

Unexpected Joy

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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Today, I want to take a little time to talk about this word joy. We use this word in our everyday language, but certainly around this season, the holiday season, this is a word that we use even more often, this idea of joy. And all too often, I think that we use these words together, joy and happiness. And we think that they're synonymous. They're the same words, but they're not. Joy and happiness are two completely different things.

So much so that as we look at Scripture, scripture commands us that as followers of Jesus, we are to have joy. Now, you can't command somebody to be happy, can you? You can try to force them to be happy, but it just doesn't work. And so how can Scripture command us to have joy? It's because joy is a choice. It's a decision that you make. It's like love. All too often, I will interview couples or do premarital counseling for couples that want to get married.

And I will explain to them that there are going to be days that they don't feel like loving their spouse, but they're going to have to make the choice to love their spouse. Because love is not a feeling, it's a decision. The same is true with joy. It's a choice that you make. And so when Scripture commands us to have joy, it's not talking about that outward good feeling. It's talking about an inward choice.

So let's look at some of those scriptures together that we are commanded as followers of Jesus to have joy. The first one is Psalm 32:11. When David said, rejoice in the Lord and be glad you righteous, sing all you who are upright in heart. Then later, Psalm 98:4 says, shout for joy to the Lord. All the earth burst into jubilant song with music.

You will notice that this idea of joy and singing praises or rejoicing go hand in hand in Scripture. We sing our praises to God because of the joy that we are choosing to have in him. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:4, rejoice have joy in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice! 1 Thessalonians 5:16. A first good verse to memorize. If you struggle with memorization, this is the whole verse rejoice always.

Okay. Rejoice always, have joy always. And then Revelation 19:7 says, let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. This is a command that we are given. It's not a feeling, it's a choice. It's a decision that you and I make every single day when we get out of bed, are we going to have joy today or not?

Are we going to have a joy around us that others can see? Or are we not? Because joy, when you choose to have it, endures hardships and trials and connects with meaning and purpose. And so our joy comes with meaning and purpose. It comes with a beautiful promise. You see, you can pursue happiness. We all do things that pursue happiness, this feeling.

But joy is a choice. Happiness fades. Happiness has high seasons and happiness has low seasons. There are things that happen to us that are outside of our control that can bring feelings of happiness, and there are things outside of our control that can take away our happiness. But joy is a choice. As I look around our world today, as many of you do, watching social media or looking at the news headlines, I don't see a lot of happiness and joy in our world today.

When I read the headlines, when I read what people are posting on social media, it's obvious that there are a lot of things in our world today that are bringing anxiety and depression and stress. Just listing some of them from the headlines and the things that I read, of course, you still have this COVID thing that's swirling around, although that does seem to be dying down. Fewer people are talking about it. At least. If you look in the headlines of the news, you see the war between Ukraine and Russia and you have all the sides of that and trying to understand what's actually taking place there.

Of course, you read headlines about our economy and you have people that are in financial distress and are living paycheck to paycheck. And so we come to the Christmas season where people want to give, but they can't give. Of course, there's always broken relationships. That always exists in our world. You have job changes, people losing their jobs, you have family struggles. As we come to this Christmas season, where people are going to be gathering with family, where maybe there's some strain in the relationship.

This is on the less critical extreme, certainly. But you have people that are rooting for bad sports teams, and so they get distressed about that, certainly one that's very true for all of us, health things that are going on. And so for some people, they seem to go from one thing to another, one health issue to another. And you think to yourself, how am I supposed to have joy when my body doesn't even want to get out of bed in the morning? There's so much pain. There's so many things that are going on.

Now, of course, I could go on and on, but you get the point. All of these things affect your happiness, but none of these things should affect your joy, because joy is a decision. With Christmas coming upon us, this idea of joy is something that we talk about, an unexpected joy. And so as we continue in our series the Unexpected Messiah, when our Messiah entered into his creation, it came in an unexpected way.

And we talked about that last week, that he came in the form of a baby and not to a rich family in Jerusalem that had a lot of influence, but instead to a poor teenage, engaged couple in Bethlehem who didn't have any idea what they were doing. He came in an unexpected way, and so he brought this unexpected hope into the world. And so also today, we want to talk about how that baby also brought about an unexpected joy into our lives.

As we enter Christmas, we sing this song, Joy to the World. And I wanted to read some of these lyrics to you. Joy to the world the Lord is come let every heart prepare him room joy to the earth the Savior reigns he rules the world with truth and grace and heaven and nature sing so let's take a moment to talk about joy today.

What is it that allows us to have that inward joy regardless of what is going on around us? Let me pray, and then we'll jump into that. Heavenly Father, I know that there are certainly people here today, as always, people that are watching online, listening on the radio, that are going through an extremely difficult season right now. And when we find ourselves in those seasons, it's hard to have joy because often our happiness is a lot lower than what we want.

