

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

The Vine and the Branches – Part III

Pastor Ty Blackburn

John 15:1-17

March 15, 2015

What a real blessing. That song is one of my favorite songs. The Gettys have written some amazing things in the last 10 or 11 years, and that is one of the songs they have written. It could almost be sung every Sunday right before the preaching of the word. That's what we need is for God to speak, and so we certainly pray that He'll do that as we have just voiced to Him in song.

I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to John 15. We're coming back for our third message in this passage, Verses 1-17. Ted Guthrie is gone today, and just appreciate so much him preaching for us last week, bringing the word from Hebrews 11. There was a great conference in California and still just kind of on the high of that, but definitely was a good thing for me not to be preaching last week, I think, and it was good to hear the word preached again by our brother.

This morning we are back in John 15 though, for the third time. We have looked at this passage, and we've seen that in this passage we have an extended metaphor. Jesus introduces this metaphor and then works it out over 17 verses in the 15th chapter. Now we took note of, in our first two messages, the context in which Jesus spoke these words. You remember that it was a time of upheaval about to happen. There was turmoil just over the horizon, literally just in front of the disciples. The storm was about to break upon them with all of its fury. And in the moments right before that, hours before His arrest, in the very shadow of the cross, Jesus stops and uses this agricultural metaphor. Apparently, maybe, as they were walking along, from the upper room, on the way to the garden, He passes a vine, and He stops and says, "I am the true vine. You are the branches." And we asked the question, *Why now?* The vine image is one that was familiar, even serene, calming, seemed somewhat out of place in the flow of the conversation. We noted that when He spoke this, they got up to leave the upper room. Jesus, in Chapter 14, Verse 30 says:

John 14:30 ~ I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming,...

The idea is, "We can't talk anymore because the ruler of the world is coming. We've got to go meet him." As if He is getting the disciples up, marching to the

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conflict. And we see that it really, it would have been so natural for the first 17 verses of John to be left out, and Jesus, as He talks about going to meet the ruler of the world, He might have just gone straight into John 15:18:

John 15:18 ~ “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

Because from Verse 18, all the way through Chapter 16, Verse 4, He talks about persecution, intense, spiritual opposition. It would seem that that was the context. I mean, why did He stop and talk about this vine and the branches? This picture of serenity, pleasantness, peacefulness. What we noted is He is basically telling them, “Listen, how do you bear up when things are falling apart around you? How do you bear up when evil comes in like a flood? What are you to do?” We started considering the image under that first question, *What?* Two messages ago we said: *What are you to do when life comes apart at the seams, when evil comes in around you, what are you called to do? What does God require of you? What does God want from you?* And we answered the question, *What? What does He require of you?* by saying, “To bear fruit.” He wants us to bear fruit. He wants us to offer the worship of loving obedience to Him no matter what is going on around us. Our calling is straightforward, simple, and plain—bear fruit.

And last time we asked the question, *How? How do you go about bearing fruit when things are falling apart around you? How do you do it?* And we said the answer is in Jesus’ command, which the word that He uses ten times in the passage is ‘*abide*’. You are to abide, to remain in the vine, to abide in the vine, to maintain a close, intimate connection with Christ. No matter what is going on around you, the focus is where is Jesus in this process, and I want to focus on Him and what He is doing. We talked about letting your mind be filled with His words, letting your heart be filled with His love, and letting your life be ruled by His will. That is abiding. That is how you do it.

So we looked at *What?* and we looked at *How?* and I think the next major focus is *Why?* That is the question. *Why are you to do this?* It is amazing God gives, in His grace, He often makes commands of us, and then gives us reasons why we ought to obey them. Which is really incredibly kind of Him because Him being God, and us being men, He has the right simply to say, “Do what I say.” “Why?” “Because I said so.” But here, as in so many other places, He, in His gracious condescension, He stoops down to say, “Here are the benefits of doing what I’m saying.” I think we have at least three, I’m planning on dealing with at least three benefits of

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abiding in Christ, or you could say three benefits of bearing fruit in turbulent times, or three benefits of abiding in Christ. The first, we're going to look at this morning. He is basically saying, "Why should you abide in Christ? Because here are some things that are going to come into your life as you abide in Me in turbulent times, this is what is going to happen.

