

Sunday Sermon

6/4/23

Series: Joy

Passage: John 15:1-17

Title: The Pursuit of Happiness

Good morning, Church! Please turn in your bibles this morning to John 15. Today we will be starting a new series through the month of June on the subject of "Joy."

As we begin, I want you to imagine with me you are a baseball player. You're a good baseball player. You feel as though you have all the tangibles to play baseball well. You're in good shape. You understand how to play the game and play it well. You have a love of the game and you want to play it well. But you have a problem. Every time you get up to bat, you swing at the pitch and you whiff. You see the ball. You read the pitch, but for the life of you, you just cannot connect. And no matter how long you train, and how much you try, and how hard you swing, you just can't get it done. You keep striking out. And you're getting frustrated. You think to yourself "what in the world is going on?" "why can't I connect?" "where am I going wrong?"

When it comes to the Christian life, this is not unlike our experience with joy. Knowing this sermon series was coming up, I've been talking with several people about this concept of joy, and this morning I want to give you the number one response I heard. Anyone want to take a shot at it before I put it on the screen?

"Joy is often elusive to me." (whiff) Can anyone relate to that? We feel like we should have the ability to connect with it, lay hold of it, maybe we've had moments where we've tasted it. But more often than not it's elusive. I can't keep it. And yet we read in scripture: "Rejoice (Be joyful) always." (– 1 Thess. 5:16) I want joy. It seems like God desires me to have joy. But for some reason, I have trouble finding joy. I keep whiffing.

NBC News put out a study in June of 2020 which concluded that Americans were the unhappiest they had been in 50 years with just 14% of adults saying that they were happy. Now to be fair, that was just after the beginning of the pandemic so the number I want us to focus on is their 2018 number – 30%. 3 out of 10 adults describing themselves as happy.

PR Newswire put out a study on global happiness last year with this bottom line – 45% of people have not felt true happiness for more than two years (that's half!) and 25% don't know, or have forgotten what it means to feel truly happy. In that, they say that 88% of people are looking for new experiences to make them smile and laugh. What is all that? It's our search for joy.

And as we talk about joy, happiness is where we need to start. Webster defines "happy" as **feeling or showing pleasure or contentment**. You see, we all want to be happy. Everyone is looking and searching for happiness.

There has never been an ad for a product that sounds like this – Buy this iPhone. It is going to make you miserable, and sad, and uncomfortable. Nope it says, this is the best thing ever! If you buy it, it will make you happy. The problem is that happiness is elusive.

Happiness is an emotion that happens as a response of the current outcome.

It may be too soon for this, but for Bills fans I only need to say 13 seconds...and you know exactly what I'm talking about. I just watched dark clouds come over your facial expressions. 13 seconds between pure elation and devastating sorrow. Everyone is happy until... and then all of a sudden in an instant the exact thing that I got to bring me happiness is the exact same thing that brought me the word that I never wanted to hear. Because happiness is hard to get your hands on. And it's hard to hold onto. Because as we're describing: Happiness is an emotion that is a response to the current outcome.

And when the outcome is amazing, happiness goes up (opposite) And I've got to look for something else to make me happy.

Everywhere we look people are pursuing happiness. It's what people do. I am not that interested today in making a war between the word happiness and the word joy, but I just want us to understand that Jesus' desire for your life is that you have joy in your life. Joy that is greater than the circumstances and the outcomes that you face all thought the day.

It says in John 15, and if you have your text this morning, we are going to look at 1-11. In fact, let's read it together.

Jesus says in verse 11, let's start there, we'll talk about the context of this ***"I am the vine you are the branches"*** but as he comes down to the end he says, ***"I'm telling you all of this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (complete)."***

In other words, what God is hoping for you and for me is that not only will we have joy, but we will have his joy, his quality of joy, in our life. And when you have his joy in you then your joy will be complete.

I want you to think for a moment of a person that you know that you would describe as full of joy. Can you do that? If I were to ask, "who's the least joyful person you know?" You'd be like, "Oh it's definitely, Karen." But who in your life is an example of someone full of joy? For me, there are a few people I think of, but one of them that comes to mind is, Pastor Wally. In college, I remember thinking to myself, this guy might be the most joyful person I'm around. So I started talking with people, maybe it's just me, maybe I don't see what others see. Nope, others agree - this guy radiates joy. We have a few in our church like this too, btw, and I thank God for your example.

