

Session 11 The Promise of Joy and the Illusion of Happiness (Jn. 15:11)

“Let me drink from the river of Your pleasures as I delight in Your beauty.” (Ps. 36:8; 37:4)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. John 13-17 is the greatest teaching by the greatest teacher in history. It is a most important passage for God’s people in the generation in which Jesus returns, when many will be troubled by dark emotions such as fear, shame, bitterness, grief, etc. Jesus promised to strengthen His people with supernatural joy to enable them to have a vibrant heart that overcomes sin and dark emotions.

¹¹***“These things I have spoken...that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (Jn. 15:11)***

B. Many define *joy* and *happiness* in different ways. I speak of “*divine joy*” as that which is imparted to us only as we relate to Jesus. I speak of “*natural happiness*” to describe the good feelings we have related to favorable circumstances—relationships, possessions, achievements, positions, etc. I value “*natural happiness*,” but the intense pursuit of it is an illusion rooted in idealism.

II. REVIEW: TWO TRUTHS, ONE COMMAND, AND TWO PROMISES (JN. 15:9-11)

A. In John 15:9, we see the *two most important truths* and the *most important command* in the Bible.

⁹***“As the Father loved Me, I have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love... ¹¹These things I have spoken...that My joy may remain in you...” (Jn. 15:9-11)***

B. ***Truth #1: The Father’s love for Jesus*** (15:9a) points us to the reality of how God loves God.

C. ***Truth #2: Jesus loves His people*** (15:9b) in the same intensity that the Father loves Him.

D. ***Abiding in love***: There is a human part (15:9c) and a divine part (15:10b) to *abiding in love*

1. ***Human side*** (15:9c): Jesus commanded us to engage in the human part of *abiding in love*—by staying focused on searching out the two truths in 15:9a, and on talking to Him about them (saying, “Thank You, show me more” of specific truths) with a spirit of obedience (15:10a).

2. ***Divine side*** (15:10b): The Spirit imparts living understanding of God’s love that tenderizes the hearts of disciples so that they feel love from Him and love for Him and others. This speaks of a breakthrough of the heart—that we abide in or live in the conscious reality of God’s love.

E. ***A command*** (15:9c): Jesus commanded us to ***abide in His love*** or to live focused on understanding and expressing it as we search out the two truths in 15:9a, b and speak to Him often about them.

F. ***Promise #1*** (15:10b): Jesus promised that we ***will abide in His love***. This is a promise of the Spirit granting a breakthrough in the hearts of obedient disciples so that they increase in understanding and even in feeling love from Him and love for Him and for others.