Fullness of Joy

The first benefit is what we're going to look at this morning, and that is fullness of joy. That Jesus says that He wants for you and me to have fullness of joy. That in itself is more wonderful than we would ever have imagined. Why does He want us to have fullness of joy in this world? Yes, but not only that, He wants you to have fullness of joy no matter what your circumstances are. Even when things are coming apart around you, you, as a Christian, can be characterized by joy, His joy, to its full, and that is His will for your life. He wants you to be filled with joy. Let's read the text of John together and you'll hear this. He is going to say basically, He's going to tell us the reason He just told us all these things about the vine. Real clearly, this benefit of abiding is spelled out crystal clear as we read through it. Look with me at Verse 1-17 of John 15.

John 15:1-17 ~ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

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12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that You truly might speak to us from Your word. You spoke perfectly when you inspired these words through the apostle John, by Your Spirit. And we pray now that the same Spirit that inspired these words might illuminate them by opening our eyes, our minds, and our hearts to see and to understand, to repent and to believe. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

C.S. Lewis wrote a biography, it wasn't a full biography, he wrote it before he was too far along, other things happened in his life, but about his early life, his conversion experience, and he calls that biography, the story of his conversion, Surprised by Joy. I always thought that was an arresting title. Basically, Lewis is saying that he was an atheist, he was an atheist professor at Oxford in England. He was a convinced atheist, and so he didn't think anything positive about Christianity. But the Lord began to work in his life, and he moved from atheism to believing in theism, that there had to be a God. Then he moved from theism to becoming a Christian, the Lord brought him to faith. What he said was, what really surprised him was the joy that he had, and that he found that when he became a Christian. He found what he was always looking for, though he didn't know he was looking for it. So he found joy in the most unexpected place for him.

And in reality, I think for Christians, even after we come to faith, that this passage tells us that we find joy in the most unexpected places. It is the way of God in a fallen world. I mean, it is unexpected that He would talk about fullness of joy in these circumstances that they are in at that moment. They are about to see Him arrested, they are about to be scattered, they are about to run for their lives, they are about to be overwhelmed with grief as they see their Savior die, and they don't understand yet. Even though He has been clear again and again about His resurrection, they just haven't gotten it. They are about to go through this kind of

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agonizing suffering and yet Jesus says, “I want you to have fullness of joy.” And that is one of the realities, that God’s joy comes in the most surprising places.

Another thing that is surprising about this is we’re going to see that joy really comes. As we look at this, joy comes not only in surprising places, it comes from a surprising source. Joy, true joy, fullness of joy, comes from obeying God. Now I say that because the lie that has been propagated from the very beginning by the father of lies, Satan, is that if you obey, you will be miserable, you will be less, you will have less. But the reality is, the truth has always been this way, but because of our sin nature it is counterintuitive. We think that to obey is to lose something. To obey is to find everything, and the place that you find the fullness of joy. In fact the more you obey, and the more you submit to God out of loving submission, true biblical obedience, not some kind of pharisaical, surface obedience, but true, from the heart obedience, a surrendered life in response to the grace of God in Christ, when you surrender like that, you find the fullness of joy. And so we need to be surprised by joy, and to experience this more and more.

I want us to consider this subject, the benefits of abiding in Christ, fullness of joy, under three points. We’re going to look first at *The Essence of Joy*, secondly at *The Elusiveness of Joy*, and thirdly at *The Experience of Joy*. The essence, the elusiveness, and the experience.

1) The Essence of Joy:

First, the essence of joy. What is joy biblically? Now the word here, the Greek word is the word ‘*chara*’, and it comes from the Greek verb ‘*chairō*’. The verb means ‘*to rejoice*’. It covers both the subjective feeling, and the objective cause of joy. So the idea is it means to rejoice, but it doesn’t just mean to pretend that you are happy. It is not some kind of *Pollyanna* veneer of joy. No, real joy biblically is that which is in the heart, the expression of the heart, rooted in a real, factual reality. In fact, I mean, when you look at it more carefully, you could say it is feeling. It is feeling, rooted in objective fact, or maybe it is better to say because feelings ebb and flow. Sometimes you may be joyful but you just don’t feel the joy of it, but in your heart you are. Why? Because you are just exhausted. You are too tired to feel the joy, but your heart can be joyful even in that moment. It is really a state of being. Joy is a state of being.