But when you see this person, you also see the gap, and you wonder what is going on with them that's not going on with me? And, hint, there could be something about this fact that His joy could be in them and their joy could be complete. We think to ourselves, is it just a

personality trait? Is it that they have a sleep number bed, and they wake up on the right side of the bed every day.

What is it that makes a person joyful? And Jesus is giving us a clue here in John 15. He's revealing the secrets (not secret like...shh, keep this a secret so nobody finds out, but secret like, how does nobody know about this yet?)

So if happiness is an emotion that is a response to the current outcome, then it's important for us to define joy as well. I'm going to define joy this way. Joy is a durable and permeating gratitude rooted in unchanging outcomes.

Durable in that it comes from something that is anchored in you, and permeating because it is something that sets a new tone through your entire being. – It is a permeating gratitude rooted in unchanging outcomes.

In other words, having an attitude of gratitude is going to be the difference between whether I can lay hold of joy or not.

And for the Christian life, we are told all throughout the NT of the importance of maintaining gratitude in our hearts. Gratitude based in what? Scripture is pretty clear, gratitude based in the grace of God.

I am saved. That's a big deal. I have been brought from death to life by Jesus Christ through the cross and empty tomb. And that's an unchanging condition by the way. But that's not all that's true about me.

I have a second unchanging circumstance that is also true of me – it's that of future grace, that I am seated with Christ in heaven forever. The cross and the crown. It's grace and future grace. It's grace and glory. And those two things should be everything to us. They should produce gratitude in our lives, that God would pour out this amazing grace on me. You think I deserve that? I don't deserve that, I deserve hell, but because of Christ I've been given heaven. Grace and glory.

I want to do a little word study with you, the Greek word for joy is "chara" or "charis" and there are many forms of the word used in scripture, but all of them come from the root - "char" which means to "extend favor, lean towards, be favorably disposed." So properly the word "joy" "chara" is actually tied to the concept of being "aware of God's grace and favor." The favor has been extended to us. That God has leaned toward us. That he looks favorably on us. Therefore, biblical joy, Christ's joy, the fullest joy can be described as "grace recognized."

"I'm telling you all this," Jesus said – this vine, branches, fruit, remain – "so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

Are we getting this? Because joy is a durable and permeating gratitude rooted in unchanging outcomes. And, in Christ, I already know that what I'm rooted in is the fact that I have been

saved and I'm not dead anymore and the fact that I have been seated with Christ in the heavenly realms forever.

I rejoice because of grace. I have joy because of grace. Where does joy come from? It comes from being rooted in grace. I'm not talking about worldly joy, cheap circumstantial experiential momentary elation, I'm talking about top shelf joy, identity joy, the joy God gives that boils up from within because we have now been rooted in his unchanging grace.

And **being rooted in grace produces gratitude**. Gratitude for what he has done and gratitude for where you're going with him. No matter what comes in the middle, I'm still saved and I'm still seated.

All this comes together to show us that when people aren't happy, it's normally related to a circumstance that they don't like, but when people aren't joyful it's because they forgot to be grateful. And Christians especially when we discount the grace we have received in Christ.

You say, "Ok, I want to get on the joy train. How do I get there?" You get there by understanding that your relationship with Jesus is the source of your Joy (15:5). He says, "***I am the vine.***" He says, "***Abide in me and I will abide in you.***" That's how it works. We have this picture of what a vineyard looks like. The vine goes down the trellis and then there are the branches. But every so often the vine goes down into that big thick root, the source of life. And Jesus says, "That vine, that source, is me. My life flows down the vine and into the branches." **Listen: There's going to be no joy in your branch unless Jesus is flowing in you.**

I'm telling you – nobody, no thing, no destination, no experience, can deliver to your branch the durable permeating joy that Jesus wants to give you. That's what's at stake here. All in favor of joy this morning?

Joy is as good as it gets. But sometimes we tend to say, "Well I like joy, but I'm going to take a cooking class." Well, that's fine, but that's not going to help your joy. Listen: This world is not our hope. This is not our home. This is not heaven. This is not heaven. Ok? This world, this world is broken. Do you understand? It doesn't work right. Stop trying to squeeze what can only come from God, and will ultimately come in heaven, stop trying to squeeze that from life on earth. It's not coming. The best there is, is joy.

Joy is the secret to living life to the fullest. Lower your expectations of happiness. Raise your pursuit of joy.

