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**You Can Choose Joy John 15:11, 16:22-24, 17:13****Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church**

In Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit in *Galatians 5:22*, Love is first, followed by Joy. Joy is a significant word throughout the Bible. The Psalms are filled with the joy that people experience in creation, at worship, and in God's presence. The theme of joy is particularly strong in Luke's Gospel, where the birth of Jesus leads to an outpouring of human and heavenly joy (*Luke 1-2*) and so does his ministry. In *Luke 10:17* The seventy disciples Jesus sent out to carry on ministry in his name "**returned with joy**, saying, *"Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"* Luke's Gospel concludes with a high note of joy (*Luke 24:52-53*), *"And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem **with great joy**; and they were continually in the temple  **blessing God**."* Joy was a fruit of the disciples' relationship with Jesus and their worship of God.

We hear about that relationship in Chapters 15, 16, and 17 of the Gospel of John. These chapters include Jesus' final major speech to his disciples and perhaps his most important prayer to God. They are the words of a teacher to his students on the night before his death. They're not spoken as a master to servants, but from one friend to another. They're the words of someone who's going to die to those he loves and who love him. One could say many things in such a situation. We might speak of the injustice and unfairness of it all and feel sorry for ourselves. We could speak angrily of revenge. We could lament our unfortunate condition before God and within earshot of everyone else in an attempt to garner sympathy. We could speak words of assurance and comfort, appreciation and hope. It might come as somewhat of a surprise in this situation to hear words **of joy**. Jesus speaks of joy not once or twice but three times in these chapters. Three times he speaks, not of an occasional burst of happiness but of complete joy. Listen to what Jesus says:

"I have said these things to you **so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete**. So **you have pain now**; but I will see you again, and your hearts will **rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you**. On that day you will ask

nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, **so that your joy may be complete**. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world **so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves**.”

The first time Jesus speaks of Joy in John 15:11, Jesus is speaking of our relationship with him. One of the main reasons Jesus came was so that his *“joy may be in us, and that our joy may be complete.”* As we’re united with Jesus through his word, prayer, and loving obedience the result in our lives will be joy. Jesus wants us to have the complete joy that comes from an close and lasting relationship with the loving and gracious God who gives us life.

Some of us learned a song when we were kids, *“I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart to stay. And I’m so happy, so very happy, I’ve got the love of Jesus in my heart.”* If we’ve got the joy of Jesus down in our heart, it should show on our face. Dennis Prager in his book, *Happiness Is a Serious Problem*, shares this experience: “I once asked a deeply religious man if he considered himself a truly pious person. He responded that while he aspired to be one, he felt that he fell short in two areas. One of those areas, he said, was his not being a happy enough person to be considered truly pious. His point was that unhappy religious people reflect poorly on their religion and on their Creator. He was right; in fact, unhappy religious people pose a real challenge to faith. If their faith is so impressive, why aren’t these devoted adherents happy? Unhappy religious people should therefore think about how important being happy is – if not for themselves, then for the sake of their religion. Unhappy, let alone angry, religious people provide more persuasive arguments for atheism & secularism than do all the arguments of atheists.”

While joy and happiness are not exactly the same, I believe it’s true that following Jesus is conducive to joy, therefore if we practice our faith correctly, the fruit of joy will begin to grow and become increasingly evident in our lives over time.

If we can learn how to have the joy of Jesus in our hearts and lives, (through hearing his word, prayer, and loving obedience); perhaps we'll be able to face life, even in the challenging and heart-breaking times, with an attitude that is marked by joy.

The second time Jesus speaks of Joy in *John 16*, he says to his disciples, **“So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”** Having the joy of Jesus does not spare us from the hardships of life, for some people, it may increase them. All of us have pain in our lives of varying degrees and intensities. Henri Nouwen in his book, *Here & Now: Living in the Spirit*, wrote: *“I have a friend who radiates joy, not because his life is easy, but because he habitually recognizes God’s presence in the midst of all human suffering, his own as well as others’...My friend’s joy is contagious. The more I am with him, the more I catch glimpses of the sun shining through the clouds. Yes, I know there is a sun, even though the skies are covered with clouds. While my friend always spoke about the sun, I kept speaking about the clouds, until one day I realized that it was the sun that allowed me to see the clouds. Those who keep speaking about the sun while walking under a cloudy sky are messengers of hope, the true saints of our day.”*

Each of us makes the decision, dozens of times a day, about whether we're going to speak about the Son/sun or about the clouds. Whether we will spread and share joy or something else. Jesus knows there are clouds, but he says in *John 16* if we ask, we will receive, so that our joy may be complete. Someone might say, *“That isn’t true. I prayed for someone to be healed and they weren’t. They died.”* Jesus understands those feelings; remember, he’s speaking about joy moments before he is: abandoned by his friends, arrested, beaten, and crucified. Most of us, including Jesus, are not seeking out painful events in our lives, but tests, afflictions, and trials will come to all of us.

Even in times of trial, the Bible encourages us to be mindful of our attitude. The Letter of James begins (1:2-4), *“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, **consider it nothing but joy**, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature*

*and complete (there's that word again), lacking in nothing.*" It's hard to consider it pure joy when we're going through trials, because often it hurts. Sometimes it hurts more than we feel we can bear. Yet through our tests we discover what our faith is made of and it can even mature and deepen.

**The third time Jesus speaks of joy** in his farewell discourse in John 17, Jesus is praying for us, not himself. Jesus wants his followers to understand that his death is not cause for sadness; it's his glorification because he's returning to the Father. Jesus is praying that his followers will be one, even as he and the Father are one, and ***"that they may have my joy made complete in or among themselves."*** In John's gospel, the arrival of Jesus is cause for Joy and the departure of Jesus will lead to joy as well.

