

Joy to the World

On the Fifth Sunday of Advent—Joy
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Sermon Outline

- Introduction
- 1. So—Whence joy?
- 2. What is Joy in A World of Happiness?
- 3. A New World Full of Joy
- 4. Many False Joys
- 5. Stealing Joy
- 6. One True Joy
- 7. Kingdom Joy is Now — Application
- 8. Conclusion

Introduction

Who are you?

Do you know who you are?

How well do you know yourself?

Last time I spoke about how faith, patience and hope were all working together in perfect purpose. The end of faith was hope fulfilled.

Joy is the fruit of that fulfilment.

But I want you to consider this:

If you have no joy, you do not know who you are.

1. So—Whence joy?

In the beginning, God created mankind for joy. We were made in the image of God to experience joy, inwardly and outwardly, in and through all things. Mankind was designed to enjoy the simple pleasure of Eden—growing, gardening, and eating its fruits.

Genesis 2:8-9,15 — And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.... The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Everything was created from joy, in joy, and for joy.

Joy is fundamental to being human, or in our case, becoming human. It is essential to our full restoration in Christ, to the image of God. You see, unlike Faith which will have its end, and Hope which will be fulfilled, Joy is forever. The Joy you have right now will always be with you and will continue to grow and grow and grow—if you have Christ.

But when we, the image of God, fell into sin and death, and the world with it, **our joy was uprooted**. We now have a partial sense of Edenic joy—which you can see in our children—but this joy is fading away like a lone flower in the dead of winter. The sun is set. The water is ice. The soil is too hard to take roots. Like a child, true joy is fragile. It will wither away in the night if it is not planted in good soil with sunlight, warmth, and water.

Yet we, by nature, as image bearers, look to the world—outwardly—like Adam/Eve did, to find joy. We look for any kind of fruit that is pleasing to the eye, to new Edens, to new pleasures, new appetites, **to make us feel alive**. This is the essence of joy.

Once we took our eyes off God, and made the source of joy about eating fruit, about the pleasures of Eden itself, we lost our joy, we severed ourselves from the source of all joy—true joy. Now, we are frozen in worldly joys (or happinesses), an excess of immediate gratifications—pleasures, passions, appetites—all of which are actually seeking to take root in the joy it once had from the foundation of the world.

2. What is Joy in A World of Happiness?

You'll often hear people of the world say things like,

- “The most important thing is to enjoy your life – to be happy – it's all that matters.” — Audrey Hepburn
- “If you want to be happy—just be you! Do more of what makes you happy”
- Even the famous phrase from the U.S. Declaration of Independence, “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”.

Our Western ethos (and its economy) is built on satisfying this kind of happiness.

This kind of happiness is about us chasing and satisfying fleeting emotions, the next high, new ecstasies—it is not grounded or nourished in the everlasting joy of the Lord. This kind of joy is sought and found in perishable stuff alone.

In fact, the Bible describes these two kinds of joy: **Temporal Joy + Eternal Joy**

We experience temporal joys regularly—for example...

Sometimes temporal joys can be twisted and distorted by sin—for example...

But temporal joy is only partial, it is a flower severed from its roots. In its own strength, it will die—joy needs spiritual nourishment to live. The roots of joy need to dig into good soil and living water and receive the light of God's grace.

Ultimately, our temporal joys desire everlasting joy—it is seeking after that which was lost.

Now, to be clear, chasing happiness is a normal response—not a good response—but it is a normal human response for determining right/wrong, or good/evil, for two reasons: (1) God designed us in His image to be joyful by nature, and (2) it is the consequential state of our fallen nature, albeit distorted by sin. When we fell, we were alienated from God, we lost the source of joy—our nature still seeks after that joy to heal and nourish itself, yet without God its roots will twist/coil back into itself.

In other words, when you see people chasing happiness every which way they can, it is a survival mechanism, if you will, twisted by sin and a hardness of heart, to bind back true everlasting, nourishing, wholesome joy that completes you—that makes you alive.

3. A New World Full of Joy

We know this is true because everlasting joy is the end game!

That is why God intends to fully restore our joy (completely) when Christ returns—this joy is inward and outward restoration. It is the healing of our disfigured image through Christ and the renewal of Eden. That is why:

Matthew 25:21 — God says to his faithful servant, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

Joy is relational. It is enlivened between two. Pure joy is integral to communion.