I told you the word because I want you to understand it is closely related, this is very interesting in the etymology of the word. The word for joy, ‘*chara*’, is very closely related to the word ‘*charis*’, which is the Greek word for ‘*grace*’. The same

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root family, it came from *'chairo'*. The idea of the word, that's the verb *'rejoice'*, the noun *'chara'*, *'joy'*, the noun, *'grace'*, come from that same root. So grace, we think about grace as God's unmerited favor. Yes, but the root of the word is that which produces joy, and when you look at it even more closely, in the etymology, the reason that you have joy, it is about well-being. Grace is that which produces well-being, and joy is the enjoyment, or the experience of that well-being. Grace produces the well-being, and joy is the experience of the well-being. So that joy really is a sense of, it is closely related this idea of well-being, everything being right.

In fact, when you go back into the Old Testament, one of the ways that you do a good word study is you realize that the New Testament authors, though they were using Greek words, and the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, that they thought in constructs, and in thought patterns of the Old Testament. And so that when they were using, though they were speaking in Greek, the Lord willed to reach a wider audience, the Gospel is now for the whole world. They were still thinking in terms of Old Testament words, and when you carefully study the ideas of grace and joy, *'charis'* and *'chara'* relate closely to the Hebrew Old Testament word *'shalom'*, which is the word for *'peace'*. But *'shalom'*, in its real meaning, means a state of well-being, it is a state of peace, it is a state where there is no conflict. There is an absence of conflict and everything is right. All is as it should be, and when everything is as it should be, your experience of that situation is joy. That is what biblical joy is.

It is very different from happiness. We can use the word happiness and mean joy a lot of times. I do that. "I'm very happy." I don't really mean happy, but you know, happiness, strictly thinking, the etymology of the English word *'happiness'* is related to the other English verb *'happen'*. "What *happens* makes me happy." You see it is kind of a feeling of sort of chance, circumstantial, and happy means everything worked out great. Joy is not like that. Joy is a state of being that transcends your circumstances. It is not about what happens, it is about what is. It is not about what might happen tomorrow, it is what is true now.

So joy is something much deeper. It is a sense of wholeness, completeness, harmony. No discord, no conflict, things are precisely as they should be. And the way that you find joy, and ultimately joy will be the joy of Heaven, but the joy of Heaven, Jesus says, is now available to His people right now where they are, no matter what their circumstances. That is why Paul could say, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Rejoice in the Lord some of the time? Rejoice in the Lord most of the time if you are a good Christian? He said, "Rejoice in the Lord *always*. In every

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circumstance, rejoice.” One of the fruits we are supposed to bear is the fruit of joy, at all times. And again, it is not a plastic fruit that you hang on the tree, like to make it look like it is a real apple. You know, “I’m going to just put a smile on my face and act happy.” No, joy is something that is rooted in reality, it is rooted in the truth, it is rooted in a true assessment and correct understanding of what is.

Now what this shows is, the difference between joy and happiness is happiness is related to your circumstances. Well, joy, how can you have joy in bad circumstances? Well, things are falling apart around you, but if you are thinking biblically, you know reality is that everything that is falling around you is falling exactly where God wills it to fall, and everything is as it should be. There is nothing in your life, if you are a Christian, that is not as it should be at every moment, no matter what happens. Something tragic could happen this afternoon, and the source of your joy, you will struggle with that. I mean, because we experience this perplexing contrast that this world is not as it ought to be, in one sense, right? Because it is a fallen world. We weren’t created to experience death. We weren’t created to see evil. We weren’t created to see all of the horrors that sin can bring because of our own sin, and because of the sins of others.

