

Advent 2020: Joy - John 15:11

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. It is so good to be with you today and to be able to present a message with my favorite topic during the Advent season.

In joy and finding joy in Christ, because I like joy. And I'm just so excited to be able to come before you today.

And last week we kicked off the Advent season. And during this time, during the course of this year, when we speak of Advent, we focus in on some specific characteristics that we see that Jesus brought into the world of hope, joy, peace and love.

And last week we talked about the hope that Christ brings to us. And this week we are going to be talking about the joy that Christ brings to us. And when I think about the topic of joy, you know, I grew up in the church.

I've been going to church basically all of my life. And if you would have asked like 12-year-old me, you know, is Christianity joyful? I don't think I would have said yes to that.

[1 : 0 7] Like for me growing up, joy was not synonymous with Christianity. You know, I went to church because my parents made me. And all my friends were at church, you know, so I enjoyed that aspect of it.

But for me, my knowledge of God, it seemed like, you know, God kind of prevented people from having joy. Like if you were following after God, you know, you probably weren't experiencing a lot of joys in life.

And if you weren't following after God, you know, then you were. That was at least my perception as a kid. And I remember, you know, just like going to church and not really experiencing joy in God. And maybe that was some of you too. But I think for the majority of us, you know, we understand the fact that there is joy in serving God. But it's not something that I necessarily feel or experience all the time.

You know, there's certain like the way that I like to put it is almost like there's waves in your life of joy. Right? Like where there are times in your life where you really feel and experience joy.

[2 : 1 5] But then there's other times in your life where joy seems completely absent and completely not there. And when I look at the scriptures, joy is mentioned so many times in the Bible.

And I didn't even realize this growing up. Like joy is mentioned over 100 times in scripture. So this is something that is important. This is something that God wants us to understand and to be able to experience in our lives on a continual basis.

And so we're going to be looking at one specific text today in John 15. If you want to turn there, if you have your Bibles. First, John chapter 15. And in this, Jesus is teaching us how to have joy in our life.

When you find yourself there, we're going to be in John 15, starting in verse number 11. And Jesus says, Jesus here is talking to his disciples and he's telling them that he wants them to experience his joy.

And he wants this joy to be full. And when I think about, you know, the joy that we have in life, kind of what I was talking about, these ways and flows, you know, it seems like in my life, there's so often when I experience joy is often because, you know, I'm doing something for someone or I'm serving them or something good happens in my life.

[4 : 0 0] You know, we all experience those common joys in life when you give to someone or when you serve one another. And even when people serve you, you know, we have all sorts of different joys that we experience and go through in life.

Some big, some small. I find joy when I eat a chocolate chip cookie. You know, I find joy when I serve my neighbors. I feel joy when I when I give myself to people.

But like I said, this aspect of joy kind of ebbs and flows to where I experience it for a little while and then it goes away. And even, you know, in my own life, too, there's there's an attitude, you know, that we seem to have with joy where it's like, OK, I want to experience joy in my life.

I think that's something that unifies all of us in here today, whether we're followers of Jesus or not, that we want to experience joy in life in some way, shape or form.

And one way that we try to do that is by determining in my life, hey, I want to experience joy. I want to experience the satisfaction in life. And so you may be like me where, you know, either maybe the night before you're like, this day really wasn't that good.

[5 : 13] You know, I want tomorrow to be better. And so I'm determined that I'm going to have a good attitude and I'm going to experience joy in my day. Or maybe you wake up like super motivated and determined in that way.

And for me, like that almost ends immediately when my alarm clock goes off, you know. But if you're fortunate enough to make it through that, you know, maybe your joy ends on your way to work, you know, and you have experiences on the road with people, you know, that puts an end to the joy for that day.

Or most certainly, you know, when you get to work, man, I work in retail. And there's so often, you know, where I'll go into work with a good and positive and joyful attitude.

And then somebody will just do something or say something. And you're just like, man, like what are you doing, you know. And then I find myself, I have to put on, you know, what I call my Chick-fil-A voice. You know, to where it's like you're really feeling angry on the inside, but you're just happy on the outside.

Like, oh yeah, you know, like it's my pleasure to be able to serve you in this way. When in reality, you know, like the Chick-fil-A worker is not finding a lot of pleasure in giving you another Chick-fil-A sauce, you know.

[6 : 18] But it's like this outward projection of joy that we put on. But on the inside, it's not really there. It's not really present. And when I read this text of scripture, when I read what Jesus has to say, I don't think that's the joy that he's talking about.