G. ***Promise #2*** (15:11): Jesus promised that His disciples would supernaturally ***receive His joy***.

III. EMPOWERED BY JOY THAT TRANSFORMS (JN. 15:11)

- A. Jesus promised to strengthen His people supernaturally with His joy which enables them to have a vibrant heart that overcomes sin and dark emotions. Joy in this age is a down payment of eternal joy.
- ⁹*“As the Father loved Me, I have loved you...¹⁰keep My commands...you will abide in My love...¹¹These things I have spoken...that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”*
(Jn. 15:9-11)
- B. **These things:** Jesus was emphasizing that the truths in 15:1-10 were essential to empowering them to receive joy. “These things” refers to 15:1-10 with a special emphasis on what He said in 15:9-10. Our ability to receive God’s joy is anchored in our understanding of and our on-going conversation with the Spirit—about how the Father loves Jesus and how Jesus loves us (15:9). The combination of experiencing His love (15:9) and walking in obedience (15:10) results in joy (15:11).
- C. The overarching theme of John 13-17 is found in 14:1 when Jesus commanded the disciples not to allow trouble to dominate their heart (14:1). There are human dynamics involved as indicated by His command to **“let not...”** Jesus promised to release His joy (15:11) and peace into the hearts of those who continue not to allow trouble to dominate their heart (14:27).
- ¹*“Let not your heart be troubled...believe in God, believe also in Me...²⁷My peace I give to you... Let not your heart be troubled...”* (Jn. 14:1, 27)
- D. John 13-17 tells how to engage our troubled hearts to overcome *fear, shame, bitterness, grief, etc.* In these 5 chapters, Jesus gives us line-upon-line insight into God’s heart (about 25 truths and promises) that equip us to overcome painful, dangerous, or dark emotions and/or mindsets. The main emphasis is not how to become safe physically and financially but to be safe spiritually.
- E. Jesus is the best teacher on how to overcome a troubled heart. If we engage often with the truths and promises in John 13-17, we will have joy. Many sincere believers are confused as to why they do not have joy. I would ask them how often these truths regularly get in their conversation with Jesus.
- ²⁰*“...give attention to My words...²¹Keep them in the midst of your heart; ²²for they are life to those who find them...²³Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”*
(Prov. 4:20-23)
- F. **That My joy may remain in you:** Jesus promised to strengthen His disciples by imparting His joy in them to enable them to have a vibrant heart in the face of pressures and temptations (15:11 [2x]; 16:20, 21, 22, 24; 17:13). Joy is a feeling of pleasure or delight that things are good or are working for our future good—according to how God defines good. We experience joy as the truths of God’s Word is the lens by which we define good and view our life both in this age and in the age to come.
- ¹¹*“These things I have spoken...that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”*
(Jn. 15:11)
- G. Some are confused about biblical joy, thinking of it as temporary “euphoric high” paralleling what occurs with drugs. Jesus said that His joy “remains”—it is more than a temporary “euphoric high” but it is to “remain” as a regular part of a believer’s life. Some think of joy mostly in terms of the Spirit making them laugh at a church service or when jumping with joy to an upbeat worship song.

- H. David wrote of the fullness of joy at God's throne (Ps. 16:11). God's throne is the epicenter of joy in the universe; those near to it are filled with joy and experience pleasures (spiritual and physical). David prayed to drink from the river of His pleasures (Ps. 36:8). This occurs as the Spirit reveals the Father and the Son to us. The Spirit reveals the things of Jesus' heart to His people (Jn. 16:14).

¹¹...*In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps. 16:11)*

¹⁴*“He [the Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” (Jn. 16:14)*

- I. Joy is found in discovering that “**He is enough for me**”—that is, to relate to Him and live for Him. “*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.*” **John Piper**
- J. **God's joy in us includes**—1) the *pleasure of interacting with Jesus* (Ps. 16:8; 36:8; Jn. 3:29; 16:14); 2) a *sense of well-being* with confidence in His leadership—a quiet spirit (Rom. 8:28; 1 Pet. 3:4); 3) our *hope of future glory* in living and ruling with Him forever (Rom. 5:2; 8:18; 1 Cor. 2:9)—knowing that He esteems our small acts of obedience with eternal rewards (Mt. 25:21; 1 Cor. 3:14); 4) *God hearing and delighting in our prayers* that are in His will (Prov. 15:8; Jn. 16:24; 1 Jn. 3:22); 5) joy that results from *loving and helping people to love Jesus* (1 Thes. 2:16; 2 Jn. 12; 3 Jn. 4).

⁹...*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9)*

- K. **Your joy may be full:** Our experience of God's joy comes as regular momentary impartations of the Spirit. In time, His joy becomes the lens by which we view our life so that it progressively becomes “our joy” or part of our mindset and emotional make up. His joy sparks our heart until joy becomes more dominant in our heart than dark emotions. Our joy can grow to the “full maturity” that God ordained for this age. Our joy now is not full in the absolute sense since it will increase in heaven.
- L. There are human and divine components involved in receiving God's joy. The **human side** includes conversation with God around biblical truths and promises, plus setting our primary life goals in agreement with that which *lasts forever* and with that which *God calls great* (Mt. 5:19) such as walking in love, purity, humility, generosity, gratitude, faithfulness, etc. The **divine side** consists of the Spirit's activity inspiring the mind and heart of a believer with understanding and peace. Joy is associated with the confidence that our pursuit of greatness is in agreement with what God calls great and rewards eternally—a greatness without regard to temporal circumstances or achievements.

