovingly looking at the child and she forgets her pain. She's not denying it, she's still hurting, but she isn't being controlled by the pain.

The pain can't get her down and it can't keep her down. You see, the nature of Christian joy is that you've located your greatest beauty and joy in God.

[ 15 : 27 ] He is your beauty He is the greatest source of joy, more so than anything else in life. And so Christian joy coexists with suffering and sorrow.

The Christian is very realistic about suffering and grief and sorrow, but it doesn't control them. Worldly joy has to avoid suffering and hardship or alternatively deny it altogether.

Christian joy coexists with suffering and is in fact enhanced by it because it helps us to see where true joy can actually be found. When our joy is located in the resurrected Jesus, circumstances can't even touch it.

Verse 22, now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.

On a supper, this is why I think Christians should be the least sentimental people in the world. Christians should never be denying their own pain. They should never be denying what the world is painful.

[ 16 : 39 ] They should never really be super stoic. And Christians should never be afraid of getting empathetic and involved with people who are suffering.

Why? Because Christian joy coexists with suffering. Christians have a joy that goes deeper with sorrow. Christian joy grows brighter when things are darkest.

So hopefully by now you're wanting to know how is it possible to get such joy, especially when I'm living in such a miserable place like Sydney. Try visiting Arkansas. Maybe you're thinking you can't do this.

Maybe you've been miserable for 40 years and you're settled with it and you're just given up trying. The good news is it's not a matter of trying.

When Jesus is telling us about this woman giving birth in verse 21, who is she? Who does she represent? Let me just show you.

[ 17 : 46 ] Verse 21 says, A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come. Now there is a deeper meaning in the words her time.

The word in the original language is her hour. This woman is in all this pain because her hour has come.

That little word hour is very important in John's gospel. It has a very specific meaning in chapter 7 verse 30, 820, 1223 and 27, 131 and 171.

Even in chapter 2, when Mary tells Jesus that they need more wine at the wedding of Cana, Jesus says to her, it's not my hour.

So what is the hour referring to in John's gospel? it's the hour when darkness descended on the cross and Jesus Christ calls out from the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[ 18 : 54 ] Friends, in those days, first century Palestine, when women gave birth, this is before gas and epidurals and other anesthetics, and every woman who gave birth was not only in incredible agony, but also on the verge of losing her own life, and many did in the process of giving birth.

Jesus is saying here that this woman in labor is illustrating him. The pain and the agony of the cross was his hour, and there was no stopping it.

The time had come. It was the will of the Father. His agony was the spiritual agony of carrying the sin of the world. His agony was facing the judgment of God in our place.

The only way for a woman to give birth, give birth, a baby the joy of life, is to lose her own joy momentarily.

She has to give away her joy and suffer, and at times she even gives away her own life in order to bring life to a child.

[ 19 : 58 ] And Jesus says, he's departing, his disciples will be filled with grief, but so will he. They will momentarily lose their joy.

He is surrendering his. He will lose his life to bring joy to them and many. You see, Jesus eternally existed in perfect joy with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

As the Son with the Holy Spirit and the Father. And together they created the world and humanity to participate in their perfect joy relationship. They made us to share their joy, but we rebelled and we rejected it.

And so Jesus lost his so that we could be brought back into it. Hebrews 12 2 says that for the joy that was before him, he, Jesus, endured the cross.

What was the joy he was looking forward to? What was the woman's joy in John 16? The baby was the joy. New life. What Jesus got out of the incredible agony of his death and losing his joy on the cross was us and us being included in his joy.

[ 21 : 17 ] We were the only thing that he didn't have. He had everything else. He didn't have us. In Isaiah 53 we are told that the result of his suffering is that he will see and be satisfied.

He has linked his heart to us. He has made us his treasure. American theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote this a couple hundred years ago.

Christ has his delight most truly and properly in obtaining our salvation. Not merely as a means conducive to his joy and delight but as what he actually rejoices in and is satisfied in directly and properly.

As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall our God rejoice over thee. We are his jewels, we are his treasure. Our joy grows simply by seeing what Jesus did and that he did it to make us his joy and that will change you.

When we see him locating his joy in us, ultimately it melts us. He will become all that we want. You see, it's not Jesus plus health, it's not Jesus plus a good life, it's not Jesus plus wealth, it's not Jesus plus anything.

[ 22 : 34 ] In him we have everything. Samuel Rutherford was a Scottish minister who was born around 1600, became Presbyterian minister in a little town in 1627 and when the Anglicans gained the power over the Scottish church, Rutherford was imprisoned for two years in Aberdeen for nonconformity.

He survived to preach again and to serve on the council that ultimately wrote the famous Westminster Confession of Faith. But while he was in prison in Aberdeen, he wrote lots of letters and about 220 of those letters are preserved from those two years.

And the spirit of them is just radiant with the glory of God and the all supremacy of Christ and joy. On his way to prison, he had said, I go to my king's palace at Aberdeen.

Tongue, pen and wit cannot express my total joy. Wow, this is a joy that just overflowed. One person said that Rutherford was impatient of earth, intolerant of his sin, wrapped in the continual contemplation of one unseen face and finding his joy in that face's returning smile.

his joy flowed out of his absorption in Christ the resurrected Jesus and Jesus promises us when we see him we will rejoice.

[ 24 : 06 ] Jesus He