I don't think this is what he's saying that my joy being in you and that your joy may be full is. Because it's not really full. It's kind of empty. It's kind of just manufactured joy.

So how do we experience, how do we have this fullness of joy that Jesus is commanding of us here? And one analogy that I want to draw to, that John draws to earlier in his book in John chapter 4, not necessarily talking about joy, but I think that we can put it into context here and it will make a lot of sense.

And John chapter 4, he records Jesus having an encounter with this woman at a well. And he goes to this well. This woman comes to the well and she is coming to draw water.

And Jesus begins an interaction with her and begins talking to her. And he says, I have water that will cause you to never thirst again. And this woman, you know, of course, is intrigued and interested, you know, because it's like, man, I have to go to the well every single day.

[7 : 41] It would be amazing to have something that I would never have to thirst again. And we all know, if you know the story, that Jesus is talking about a spiritual nature that he offers to us an eternal satisfaction, an eternal joy, an eternal fulfillment that things in the temporal can't really offer and can't really give us.

And just as Jesus was talking about water and spiritual water in that circumstance, I think we could fill in of spiritual joy. And I think this is what Jesus is calling us to here in this passage, that we try to manufacture daily joys and it's a struggle and it's hard.

And sometimes we get there and sometimes we don't. But Jesus is offering us eternal joy and fullness of joy. And when we look at this text, he says, These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

And if you're thinking through this text, you should be asking like one really big question. At the beginning, it says these things I have spoken to you. And then this is how the joy comes. So what were the things that Jesus just spoke to them?

Great question. Let's let's turn to John 15. We're already there. Verse number one. He says, I am the true vine and my father is the vine dresser.

[9 : 07] Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers.

And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this, my father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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.

[10:17] And then he says, These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. You might think, wow, that's a lot, Ross. What exactly is Jesus saying here in this text?

And I love the way that Jesus goes about teaching and preaching because so often he uses analogies and stories and illustrations to be able to drive the truth principle that he is trying to teach and he's trying to show his disciples and whoever's in his audience.

And a lot of times he does this in a way, you know, to be able to present the truth, but his hearers don't necessarily understand what he's talking about because their idea of who God is and what he is trying to do and accomplish is so miscued and so wrong, you know, that his stories become really complicated and hard to understand.

And you see this all throughout the gospels that Jesus really has to explain what he's talking about because their view of God was so off. But here in this story, Jesus is giving us an example of a vine and its branches.

And I don't know about you. I'm not very, like, agriculturally inclined. You know, I, my, my parents had a garden growing up. I wasn't into that. You know, if it came down to me where if I lived in the 1800s and still had to provide for my own food, you know, when it comes to farming and not target Aldi and Kroger, probably wouldn't be standing here today.

[11:45] And, um, but, but Jesus here doesn't go too in depth. You know, he gives us something that I think that we can all understand just from seeing science and just from seeing how life works.

So talking about this vine and this branch. So Jesus here is saying that he is the vine. He is the source of life that this branch gets its life from.

You know, I remember as a kid, um, I would go outside a lot and, you know, uh, we would have like flowers or, or most often weeds in our yard.

And I would remember like cutting them, you know, and giving them to my mom because I was a pretty good kid. And, um, and so she would take them and they were flowers. She would usually keep them. If they were weeds, she probably wouldn't.

And, um, and so, and so, you know, I would have like these things that I would cut and, you know, I wasn't like a typical boy and just like to watch things die. You know, like I cared a lot about life.

[12:40] And so, and so I would sometimes take like these cut up weeds, you know, that I would have, and I would try to place them back into the ground and, you know, put dirt around them and, you know, expect them to just grow like they were before.

But if you know science decently, well, you know, it doesn't really work that way, right? Like the weeds or the flowers or whatever it is last as long as the nutrients are still in there, but it's not getting any more nutrients just from being in the dirt.

And they're just going to wither up and they're going to die. And the same thing that Jesus is trying to show here is the fact that we aren't self-sustaining for this.

We have to be plugged into, we have to have a source of life in order to be able to experience this joy that Jesus is talking about here.

This, this fulfilling of what God has called us to do. So he says that Jesus is divine. The Father is the vine dresser and every branch that does not bear fruit, he takes away.

[13:43] And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes. And so what is our goal in the Christian life? Like as followers of Jesus, we don't want to just be static, right?

We don't want to just live life, you know, the same every single day. We want to be following after Christ. We want to grow and we want to do things like Christ has called us to do.

