

{Slide: Rejoice always}

Intro

(Core of the message from 'How do you define Joy' - John Piper)

Today we want to talk about joy

We want to talk about joy because our circumstances do not always make us feel like being joyful.

But first I want to clear up a common misconception.

What is the shortest verse in your Bible?

{Slide: Joh 11v35}

Joh 11v35

Jesus wept

I'm going to show you two verses now and ask the rhetorical question, which is the shortest.

{Slide: Two Greek verses}

ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς

Πάντοτε χαίρετε

These are two verses in the original Greek

This is what they mean.

{Slide: Two Greek verses with English}

ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς - Jesus wept (Joh 11v35)

Πάντοτε χαίρετε - Rejoice always (1 The 5v16)

So now when someone tells you that Joh 11v35 is the shortest verse you can counter with, "but not in the original Greek".

The title of the message today is, "Rejoice always" one of the most challenging statements in the Bible, even more so considering the circumstances of the last week.

So

Today we are going to tackle the subject of Christian Joy, what exactly is it?

Definition of Joy

One of the best ways to understand a particular theme or topic in the Bible is look at what it isn't and it usually isn't what the world defines it as.

If we look up the definition of joy we get something like:

a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

"tears of joy"

synonyms:

delight, great pleasure, joyfulness, jubilation, triumph, exultation, rejoicing, happiness, gladness, glee, exhilaration, ebullience, exuberance, elation, euphoria, bliss, ecstasy, transports of delight, rapture, radiance

(Joan saving up pocket money for a car)

I definitely think that Christian 'joy' can be described by some of those words but they don't really help us understand what it means from a Christian point of view.

Until we look a look a little deeper, we can distort the meaning by substituting worldly ways to achieve a state described by words like this.

So what we are going to do is build up our own definition of Joy as we work our way through a number of different Scriptures

A good feeling

It's a feeling

What do these Scriptures say to you:

{Slide: Psa 16v11}

*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.*

Joy is a good feeling.

The Bible uses the words, "eternal pleasures".

Why eternal?

Because all the pleasures we know are short lived

Worldly joy has a life span

(cell phone, good meal, movie, time with a partner, a sunset, a great song)

There is nothing that this world can offer long term other than death and taxes and unless you're an undertaker or SARS there is no long term joy there.

But the joy of God lasts eternally.

What about this one?

{Slide: Psa 19v8}

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

What does that leave you with?

You can spot someone who has that good feeling.

There is a joy in their heart and a light in their eyes.

Here's the thing though, **it's nothing you can artificially generate by yourself.**

That's the thing with feelings, **your body will feel what your body feels**

(Running story)

It's not something that can be generated at will, it's something that happens.

It's not something you decide to switch on and off.

{Slide: 'Christian joy is ...}

Christian joy is a good feeling ...

In the soul

What are feelings?

Physiologically, it's some feel good juices produced by the body in response to some stimulus.

Like the sight of a Ferrari in my drive way (McLaren)

That is not joy even though it may feel like it

We are an engine after all, made up of a complex array chemicals and nerves and muscles, atoms, molecules, electrons and so on.

How my body responds to something is largely out of my control.

What I do with that response is largely within my control.

Before I knew God, I thought my responses were completely justified because I had nothing to compare them against.

Then I got to know God and realized something new

Something that happens outside of what I think

Something that has nothing to with me or my opinion

Something that you only start realizing when you connect with God

This verse describes this much better than I can:

{Slide: Psa 42v1-2}

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?*

The writer has it spot on
 He says his soul pants for God
 His soul thirsts for God
 His soul needs to connect with God
 The soul has nothing to do with how my body reacts to the outside world
 But the way I responded however started changing
 Because it felt good and right

Before we knew God, this translates into a restlessness
 A searching for something that makes sense in this world
 And until we connect with God, the restlessness remains
 See how the writer connects his soul with God
 Once we connect in this way, then heart and the mind and our strength will follow.

It helps me understand Jesus a little better when He says in Mat 22, in response to the Pharisee's question on the greatest commandment, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*".

He says the connection point with God is the soul, that something inside us that we ourselves cannot really define and that is probably the way it should always be.

