

‘Living in the Light’

A teaching series in 1 John by Rev. Robert Griffith

Part 2: Fullness of Joy

“We write this to make our joy complete.” (1 John 1:4)

What makes people happy? What makes you happy? Do you think happiness is even important? Obviously, people do think happiness is important, and this is not some new and novel idea. The pursuit of happiness as a basic right has been around for quite sometime.

Listen to these words from a document dated July 4, 1776:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

These words, of course, are from the American *Declaration of Independence*. Undoubtedly, the founders of that country thought that happiness was a worthy goal to pursue. The problem, however, with pursuing happiness is that you have to catch it, because it always seems just ahead of many of us. All sorts of advice has been given out over the years.

A Chinese proverb reads,

“If you wish to be happy for one hour, get intoxicated. If you wish to be happy for three days, get married. If you wish to be happy for eight days, kill your pig and eat it. If you wish to be happy forever, learn to fish.”

Now whether you agree with anything in this proverb or not, it does illustrate that there’s no widely held consensus on how to find true happiness. There is a good reason why people have had trouble discovering true and lasting happiness. The problem is in the nature of happiness.

Happiness depends on what happens. Happiness is linked to our circumstances. When things are going great, then I am happy. When things take a turn for the worst, then my happiness evaporates. What people really want is a happiness that lasts. People desire a happiness that does depend on happenstance. But, does such a thing exist?

Such a thing does exist. But it’s not called happiness. In fact, we find this thing mentioned often in the Bible. There we see a better alternative to happiness in what the Bible calls **joy**. Joy, unlike happiness, does not depend upon my situation in life. Joy is much deeper, more abiding and has a very different origin to happiness. Joy is something that God gives His children. Joy is a mark of someone who has been truly redeemed. Listen to how D. L. Moody describes this difference.

“Happiness is caused by things that happen around me, and circumstances will mar it; but joy flows right on through trouble; joy flows on through the dark; joy flows in the night as well as in the day; joy flows all through persecution and opposition. It is an unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart; a secret spring the world can’t see and doesn’t know anything about. The Lord gives His people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience to Him.”

Do you have this joy? That's the real question for today. Do you have the real and lasting joy that only Christ can give? The good news of the Bible is that fullness of joy can be ours in Christ. Joy always results from a relationship with Christ. This is what the Bible teaches this is what human experience confirms. So let's take a look at how we can quit pursuing the shallowness and emptiness of *happiness* that fades and find the real fullness of *joy* that lasts for eternity.

In our text today in 1 John 1:4, John tells us why he is sharing the truth about Christ with them: *"We write this to make our joy complete."* In other words, the reason he shares Christ with them is so they all may experience joy. Full and complete joy results from a relationship with Christ. And this joy can be ours in Christ.

A Poverty of Joy

If there is one thing that is clear, however, it is that there is a poverty of joy everywhere. Certainly in the world we see this poverty of joy. We all probably know people who suffer from an inability to find anything positive in life. For them, life is merely an existence. Everyday is filled with drudgery. They're like the man who went to his doctor for his annual physical check up. After the examination the doctor came in with his charts in hand and said, *"There is no reason why you can't live a completely normal life as long as you don't try to enjoy it."*

That is the way many people look at life today - and it's a tragedy. It's tragic because life doesn't have to be like that. Sidney Harris once wrote, *"The most miserable people I have known have not been those who suffered from catastrophes - which they could blame on fate or accident - but those who had everything they wanted, except the power to enjoy it."* There are indeed many people who lack the power to enjoy life. But, even in the Church we find a poverty of joy. Now this is really tragic. The Church ought to be a place where joy abounds. Sadly, this is often not the case. In fact, some Churches seem to have the idea that the absence of joy is true spirituality. Some people seem to believe that you can tell how holy a man or woman is by the length of their face. But this is not true spirituality at all.

It reminds me of something a Hollywood play write once said, *"Some people think it's difficult to be a Christian and to laugh, but I think it's the other way around. God writes a lot of comedy, it's just that He has so many bad actors."* Now if you were to interview some of these long-faced Christians, they would probably tell you that they are glad to be saved. The problem is that you just don't know it. They missed the memo which said, *"If you're happy, try telling your face."* Christianity has suffered too long from a poverty of joy.

A Promise of Joy

It doesn't have to be that way because God has given us a promise of joy. When John wrote what he did in the text we are looking at today, he must have been thinking of the words of Jesus that he recorded in his gospel. In John 15:11 we read, *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."* Here Jesus is telling us that His joy would be in us and would make our joy complete or full. Jesus came to give us life, but it was a certain kind of life that He came to give us. He came to give us eternal life, but He also came to give us abundant life.

Jesus said, in John 10:10, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."* The life, which Jesus desires to give us, is a full and abundant life characterized by an abiding joy. In that passage in John 15, the joy is directly related to an abiding relationship with Christ. That is what John 15 is all about. The whole chapter is about abiding in Christ and drawing our resources and strength and joy from Him like branches draw their life from the vine.

