

Psalm 51:1-13

October 15, 2017

Galatians 5:22-26

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

“Make A Joyful Noise”

Introduction

For the past couple of weeks we’ve been focusing on the fruit of the Spirit – taking our cues from Paul’s letter to the Galatians 5:22 “... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,” The fruit of a Christ-like character will show in those who stay connected to Him and allow the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. It’s about the good fruit of a life in Christ becoming a reality in our living. In contrast to the “forbidden fruit” that brought sin into the world, we’re focusing our attention on the fruit of the Spirit which brings grace into the world.

In this series of messages we’re going through that list and taking a closer look at what it all means for our life in Christ. Our aim here is to foster genuine Christian character among ourselves at church, so that when we go into our neighborhoods we are good examples of our faith in Christ, and cultivating the fruit of the Spirit is essential in this.

Last week Darrell was our preacher ... doing a fine job of helping us understand the first aspect of fruit of the Spirit: Love. Now, this isn’t the kind of love that we usually think about – between a man and a woman, or like when we say, “I just love barbecued ribs.” The love that the Bible means is what we call “agape love” – from the Greek word for self-sacrificial love, the kind of love that God has shown us in Jesus, the kind of love that really makes all the difference in the world when we look to the needs of others, rather than just our own.

Today I am going to focus our attention on the second aspect of fruit of the Spirit. I reminded of it every time I see the license plate of someone around here. The plate says: “joyful noise.” Echoing the Psalm “Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs,” Psalm 100:2. We’re talking about joy (χαρά). Near his life’s end the author Robert Louis Stevenson said, “To miss the joy is to miss everything!” It’s hard to argue with that. God intends you to have joy in your life.

True Joy

“Joy” translates the Greek χαρά, which means “rejoicing, gladness, enjoyment, or bliss.” In many ways, joy means to celebrate when

something great or good has taken place. Joy wells up from the depths of the soul. *Αγαπε* – godly love - melts the heart of stone, while *χαρα* touches the deepest part of that heart.

Let us make a distinction between “joy” and “happiness.” Happiness has its source in human emotions and so it is as fleeting as our emotions are volatile. When we get what we want – new possessions, affection and attention from another, accolades and recognition from our peers, etc. - we feel happy. Happiness is linked to the moment; it is tied to the circumstances which produce or bring about that happy feeling. The word *happy* and *happen* have their root in the word *hap* meaning “*chance, fortune*.” That which occurs by luck or chance is a happening. Good luck brings happiness. But as sand quickly runs through the hourglass, or as water slides through your fingers, happiness quickly comes to an end and we easily say, “...*The days of trouble come and the years catch up with you. They will make you say, “I have found no pleasure in them,” Ecclesiastes 12:1. Happiness is superficial and fleeting and a wholly inadequate substitute for joy.*

Joy wells up in the soul and remains even when happiness flees. Joy is found in celebrating God’s blessings in the lives of others, joy is found in giving and sharing, joy comes from living in the Spirit, knowing that God is your foundation. Joy is discovering and celebrating what God is doing, even in dark times. It is an expression of joy to say, “I’m on the winning team” when the days of trouble come. When disaster strikes, like hurricanes, earthquakes, or mass shootings, happiness is banished in the face of tragedy and destruction. But joy sees the helpers – you will always find people who are helping. Jesus never counted it a crime to be joyful. He loved to share in the rejoicing of a wedding feast, the joy of salvation coming to a home, the joy of God’s triumph over Satan.

Reasons for Joy

The Bible highlights numerous reasons for joy. Let’s look at several:

A. Salvation. Psalm 51:12 sings, “... *restore to me the joy of your salvation...*” Salvation is the result of God’s *agape* toward us – unfit as we are - because God’s favor toward us is not motivated by our worthiness, but by our need. [Jesus’ had an intimate relationship with His Father God, even calling him “Abba,” or “Daddy.” There is joy in story for us when we know that our (heavenly) Daddy loves us.]

Salvation is God’s gift to give. *Caris*, the Greek for “grace,” is closely related to *cara* or “joy.” Joy is found in receiving the gift of

God's grace, which is salvation. That is why joy is sung at Christmas, the birth of our Savior, God's gift to all. Salvation is not about us, but about God's action, *"Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."* Luke 10:20.