Revelation 21:3-4 — “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

But the happiness and joy of the world is fleeting, it’s perishing. It is a temporal, fading happiness that comes and goes with like wind. Because ‘all creation was subjected to futility and eagerly longs for the revealing of the son of God’ (Rom.8:18-22). Paul continues, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

John 16:20-22 — Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 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.**

You see, the world has a peculiar sense of joy—its soil is frozen over. It rejoices when the prophets are killed, when it has power over someone else. If your happiness is rootless, so are you. True Joy comes from an eternal (external) source—**Holy Trinity.**

So—Where is your joy?

4. Many False Joys

If you profess Christ as your Lord and Saviour, but you have more joy in the world than you do in His kingdom, in being His body, the Church (indwelt by the Holy Spirit unto life everlasting), **you are being tested: Is your joy real?**

- **Parable of the Sower** — the seeds represent spreading of the word of God and His Kingdom come (the gospel) + the soil types represent the different conditions of people’s hearts.

Luke 8:13 — And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

The person receives the gospel with joy, he’s happy about it, but it is a temporal joy, its rootless, and his belief withers and fades away when tested.

Is your joy real? Is it genuine? Sincere? Honest? Pure? Innocent like a child?

“The Ladder of Divine Ascent” by John Climacus — Step 25: On the Destroyer of the Passions, Most Sublime Humility (Page 82): “Guilelessness is a joyous state of soul far removed from all ulterior motive.”

Because of sin, our hearts are self-deceitful, wicked and perverse. We convince ourselves that this temporary satisfaction or immediate self-gratification is all I need. But it’s a lie from the bottomless pit, where nothing can take root.

- Is your joy constantly being sapped?
- Are you catching happiness from one moment to the next?
- Are you wandering aimlessly in search of that next feeling of ecstasy?

If chasing happiness around like the wind is how you find joy, you will never find it— in fact, it may be proof that true joy is not in you or working through you.

There are many false joys or carnal joys in the world that can make you happy— here are two:

1. Joy in the abundance of material wealth and prosperity:

Deuteronomy 28:47-48 — Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you.

- Who does that sound like right now? Which society?
How much more our society than theirs?
- False comforts is insurance, not assurance.

2. Joy in ungodly friendships:

Matthew 13:20-21 — As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

- If you find more joy in your worldly friendships than you do with others persevering in the faith, in the body of Christ who have the Spirit of Christ, what joy do you really have?
- If you're friends with the world, how can you suffer for His names' sake? How can you be persecuted? You know what that means?
You are in the test—right now!
Repent! Lest you lose your joy.

These are rootless joys that appear or feel substantial, revitalizing, or refreshing. It makes you feel young again! But these are illusions.

If this is where you find joy, your heart is frozen.

I.e., Projector-Fog Analogy

Satan uses these temptations of power and prestige to steal your true joy.

Don't let the illusions of the world steal your joy.

5. Stealing Joy

In the Parable of the Sower, the raven is stealing the gospel kingdom from your heart:

Matthew 13:18-19 — “Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

—he certainly isn’t stealing false joy... he’s stealing the joy of the kingdom.

How does Satan try to steal your joy?

Temptation + Persecution

He attempts to overcome you with carnal proclivities and old habits not fully submitted to the Lord, so that you give into temptations, such as sensual pleasures and carnal appetites, or persecution from social peer pressure or fear of abandonment — because Joy is intrinsically relational.

1. People come against you—lie behind your back, two-faced...
2. You want a divorce—you’re not happy with your spouse...

Yet, in God’s providence and infinite wisdom, we learn that true joy takes root and spiritually matures and blossoms when it overcomes temptations from the passions of the flesh and worldly pleasures, especially when it withstands the trials and tribulations of persecution—both physical and spiritual:

James 1:2-4 — Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be **perfect and complete**, lacking in nothing.

Hebrews 12:1-2 — Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 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.

2 Corinthians 7:4 — I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; **I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.**

Hebrews 10:32-26 — But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you **joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.** Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised

*Consider this in light of our abundance and prosperity. This passage is not about self-defence or whether it is right to defend your home. This is about a priority structure: **Is the joy of the Lord above your material possessions that are fleeting and dissolving with the world?***

Do you know His joy?