You see, your relationship with Jesus Christ does not change even though other relationships change. Your relationship with Jesus Christ does not change even though your circumstances change. In the midst of the most trying circumstances, you can rest in the joy of knowing Jesus and of knowing that He is with you even in the darkest of time. Doesn't it give you comfort to know that whatever the situation is in your life, Jesus is walking through it with you? Joy comes when we recognize that we are in the presence of God. And we need to understand that we are in the presence of God every moment of every day. The Psalmist speaks of this joy of being in God's presence in Psalm 16:11, "*You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*"

True and lasting joy comes from abiding in the presence of the living God who loves us. Somehow the Church has forgotten its roots in the Jewish faith. Kaufmann Kohler states in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* that no language has as many words for joy and rejoicing as does Hebrew. In the Old Testament, thirteen Hebrew roots, found in twenty-seven different words, are used primarily for some aspect of joy or joyful participation in worship. Hebrew worship ritual celebrates God as the source of all true joy. In contrast to the rituals of other faiths of the East, Israelite worship was essentially a joyous proclamation and celebration. The good Israelite regarded the act of thanking God as the supreme joy of his/her life. Pure joy is joy in God as both its source and object.

So if true joy comes from abiding in Christ's presence, then we need to spend much more time doing just that. We need to spend time praising God, thanking God for being a God of grace and mercy. We need to come into His presence with praise and thanksgiving as it says in Psalm 100:4, "*Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.*" By practicing the presence of God through praise and worship we will become more aware of His real presence with us and more filled with joy at knowing Him, loving Him and serving His mission.

The Power of Joy

What happens to us as we begin to enter into His presence and experience the fullness of joy that comes from knowing Him? Here we find the power of joy. Nehemiah 8:10 describes this power by telling us that, "*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*" Another passage of Scripture also puts strength and joy together. We read in 1 Chronicles 16:27, "*Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and joy in his dwelling place.*" Strength and joy are linked together in Scripture because in the joy of Christ, of knowing Jesus, of dwelling in His presence, there is Godly strength for the believer. There is strength for adversity. There is strength for our trials. There is inner strength which cannot be shaken – and it's all wrapped up in the presence of Jesus. Everything comes back to your relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. It doesn't depend on keeping certain rules and regulations, but it does depend on your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Scripture teaches clearly, for those who care to see, that it's never about keeping a certain code of ethics. We are pleasing to God because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. God completely accepts us, as we are, because we are in Christ. We don't find inner victory and strength by keeping rules and regulations and conforming to a certain pattern of behaviour. It is because of an inner relationship with Jesus Christ that we receive strength to follow Him. If you love Jesus and are committed to His mission in the world, you don't have to focus on following rules. Jesus has already obeyed the holy law of God completely, perfectly, once and for all.

If you love Jesus and abide in Him, you will walk in righteousness, you will live by a higher standard because it's no longer you who lives, but Christ Who lives in you! The key is to come to the place where you love Jesus so much that you are able to live, even above the standard of the Law, and do it out of the motivation of love and joy and in the strength which He provides. This is the real key. We are not to live merely out of a sense of duty, but out of the power of a living relationship with Jesus. There is a huge difference.

Some Christians complain because they feel like they are duty bound to do certain things. What we need are people who do things because they *want* to do them, not because they *have* to do them. And the only way that you're going to want to do what Jesus calls you to do is to be so in love with Him, so consumed by Him, so united with Him and His mission on earth that your desire is always to please Him and manifest His life in all you do.

The challenge for us is to come to this place of abandonment to God. When we do, we will experience what joy and freedom in serving the Lord that too few Christians know. There is a liberating joy that comes from this abandonment. It really is a joyous abandonment. As we do so, we receive a joy which is worth more than all the riches the world has to provide. It's a powerful joy. It's a joy that does not fade. It's a joy that doesn't depend upon our circumstances. It's a joy born out of our relationship with Jesus Christ. It's a joy that will last forever. Listen to what the Apostle Peter calls this joy in 1 Peter 1:6-9.

"In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith - the salvation of your souls."

Joy unspeakable and full of glory. Other translations say this is an inexpressible and glorious joy. Does that sound like a great place to be? Wouldn't you like to live out your days with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Well, friends, that is your birth right, in Christ. That is the promise of God for all believers! That is where we should all be living.

So I want you to hear what the Spirit of God is saying to you today. In fact, I believe the Holy Spirit is calling the whole Church back to our first love – to Jesus – to the source of all life, hope, purpose, power, meaning and the only place where we can experience joy unspeakable and full of glory! Which reminds me a great hymn you will hear in most black gospel Churches across the USA. Follow this link and sing along! <https://youtu.be/LGJDH4Czkfl>

Joy Unspeakable

I have found His grace is all complete, He supplies my every need
while I sit and learn at Jesus' feet, I am free, yes, free indeed.

*It is joy unspeakable and full of glory, full of glory, full of glory
it is joy unspeakable and full of glory, oh, the half has never yet been told.*

I have found the pleasure I once craved, it is joy and peace within
what a wondrous blessing, I am saved, from the awful gulf of sin.

I have found that hope so bright and clear, living in the realm of grace
oh, the Saviour's presence is so near, I can see His smiling face.

I have found the joy no tongue can tell, how its waves of glory roll
it is like a great overflowing well, springing up within my soul.

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