In *John 3:25-30*, John the Baptist shares something important about joy. The disciples of John the Baptist come to John concerned that he is losing market share to Jesus, *"Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him."* John the Baptist isn't upset about this development, it means he has done his job and he says, *"The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. **For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.**"*

John's words are good advice for having the joy of Jesus. Jesus must increase within us and our old nature, our selfish self, our self-sufficient self, must decrease. Having the joy of Jesus comes from speaking to him in prayer, living obediently, listening to God through the scriptures and in our prayer, understanding Jesus wants us to have his complete joy in us, and recognizing that we choose our attitude.

The theologian Helmut Thielicke wrote this about joyless Christians, *"The glum, sour faces of many Christians... They rather give the impression that, instead of coming from the Father's joyful banquet, they have just come from the Sheriff who has auctioned off their sins and now are sorry they can't get them back again."*

The second fruit of the spirit is joy. Jesus radiated **joy**; that's part of what made him attractive to all kinds of people: children and adults, the troubled, the grieving, tax

collectors, people from all walks of life. About the only people who didn't like Jesus were the religious people who thought Jesus hung around with the wrong crowd, went to too many parties, and gave God a bad name. As followers of Christ we believe

**Having the joy of the Lord** comes from being united with Jesus through our habits, attitudes, and decisions so that Jesus is increasing in us and our old self is decreasing.

**Having the joy of the Lord** comes through praying for God's Spirit to grow the fruit of joy within us in all circumstances. We can be encouraged knowing this is not only our prayer, **but Jesus prayed and is still praying that we may have his complete joy in our lives.**

On July 30, 1967, when she was 17-years-old, Joni Eareckson Tada dove into the Chesapeake Bay after misjudging the shallowness of the water. She suffered a fracture between the fourth and fifth cervical levels and became a quadriplegic paralyzed from the shoulders down. She founded Joni and Friends in 1979, an organization to "accelerate Christian ministry in the disability community" In an article in Decision magazine, "*Joy Hard Won*," Joni wrote, "Honesty is always the best policy, but especially when you're surrounded by a crowd of women in a restroom during a break at a Christian women's conference. One woman, said, "*Oh, Joni, you always look so together, so happy in your wheelchair. I wish that I had your joy! How do you do it?*"

*"I don't do it," I said. "In fact, may I tell you honestly how I woke up this morning? This is an average day," I breathed deeply. "After my husband, Ken, leaves for work at 6:00 a.m., I'm alone until I hear the front door open at 7:00 a.m. That's when a friend arrives to get me up. While I listen to her make coffee, I pray, 'Oh, Lord, my friend will soon give me a bath, get me dressed, sit me up in my chair, brush my hair & teeth, & send me out the door. I don't have the strength to face this routine one more time. I have no resources. I don't have a smile to take into the day. But you do. May I have yours? God, I need you desperately.'"*

*"So what happens when your friend comes through the bedroom door?" one of them asked. "I turn my head toward her & give her a smile sent straight from heaven.*

*It's not mine. It's God's. And so,"* I said, gesturing to my paralyzed legs, *"whatever joy you see today was hard won this morning."* Joni concludes, *"I have learned that the weaker we are, the more we need to lean on God; and the more we lean on God, the stronger we discover God to be."*

Having the fruit of the Spirit Joy comes from being intimately united with Jesus through our habits, attitudes, and decisions so that Jesus is increasing in us and our old self is decreasing. We can pray for the Spirit to grow the fruit of joy within us in all circumstances. Finally, we can be encouraged knowing this is not only our prayer, but Jesus prayed and is still praying that we may have his complete joy in our lives. While there are always times in life to lament and mourn and weep, overall, Christians shouldn't walk around looking like we've been eating lemons. Too many people who claim to follow Jesus act in ways that are frequently mean, unkind, angry, and lacking in compassion and it's a huge turnoff and reflects poorly on the Lord, the church, and all of us. We want to make sure the message we're communicating as Christians is one of joy, love, peace and all the fruit of the Spirit.

In A.A. Milne's, classic *Winnie-the-Pooh* it says, *"Piglet noticed that even though he had a very small heart, it could hold a rather large amount of gratitude."* Cultivating an attitude of gratitude is one of the best things we can do to fan flame of joy and thankfulness in our hearts and lives. **The joy of the Lord really does give us strength.** Do you know what it's like in the presence of God? *1 Chronicles 16:27* says, ***"Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and Joy in his dwelling place."***

*Psalm 16:11* assures us, ***"In your presence there is fullness of joy."***

**Blessing: May the joy of the Lord be your strength today, tomorrow, for the rest of your life and for all eternity.**

## Questions for Reflection or Discussion

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 = No Joy and 10 = Full of Joy, how would you rate yourself today? What do you think are the reasons for rating yourself that way?

According to *Proverbs 15:13* and *17:22*, why is “a cheerful heart” important? What does choosing to have a cheerful heart do for us and to us?

What do we learn from the three times Jesus speaks about joy in his farewell discourse in *John chapters 15 through 17*?

Even though he dealt with very stressful situations including matters of life and death and conflict, Jesus had a personality overflowing with joy. What do we learn from Jesus about choosing joy even in challenging moments and seasons of our life?

Discuss or reflect on this quote by Dennis Prager in his book, *Happiness Is a Serious Problem*, “Unhappy religious people should therefore think about how important being happy is – if not for themselves, then for the sake of their religion. Unhappy, let alone angry, religious people provide more persuasive arguments for atheism and secularism than do all the arguments of atheists.”

How can you reflect more of the joy of Jesus in your daily living?