One of the great results of the joy of salvation is that it enables us to look beyond our current situation. We have joy because we can forget about yesterday, see past today, and look ahead to the future when Christ will return and bring the kingdom of God in it's fullness. On the night before Jesus was to die, he encouraged his disciples to look beyond the current situation. In the Gospel of John we read about how Jesus told his disciples that he will be going away and that they cannot come with him, but that he will return one day to take them with him. *"I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy,"* John 16:20. We're on the winning team!

B. Participating in the work of God. Renowned psychologist Abraham Maslow once said, "I have found that every person who was sincerely happy, radiantly alive, was living for a purpose or a cause beyond himself." There is great joy to be found in living and working for a purpose bigger than ourselves and the greatest work that we can ever do is the work of God. *"...if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday,"* Isaiah 58:10.

The apostle Paul, suffered many things, from beatings and imprisonments, to shipwrecks and ultimately death. But he maintained a spirit of joy in all the circumstances he found himself in. He was able to do so because he was doing the work of God that he was called to do. He lived to serve Christ. And what really excited Paul was to have others join him in this work. Philippians 1:4-5, *"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."*

Your life is going to be used up in some way. It's better to wisely decide to use it by joining in God's work, a purpose much bigger than yourself, instead of withering on the vine as a collection of aches and pains and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. You'll find joy when you join God's work. There is joy in sharing and giving. Operation Christmas Child is a great opportunity (Flood Buckets for RENEW).

C. Investing yourself in others. There's a ton of satisfaction in watching people that you've invested yourself in, succeed. Isn't that a lot of what motivates us to pour ourselves into our children? We

want them to do well in life and it brings joy to us when they do. I remember the first time my daughter came down the bunny slope on skis – I felt like a million dollars. And when my son plays a piano piece here in church joy wells up within me. St. Paul certainly found satisfaction when one of his congregations lived the gospel. *“... make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind,”* Philippians 2:2.

Likewise he found joy in his protégé Timothy whom he mentored in ministry: *“...as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy,”* 2 Timothy 1:3-4.

And again concerning another congregation: *“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy,”* 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20.

There is great joy found in connecting with other believers – that’s one of the things I appreciate about meeting genuine believers from other nations, as well as homegrown Christians. When you share those genuine, deep faith experiences with another it just makes you feel full. Believers are catalysts of joy for one another. Shouldn’t we be about developing relationships of believers here who experience the joy of the Lord together? I get some of that in my small group, and when some of us are working together on a community service project. When we work together with others in ministry experiences, we get to watch those people grow in their faith and also find the joy of the Lord. That’s worth celebrating!

Christmas Year Round

Love, joy, and peace are often heard at Christmas time, but God intends for us to have the Christmas spirit all year round. How can we ensure that joy will last? Jesus said, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing,”* John 15:5. A big part of having a life of joy is an attitude that allows the Holy Spirit to transform your life.

Pastor Chris Santasiere (from Virginia) shared about someone he knew who lived with joy. Robert Reed would tell people, “I have everything I need for joy!” You’d look at him and see that his hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He can’t bathe himself. He can’t feed himself. He can’t brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put on his underwear. Strips of Velcro hold his shirts together. His speech drags like a worn out audiocassette. Robert has cerebral palsy.

The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school and then Abilene Christian University. It didn't keep him from teaching at a junior college or going on five overseas mission trips. Robert's disease didn't prevent him from becoming a missionary in Portugal - alone. [He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972. There he rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language. Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years he led seventy people to the Lord, one of whom became his wife, Rosa.]

Pastor Santasiere continues: "I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him in his wheelchair onto the platform. I watched them lay a Bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers force open the pages. [And I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces.] Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, "I have everything I need for joy." His shirts are held together by Velcro, but his life is held together by joy."

At some point in his life Robert had concluded that everything we need for joy, we possess in God. Just as has been said long ago, "*The joy of the Lord is your strength*," Nehemiah 8:10. When we too discover that, our lives will be held together and defined by joy. Robert looked beyond his situation and saw the big picture that God had in store for him. What's holding your life together today? Your job? Your family? A hobby? Money? Or is your life held together by the joy of salvation found in God?¹

How can we ensure that joy will last? Let His words remain in us and obey His commands (John 15:3, 7, 10). If you've lost your joy it's right where you left it: in His presence.

Jesus said, "*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete*," John 15:11.

¹Chris Santasiere "Joy" (Fairmount Christian Church, Mechanicsville Virginia) June 12, 2002. Sermon Central <https://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/chris-santasiere-profile-6477?ref=SermonSerps>