Back to John – the secret to joy, then, is fruit-bearing. Joy is a fruit, and fruit is produced only as the result of being connected to the root. Nothing infuses your life with joy like this thing called bearing fruit.

And like the master teacher he is: Jesus uses a visual to teach a concept. He's like: check out those vines right there. You see those vines? You see those branches? That's like us! I'm the vine. You're the branches. That's a challenge to us because we want to be the vine. We want to be our source of life.

Jesus says (v2), ***"I am the vine, my Father is the vinedresser."*** Vinedresser means literally "the farmer, the tiller of the soil." God the Father is seen as the one behind it all. Christ the one through whom the life comes to the branch. And then he says, ***"Every branch of mine who does not bear fruit he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."***

Now, we have so many different people who come to this church. People from different backgrounds. Some of you don't even know how you got here, but here you are nonetheless. Has anyone ever explained this to you? If we get nothing else, we have got to get this: ***You're not saved because you say you are. You're saved because God says you are.*** In fact, Jesus tells us in Matthew 7 that many people on the last day, when we go to appear before the Lord, on that day, (21) ***"Many people will say, 'Lord, Lord! We cast out demons in your name. We prophesied in your name. Lord, we did many wonderful works in your name.'" Matt 7:23, Jesus says, "Then I will say to them, 'Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. I never knew you."***

That should cause each one of us pause at least. That would be a jolt, "I thought, I thought I was going to be in heaven, and then I found out at the last possible second when it was too late to do anything about it, that I was only fooling myself."

We say, "Well, I don't want that. There's got to be a test, there's got to be some way of knowing." Uh, there is. Right in that same passage Jesus says, ***"By their fruits you will know them."*** By their FRUIT you'll know them. Listen beloved: Understand that at the end of the day you're not a Christian because you go to a church, because you're a good person, because you carry your bible, because your grandma is, because you understand how to be saved – the proof's in the fruit.

And quickly this morning, I want to give you 5 fruits that God's Word says are produced in the life of those who are attached to Jesus Christ. I don't have to make them up. The bible tells us what fruit we will produce when we are really connected to the vine. I have 5 of them:

1) Winning souls to Christ – Rom. 1:13, ***"I don't want you to be unaware brothers that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some FRUIT among you and among the Gentiles."*** Listen, scripture tells us that, as Christians, we become ambassadors of Christ. That we carry in us the aroma of Christ. And well to some that aroma is death, to many that aroma is life leading to fruit. How many people are following Jesus today because of you? Because God used you? Planting, watering, reaping? That's fruit 1.

2) Personal holiness – Not perfection, no one is perfect. But we should be being made new day by day as we are attached to Jesus Christ. Rom. 6:22 — ***"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the FRUIT you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life."*** Fruit to holiness. A desire for godliness. A change in my heart to desire the things of God. A disdain for things that do not honor God. We will never be perfect in this life, but the fruit of connection to Jesus is a growing pattern of holiness, becoming more and more like the one we're attached to.

Now either that's happening or not. And you might be able to fake the pastor. Or fake your small group leader. But you're not gonna fake God. It's fruit that only comes from Jesus, and faking it isn't meriting you anything and that's why you might be missing joy.

Winning souls, personal holiness...

- 3) Godly character - Gal 5:22-23 – The fruit of the Spirit. You can't have a list of fruit without including this. But notice this: it's one fruit. Many facets, one fruit. ***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."*** Godly character.

Does your life exemplify these things? In how you deal with your spouse? Your kids? Your neighbors? This fruit of character is produced in you by the Spirit when you are attached to the vine, as we more and more over time abandon the selfish desires of the sinful flesh and more and more depend on, press into, do life with Jesus Christ. And look, one of the qualities that is produced in this fruit is joy.

- 4) Good works - Col. 1:10, ***"So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing FRUIT in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."***

Here's a question to help this one become clear. If every member of the Church worked for God in the way that you work for God, how would the church work? What kingdom responsibility have you taken on as a response of love to Jesus? It's fruit. Are you producing it? Winning souls, personal holiness, Godly character, good works...

- 5) Sacrificial worship – Hebrews 13:15 ***"Let us continually offer unto God the sacrifice of praise, the FRUIT of lips giving thanks to his name."*** Gratitude. This brings us full circle.

Joy is a durable and permeating gratitude rooted in unchanging outcomes.

