The Fruit of the Spirit: "Joy"
Galatians 5:22-25

Last week we began a series on Paul’s Fruit of the Spirit listed in the Letter to the Galatians. The first fruit was love. Today we come to the second fruit, the fruit of joy.

22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

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I put this series together several years ago and went through my library to realize I did not have one single book on the topic of joy. I had numerous commentaries on every book in the Bible. I had lots of books on worship and preaching. I had books on prayer and pastoral counseling. I had books on death and dying, world religions, Christian ethics, theology, church history, Christian education, stewardship, leadership and mission work. I didn’t have one single book on the subject of joy, and yet it is one of the fruits of the Spirit of God. Wonder what that says!

Then I went through the list of every sermon I’d ever preached and realized I had never preached a sermon on the subject of joy. I was really beginning to feel depressed! So as a last resort, I went to the Bible! What a novel idea.

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The Bible has 171 references to joy. Even in Job, the saddest man on earth, there was a reference to joy.

(God) will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy. (Job 8:21)
There’s a wonderful passage in Psalm 30;

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\text{Weeping may linger for the night,}
\text{but joy comes with the morning.} \quad (\text{Psalm 30:5b})
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I don’t know why we don’t quote this one from Proverbs more often;

\ldots the parent of the fool has no joy. \quad (\text{Proverbs 17:21b})

Jeremiah, during the exile of Israel, talks like this;

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\text{My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.}
\quad (\text{Jeremiah 8:18})
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When the angels came to the shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth, they brought these words;

\text{"Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord."} \quad (\text{Luke 2:10b-11})

And when the wise men saw the star stop over Bethlehem, Matthew tells us,

\ldots they were overwhelmed with joy. \quad (\text{Matthew 2:10})

And James writes in his letter,

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\text{My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.} \quad (\text{James 1:2-4})
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It’s what Jesus said about joy that should most capture our attention. After his resurrection, in preparing to leave his disciples, there is a long discourse in John’s Gospel. It’s there that Jesus said these words,

\text{"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."} \quad (\text{John 15:11})

To know Christ is to know his joy. It’s his goal that we come to know this joy.
The Bible talks about a different kind of joy. It’s rooted in a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and not through material things or earthly treasures. It’s not based on accomplishments, nor can it be thwarted by failures. It’s not determined by outward appearances, health, education, money or success.

The kind of joy the Bible talks about is not based on the present circumstances. You can have true joy in life in the midst of severe poverty, sickness or even at the moment of death.

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Sounds good, but it is relatively easy to lose your joy in life. There are plenty of “joy robbers.”

- A loss in your life can rob you of your joy. Loss of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of health, loss of a marriage. Grief is like a dark cloud that momentarily covers the sunlight of joy.
- A crisis can definitely rob you of your joy. How do the good people of Annapolis, Maryland have joy today after the senseless shootings at the Capital Gazette newspaper? It’s unthinkable.
- Stress can snatch joy away. When the demands of your life outrun your resources, you can lose your joy.

But the source of our joy is not based upon our circumstances. True joy is something that God bears within us. It is a work of God, a fruit of the Spirit. That’s the point. You can’t make yourself joyous. As God’s Spirit resides in you, God’s joy resides in you.

C. S. Lewis wrote, Surprised by Joy. (I now have that book!) He reminds us that joy is not something to be pursued rather, “Joy is the consequence of being open to that which is beyond one’s self.”

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Today we celebrate communion. We “celebrate” communion. It is “the joyful feast of the people of God!” It is not another funeral for Jesus. If joy is a trait, or fruit, of God’s Spirit, then joy is a part of the Christian life. We can’t afford to lose our joy!

We are sinners, but we are forgiven sinners, called to a new way of life. We do see the pain and suffering in this world, but we also have hope in God’s power and strength. There is loss and crisis and stress, but God’s love can heal and restore us.
If you have lost your joy, this may be the place to pray to receive it again as we celebrate communion with Christ. May the fruit of God’s Spirit dwell richly within you.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: **Amen**