We don't have those warm feelings. Instead, we feel pain. But, Father, my prayer is that in the midst of those seasons, as well as in the seasons of blessing and fruitfulness, that we would choose joy and that we would allow that to come off of us and to touch others in such a way that we can point them towards you. We ask us in Jesus name. Amen.

Because of my position here at the church and being a youth pastor before, I have had the privilege and opportunity to go on a lot of mission trips. Some of those are in the States, some of those have been around the world. I have gone on various trips to Louisiana, some with adults, some with teens, where we went down after Hurricane Katrina. And of course, we're helping people there that lost their homes, lost everything. Many times in that situation, the people not just lost their physical belongings, but they lost things that were irreplaceable, photo albums and memories and things like that.

And so it was awful to see them go through that. I've taken teens on mission trips to the mountains in North Carolina to help some elderly people, under resourced people. And so I remember going there and serving those people, people that were living in trailer parks and living with very little and trying to help serve them. I remember going to China when I was in college and having the opportunity to share the name of Jesus with people that had never heard the name of Jesus before.

And I remember that experience because it reminds me of the Apostle Paul, whose desire it was to not build on somebody else's foundation of faith, but be able to build from the very beginning about who Jesus is for people. And that was always exciting. I loved doing that. I've had multiple opportunities to go to Mexico to run vacation Bible schools and to be there to teach children about the name of Jesus and to put on plays and do things like that.

I had the opportunity to fly to Brazil with some teenagers to encourage some of our missionaries that were there as well as a new church plant that was there. And one thing about all of these mission trips is that God would teach me different things. It's what's given me my passion and my heart for doing missions and supporting missions. And those that are sharing the name of Jesus is because not only is there a benefit for the people that you're serving, but even those that are the missionaries are learning and growing.

And God taught me a lot of different things on all these various mission trips. But there's one thing that every mission trip I have ever been on, there's one thing that stands out, one thing that God seems to have to teach me over and over again. That on every mission trip I have met people who have far less than I have. I have met people in Brazil that were living in the slums that didn't know where their next meal was coming from.

I met people in China who didn't know if they were going to be persecuted because of their faith in Jesus. I've met people in North Carolina, in the mountains, in a trailer park that had basically nothing, gone down to Louisiana and helped those that have lost everything by a hurricane. And one thing that I discovered is that I was meeting people that had more joy than the millionaire who lived on the lake in Steuben County. It was amazing.

It's the same thing that God would teach me over and over again. I've met missionaries who have literally given up all of the comforts and the luxuries of First World living and the things that go along with that. They have willingly given up those things so that they can go into a Third world country and share about the name of Jesus. And some of those people have more joy than those of us that are living here in luxury.

And so it causes me to ask some questions. The first question is where does that joy come from? Probably the better question is who does that joy come from? How does that joy last? How does that joy continue? And then my final question, which is probably my favorite question why does there seem to be an inverse relationship between the amount of joy that someone has and the amount of stuff that someone has? An inverse relationship.

Meaning that the more stuff, the less joy, the less stuff, the more joy? Why does that happen? These are the three questions I want to answer. So let's start with the first one. Where or who does their joy come from? All of these people that have met around the world, even in our own community, not just around the world. And so let's look at this. Let's look at scripture. Psalm 16:11. Who fills them with that joy? Of course, you know the answer. The psalmist says, you make known to me the path of life.

You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. God's presence is what brings joy. That's what the psalmist is saying. You will fill me with joy. It only can come from you. It can't come from stuff or things. Romans 15:13 says, 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.

Where else does that joy come from? It comes from our faith. It comes from our belief that we can be filled with joy because we are putting our trust in God. Finally, Romans 14:17. For the kingdom of God is not a

matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. God gives us joy through the Holy Spirit. And here is what all of these verses are saying.

Here is the truth about where true joy comes from. Joy can only come from the Lord. That's it. Nothing else can bring us joy. Not a single thing, not another person. Only the Lord can truly give us that joy. And so if we are low in our joy content this morning, it's because we are trying to find it in the wrong place or the wrong person. Only the Lord can bring us joy.

And the beautiful thing about that is that the joy of the Lord is eternal. It's not temporal. Then it can't be taken away. Joy can be found in your blessings. It can be found in the good things. But often what I find to be true in my own life is that joy is more often found in my sufferings and trials and persecutions. Isn't that amazing how God works? But yet many of us fall into this trap. All of us fall into this trap.

It doesn't matter who we are that we believe. You know what, Pastor? If I just found the right man or woman to be in my life, then I would have joy, right? I'm lonely. I just need somebody. Some of you would say, if I could only get my kids to get along with each other and stop fighting, then I would have joy in my life. But that just takes my joy away. Some of you would say, you know what? If I could just find a good group of friends to plug into, maybe I moved to the area.