Or when David says in Psa 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
²He makes me lie down in green pastures,
 he leads me beside quiet waters,
³he refreshes my **soul**

Where God connects with me, that part of me that, "*thirsts for God*"
 That's joy
 It's a good feeling in my soul

{Slide: 'Christian joy is ...}

Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul ...

Produced by the Spirit

Are you starting to get the feel that this thing called joy is not quite in your control.
 How does that make you feel?
 Not in control
 Good, that's where I want you
 Because this Scripture is not going to make you feel any better.

{Slide: Gal 5v22-23}

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³gentleness and self-control.*

Christian joy is a fruit, the result of something and this Scripture tells us the Spirit, working within us, produces joy as a result of its work.

Not your work

Not your efforts

You can't fake this one

Either love, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control and joy is displayed as part of your Christian journey, or it's not.

Not convinced?

Let's go back to some of our first Scriptures

{Slide: Psa 16v11}

***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.***

You (God) make known to me (Marc) the path of life

You (God) fill me (Marc) with joy

The joy in my soul is coming from God actively working in my life, evident through the fruits produced by the Holy Spirit.

We are not in charge

We are not in control

We are helpless before God at this stage of our walk through this topic.

Or as it says in Pro 2v6 - "*For the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding*".

There is nothing in our lives that we hate more, than not being in control

But in this one, we are not in control.

As we connect with Him, He gives.

{Slide: 'Christian joy is ...}

*Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul,
produced by the Holy Spirit ...*

As we see Jesus

It is all about Jesus

And whether or not we see His beauty

This is something we have been talking about in our series called 'Who is this Man?'

And here we meet it again.

{Slide: Phil 3v1}

*Further, my brothers and sisters, **rejoice in the Lord!***

Paul exhorts us in this Scripture to, "*rejoice in the Lord*"

To do that we have to know something about Him

We cannot rejoice or find our joy in something that we know nothing or little about.

Even in the OT, the experience was very similar.

{Slide: 1 Chr 16v10}

*Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD **rejoice**.*

The context is the ark of God is placed inside the tent that David had pitched for it

Burned and fellowship offerings were presented

Before God

Before His Presence

Then David gave the priests instructions on how to offer praise from V8 to V36

Something well worth reading through

And in Verse 10 he says, "*let the hearts of those who seek the LORD **rejoice***"

What impression do you get?

It has to do with Jesus.

Our Christian joy comes from finding out more about Jesus

From seeking Him.

If we have no desire for Jesus, then there is no chance of joy

Jesus teaches us a bit more about the process in John

{Slide: Joh 16v13-14}

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

This Spirit, our guide into all the truth

Glorifies Jesus by acting as a conduit, making known to us what it is we need to know.

Which will only happen when we seek the Lord

Which then brings us joy

{Slide: 'Christian joy is ...}

*Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit,
as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ ...*

In the Word
And the World

So where is the clearest and most obvious place where we would go looking for Jesus

Seeking Him

In His Word of course, whose authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit

And what better place than one of our favourite Scriptures but I'm only going to quote one verse.

{Slide: 2 Cor 4v6}

⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," ^{it} made his light shine in our hearts to give us **the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.**

Again we see God at work, in spite of our efforts.

He, "made his light shine in our hearts"

Why?

To understand, "the knowledge of God's glory", better

How?

Because it can be seen, "in the face of Christ"

All this becomes available as we Seek, Savor and Submit to the Sovereignty of Christ

Where else can we see Jesus?

Well, this one's easy

In His work

{Slide: Heb 1v2-3}

²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and **through whom also he made the universe.** ³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, **sustaining all things by his powerful word**

Not only do we see Jesus all over the Bible

But, as the Creator of the Universe, which God called, "very good" in Gen 1v31

We can view His Creation all around us, continually being sustained, "by his powerful word".

So when we put all of this together we get:

{Slide: 'Christian joy is ...}

Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world.

Summary

{Slide: Rejoice always}

That was just a brief walk through a very big subject

And our definition is not complete

But the point is this:

We, as a congregation have just gone through a week that no one could have predicted.

Experienced a tragedy that changed us permanently.

Yesterday we celebrated a life that was taken from us.

Today we turn our gaze resolutely towards Jesus
Back to a relationship with Him because that is the only place where we will find the
ultimate Joy

Because we do need to Rejoice always

*Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see
the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world.*