

Sermon: A Life of Joy

Text: John 15:5-11; Galatians 5:16-26; Psalm 126

Discussion Questions:

One of the Sunday school songs I learned as a child went like this:

I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart! (Where?!)

Down in my heart! (Where?!)

Down in my heart!

I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart—down in my heart to stay!

And I'm so happy! So very happy! I have the love of Jesus in my H-E-A-R-T!

And I'm so happy! So very happy! I have the love of Jesus in my heart!

I have fond memories of singing this song! It was fun—and upbeat—and JOYFUL!

But it also seems so...simple. So easy. It seems so easy to have joy in our hearts as children. It gets a bit more difficult as adults. Would you agree?

- Why is it that joy can be so elusive in our “adult world”?
- Why is it that joy can be so elusive in our “American world”? What are some factors in our modern-day lives that make joyful living difficult?
- What are some things in your life that have robbed you of joy?
- This children’s song equates joy with happiness. Is that true? Are joy and happiness the same thing? If not—what makes them different?

Examination:

- Read **John 15:5-11**
 - Jesus was a master of metaphors. He was constantly pointing to things of nature (soil types, birds, lilies in the field, water, sheep, etc.) and making comparisons to the way things operate in the Kingdom of God. The metaphor that Jesus uses here in John 15 is that of a grape vine, a branch, and the grapes at the end of the branch. This is something that the folks of that day would likely see every day as they walked around the Judean countryside. According to verse 5, what did Jesus want us to notice about the vine, the branch, and the fruit?
 - When Jesus says that “apart from Him we can do nothing,” what did He mean?
 - What happens to unfruitful branches (v. 6)?
 - Who is supposed to get the credit when we bear fruit (v. 8)?
 - If Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, what role does the Father play in this metaphor (v. 9)? What role does the Holy Spirit play?
 - In verse 9, Jesus uses the word “remain” for the 9th time in this chapter. What does He mean by this word? How do we do it? What are the results of remaining?
 - Jesus adds an additional thought in verse 10—obedience. Obeying God’s command. Doing what we’re told. He returns to this instruction in verses 12 & 14. What is the command we are told we must obey?

- You might be wondering by now what this passage has to do with **joy**. Verse 11 answers that question. All of this teaching has to do with joy. Joy is the bottom line. What does verse 11 tell you about joy? Where does it come from?
- Read **Galatians 5:16-26**
 - John 15 tells us to “remain in the vine.” Galatians 5:16 tells us to “walk by the Spirit.” Is there any connection or similarity between these two things?
 - In keeping with the metaphor of the vine and the branch—might the Holy Spirit be the “sap” that flows from the vine into the branch producing the fruit?
 - What is produced in our lives when we “live by the flesh” (vv. 19-21)?
 - Is there a connection between what happens to people who live according to the flesh—and the branches that are gathered up and thrown in the fire (Jn. 15:6)?
 - Here we see **joy** showing up again—as a fruit of the Holy Spirit flowing through our lives (v. 22). What does this say about joy? How do we “get” joy?
 - Does joy (or love, or peace) seem to have anything to do with our circumstances?
- Read **Psalms 126**
 - One of the keys to understanding this short Psalm is in understanding WHEN it was written—and why. If you’re familiar with the Old Testament, you know that the nation of Israel was taken as prisoners of war to Babylon in 605BC. Almost seventy years later, they were allowed to return to Jerusalem (aka “Zion”). Verses 1-3 of this Psalm express what this first group of returning exiles were experiencing. According to verse 1, what simile is used to describe how these people felt?
 - What did the people DO when they were allowed to return (v. 2)?
 - What impact did this return to Jerusalem have on the surrounding nations?
 - How would you describe the joy that these people felt (v. 3)? Have you ever experienced this kind of joy in your life?
 - Verses 4 through 6 seem to shift gears a bit. My guess is that verses 1 through 3 might have been written after they were given the green light to return—but before they actually got there. The harsh reality was that Jerusalem was completely destroyed. Obliterated. How does verse 4 seem to bear that out?
 - The Negev is the barren desert. No water. Desolate. What would God have to do to produce a stream in the Negev?
 - If verse 4 is something that God does for us (creates a rushing river in the middle of a desert)—verse 5 is something we do. It’s clearly something these folks did when they SAW the condition of Zion. What did they do—and what did it produce or result in?
 - What are the “seeds” that verse 6 describes? What is the “harvest” that these seeds bring about? What is the abundance of the harvest?
 - What does Psalm 126 teach us about joy?

Application:

Take all three of these passages together—what have you learned about joy? Where does joy come from? Do we choose joy? What part does the Holy Spirit play? What part do tears play? Does it speak to your heart—knowing that those who sow seeds of tears reap a harvest of joy? Is that true for you right now? Do you believe joy is possible? If not—are you truly abiding in the vine?