

Joy to the Church, part 1

(John 15:1-11)

(preached 6/16/19; Pine Grove BC Sun AM)

Introduction

Last year in preparation for Father's day, an article online on the everyday family website was entitled..

6 Secrets to Being a Happy Father.

And unlike most internet articles, the folks at everyday family had some good suggestions on being a happy dad.

One supposed secret was to prioritize being a father, which is certainly important..

Another secret was to be consistent in our parenting, which is another great piece of instruction..

But the thing that caught my eye and got me to thinking was the first secret they offered..

And it was simply to "Choose Happiness."

Well, I have been a dad for 16 1/2 years, and I have tried to choose happiness but I can tale you that there are times when my choosing of it doesn't work.

Sometimes, happiness in being a father is difficult.

That's not a reflection on my kids.

That's a reflection on my fallenness.

I lose patience.

I am moved to anger.

I am inconsistent.

I am selfish.

And those sins make choosing happiness a difficult endeavor.

So how do I find joy as a parent, as a father?

Well, joy is something that everyone wants but few know how to find?

Fortunately for you, John 15:1-11 is going to be a recipe for joy in your life..

Now, I was out last week on vacation with my family, so let's get our minds back into the gospel of John..

Two weeks ago when we were together, we finished up John 14..

It was Thursday night in a room above a house in Jerusalem.

Jesus was less than 24 hours away from his death on Friday afternoon.

The 12 disciples had gathered with him on Thursday after sunset to celebrate the Passover meal.

It was the start to what was supposed to be a week long celebration of God's past goodness to Israel in reducing them from slavery in Egypt.

The year was 30 AD.

God has recused them in 1445 BC, but the Jews are still celebrating that rescue almost 1500 years later.

And it was always a joyous occasion.

However, this Passover would be unlike any Passover ever.

On this Passover, Jesus would die as the ultimate Passover lamb to save His people the angel of death that comes due to our sin..

As a result of the most unique Passover, the mood among Jesus' disciples was more somber than joyous.

In fact, verse 1 of chapter 14 let us know that the hearts of these men were troubled.

They were about to lose their greatest joy in the world.

They were about to lose the One who they watched calm the sea, raise the dead, give sight to the blind.

They were about to lose the One who had taught them with greater authority than anyone had ever taught them.

They were about to lose the One who had protected them and provided for them and shielded them from the evil all around them.

So Jesus set out in chapter 14 to calm their heart.

They needed to stop their worrying and repent of their anxiety.

First of all, they knew the truth about Jesus and they had beloved that truth, and now they had a home in heaven waiting for them.

Second, they were going to do some extraordinary things after Jesus' departure.

Third, they would have help after his departure in the Father, Son, and Spirit who would come to them and

teach them and remind them and be with them just as Jesus had been with them for 4 years..

And that entire chapter was designed to give these 11 men peace.

They weren't called to be fearful and anxious.

They weren't called to be troubled and upset.

They were called to find peace in what Christ had accomplished for them by dying for their sins.

They were called to be at peace as the triune God resided with them..

But peace is not the only thing that these men need.

They also need joy.

Look, there is much to be said about peaceful people.

We like peaceful people.

We are attracted to peaceful people.

But show me someone who has peace and joy, and I will show you someone with lots of friends.

I will show you someone who is likable and influential in the world.

Look, these 11 men are about to take the best news the world has ever heard...

The new that that sin can be forgiven through faith alone in Christ alone..

These men are about to be messengers of that news.

And though many in the world will despise it and persecute ignore it, their job is to wrap that message in a lifestyle of peace and joy.

Who wants to listen to someone preach who is bitter and lacks peace?

Who wants to listen to a message from someone who is filled with worry and fear and is never happy with anything?

Yet, take the gospel and put in men who are always and peace and always joyful and you create a powerful message.

On top of that, put it in men who have peace and joy despite suffering and you make the gospel all the more believable and convincing.

