

Joy – A Light in the Darkness

How many people remember what we talked about last week?

* - Great I'm overjoyed!

Before we get going this morning let me state for the record that:

Joy is the byproduct of obedience.

First let's try a little experiment... Look around you this morning. Look at the people sitting next to you. No not glance, like when you walk into an elevator and you want to assess whether the guy beside you is carrying an axe under his trench coat. Look at the faces of the people near you.

Okay next... No judgment on your neighbors please... No assessment of their makeup, clothes, breath... etc.

Here's a tough question: Did you see the joy of the Lord radiating from them this morning?

Here's a tougher one... Did they see the joy of the Lord radiating from you this morning?

Oh I know you have light, but can anyone see it? Is the oil of Joy in your lamp?

While you think about that for a moment, let me tell you a story...

There was a famous man in the US named Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. this man was a member of the supreme court for 30 years. He was recognized for his clever wit and his intelligence. Many called him "The greatest justice since John Marshall" He was thought to be a leader of men and many looked up to him and respected him.

By this point I am hoping that the question is resonating in your mind. "So What?" Well... once day Justice Homes was asked about his choice of career. He said: "I might have entered the ministry if certain clergymen I knew had not looked and acted so much like undertakers."

We worship God with our lives. Is the joy of our relationship real? And if so... is it reflected to those around us? You see the man or the woman IS the message. What message are we giving to the world?

You see the world hasn't changed all that much since the time of Christ. Oh yes there are advances in technology etc. but the condition of man has not changed all that much.

Do you believe the bible is relevant for today?

Let me tell you another true story... There was once a man who lived about 300 AD. He knew his death was fast approaching and he penned these words: "It's a bad world, and incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy, which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are Christians – and I am one of them."

Let's get more personal for a moment.

Have you ever lost your wallet? Did you search your dresser, or your pants pockets? Did you check the night table? Have you ever felt the dread of not knowing where it was? Did you keep searching? How about when you finally found it, how did you feel? Do you know why you didn't find your wallet right away?

You were looking in the wrong place...

Was it in the last place you looked? I certainly hope so, to continue looking after you found it would be.... *Fill in your own word here.*

I want you to go deep inside yourself for a moment and think about some of the places where you have tried to find joy in your life. Has it been at your job, in your wealth, or perhaps in your recreational activities?

We often lose our joy because we tie our joy to our circumstances instead of to our faith in God.

As a church we don't need fake joy. We need the real thing and that only comes from obedience to Christ.

Why is joy important for the church?

Joy is important because it is our light to the world. People are drawn to the difference between their lives and the joy that can be found in Jesus. If you are not finding your joy in the Lord, you need to plug in. The Joy in your life and in you is your light reflecting your relationship with Jesus. This means that if you are not joyful, truly joyful – people can tell, then you won't be an effective soul winner for Christ.

Now I am not saying to put a smile on your face when someone is suffering or prance around smiling at a funeral etc. People will believe you are insane. What I am saying is that a Christian without joy is a contradiction in terms. If we are hurting, wounded or going through it, we need to get back to a place of joy. I want to

walk in the presence of God continually. I want to have overflowing contagious joy. I want the world to see my God through my joy. I want to share that joy with them.

Remember what Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. said? I don't want to be out there with people seeing a bible in my right hand and a tombstone in the other. And... yes I get the death to self... part, stay with me here.

I know this will sound like a broken record but we have to choose between despair or joy.

Don't think I have said that before? How about every decision we make is either one of fear or faith? Despair comes from fear and Joy comes from faith. The work of faith is obedience to God's will and Obedience brings Joy.

John 15:7-12

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"

We are not called to just any joy but his joy...

Jesus is our strength. We need joy to endure life's burdens

Philippians 4:11-13 (Paul)

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Joy is a reward for obedience

Hebrews 1:9

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy

Jesus has a purpose set out for us to have a full measure of joy

John 17:13 (Jesus)

"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them"

Joy tells the world of your faith. Joy comes from obedience to Gods will. Despair or Joy – Fear or Faith?

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Let's dig in practically for a few minutes...

Have any of you ever experienced periods of depression or sadness? I have. In fact, there are several biblical examples. Here are three:

- Job 3:11 – Job wishes he was never born
- Psalms 55:6-8 – David wants to be turned into a dove and get away from his circumstances
- 1 Kings 19:3-5 – Elijah asks God to take his life

So how do we get back on track with the whole Joy thing?

PRAY

Job 33:26

... That person can pray to God and find favor with him, they will see God's face and shout for joy; he will restore them to full wellbeing.

READ

Psalms 9:8

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes

PRAISE

Psalms 42:5

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God

UNITY

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

At this point, I am going to throw in some personal advice on the subject...

When these low periods come, if we focus on ourselves, our own problems, our hurts we don't do ourselves any favors. Psychotherapy and counseling can help in certain situations but they are not the ultimate answer. The answer doesn't lie in retail therapy. The answer lies in Jesus Christ. He is the way out of these difficulties, but we must be obedient and surrender ourselves to his will in our lives. Joy comes from obedience to Jesus.

John 15:1-11 (Jesus)

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

It is that willing spirit that sustains us in the Joy that Jesus has for our lives.

Psalms 51:10-12

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

My prayer for you is:

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.