True joy sustains you—it keeps you alive! No matter what trials you face.

True joy flows out of the river of living water that heals and nourishes you to persevere.

It is purifying!

What is joy, really?

6. One True Joy

God is joy — *everyone repeat after me please... God is joy!*

Joy is one of our deepest sentiments as image bearers—a holy affection!

Joy is fundamental to who you are. It underpins your soul because it is grounded in salvation and takes root in the love of God.

Joy is the restoration of who you are, of who you are supposed to be. In other words, true Joy is who you are supposed be finding its roots.

This is why Christ came, in the flesh—to give you overwhelming aliveness and everlasting joy right now. A joy that cannot be taken away.

Joy is life! It is the Garden of God.

Joy is sacred. It is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Joy is forever. It is the Kingdom of Christ! — Rejoice!

That’s why Satan tries to steal it. He doesn’t want you to uproot his kingdom.

There is a war for the joy you have — because true pure joy is the kingdom of God.

Romans 14:17 — For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Again, Joy is intrinsically relational, the essence of which is communion with God and fellow believers.

Philippians 4:1 — Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, **my joy and crown**, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

The world is being transformed into God’s kingdom.

The joy of the Lord is in you and in your midst!

True joy is the gospel blossoming and flourishing in and through you, producing wonderful fruits for all to enjoy—it is not Joy from the world, it is Joy to the world.

Joy is the living word of God!

7. Kingdom Joy is Now — Application

How do you nourish joy? How do you withstand temptation and persecution?

Through Joy Himself—Prayer and the Word of God:

Psalm 1:1-4

Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,

nor stands in the way of sinners,

nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

but his delight [**his joy**] is in the law of the Lord,

and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree

planted by streams of water

that yields its fruit in its season,

and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so,

but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

The word of God is spiritual food to nourish the soul — it heals, it saves.

Jeremiah 15:16

Your words were found, and I ate them,

and your words became to me a joy

and the delight of my heart,

for I am called by your name,

O Lord, God of hosts.

The Word of God is spiritual food.

It is healthy, medicinal, and nourishment for your soul.

The Word is Joy!! To cure the deadness within. *Aliveness!*

Joy in what? The forgiveness of sins.

That is why Christ and Scripture pairs the Word of God and food together: “Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins...”

—If you want to know more, join us for Evening Service @ 7PM—

That is why the prophet Ezekiel *literally* ate a scroll and the apostle John one too, and it was as sweet as honey (**Ezekiel 3:3; Revelation 10:9-10**).

The prophet Job, foreshadowing the words of Christ to come, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,” said this:

Job 23:12 — I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.

Scripture cultivates the Garden of God. It is fruit from the Tree of Life “that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”

2 Timothy 3:14-17 — But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Therefore, Kingdom Joy is fulfilled in two:

- **Childlike Awe/Wonder** in the mystery and majesty of God and His creation—it inspires humility in us. Christ said unless you become like one of these little ones, you will not enter heaven. *If you have no joy, can you even be child-like?* Wonder withstands temptation.
- **Christlike Courage** in the face of death (“death, where is thy sting?” Christ has won, what is there to fear?) Cowardice is a sin. Tell your friends about Christ. Courage withstands persecution, to persevere to mature manhood.

By these fruits you will know His kingdom joy.

8. Conclusion

I asked you earlier: **Do you know who you are? Who are you?**

You are a child of Joy — tending the Garden of God.

If you don't have joy, you don't know who you are.

If you don't have joy, you are dead on the inside.

The warm light of God does not indwell you—you need Jesus Christ.

If you want this inexpressible joy, a joy that is unshakable, unbreakable, grounded in truth and love—then call upon His name! Repent in your heart and confess with your mouth, “Jesus Christ is my Lord and Saviour! I am nothing, you are everything.” And He will save you.

God had a plan and purpose just for you from the foundation of the world. He made you, with all heaven's joy, and he rejoices when you come to him, as a Father embraces his son for the first time.

He made you to enjoy Joy forever.

Call The Elders — James 5:13-16

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Benediction — Jude 1:24-25

Now to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever, who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glorious coming with great joy.

May the Lord bless you and keep you!

Go in the peace and joy of our salvation, Jesus Christ.

Amen!