So there is a sense in which we draw back from that, but the reality is the good news that makes the feet of the prophet lovely. How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news. What is the good news? He announces peace, he proclaims good news of happiness. The Hebrew word doesn’t really mean happiness, by the way, it means goodness. The word ‘*happy*’, we use it, I’m not trying to be so hung up on the word ‘*happiness*’. You understand though, he says, “How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace. There is going to be an absence of conflict. There is going to be wholeness, and completeness, and well-being.” God is announcing His era of peace, His era of well-being, where you can be right with Him, and if you are right with Him, everything is right with you. And if you are not right with Him, nothing is right with you, or ever will be right with you, no matter how good your circumstances are. If you are at enmity with God, you are against everything that matters, and everything that matters is against you. But if you have come to know Jesus Christ, or if you will choose to come to know Jesus Christ today, if you will repent and believe in Christ, receive the offer of peace that has been made, that is announced to you even now in the preaching of the word at this moment. Peace is offered to you, and if you will repent, and receive the offer of peace then everything will be right with you. Everything that matters will be right with you, and you will know the truth, the promises like Romans 8:28.

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Romans 8:28 ~ ...God causes all things to work together for good...

Not for all people, no, to those who love Him, and who are called according to His purpose. Everything that happens God makes good to accomplish His purpose in those who love Him, and His purpose is to make us like Jesus. The most joyful thing that can happen to you is to become a little more like Jesus. If we become a little more like Jesus, that is the most wonderful thing that can happen, and when we understand that it changes everything. So joy is a state of being rooted in reality, a correct assessment of reality. The reason that Christians are not joyful is because they are not focused on reality. They are living in unreality.

The reality is that God is reigning, that His Kingdom is going forth no matter what I see on the news. His Kingdom is marching forward. His perfect will is being done every day. Satan rages, evil is done, yes, there are things that are against His revealed will, but His sovereign, decreed will, everything is on pace. There is not one moment where anything happens outside of His perfect plan, and when I focus on that, I can have joy. And it is not only the great movements of society, things like ISIS, or political things that are going on in our country, or other countries, it is down to the fact that you get sick tomorrow, that you don't get the promotion at work, you get laid off, all of those things. The smallest things in our life are under His governance and control, and that is where joy comes from. That is what joy is, is to know that everything is as it should be.

Now, the essence of joy. That is what it is. Now I want to talk about this for a moment, before I move to the second point, who is the supremely joyful man that has ever lived? Jesus of Nazareth. No one was as joyful, as happy, as Jesus. He was always joyful. He didn't have bouts of depression like you and I have. He didn't have days where He felt like Eeyore, for those of you who remember the *Winnie the Pooh* series, you know? "Good day, Eeyore." "If it is a good day, which I doubt." That was his standard response, "Probably not a good day." Jesus was never like that. Every day was a delight to Him because everything was right with Him. Now listen, the reason that you and I don't have joy, we are going to get to it in a minute, but Jesus knew everything was right in the world, and yet He is also called a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Who is the man that has had the greatest sorrow that has ever been experienced, the greatest sorrow in the world? Jesus Christ! No man comes close to Him in experiencing sorrow. You think you've had it bad? You haven't had it nearly, nowhere close to what Jesus experienced. Every day was filled with sorrow, and at the same time it was filled with transforming joy.

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Every day the Son of God who lived His life perfect in righteousness, obeying the Father, He encountered sin, and the ugliness of sin, everywhere around Him, and He saw it more clearly than you and I. He felt the ugliness of it, the awful damage that it does. He was completely rejected by almost everyone He encountered, and yet He lived a life that even though He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, He went from sorrow to sorrow, but every time He found sorrow, He kept surrendering Himself to the Father, abiding in the Father, and being filled with joy, the joy of knowing He was exactly where His Father wanted Him, doing exactly what His Father wanted Him to do. And that's why He could say, "My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him who sent Me. That's what I'd like to tell you about is that My joy in life is doing His will." That's the model for us we're going to see. We've looked at *The Essence of Joy* and now *The Elusiveness of Joy*.