If I could just find a good friend, then I would have joy. Some of you would say if I could just find a good church or a group of people in the church, maybe then I would have joy. You know what, Pastor? If I could win the lottery, man, I'd have a lot of joy in my life, right? If I didn't have to worry about money ever again, if I could sleep better at night because of my health, or if I could live in a bigger house, or if I could lose that final 15 pesky pounds, then I would have joy.

But Jesus taught different, didn't he? Those things don't bring joy. They never will. They're only temporary. Nothing wrong with any one of those things. But those are about happiness, not about joy. Look at what Jesus said in John 15:11. I have told you this about his love, about his sacrifice, so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

It's the only way that our joy can be complete is when we are looking to the right person for that joy. And that's in the person of Jesus Christ. God fills us with that inexpressible joy. So that's who it comes from. How does it last? How do we keep that joy? Because joy has this ability to last through the pain and the suffering and the heartache and all of those things. Because we know the end of the story.

It doesn't have to be based on circumstances. We know that everything here is temporary. So even if we're going through a difficult season or a heartache or a loss, we know that that loss is temporary. And as followers of Jesus, we know what truly matters. That's what allows our joy to last. Because what really matters can't be taken away from us. Psalm 30:5. David says, for the Lord's, anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime.

Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. I think one of the best analogies we have of how we are supposed to survive through those difficult seasons is this idea of a woman who gives birth to a child, right? Paul uses this. A woman is able to endure the pain of childbirth because they know what comes after that. They know they get to hold that beautiful, miraculous baby in their hands.

And so that pain is lessened slightly in the midst of that because they know the end. They know what is coming. And so think about that in our lives. We can endure pain and suffering now because we know what is coming in eternity. And I would hope that our goal is not just to endure, not to just survive or to make it through, but to actually live life to the fullest in the midst of actually live a joyous life that others can feel around us.

Now, let's get to the last question. Why does there seem to be an inverse relationship between how much stuff you have and how much joy you have. Now, to me, I think it's a fairly easy answer as I think about my

own life. Jesus knew that this was going to be a struggle for us, that we were going to try to fill that void or vacuum in our life with stuff and with things and with people somehow believing that if we could accumulate enough of that, that we would have joy, that we would be able to have this feeling of being fulfilled.

Jesus knew that we were going to look in all of those wrong places. And so that's why Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21, do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But instead, Jesus tells us, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In other words, if you are making the things of this world your treasure, if those are the things that you value above all, your life is going to be miserable, because all you have to do is worry about those things. You have to worry about where they're going to be and what's going to happen. The problem is, Jesus is saying, you can't save enough money, you can't live in a big enough house, though. This looks pretty nice, doesn't it?

You can't have enough stuff to fill that inner desire for joy that you have. And we know it's true, but every single one of us, to some degree or another, somehow feels that if we get that one more thing, it's going to fill that void, that one present. If that one thing is under the tree or in the driveway or whatever else, then I'm going to have joy in life. And the problem with accumulating all that stuff is then you have to maintain it.

You see? Why is there an inverse relationship between the amount of stuff you have and how much joy you have? Because the more stuff you have, the more worry you have, because it breaks down, it gets rusty. You have to worry about insuring it in case it gets stolen or in case a natural disaster comes or something happens. And so you're thinking about that. You lie in bed at night and you wonder, is my car safe out in my driveway? Is somebody messing with it? Right? You think about your house as someone that loves doing woodworking.

There's always new fancy tools, do you know that? To do the same thing, right? There's always something new out there. And you think, oh, if I just have that, that would be amazing. I'd love to have it. And so you get that thing, that new tool, and it comes and it's shiny. And you know what? It's somebody that struggles with perfectionism. I don't even want to use the tool. I just want it to sit in my shop and look pretty, right? So I'm part of all of these threads on Facebook with woodworkers, and I can tell the people that are just like me, they're asking all these questions, how do I get the scratch out of the top of my table salt? And the other guys don't use it.

That's how you get the scratch out, right? Like it's a tool. You're supposed to use it. But those are the things we worry about, and all of us do that to one level or another. You buy a house and you move in, and you think, oh, this is my dream home. Which, by the way, there's no such thing as a dream home. It changes. It's a moving target. We moved into our house nine years ago, and there were things we wanted to update, so we put a new carpet, and we painted and whatever else. And, you know, the problem with doing all of those things is by the time you get to the end of the list, you got to start all over again, don't you?

We moved into our house, and one of the first things we did was put in carpet it, and we're moving through the list, and we're not even to the end of our list. And guess what? The carpet needs to be changed again already. You think about your vehicles that you drive, and you want them to be all fancy and shiny and waxed and taken care of. And I see a lot of you going through the new drive through in town. You got the \$5 a month unlimited car washes. I wasn't the only one, right? I see some of you. Yeah, you can be honest. We want to take care of our stuff. You go through the drive through, you want it to be pretty, but then you take that new car into the Walmart parking lot and someone's Christmas shopping, and they give you a big Dornick, right?

