

“FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: Joy”

Isaiah 12:1-6 • Romans 12:1-13

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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We are continuing our series on the fruit of the spirit and this morning this morning we're talking about joy. The word joy is mentioned over 200 times in the Bible and the word rejoice, which is the expression of joy, another 200 times. To put that in perspective, forgiveness, which is pretty important concept in the Bible, is only mentioned about 115 times. C.S. Lewis said “Joy is the serious business of heaven.” As citizens of heaven joy should be serious business for us, too.

But if you look at old photographs of church people they don't look very joyful. They look rather serious. Especially Presbyterians. Stern Presbyterian was usually redundant. Probably because that's the way they were taught. The 1839 Presbyterian *Directory for Worship* described worship this way: “let the people enter the church, and take their seats in a decent, **grave**, and reverent manner.” It then goes on to say, “let all the people attend with gravity and reverence...abstaining from...gazing about, **smiling**, and all other indecent behavior.” Smiling in church was considered “indecent behavior.” I think this is what Paul was talking about in Galatians 4 when he wrote, “What has happened to all your joy?”

So many people are trying unsuccessfully to find joy that joy has become big business. I did a little research and found that there are over 17,000 books with the word “joy” in the title. One of our wedding gifts from Leslie's grandmother was *The Joy of Cooking*. Don't get me wrong. It's a great cookbook. But I can't say that it's been a source of enduring joy. The joy we get comes from the scriptures and sayings that she wrote throughout. There are lots of other books that want to somehow give you joy. How about *The Joy of Keeping Farm Animals*, or *The Joy of Juicing*. One you may want to add to your Christmas wish list is a book about the joys of math. No?

There are lots of self-help books about how to find or create your own joy. The fact that

there are so many of them hints that maybe it's not possible to find joy simply by trying harder. So the question for us today is “where does true joy come from?” George Burns once said, “Happiness is having a large, loving, close-knit, caring family...in another city.” Aristotle claimed that “happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.” In America we consider the pursuit of happiness to be an inalienable right and there are many in our society today who believe that if it feels good then it's good.

The problem is that we confuse joy with happiness. Happiness is the product of our circumstances. If things are going well, we may be happy. We say, “If I could just get that new car or that new job, then I'd be happy.” But that kind of happiness is fleeting. It won't last. The new job turns out to be no better than the last one. The new car stops smelling new and begins to wear out. The happiness doesn't last. Joy, on the other hand, is not something we create ourselves. Joy is our response to God's activity in our lives and in the world. Joy comes from God's salvation. Isaiah 12 contains a couple of prophecies that are also songs of praise. Isaiah is filled with joy because of God's salvation that will come through Jesus. Verse 3 says, “With *joy* you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” And in verse 6 he says, “Shout, and sing for joy...for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Now as we turn our attention to the twelfth chapter of Romans I want to give you the secret to real joy. You might want to write this down because it will save you a lot of money on self-help books about making joy. Ready? The secret to joy is JOY. J-O-Y. That stands for Jesus, Others, and You. When you put your priorities in this order you unlock the secret to joy regardless of your happiness. Let's look at each of these.

The first thing I want us to understand about joy is that it's the result of being loved by Jesus. When His undeserved grace and forgiveness are finally able to penetrate through the thick layers of self-doubt that we create, we begin to feel the surge of joy. Of course this is not easy for us. We find it difficult to let Christ love us and change us. For some of us, it's hard to imagine that God could possibly love us in spite of all the things we've done wrong.

Or we try to earn God's favor. We feel like if we can just *do* the right things or at least *think* the right thoughts, then we deserve God's favor. But when we think that way we completely miss the meaning of grace. The last thing we want from God is what we deserve. That's where grace comes in. Grace is unmerited favor. In other words, grace means we get something we don't deserve at all – namely salvation.

In Romans 12, the Apostle Paul tells us to make Jesus the number one priority in our lives. That's hard. It's hard because it means that whatever we've made most important has to move. It's usually ourselves. You have to get off the throne of your life and let Jesus take His rightful place. Paul writes, "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." How do we do that? One of the ways is to "be transformed by the renewal of your mind." Every moment of every day is an opportunity to be in the presence of Christ by using your mind.

So if the first key to unlocking joy in your life is Jesus, the second key is "others." Verse 3 says, "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." Joy is the result of love and love is fueled by joy. Real love is not a feeling or an emotion. Real love is an act of the will.

What Jesus demonstrated for us is that true love involves sacrifice. To love someone you must put that person's needs and interests ahead of your own. That's how it works in marriage and in friendship and in the church. Paul uses the analogy of a body with all the different parts working together. Then in verses 6-8 he mentions several gifts that God gives us. Notice that each of these gifts is given to you for the benefit of others – prophecy, serving, teaching, preaching, giving, leading, and acts of mercy. God has given each one of you a particular set of gifts and the reason He gave them to you is for you to use them for other people. Verse 6 says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them...*with cheerfulness.*" As you think about the gifts God has given you – time, skills, knowledge, money – recognize that He expects you to use them for His Kingdom first.

That brings us to *you*. In Luke 6 Jesus said, "forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

If you love Jesus enough to put Him first in your life, and love other people enough to put serving them second, you will find that you have more joy by being in third place than you would have by trying to take care of yourself first. That's because love and joy can't be bought and it can't be made. The irony is that the more you try to make yourself love or have joy, the less of each you will have because you will be focused on what you don't have. But the more you sacrificially love and give, the more love and joy you will experience.

Amen.