2) The Elusiveness of Joy:

Why is it that so many who profess to be Christians find joy elusive? Why is it that we find this so hard? Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments on this in the beginning of his book *The Sermon on the Mount*. He talks about how remember the Sermon on the Mount begins with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they who mourn. Blessed are the meek," the Beatitudes, the *blessed ares*. The word literally in the Greek means *oh how happy are* the poor in spirit. Oh how happy are they who mourn. Oh how happy. Why? It's because the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Oh how happy are they who mourn, because if you mourn, you'll be comforted. Oh how happy are the meek. The meek are people who release everything. Oh how happy are you if you are meek, because the meek will inherit the earth. If you let go of everything, you find everything.

Lloyd-Jones writes in his commentary on Matthew 5, that one of the great problems that he saw in the church—Martyn Lloyd-Jones ministered in London from like 1939 to 1969 at Westminster Chapel. He was a wonderful man of God. He said one of the greatest problems confronting the church today in reaching the lost is the somberness and sadness of Christians. What kind of an invitation is it to people to come to Christ when we go through our lives depressed and downcast? He was a man who knew and had struggled with depression. He wrote the book *Spiritual Depression*, so he understood it's something that's not automatic, but it's something that grieves the Lord, that we should be, of all people, the most joyful, truly joyful. From the depth of our souls, we ought to have a joy that's rooted deep in the heart, because it's rooted in truth, unchangeable truth that the circumstances

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can't get close to, and yet it is elusive, isn't it? It's elusive because we forget what's true.

We find ourselves thinking about our circumstances far too much, and trying to control them. And Jesus is basically telling us here in this passage, He says, "Listen, I've spoken these things to you so that you will have joy, that if you don't understand these things, you're not going to have the joy like you need to, so I'm giving you the road map, the blueprint, for joy. I know it's hard for you to have joy in this world." He knows how hard it is to have joy in this world. The world certainly knows that, how hard it is, and if you look around you, aren't there times where you just think, "Man, what is good that's going on?"

Mark Twain was certainly not a believer, but he wrote some things that were insightful and helpful. Blind squirrels find acorns. He wrote a short story called *The Mysterious Stranger*, and in this very interesting story, he talks about this mysterious stranger who shows up at this family's home. Now, the mysterious stranger, we find out, and we begin to sense as we read it, that there's something more to him. He's very mysterious. In fact, he represents Satan, and the mysterious stranger befriends a little boy, and the little boy tells him what he would really like is for his grandfather to be happy. He asks him, "What would you really like?" "I would like for my grandfather to be happy." And he says, "I have the power to make him happy. I'll do it." And so what he does is he makes the grandfather completely, stark raving mad. He makes him insane, and the little boy can't understand what's happening. "Why did you do this?" And the mysterious stranger says, "The only way to be happy in this world is to be crazy." That sounds like Satan himself, doesn't it?

There's a certain amount of truth in that. If the world was just as it appears to the natural eye, I think there'd be a lot of truth in that. If I was just someone who had my hopes in what's going on in this world, and looked around me at the decline of our country, and looked around at what's going on in the world, I think I'd be stark raving mad almost. I don't know how these people are handling it, but praise God, I don't have to worry about that, because I know that whatever is happening is happening according to the ordained, moment by moment, perfect management of a sovereign God. And so as I look at the circumstances, I don't have to think I have to be crazy. No, wait a minute. I just have to know who's in control. His invisible hand is guiding it all.

Joy is elusive for the unbeliever. They can't have it, and so sometimes professing Christians don't have joy because they're not really Christians. If you don't

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understand anything of the desire for joy and the joy of forgiveness in Christ, if that doesn't strike a chord in your heart to know that you are forgiven, that you are cleansed, that you are washed, then you need to reexamine yourself and go back to the basics of the Gospel, and reach out to Christ. But often Christians don't have joy because they forget. We are forgetful. We don't focus on what we really need to focus on, but the good news is Jesus wrote these things for us to be able to have joy. We've covered the essence of joy, the elusiveness of joy, and now we move to the experience of joy.

3) The Experience of Joy:

Jesus says:

John 15:11 ~ These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you,...