Listen: Sometimes praising the Lord is a sacrifice. When things are good, it's easy for me to come to church, or drive in my car, or sit at my desk and worship God. But when times are tough, when it's not easy, then it's a sacrifice. And sacrificial praise is still praising God when it's raining in my life, praising God when it's hard in my life, when it's dark, when it's difficult. The fruit of lips is gratitude rooted in the grace of God - that I am saved and that I am seated.

It reminds me of the hymn "It is Well with my Soul." The guy loses all of his kids in a shipwreck and still pens those words – ***"When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrow like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well. It is well with my soul."*** Another song we sing *Blessed be your Name*. We sing, ***"Blessed be your name when the sun's shining down on me, when the world's all as it should be, blessed be your name. Blessed be your name on the road marked with suffering, when there's pain in the offering..."***

If you can keep on praising when it's hard, even when it's hard, say it, what is it? That is fruit. And when Jesus says, "I am the vine." This is what he's talking about. Joy is found in Jesus. And if you are lacking joy, you're lacking joy because you are lacking fruit. You're lacking fruit because you're not fastening yourself to Jesus, he is the vine.

"These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Our struggle is where we place our dependence for life – in our flesh, or in the spirit? When the bible talks about our flesh, it is talking about the old ways or patterns by which we have attempted to get all of our needs supplied instead of seeking Christ first and trusting him to

meet our needs. Jesus says, "Abundant and lasting fullness is not found in those things." Keep going after them and [whiff].

Who's the vine? Who are the branches?

Let's ready our hearts for communion.

At the communion table the Lord invites us to return to the vine and attach ourselves to him for our life. Not to achieve, but to receive all that he has for us. Jesus says, "Seek first his kingdom and righteousness, and then everything else will be added." You want to lay hold of joy? It begins and ends with Jesus, who gave his life as the sacrifice for sin, so that all who would come to him by faith could receive his life, his joy, his abundance, both now and forevermore. I am saved, and I am seated. Let's pray.

Lord, you are the vine. We are the branches. Here at the Lord's table we confess that life and joy comes through you. Give us gratitude, not only for what you gave, your life on the cross, but for what we gained, access to you. We are saved and we are seated. Thanks be to God! And it's in the name of the Son we pray, Amen.



Joy is often elusive



Definition:

Happy:

**Feeling or showing pleasure
or contentment.**



Definition:

Happiness:

**An emotion that happens as a response
of the current outcome.**





“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

- John 15:11



Definition:

Joy:

**A durable and permeating gratitude
rooted in unchanging outcomes.**



Word Study:

Gk. “Chara” = Joy



Truth

***Being rooted in grace produces
gratitude***



**“I am the vine; you are the branches.
Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is
that bears much fruit, for apart from me you
can do nothing.”**

- John 15:5



Truth

There's going to be no joy in your branch unless Jesus is flowing in you.



The secret to joy:

Fruit-bearing



“I am the true vine, my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine who does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

- John 15:1-2



“Many people will say, ‘Lord, Lord! We cast out demons in your name. We prophesied in your name. Lord, we did many wonderful works in your name’...then I will say to them, ‘Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. I never knew you.’”

- Matt. 7:21,23



“By their fruits you will know them.”

- Matt. 7:20



Fruits of being attached to the Vine:

1) Winning souls to Christ



“I don’t want you to be unaware brothers that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some FRUIT among you and among the Gentiles.”

- Rom. 1:13



Fruits of being attached to the Vine:

- 1) Winning souls to Christ***
- 2) Personal holiness***



“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the FRUIT you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”

- Rom. 6:22



Fruits of being attached to the Vine:

- 1) Winning souls to Christ***
- 2) Personal holiness***
- 3) Godly character***



“But the FRUIT of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

- Gal. 5:22-23



Fruits of being attached to the Vine:

- 1) *Winning souls to Christ***
- 2) *Personal holiness***
- 3) *Godly character***
- 4) *Good works***



“So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing FRUIT in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

- Col. 1:10



Fruits of being attached to the Vine:

- 1) Winning souls to Christ***
- 2) Personal holiness***
- 3) Godly character***
- 4) Good works***
- 5) Sacrificial worship***



“Let us continually offer unto God the sacrifice of praise, the FRUIT of lips giving thanks to his name.”

- Hebrews 13:15



“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

- John 15:11