IV. “NATURAL HAPPINESS” AND “DIVINE JOY”

- A. We naturally seek “the illusion” of gaining deep satisfaction via having favorable circumstances. *There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person, and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ.*” (**Blaise Pascal**)
- B. Nothing can fill the “God-shaped vacuum” in our heart that was designed by God to be fulfilled only in context to a deep relationship with Him. A person can have a great family, amazing friends, abundant finances, good health, and a growing ministry but still lack a deep sense of joy. I am grateful for temporary good feelings related to favorable circumstances, but I know that they are temporary, and I do not trust them to give joy and strength to my heart (Neh. 8:10)

¹⁰*“Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (Neh. 8:10)*

- C. I feel urgent to expose this illusion in light of the false voices that are deceiving many (Mt. 24:11). Some of these false voices are social commentators who promote false narratives about how the human heart works and how people are fulfilled. The false message promoted by many marketing teams and social commentators dominate the global conversation today. The message marketed most is that “*you must wholeheartedly pursue what you think will make you happy.*”

¹¹Then many false prophets [social commentators] will rise up and deceive many. (Mt. 24:11)

- D. The result is multitudes who are constantly seeking to change their circumstance—they change jobs, occupation, houses, cities, ministries, friends, and now their gender in pursuit of being happy. Only one Man has the one reliable pathway to joy and fulfillment—He shared it in John 13-17.

- E. I urge you to let go of “*the illusion of natural happiness*” and make a decision not to look for deep fulfillment in favorable circumstances. I made a very conscience decision to shift my focus from looking to happiness in good circumstances to finding genuine joy in my relationship with Jesus. The shift started in 1973 when, at age 18, I witnessed the anguish of my 17-year-old brother who broke his neck, leaving him totally paralyzed for the next 33 years (he died in 2007).

- F. My life paradigm began changing. I had two prophetic dreams about the judgment seat of Christ at ages 18 and 23. The first dream stirred me to study Ecclesiastes and Revelation to see “eternity.”

***¹²Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,
¹³each one’s work will...be revealed by fire...¹⁴If anyone’s work...endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he will be saved. (1 Cor. 3:12-15)***

- G. Solomon seemingly had everything including a powerful intellect, abundant prosperity, the highest position of power in the nation, accomplishments that brought him fame and admiration including “sexual freedom” (700 wives and 300 concubines), and yet he said, “*All is vanity*” (Ecc. 1:2).

²...“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. ³What profit has a man from all his labor...?

⁸...The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” (Ecc. 1:2-3, 8)

¹I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with...pleasure”...²What does it accomplish?...

⁴I made my works great, I built myself houses...⁸I also gathered for myself silver and gold...

¹¹I looked on all the works that my hands had done...all was vanity... (Ecc. 2:1-11)

***¹¹...He has put eternity in their hearts...¹⁴whatever God does [values], it shall be forever...
that men should fear before Him...¹⁵and God requires an account of what is past. (Ecc. 3:11-15)***

¹³Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments...

¹⁴God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing... (Ecc. 12:13-14)

- H. For God’s promise of joy to be true—it must be attainable for all people; it must result in enjoying God; it must be connected to goodness that last forever; and it cannot be stopped by our enemies.

- I. As I began to grasp that God sees, esteems, and eternally rewards my love and obedience and as I experienced more of His love and better understood my life with Him in the age to come, then God’s joy began to increase in my life in a more consistent way. Thus, I determined to make my main life pursuit to grow in the grace that would empower me to love God and to be faithful to Him.