He's the happiest Man that's ever lived, the most truly joyful Man that's ever lived, and He says, "I want My joy to be in you," the joy that He possessed, to be in you. And not only that, He says, "I have spoken these things to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full, that you may be filled up to overflowing with joy." That is the will of God for us, to be full of joy. That's what Paul was getting at in the letter to the Philippians. "Rejoice, rejoice. Again, I say, 'Rejoice.'"

Now, how do you have this joy? Well, if we look at it in context, I think we're going to see that basically there are just three things that we need to remember. Well, let me say there are two sub-points on this third point. My outline may be a little complicated, so pay attention here for a moment. If you lost me for a second, dial back in for this right now. The third point is *The Experience of Joy*. There are two sub-points under that. The first sub-point is *Abandon the Pursuit of Happiness*. The second sub-point is *Abide in the Perfection of Joy*. On the second sub-point, there are three points. Now that everybody's thoroughly confused, or at least I am anyway, let's press ahead. How do you experience joy? Well, the first thing that you do, the first sub-point is that you abandon the pursuit of happiness

A) Abandon the Pursuit of Happiness:

The reason that we're not joyful as Christians is we are pursuing happiness. What is happiness? Pursuing happiness is trying to control my life and make my

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circumstances the way I want them, so that I can be joyful. Boy, that's hard work. Isn't it overwhelmingly burdensome controlling your circumstances? I mean, it's completely pointless.

I like what one brother says. "The only thing that you run is your mouth." That's all you're in charge of. But abandon the pursuit of happiness. Stop trying to control your circumstances. Stop trying to manage your life. Stop trying to change other people. We get this confused. We're supposed to make an impact on people, and so we try to minister to them, and we get confused, and we realize that we think more about the outcome than what our responsibility is. You can't control the outcome. Newsflash: You can control zero outcomes of anybody else for all of your life. Zero. The only thing that you can change is you, by God's grace. You can repent. You can believe.

So if you're going to make your joy or your happiness tied up to whether somebody else does one thing or another, you will not have joy. You must leave that to God. You can't change your circumstances. You can't change other people. You can't worry about achieving results. Even in your own life you have to hold this a little bit lightly. I mean, you have to hold it lightly. We're to pursue holiness, yes, but don't let your joy be tied up in how much progress you've made. Let your joy keep being tied up in who Jesus Christ is, and the fact that He's at work in you, and the work He began in you, He will complete in you to the day of Christ Jesus. Because if you keep looking at the scorecard of where you are, you won't have joy. But if you keep looking at Christ, you will have joy.

So abandon the pursuit of happiness. You're not going to have joy in your life, and one of the reasons that some of us have been struggling to be joyful is we have been investing so much energy in pursuing happiness. Stop it, and make a conscious decision and a continual determination that I will not pursue happiness right now. I'm not going to do it right now. God will remind you how you're doing it. You need to stay in His word and you need to keep thinking about Him, but let this reality sink in. One of the reasons that I find myself down and discouraged again, and again, and again, is I'm thinking about things I can't control, but I wish I could. Jesus says, "I want you to be a branch." What can a branch do? Without Him, you can do nothing, but if you abide in Him, you can bear fruit and you can have joy. Just do what you're called to do. So you abandon the pursuit of happiness, and then the second sub-point under *The Experience of Joy* is to abide in the perfection of joy.

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B) Abide in the Perfection of Joy:

Abandon the pursuit and abide in the perfection. It's already here. It's like a room that's set up for you. Just go in and enjoy it. It's that clearly laid out. It's like you go to a nice hotel, a really nice hotel. Sometimes they have like mints on the pillow or chocolates on the pillow. Have you had that before? There are different times where I got to travel to places, and I was like, "Wow, this is amazing." I love the Hampton Inn and everything, and I really do. That's where we stayed when we were in California. They didn't have mints on the pillow, but they had a great waffle maker in the morning. But when you go into a room, even that, it's nice, it's clean, your shampoos are all laid out for you, and you walk in and you enjoy them. What if I walked into my hotel room and I slept on the floor all week, or I slept out in the hall? I have the key. They gave me the key. I paid for the room. The room's prepared. What are you doing out in the hall? That's how Christians sometimes live. God has prepared a life of joy for us, and we live outside. We're living on crumbs and foolishness.