You see, only God can bring lasting peace and joy despite persecution..

And when these 11 men live in peace and demonstrate joy under intense persecution, the world has to and will take notice..

Now we know how to have peace from John 14, but how can these men find joy?

Well, chapter 15 is going to give us some help.

So let's read the entire passage and then we will go back and identify 7 sources of joy for the believer..

John 15:1-11

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He [a]prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already [b]clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot

bear fruit [c]of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so [d]prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

The last sentence become essentially serves as the main idea of the first 11 verses.

These men are on edge because Christ is leaving them.

They need peace, but they also need joy.

So he gives them a mini sermon in verse 1-11 meant to make their joy full..

These men listened to Jesus' words and they found lasting joy in a very sad world..

May we be listen and obey in the same way..

The first way to have joy is found in verses 1-3..

I. Joy Comes from Absolute Sovereignty (1-3)

As chapter 14 ends, we see Jesus tell these men to “get up and let us go from here.”

Now where is here?

Well, we aren't exactly sure of the house, but Jesus and these 11 men had been in a banquet room above a house in Jerusalem.

The night had begun with Jesus washing these disciples feet.

Then before Passover Supper began, Jesus dismissed Judas.

Then the 11 remaining disciples and Jesus enjoyed the final Passover meal which was now the Lord's Supper.

All during supper and after supper, Jesus had taught these men.

But now as the time of his death approaches, it is time for Jesus to be betrayed by Judas..

Be put on trial by a group of cowardly Jewish leaders and then be sentenced to death by the Romans.

As Jesus speaks in verse 1 of chapter 15, it is probably late into Thursday night or possibly the wee hours of Friday morning.

Some see this message as still occurring in the room as the disciples prepare to leave with Jesus.

Others see this teaching occurring as Jesus and the disciples head out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives where Jesus will be arrested.

In the end, it doesn't matter.

I have even went back and forth on this myself, but it seems that the opening lines of verse 1 would suggest that the disciples and Jesus are outside.

Look back at verse 1..

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

Throughout John's gospel, Jesus has made many of these I am statements.

Those two alone were meant to identify Jesus as God since God had first told Moses that his name was “I AM” way back in the book of Exodus..

Jesus, being God, is also the Great I AM, so he frequently refers to Himself in this way.

Up to this point in John's gospel, Jesus has said that he is the bread of life.

I am the bread of heaven.

I am the light of the world.

I am the door of the sheep.

I am the good shepherd.

I am the resurrection and the life.

Jesus now adds to that list in chapter 15, verse 1.

I am the the vine.

Now such a statement could be said anywhere, but it make sense that Jesus and the disciples are possibly outside in the night and pass by some grape vines..

In April, vines would be coming alive from their winter dormancy.

And such a picture of nature would serve Jesus well as he taught the disciples about joy.

Christ often used pictures of the world to teach deep spiritual truths, and this was a great opportunity..

Now, I am not an expert in growing grapes, but I have read much about it in the process of studying this chapter..

And it seems that the grape business is a pretty labor intensive business if you want to produce good fruit..

Now Jesus knows all about growing and these men would be familiar with it since grapes supplied the majority of a person's liquid diet in 1st century Israel.

And without getting into the nitty gritty of the the grape business, let's just identify the parts of the analogy that Jesus uses in verse 1..

Jesus is the vine.

Grapes are the fruit but the vine is focus of the grape business.

Without a healthy vine, there is no fruit.

Now Christ is clearly a healthy vine, but there is much care needed to keep the vine healthy.

The first order of business is to remove the dead branches..

Look at verse 2..

2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away;

Well, who is the He of verse 2?

Well, that is the Father of verse 1.

Jesus is the Vine, and the Father is the grape farmer.

He planted the vine and he now cares for the vine.

And the first order of business is to remove non-fruit bearing branches.

Well, who do these branches represent in the world?

This is the unbeliever.