And Jesus uses this illustration of fruit a lot. Paul also picks up on this illustration of fruit and something that you've probably heard of the fruit of the spirit. Of things that as followers of Jesus,

we are to emulate, we are to try to do.

You know, some of those things is love, joy, peace and patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Like these are the fruits of the spirit.

This is what he is talking about here, that when we are plugged into the vine, that Jesus is producing these attributes in our life. And he's working our lives in a way to be able to produce these better.

[14 : 46] You know, he says here that the Father is the vine dresser. He's the one who's constantly pruning us and making us more like Jesus and producing more and more fruit.

And I'm sure all of us have experienced this in our life. You know, where we are desiring to follow after Jesus. And so many times it seems like, yeah, there are some circumstances that are really good.

And we're just seeing, man, like, like I love where I'm at right now in life. And I'm just seeing God work a ton in my life. And then there's also times where it's like, man, my life right now was really uncomfortable.

And I don't necessarily like my circumstances. But yet, if I have my focus on Christ and my focus on God, I'm seeing how he's working this out. You know, to be able to produce more fruit in my life. And this is the analogy that Jesus is giving here of what the Father does, that God is completely sovereign. It means he's completely in control over everything in life. And every situation that he brings into your life and everything that we experience and go through is his divine plan to point us back to Jesus.

[15 : 58] To point us back to our understanding that we are just like this branch. Like we can't produce the things that we need for our life on our own.

We have to depend on a source. We have to depend on Jesus and on his strength and on his life in order to be able to live the life that God has called us to.

And so we see here that Jesus is really showing the fact that we are not self-sustaining. And here's the thing. We still try to do that, right? Like we still try to be like that flower that's been cut off.

And it sometimes works for a little while. Just like the flower doesn't necessarily die as soon as I cut the stem. It still looks very much like a flower. And we might think, hey, we're still doing all right. You know, I've really stopped reading my Bible. I've really stopped praying. I've really stopped kind of engaging in church. But I'm still fine, right? Like I haven't done anything incredibly awful in my life.

[16 : 57] You know, things seem to be going pretty well. But what begins to happen? Just like the flower slowly but surely starts to die and wither away, our spiritual lives and most likely our joy begins to do the exact same thing.

To where we begin to wither. We begin to fall away. Like our spiritual lives become less and less impactful in our own lives and in the lives of others. And so Jesus here is showing that, man, you are not self-sustaining.

You need me. You need the vine in order to be able to live how God has called you to live. And he says here that this is how we find joy.

We find joy in having Jesus as the source and foundation for our life. Being our satisfaction in life that we go to and we don't look to ourselves.

Like I don't know about you, but there's sometimes we all experience a little bit of a joy looking to myself, but it's never sustaining. Like I begin to see and understand how much I fail and how much I need something higher, something bigger in my life in order to find that joy and satisfaction.

[18 : 08] And maybe you have experienced and seen that in your own life too. And we begin to search and we begin to try to find all these things that try to bring about joy and satisfaction.

Like I said earlier, this is something that I believe that unites us all. We all desire to have this joy in our life, to feel a purpose, to have an identity, to be someone, you know, who we are trying to be and to experience that joy.

But if it's found in anything other than Christ, it always leaves just an empty part in our life that we understand that there's something more, that there's something bigger.

And it has to be found in Christ as our source. And we see here that in following after Jesus, Jesus has some parameters in what it looks like.

You know, Christianity is pretty big. Over I think 2 billion people claim to be Christians. And in all of that massive big group, there's a lot of diversity in what people think and believe it means to be a

Christian, to be a follower of Jesus.

[19 : 18] But Jesus is very specific here. He says in verse 7, If you abide in me, and my words abide in you. I think this is huge.

Because a lot of times, even growing up in church, you know, I had my own version and my own understanding of who I thought Jesus was. Just because I was depending, A, on what other people have said, and then B, what I thought about it.

But I didn't really spend any time in my early days reading the Bible for myself. Of studying what Jesus actually said. And what Jesus actually did. And he places an emphasis on this and says, Hey, you can't just create, you know, who I am in your own vision and your own mindset.

It has to be true. It has to be right. And Jesus says, If you abide in me, and my words abide in you. So that means that you're studying, that you're knowing who Jesus really is.

Your understanding from the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the writings of the words of Jesus. Of what he has said, what he has done in life. And as we study these things, and as we know these things, it's going to lead us to being more like Jesus.