How do you abide in the perfection of joy? There are three things we need to do, and the first is we need to trust Him. The second thing is we need to love Him, and the third thing is we need to obey Him. It's that simple. Trust Him, love Him, and obey Him. This is abiding in joy.

He has said what reality is, and we need to stop pursuing to control everything around us, and start trusting Him. He's laid out everything for us, and when we understand that, we can just enjoy that. We go through life enjoying it. Our nephew, actually Patti's sister Vicki who's a member of our church, her son Craig has a son Cade, and this little guy, he's one of these cute little boys that's just all boy, and he's a bundle of energy, but he's also since the very beginning, a bundle of joy. Now, I understand his joy is not the joy we're talking about, but it's illustrative of it. Probably he'll come to know Christ, and he'll know the real joy, but he came into the world with that youthful innocence that that glass is not half full, but it's overflowing. Craig contrasted his two kids. When you have more than one child, you see the difference. Like you have one child and you think you're an expert, and then you have the other child and you realize you're not. Or sometimes you have one child and you think, "Oh, I'm the worst parent in the world," and the second child comes, and, "Okay, I'm not as bad as I thought."

He was talking about Cade, and I remember him telling me this when Cade was 4 or 5 years old. We were talking about how he's always smiling, and he said that

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Cade gets up in the morning and he bounds out of bed, and he basically says, “What have you got for me today?” And his mother is a real organizer, and so she works out a schedule. “Today there’s a t-ball game at 10:00, and then we’re going to come home and we’re going to eat lunch, and then you’re going to help dad in the yard for the next few hours. And then tonight we’ve got this for dinner, we’re going somewhere, and then you’re going to come back and oh yeah, you get to watch wrestling tonight with your dad. Then you’re going to bed at 8:00.” He goes to bed happy. “Whatever you’ve got for me, that’s what I want.” And the next day is totally different. It doesn’t matter. “Today we’re doing face painting,” or whatever. “That’s great.” He just goes into it full bore.

I was thinking about him related to this situation, and I thought, he’s got a little older now, and as he gets older, he’s going to lose some of that youthful innocence, and he’s going to figure out this world is a lot more of a mess than he realized, and it’s not going to have quite that—that’s one of the sad things, isn’t it? To see our kids have to encounter the ugliness that sin has brought. But you know, what he has is what every Christian should have every day until we go home. He doesn’t sit and think, “What time is the t-ball game? I hope we’re going to make it on time.” That boy’s not thinking about that. He’s thinking about, “Man, I’ve got some Cheerios right now, and I’m eating my Cheerios.” He’s not thinking, “Is my uniform clean?” His mom says, “Go put your uniform on,” and he goes and he puts on his uniform. “Where’s my glove?” His mom’s got his glove for him, and he goes to the game, and he gives everything he’s got in the game, and he’s not worrying afterwards, “Are we going to eat lunch today? What are we going to eat? I hope we have food.” No, he knows mom’s going to take care of that. Dad’s going to take care of that. And so when they go to McDonald’s or they go wherever, he just eats and enjoys it, and he goes through his life like that, not fretting, not worrying, saying at each step, “What have you got for me?”

If we saw reality and we’re walking in it, we would think that way about every moment of every day of our lives. After Paul says:

Ephesians 2:8 ~ For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

He says:

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Ephesians 2:10 ~ For we are His workmanship in Christ Jesus, created unto good works, which He has prepared beforehand that we should walk therein.

He's marked out every step of your life. He's predestined every moment of your life if you're a Christian. He's ordained every single circumstance. Nothing has escaped His notice. No aspect of the plan is outside of His view. He's put it all together, and your job as a Christian is simply to walk in that moment, and say, "What have You got for me? What do You want from me?" And what He wants from you is joy and obedience and love. How wonderful is it to know that whatever happens, my loving Parent has laid this out for me? My loving Father who's far more loving than any earthly parent, He's ordained that I walk in this moment right now, and what he wants from me as His child is simply to trust Him, and in trusting Him that He's got it under control, just to love Him. How good it is to walk with You and to have You holding my hand. Even though I can't feel it physically, I know it, because Your word says it, and Your word is more real than anything that my eye sees. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. His word is true.