You see, Jesus gives life to believer and unbeliever alike, but not all of those who have been given life by Christ produce his fruit.

Not all the branches believe and produce fruit, so they must be cut off.

And why is that?

Simply put, dead branches use nutrients that could go to fruit producing branches.

So the Father simply removes them..

But those aren't the only branches of the vine..

Look at the second half of verse 2..

and every branch that bears fruit, He [a]prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

The other branch of the vine are those that bear fruit.

These are believing branches..

But note that the farmer also cuts on them as well..

He prunes them so that they bear more fruit..

Grapes vines are like most fruit plants.

As the branches grow, there are often others branches that sprout of the main branch.

Most people call them suckers.

The technical name is a basal shoot.

But the danger of suckers is that they rob the main branch of nutrients.

In terms of grapes, a branch may be read to produce a cluster of grapes at the end of it, but shoots all along the branch pull out nutrients before they reach the end.

The result is a cluster of grapes that are less healthy than they could be due to lack of water and nutrition being sucked off before it reaches the fruit...

The same is true in the life of a believer.

The Father comes along and pulls off the things in a believer's life that suck out their energy of producing fruit for Christ.

It could be a nagging sin issue.

It could be good things that simply keep us less than fruitful for Christ and his church..

This is simply the work of God in salvation and sanctification.

The old man goes and the new man comes..

And God is constantly pruning off anything that keeps us less than fruitful for our lives..

Now, what does this have to do with joy?

Look, joy comes from knowing that God is working on us.

Sin discourages the believer.

Disobedience brings us down.

Negligence and laziness dishearten us.

I am sure these 11 men had their times of discouragement and despair, but joy comes from knowing that they were fruit-bearing branches, and the Father would provide the best care for them.

In fact, look what Jesus says in verse 3..

3 You are already [b]clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

The cleanness that Jesus speaks of here is really two fold.

They are clean because they are saved.

They are clean because God is pruning them constantly.

For 3 years, they have been learning to let go of all sorts of things that will prevent them from bearing fruit for Christ.

The Father has been pruning them for some time now.

Now look, why is all this a source of joy for these men and for us?

Simply put, God's sovereignty in saving us and God's sovereignty in shaping is a reason to be happy.

If I had to save myself through good works, I would be miserable thinking that I always to do more..

But even if I had to reform myself after salvation, I would be equally miserable wondering if I should do more?

The joy I have is that God is working on me.

As I grow in my knowledge of Him.

As I grow in obedience.

God is growing me.

Every true believer in here can testify about how your life has been re-ordered after salvation.

Things that were once important to you no longer are.

Things that used to consume your time no longer do.

Things that once prevented you from serving the Lord
and His church no longer do.

And all that re-ordering of our lives was not really
because we made it happen..

It was the result of God's pruning of us.

And look, that is a reason to be joyful.

These 11 men had every reason to be fearful and worried
and sad, but the truth that God had cleaned them and
would continue to prune them was a source of joy.

And it should be for us as believers.

Even today, God is pruning those who belong to Him.

As you sit here right now, the Father is reminding you of
the importance of bearing fruit for him.

He is even alerting you to things that pull you away from
his work..

This is joy for us to know that God is working.

Look, I am the world's worst at remembering things.

Then along came the cell phone and the calendar app.

I can enter an event in the calendar and it will send me a text or an email..

I don't have to worry about remembering.

Look, that is a source of joy for me.

In a sense, we find joy in God's complete work in us.

He saved us.

He prunes us.

So we can live in peace and joy.

But that is not our only source of joy..

Let's look at verses 4 and 5..

II. Joy Comes from Attachment to Christ (4-5)

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit [c]of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Separation anxiety is a term that the world of psychology uses to describe children who have a fear of being separated from a parent.

If you have worked in nursery, you have seen it all too often.

Most often, parents suffer from it far worse than the kids.

For the believer, there is joy in knowing that we will never be separated from our Christ..