[20 : 28] Or at least an understanding of who Jesus is. And he says this amazing thing afterwards. He says, Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this, my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. So if we understand the words of Jesus, and what Jesus tried to accomplish, or what Jesus did accomplish in his life, and is calling us to follow after, it's going to lead to exactly that.

It's going to lead to us emulating the fruit of the Spirit. It's going to lead us to emulating who Jesus was. And so that's why he says that, If you understand the words of Jesus, and what he has done, and what he has called you to do, it is going to be your desire to pray and ask God to work in you the works, and the ways, and the words of Jesus.

And he says that God is glorified in this work, and that he does do this work in us. And I find that to be an amazing principle. I think so often in my life, I have this tendency to think almost like God is working against me in this way.

Of wanting to do right, wanting to serve Christ. But so often, I don't go to God for that. I think, man, I have to do this on my own. I have to work this out on my own self-discipline, in my own, you know, goals in life.

[21 : 58] When Jesus is saying here, hey, if you ask of the Father, he's going to give it to you. Like, this is his goal. This is what he wants you to do. But he wants you to come to him because he wants you to understand that he is your source.

That your source is not in yourself. You will never experience joy if you try to find the source of your life in yourself. It only comes through Jesus. And so we're beginning to understand this foundational level, right?

Like, Jesus is the source of our life. Like, Jesus is the source of our satisfaction and joy. And understanding who he is, studying, reading the Bible, learning the words and works of Jesus.

But just having a knowledge and just having an understanding of it doesn't always lead to joy, right? Like, joy requires an action.

Joy requires doing something about it in order to be able to experience it. And that's why he says in verse 9, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

[23 : 02] Abide in my love. Then he says, 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.

These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. So it's not only just taking an understanding of who Jesus is, but it's also working that out in our lives and following after Jesus' commands.

And so you might ask then, okay, what are Jesus' commands? And this is what I love about this text because he's tracking right with us here. He says in verse number 12, This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this that someone laid down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing.

But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

[24 : 20] These things I command you, so that you will love one another. So I don't want to steal too much because we are going to be talking about love here in a couple of weeks. And so I'm just going to give you a little bit of a prequel because I think this is vital to the text.

Of understanding the baseline that abiding in Christ, finding my satisfaction, and finding my foundation in who Christ is, as being my sustainer, and understanding his words and his works, you know, that's the baseline knowledge.

Now, how do I work that out? He says, by following his command. And what is his command here? It says his command is that you love one another as I have loved you.

And in a society today where we talk about love a lot, just as I said before, there's a million different definitions, perhaps, of what it means to follow after Jesus, if we're just going with how we think through things.

The same is kind of true of love, right? Like, there's so many different ideas and views and concepts of what it means to truly love someone, of what love truly means and working it out.

[25 : 30] But Jesus doesn't give it as this open-ended command of just love. And you define what love is. That would be super dangerous, right? Jesus doesn't do that.

Instead, he points to something. He points to himself. It says, go out and love people as I have loved you. And then he gives this great example as a prequel to what he's about to do for his disciples in a few chapters.

It says, greater love has no one than this, that someone laid down his life for his friends. And he shows here that his love for his disciples, his love for us was sacrificial.

That he gave of himself. That he gave of himself in his earthly ministry. We see all the time of Jesus in his interactions with people, giving of himself constantly.

Whether it was healing people or spending time with people. Or going to people who, you know, these religious leaders would have never touched, you know, because they viewed them as unclean and people who you don't hang out with.

[26 : 39] Jesus constantly gave of himself. And he gave of himself in the most ultimate way of giving his life in order that we might have salvation.

Now, how do we go about doing that? How do we go about loving one another in this way? We go about it by serving one another, by loving each other. You know, Jesus then goes on to give great physical examples of what that looked like, right?

Of washing his disciples' feet. Of showing them this kind of love that it takes work. You know, we oftentimes think like leaders are up here at the top and the people under them serve them.

But Jesus showed us that to be a leader means that you are serving one another. That you are loving and caring for one another. And we see so many great examples of that in the early church, right?

Like when these early Christians gathered together, showed how they met each other's needs, they were all about serving one another and loving one another. And how often in our lives, in my life, do I lack that part of it?

[27 : 48] Where I understand more the knowledge aspect, right? Like I'm in seminary, so I'm studying the Bible a lot. You know, and I don't understand completely, but I'm studying and learning the words and works of Jesus.

I have this baseline knowledge, you know, of what it means to follow after Jesus and understanding true theological principles. But then I leave off the second part that Jesus here shows that this is really important.