Trust Him, love Him, and obey Him. What is it You want me to do? What does Your word tell me to do in a situation like this? Back to trying to change people, if you're trying to share the Gospel with someone, what does God tell you to do? "Hey Lord, here I am in this situation. I really was hoping on the plane to get some rest, and here's this guy beside me, and he seems to want to talk, and oh no, I'm going to have to talk to him." We feel like that at times, right, in your flesh. "Thank You, Lord, for this opportunity. You put this man here beside me. You ordained this. It wasn't accidental that he made the connecting flight that he made, and he's sitting in this seat. He's here for a reason. So what have You got for me?"

The Lord says to show love, start talking to the person, and share, and whether they receive or not, it's not going to affect my joy. I mean, I can be concerned and grieved that this person didn't respond like I hoped they would, but it doesn't steal my joy, not my deep, abiding joy, because I know that everyone that He has called to Himself will repent and believe at some point, in the Gospel. Maybe I just sowed a seed, and it's going to reap later, and I'll see him in Heaven. Maybe I spoke the truth and he rejected it, and he's going to hell. I hate that for him, but God's glory was still maintained by somebody lifting up Christ, and I can be joyful not in the result, but in the obedience. That's what gave Jesus joy. He says in Verse 9:

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John 15:9 ~ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

“How do you abide in My love?”

John 15:10 ~ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

Joy comes from abiding in His love and obeying His commandments. Abiding in His love is obeying His commandments. It’s obeying His commandments with a heart of love. “Because I love You, I surrender to You. Because You are sovereignly ruling over my life, because You are good, and you’ve told me that You want to me to go this way, I surrender, because I trust You and I love You.” When we do that, no matter whether we have circumstances that seem delightful and joyful, or we go through the valley of the shadow of death, we have a joy that is unshakable, that no one can take away. It doesn’t really matter. You can look at somebody else and say, “I wish I have what they have. Lord, I want to go where he’s going.” No, what did Jesus say at the end of this Gospel? Remember when at the end of the Gospel He’s talking to Peter and He tells Peter, “When you were young, you used to go where you wanted to go and do what you wanted to do. When you’re old, you’re people are going to lead you where you don’t want to go, and you’re going to have to do what you don’t want to do. Stretch out your arms and follow Me.” And Peter always wanted to speak his mind, and he says, “What about John? What about him? What are You doing with him?” Jesus didn’t tell him. He said, “You follow Me.” That’s where joy is. God has laid out a plan for you. He’s foreordained it from before the foundation of the world, and He says, “You, follow Me.” And if you and I will do that, we will be people who have joy no matter what, because we have a wonderful Father and a glorious Savior.

Let’s go to Him in prayer...

Our Father, we confess how we are men of little faith, women of little faith. We don’t trust as we ought. We doubt, we fret, we worry, and we complain. Lord, when we do that, we say things about You by our actions and our attitudes, that are lies. We testify by our attitudes and our actions that You are not good, and that You can’t be trusted. Lord, with Isaiah we say, “We are people of unclean lips,” and we ask You to have mercy on us. We ask You to cleanse us again from all of the unbelief.

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Father, restore to us the joy of our salvation, and give us eyes to see and ears to hear, and to apply the truths that we've heard, that we might be instead of impediments to people coming to Christ, we might be joyful signposts pointing the way to life. We pray that our children would see a difference. We pray that our neighbors would see a difference. We pray that our coworkers would see a difference. We pray that our brothers and sisters would see a difference. May we have Your joy, Lord Jesus, have it to the full, and we praise You that we're asking in accordance with Your will. You've already determined that we will have that if we repent, and believe, and trust.

Father, we pray for those that are here today who don't know joy, because they don't know Christ. Grant them at this moment, Lord, grace to repent and believe now, to stop fighting against You, and to trust You, and to know the freedom, and joy, and peace of Christ. We pray this in His Name and for His glory, Amen.

"The Benefits of Abiding in Christ – Part I"

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