So you got to get a new car, you know, because you're not happy anymore. We try to get our joy from this stuff, and the stuff ends up owning us instead of us owning that stuff. Now, consider somebody who doesn't

have all of those things. The people that I meet in the slums of Brazil, the underresourced in the mountains of North Carolina, those in Louisiana that lost everything for those people. They're not even trying or believing that somehow their happiness or their joy can come from that stuff.

They know they have to rely on somebody else. Many of those people that I talk with are believers in Jesus. And so you can see that their faith, their trust, their hope, their joy only comes in Jesus. And of course, they're not concerned about their stuff. They're not losing sleep overnight because they don't have anything. They don't have anything to worry about ensuring or taking care of. And so even then, their happiness doesn't come from stuff. Their happiness comes from relationships, which is a beautiful thing.

So what about you as we wrap up today? Have you lost your joy during this season? Are you looking at all of the wrong places? Like many of us struggle with to find your joy, I want to remind you that according to scripture, joy can only come from the Lord. It only comes from him. He is the source of joy. This Christmas, I want us to celebrate with this unexpected joy. So much so that you even have an opportunity.

If you're here today or watching and you're going through a difficult season of life, you have even a greater opportunity than anybody else to shine a light on Jesus. Because if you still choose joy in the midst of your suffering, the world is not going to understand. They're going to say, how do you still have joy? You've lost everything. And you point to Jesus and say, nobody can take that away. Don't believe the lie that joy will come when you finally get the right guy or the right girl, or you get that thing you've been saving for, or you're waiting for Christmas morning to unwrap.

That one thing that's just going to put everything over the top, right? Once I get that, everything is going to be great. You're waiting for your health to get better. You're waiting to retire, to get into your golden years. And, you know, I talk to a lot of people that are retired in their golden years. And do you know what they tell me? Enjoy your life now when you don't have hurts and pains and aches everywhere. The golden years aren't always so golden. You see, we all struggle with looking forward to that next thing, thinking that that next thing is going to be it.

We try to fill this unrelinquishing appetite that we have. Just yesterday, we were eating dinner with my family and talking about this idea of appetite and self control and trying to fulfill those needs that we have. And we have certain limits that we try to put on electronics and devices and things in our house, watching TV, playing video games, stuff like that, because according to doctors, it's not good for you.

At least that's what we tell our kids. But it's true. And so we put limits on that. Now, yesterday, it's a busy day. We're in a busy season. All of us were preparing for parties and doing all these types of things. And so my wife and I were busy, and so that limit kind of gets stretched a little bit. And so our kids were watching TV and playing video games. And we get to lunchtime and my son tells me, hey, dad, I know I've been playing video games a lot this morning. I'm not going to play the rest of the day and I'm thinking, okay, I know how this is going to work. Because we all do the same thing.

Every single one of us with certain areas of our life. We think if we get enough of something, then we're not going to want it anymore. If we get whatever we want, then everything's going to be fine and I'll be okay with it. And so, of course, the day goes on and they get a little bored, and so they're like, hey, can I do that again? Can I play video games? Can I watch TV again? And I let them. And so then we sit down at the dinner table and I said, this is going to be a good teaching moment. I want you to know you're not alone in this. I struggle with this as well. For me, it's technology. I'll get the new iPhone or I'll get the new AirPods or whatever, and I think, okay, I'm good.

I don't need the next generation. When it comes out, I'm going to be satisfied with this, right? And then the next iPhone gets released or the next whatever, and you watch it and it's got like, barely any new features, but you're like, oh, I really need that. If I have that, then I'll be happy. That'll be the last one I get, right? Or think about it with food. How many of you have ever eaten so much before that you say to yourself, I'm

never going to eat again, right? You overdo it at a buffet or whatever else, and you're like, I am just stuffed. But guess what happens? You get hungry again. It's an appetite.

It's this thing that we're trying to fill, and so many of us try to fill that appetite that we have for Jesus, for God. I believe that God has given us an appetite for Him that only he can fulfill. And we try to fill it with other things, and when we do, it just leaves us wanting more. It just leaves us empty. So my prayer is that this Christmas season, as we give gifts and receive gifts and spend time with family, that our joy would come from Him, that we wouldn't look in all of those other places for empty happiness.

We all need this unexpected joy because happiness is fleeting and every one of us knows that. Let me close in prayer, father, may we find our joy in you. It's the only place we can get it. And still, for those that are going through a difficult season right now, as always, I pray for comfort and peace.

I pray that in the midst of their difficult season, that they would be a light that is shining brightly for you, that others would still experience and sense the joy and the hope that comes from you that can never be taken away. We wouldn't fall into the trap, that we would trust you. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen.