

***My Soul is Filled with Joy***  
“Called to Bear Fruit” – Part II  
September 18, 2016

For the past several years now I have downloaded many of the Christian songs that I like on to my cell phone. That includes several Christmas songs. Whether on my cell phone or my computer I am not very good at setting up different files for different things. All my music is just in one file. So when I go for my walks or I am driving in my car and I am listening to my music, periodically a Christmas song will come on. I used to just skip the song and move on to the next one. But I came to realize that the Christmas songs that we sing and listen to are not just appropriate during the Christmas season, they’re appropriate all year long. Hence, our singing “Joy to the World” this morning.

This morning we are continuing our series looking at “The Fruit of the Spirit” from Galatians 5:22-23. We are looking at the fruit of joy! Joy is a rather unique word. It is found in both the Old Testament and in the New. In the Bible it is almost always connected with our response to the saving work of God. There are actually four Hebrew words used in the Old Testament for “joy.”

In the New Testament, the most common Greek word used for joy is “chara,” which is very similar to the Greek word, “chairō,” which means to rejoice. So whenever we find the words joy or rejoice in the New Testament, they have very similar meanings in their original context. And in the New Testament, just like the Old, it is almost always connected with God’s salvation.

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

*<sup>6</sup> In this you **rejoice**, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and **rejoice** with **joy** that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:1-9 (ESV)*

The apostle Paul used the word “joy” numerous times in his letters to express our response to the salvation God has offered us in Jesus Christ. Romans 15:13 is just one example:

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:13 (ESV)*

Believing in what? Believing in Jesus Christ, all that He is, all that He has done in giving us the gift of eternal life – a life beyond this one – free from all the sin, the pain, the illnesses, the conflict, even death. The three virtues mentioned there, – hope, joy and peace – are all intrinsically connected, just like the nine “Fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23 are intrinsically connected. Not only are they intrinsically connected, they all transcend our experience here on earth.

*“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*  
Romans 14:17 (ESV)

None of these virtues or spiritual fruit mentioned in the Bible are possible without the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life.

This is how the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology explains the word “joy” as found in the Bible:

“A delight in life that runs deeper than pain or pleasure. From a biblical perspective it is not limited by nor tied solely to external circumstances. Joy is a gift of God, and like all his other inner gifts it can be experienced even in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances. . .

“Joy is not an isolated or occasional consequence of faith but rather an integral part of one’s whole relation to God. The fullness of joy comes when there is a deep sense of the presence of God in one’s life.”

Joy is not limited to only our positive experiences during our life here on earth, it can also be experienced in the negative ones – in our suffering and our weaknesses – especially if they draw us closer to God – the only place where we can find true joy, hence the apostle James can say:

*Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kinds.* James 1:2 (ESV)

In some of Jesus’ last words to his disciples as recorded in John’s gospel, he says to his disciples:

*“So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”* John 16:22 (ESV)

Recently when I reviewed the nine fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5, I thought about the one(s) that I could use a little more of. Well, I could use a little more of all of them. I could use a little more patience, though I have come a long way in becoming more patient. Trust me! Just ask Mary or the girls. But the more I thought about it, the one that I could use some more of is joy!

Those words of Paul in Romans 14:17 have kept on coming back to me:

*“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* Romans 14:17 (ESV)

I feel that I have been seeking God’s righteousness over the past many years, and I have become more peaceful, both within myself and concerned about peace in general. But joy? I even asked Mary which one(s) she thought I could use a little more of. She really didn’t hesitate – “joy!”

God is not satisfied with only righteousness and peace, or the other eight fruits of the Spirit listed there in Galatians 5, He is concerned about all of them, including joy! Paul tells us plainly that the kingdom of God is not a matter of only righteousness and peace but also joy. Without joy in my life, without joy in our lives, our lives are not as pleasing to God as they can be. Christians should be the most joyful people in the world. We have the only real reason to be joyful.

We are not to sit around waiting for our circumstances to make us joyful; we are commanded to be joyful always! One of the shortest verses in all the Bible, right up there with, “Jesus wept,” and much more challenging for us is 1 Thessalonians 5:16, “Rejoice always!”

Paul emphasizes again in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say it, rejoice.” God intends that every one of His children exhibit the fruit of joy.”

“Rejoice always!” There is a huge difference between joy and being happy and unfortunately we often get the two confused.

Have you ever wondered what would make you truly happy? Might it be to have all the money you could possibly want to allow any financial restrictions you might have removed from your life? You could buy whatever you wanted. Or you could do whatever you wanted to do – live wherever you wanted to live, work at whatever job you wanted to work at, or maybe not work at all. If you could do whatever you wanted to do, have whatever you wanted to have, and be whatever you wanted to be, would you then be happy?

Most people think, “If only I could . . . or “if only someone else would . . .,” then I would be happy. A common myth is that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, however, when we get there we often find that is not always the case. So, husbands walk away from their wives and wives walk away from their husbands because they think that someone else will make them “really happy.” People quit decent jobs, change careers, and move across the country thinking that the new job, new house or the move will bring them the satisfaction and intense happiness they crave. For many others it’s retirement. Most, after they have made the change and some time passes, they still are not very happy. Even the United States Declaration of Independence proclaims that we have the right to “the pursuit of happiness.” Yet, nowhere in the Bible do you find God advising us to pursue happiness. In fact, do you know how many times the word happy or happiness is found in the Bible? Ten times in the English Standard Version and they’re all found in the Old Testament. Nowhere does God command us to “be happy!”

Why is that? Because God knows that happiness during our life here on earth is a fleeting emotion. It is here one day and gone the next, or sometimes it even changes by the hour. Our happiness here on earth is contingent on things that have no eternal significance.

Many in America today believe that money is the key to happiness. But is it? In 1988, Buddy Post of Oil City, Pennsylvania won the Pennsylvania Lottery jackpot of \$16.2 million. That was just the beginning of his misery. First, his landlady claimed that she had gone in with Buddy to purchase what turned out to be the winning ticket. She sued and successfully got one third of his winnings. Then he started several different business ventures with his siblings. They all failed.

Then one night arguing with his step daughter's boyfriend over the ownership of a pick-up truck, he fired a gun into his garage ceiling to scare the boyfriend away. For that he received six months in prison for attempted assault with a weapon. In 1993 his own brother was convicted of plotting to kill Buddy and his wife to gain access to what was left of the lottery money. In 1994 Post filed for bankruptcy. Shortly after that his wife left him and he was ordered to pay her \$40,000 per year. Things got so bad for Buddy that he tried to sell off the seventeen future payments that the Pennsylvania Lottery owed him, which was unsuccessful. \$16.2 million and Buddy Post was unable to find happiness. In fact most people that have won the big lottery jackpots have said the same thing, winning all that money didn't make them any happier than they were before.

Whereas happiness is a fleeting emotion, joy is much more. Joy is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit and comes only when we connected to the Vine – Jesus Christ. Like all the other fruit of the Spirit, joy is not something we produce on our own. It is a supernatural result of belonging to the one who is pure joy.

The joy that is spoken about in the Bible is more than just being happy, or being full of laughter, or being exceedingly excited all the time. In fact it's often just the opposite of that. The early church understood that joy should be a reality of the lives of believers/Christians no matter what happened to them during their life here on earth. When the early church leaders were rejected, beaten, and even put into prison, it says they rejoiced because "they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41), suffering for the Name of Jesus. That's why James could say, "Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds." And the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews encouraged the early Christians with these words: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2).

The joy of believers, followers of Jesus, as described in the Bible, makes no sense by human standards. The joy of a believer can be experienced in happy times, when things are going good, and in bad times, when life is rough, when we are going through great disappointment, loss or grief.

Amy Carmichael is well known as a great protestant missionary to Asia in the late 1800's and early 1900's, especially for her work with young women and prostitutes. What is less known is the many difficulties she faced in her life: losing her father at a young age and suffering from neuralgia, a disease of the nerves that made her whole body weak and achy and often put her in bed for weeks on end. And then at the age of 63 she suffered a very serious fall which kept her bedridden for the last twenty years of her life. During that time she wrote numerous books that helped countless people. These are some of her words that she wrote at the end of her life: "Where the things of God are concerned, acceptance always means the happy choice of mind and heart that He appoints, because (for the present) it is His good and acceptable and perfect will." Amy Carmichael's situation in life did not take away her sense of joy. She possessed it in spite of her circumstances.

Pastor and author Jack Hayford describes the biblical concept of joy this way:

“Joy, then, is that ever-deepening awareness that our lives are hidden in Christ and that we can be led by the Holy Spirit through anything. Afflictions, trials, pressures, or frustrations may come, but they cannot destroy us; so we experience joy. We may genuinely hurt; we may weep; we may be tempted; we may not understand what God is allowing to come our way; but none of this causes us to lose God’s focus in our difficulties or hampers our ministry to the needs of others. ‘We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28). This is biblical joy.”

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “God cannot give us joy and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there.”

Joy comes only from being sure of our salvation, knowing that Jesus has overcome and conquered death for those of us who have put their faith in Him. The apostle Paul writes in Colossians 1:13, “God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” That’s the only place we will find true and lasting joy.

If we don’t rejoice today, we will not rejoice at all. If we wait until conditions are perfect, we will still be waiting when we die. If we are going to rejoice, it must be in this day. “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

I close this morning with the words of a poem, written in the form of a prayer, by a man by the name of Ralph Spaulding Cushman, in the mid 1900’s:

*Oh the sheer joy of it! Living with Thee, God of the universe, Lord of a tree, Maker of mountains,  
Lover of me!*

*Oh the sheer joy of it! Breathing Thy air; morning is dawning, gone every care, All the world’s  
singing “God’s everywhere!”*

*Oh the sheer joy of it! Walking with Thee, out on the hilltop, down by the sea, Life is so  
wonderful, Life is so free.*

*Oh the sheer joy of it! Working with God, running His errands, wanting His nod, building His  
heaven on common sod.*

*Oh the sheer joy of it! Ever to be, living in glory, Living with Thee, Lord of tomorrow, Lover of  
me!*