Christ is in us and we are in Christ.

And the result of that union is that we as branches bear fruit for the vine.

This is why there is no such thing as a non-fruit bearing Christian.

If you are truly saved, you are truly in Christ, you are truly in the vine, and you will truly bear fruit.

Sadly, I hear Christians defending other's salvation even though there is no fruit in their life.

I assure you based upon the word of God that a non fruit bearing person is not a believer.

Believers bear fruit because we are connected to the vine..

Let me put it this way.

If I stick a knife in a light socket, I will feel the shock of electricity.

In the same way, true believers produce fruit because they are in Christ.

If you are today claiming to know Christ but you don't have any evidence of that in your life, you better repent and be saved.

Believers produce fruit because they are attached to the vine of Christ.

This too produces joy in our life.

I don't have to come up with good works to do.

Good works flow out of my life because they flow from Christ.

I am generous because Christ is generous.

I am kind because Christ is kind.

I am patient because Christ is patient.

I am forgiving because Christ is forgiving.

This is the fruit that flows out of the life of the believer because the true believer is simply an extension of the vine.

Though I am hesitant to end such an encouraging message with a stern warning, that is where we must end today.

Let's look and end with verse 6..

III. Joy Comes from Avoiding Hell (6)

Let's read verse 6..

“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

Right in the middle of a section on how to find full joy, Jesus offers such a distressing verse..

What in the world do verse 6 have to do with joy?

Well simply put, the avoidance of punishment is a source of joy for the believer.

As Christ has already said in verse 1, non fruit-producing branches are cut out and taken away by the Father.

They are piled up in verse 6 and then burned.

And though that is not the happiest of verses, it is a source of joy for the believer.

Now to be clear here, we are not rejoicing over the death of the wicked.

We are rejoicing that we aren't getting what we deserve.

We are rejoicing that we are avoiding what was due to us.

Just because I am grateful that I am not a dead branch does not that I am happy to see the dead branches burned.

I simply have joy because I see how God plucked me from that same fire.

In every true believer, you will find happiness over a future that has avoided death and destruction.

These 11 men are not extra special.

These 11 men are not much different than Judas who was on his way to betray Jesus.

The only difference is that they believed but Judas didn't.

However that belief was sending them to a room prepared for them in heaven.

While unbelief was sending Judas to hell and then a lake of fire.

Though none of these men would rejoice in Judas' destruction, they would certainly be filled with joy over their avoidance of hell.

The same should be true of you today if you have repented and trusted alone in Christ.

Joy should fill your heart because you are on the narrow road to life and not the broad road to destruction.

There are 4 more reasons for joy, but we will save them for next week.

Let's end with a couple mental notes to take home with us..

Conclusion

#1 - Be joyful because He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion.

We are a work in progress but we are also a job that will be completed.

There will be no unfinished believers.

God has worked to save you and He will work to complete you..

#2 - Be joyful because you are equipped to do every good work imaginable.

Believers are attached to the eternal life giving vine of Christ.

But we are also attached to the good works giving vine of Christ.

We produce fruit because we are attached to the vine of Christ.

#3 - Be joyful because you have moved from hell to heaven.

I will never forget the move from California back to South Carolina after seminary.

It was so good to be back in the area Tonya and I were raised in..

Traffic jams and police sirens were replaced by crickets and pine trees.

IT was fantastic.

Sometimes a change of address results in incredible joy.

For those who have come believing in Christ and repenting of their sins, their permanent address has been changed.

They have moved from hell to heaven.

They have given up the broad road for the narrow road.

They have moved from lies to truth, from death to life.

How could you not be joyful in light of that good news?

I pray that you have joy because you know where you are headed at death.

If not, I pray that you will find that joy today.

IV. Joy Comes from Answered Prayer (7)

V. Joy Comes from Assurance of Salvation (8)

VI. Joy Comes from an Ability to Love (9-11)

VII. Joy Comes from Appeasing Christ (12)