Following after these commands of loving one another and serving one another. And one without the other doesn't bring joy in life. One without the other doesn't bring satisfaction in life because we just have a knowledge and we're not actually working it out.

And when we understand how both of these work together so well, we then begin to understand how we have this fullness of joy that Jesus talks about.

You know, when we have our joy and satisfaction in Christ and we work it out in service to others. You know, one of the greatest examples that I see in scripture of doing this is Paul, right?

[28 : 55] Like Paul was once a persecutor. Christians hated Christianity, thought he was serving God, realized he was wrong. Jesus converts him and now he goes out and he's a vibrant missionary for Christ.

But you know what? Like he has to suffer a lot for doing that, right? Like if you know the story of Paul, you know that he was constantly thrown in prison, constantly persecuted, even beaten for his faith.

And it shows here that he was rejoicing even in that. One of the craziest stories in the Bible is Paul and Silas in jail, you know? And they're found in this awful situation.

But what does the scripture say? It says that they were singing in that jail. And you know, like I was actually overhearing a conversation the other day at coffee and they were talking about this.

Like, man, when was the last time these prisoners perhaps even heard a song? You know, like in this circumstance, there wasn't anybody experiencing joy in that jail.

[29 : 51] How in the world were Paul and Silas able to experience that? It wasn't because of their outside circumstances that we so often depend on for our joy in life because we're depending on ourselves.

Rather, it was Paul and Silas understanding that their joy came from Christ and living it out, finding their joy and satisfaction in him and serving him with their whole life to where it didn't matter what the circumstances were.

It didn't matter where they found themselves in. They had joy in who Christ was. And as we look here at this text in verse 11, these things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

This is how we experience fullness of joy in our life. It can't come from anything in ourself. It cannot come from any circumstance or outside environment that manufactures that.

It can only come through having my source of my life found in Christ and in serving out his commands and living a life like Jesus. And in conclusion, I want to point us to, I think maybe one of the greatest passages in joy.

[31 : 00] And it's found in Hebrews 12 too. And we see here how Jesus demonstrates this joy to us. And if you want, if you have your Bibles, let's just turn there because this is really good.

Hebrews 2. Or Hebrews 12 too, I'm sorry. Hebrews 12 too. Jesus, the greatest example of joy and demonstrator of joy.

And the author of Hebrews all throughout the book is pointing to how Jesus is better and just focusing on who Christ is. And here he says in this climatic text, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus, going through the most horrific and horrible death, was able to do so with joy because of what he was accomplishing. Because he loved you so much.

That he went through so much. That you might have a relationship with him. And if you are here today, and you might agree with me, you might say that, yeah, I have experienced joys in life.

[32 : 11] I think all of us have experienced at different levels joy in life. But joy is not something that I experience on a regular basis. Like I don't find myself having a joy in my life.

It ebbs and flows and mainly ebbs. And I want to call you today to turn to Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, scoring the shame, and sitting at the right hand of the throne of God.

That Jesus provided for you fullness of joy that can only be found in him. And I encourage you today to give your life over to Christ. There's nothing better that you can do.

There's nothing better that will provide this joy in your life and to have a satisfaction in who Jesus is and following after him. And for those of us today who are followers of Jesus, you know, we can still find ourselves not experiencing this fullness of joy, right?

Like we oftentimes tend to just depend on our own satisfaction and who we are, you know, in order to be able to experience joy in our lives and we see how unfruitful that is.

[33 : 19] And I want to encourage us today to look to this text, look to what Jesus has shown us and taught us, that in order to experience his joy and fullness of joy, we have to abide in him and we have to follow his commands.

We need to love one another as Christ has loved us. And it is only then that we will be able to experience the fullness of joy that is ours in Christ.

Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, thank you so much that you have loved us. Thank you that you have given us your word that we might be able to know you and to know how to live our lives and to be able to experience this joy that you have called us to.

And Father, I pray for me and I pray for everybody here that our desire would be to follow after you. That if there are those here who have never followed after you, that you would work that in their hearts and that you would convict them of their need of a savior.

And for those of us who are following after you, that you would allow us to understand that, man, we can't do this in our own strength. I can't do this in my own strength. I need you. And Father, I just pray that you would work that in our hearts, that you would allow us to be able to abide in you and to be able to work out what you have called us to do in order to experience this fullness of joy.

[34 : 41] I pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. As our band comes, we will have a couple of moments of quiet reflection.