

Title: *The Fruit of the Spirit is Joy*

Text: Galatians 5:22

We recently came through the Easter season and the passion week that led up to Easter. There's one verse that always helps me understand just a little bit how Jesus was able to do what he did, as much as we can, at least. There's no way to understand why Jesus would do what he did except to say it was for love. You do get a picture of what must have sustained him throughout his ordeal when you read in Hebrews where the author tells his readers, "2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

What is there that is on the other side of a horrible ordeal that can sustain you and give you the vision you need to get through it?

As I thought about that verse, I looked at A. T. Robertson's comments on that verse about joy and he compared it to Hebrews 12:16 which talks about Esau trading his birthright for a mess of pottage.

It is striking to me that rather than making some ill-conceived trade like Esau, Jesus traded his adversity for the experience of joy that awaited him beyond the cross.

We're in the midst of a series now on the fruit of the Spirit. How does the Holy Spirit work in our life and what is the evidence or indication that He is at work in our lives?

There are several things that the Holy Spirit does in our lives, but among them is the growing of Christian character that we call fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In one way or another all of these flow from love which is the cardinal Christian virtue.

I've entitled this series *Portrait of a Christian* and if we want to see what a Christian should look like, we look to Jesus, as the author of the book of Hebrews tells us we should. What is there that brought Jesus joy?

One it was reunion with his father. I've endured some tough things that I didn't want to have to go through but I grit my teeth and get through and one thing that helps keep perspective is to remember that whatever trial it is that I don't want to go through is temporary. You can get through something if you realize that you are going **through** it. Jesus was sustained through the worst suffering imaginable because he knew he was going through and on the other side, there would be reunion with His father.

The other thing he knew would be on the other side would be restoration of humanity to what God had intended before the fall. He could have joy in that God's ultimate purpose would prevail.

Maybe we need to stop here and make the distinction between joy and happiness. Happiness is fleeting. Happiness depends on your circumstances. If your happenings are happening the way you want them to happen, you'll be happy. If they're not happening the way you want them to happen, you'll be unhappy.

Joy is more enduring than that. Maxie Dunnam says about joy, "[Joy] is the gift of the Spirit that becomes a condition of the heart which is confident of its relationship to Christ – a forgiven sinner accepted by God's grace with the living Christ as a daily companion. To that he adds, "Joy becomes the expression of celebration which empowers us to be Christian."

Joy flows from your confidence in God. That's why those of us who are people of faith wonder how in the world people who don't know Christ can make it through some of the stuff they have to deal with. Maybe that's why without Christ, the adversities in our life just serve to make us hardened and

bitter. The same sun that melts butter can harden bricks. It is interesting how much of the conversation about joy happens in the context of adversity. Having confidence in God so that you're able to keep a smile on your face and have peace in your heart and have a positive outlook even though the happenings in your life aren't what you would like for them to be.

I went looking for joy in the life of Jesus and I'm sure there are many examples of Jesus experiencing joy and radiating joy and giving joy to others. I limited my search just to the same word and the same form in which it is used in the Galatians 5:22 passage. I was led to John 15 where Jesus teaches about the vine.

He says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

Jesus then concludes that teaching and tells the disciples, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." So, as Jesus sets it up here, what is the key to joy and how can we experience it? He describes the relationship between a vine and the branches of the vine. That seems to fit with any discussion of fruit, doesn't it? Jesus is the vine and he invites us into a relationship of total dependence upon him. A branch that is not in the vine is not going to have life and it's not going to bear fruit. It's not going to be good for anything but to be gathered up and thrown into the fire.

One writer says, "The fruits of the Holy Spirit are, it seems to me, largely fruits of sustained interaction with God. Just as a child picks up traits more or less simply by dwelling in the presence of her parent, so the Christian develops tenderheartedness, compassion, humility, forgiveness, joy, and hope through "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit"--that is, by dwelling in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son. And this means, to a very large extent, living in a community of serious believers."

Isn't it aggravating how our children seem to pick up all of our worst qualities?

If there's a branch that has potential but isn't living up to it, the master vintner will know how to prune that branch back so that it can reach its maximum growth potential. That's where keeping confidence in God in the face of adverse circumstances can lead to joy. Maybe you're having a rough time in some area of your life and you're not sure what's happening but you know that God seems to have zeroed in on some weakness in your character, some area where you were placing more confidence in your own flesh than you were in His plan and His purpose, maybe wanting what you wanted more than what He wanted. And maybe that's led to something that God is just having to prune away from you. He's not doing it because he's mean or vindictive. He's doing it because He loves you and has a vision in mind of what he wants you to look like and be like when it's all said and done.

Jesus says, "Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine." Jesus says, "I am faithful to do my part even when you're not doing your part, but if you're not connected to me, you can't experience what I want to do for you, and with you, and through

you, and in you.”

He says, then, if you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit and you will show yourselves to be my disciples and the father will be glorified. That fruit is a couple of different things. One, it is the lasting impact you make in someone’s life for the cause of Christ. The way to bring them closer to achieving God’s purpose for them. And second it is the changes in character that come about because of your abiding and enduring relationship with Christ.

Now as you go about, Jesus says, “Remain in my love.” Can you ever do anything to keep Jesus from loving you? Your mother will always love you, but you can do things that cut yourself off from her love. You don’t call or visit, you trash the values that she tried to teach you, and you cut yourself off from her love. In the same way, brushing Jesus aside and not spending time with him and ignoring his will for our lives is one way to cut yourself off from his love and when you do that you cut yourself off from the fruit that he wants to bear in your life.

After he gives the teaching about the vine, he says, “I’ve told you this so that my joy may be in you and so that your joy may be complete.” It’s almost like a blood transfusion, except Jesus wants to give us a joy transfusion. If you stay connected to him by spending time with him, exercising those spiritual disciplines that help you grow closer to him, you will have joy and your joy will be full.

It is interesting to see some of the other things that Jesus had to say about joy. In the next chapter, 16:29, he says, “²⁴Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” Jesus says that there’s coming a day when all of God’s intentions for this world will be fulfilled and you will understand things in a way that you don’t right now. In the meantime, though you can have the boldness to pray and to ask for things in Jesus’ name and have the faith that you will receive them, so that you may have joy.

There is a Roman Catholic priest that I have seen on a couple of different news programs commenting on different things from his Christian perspective. He’s written a book entitled *God Wants You Happy: From Self-Help to God’s Help*. I’ve already weighed in by saying that joy is better than happiness, but putting happy in the title will sell more books, I guess. The point, though, is that God wants us to have joy. Romans 14 says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

One other teaching of Jesus about joy occurs in the parables in Luke 15 which the astute Bible student will recognize as those parables that speak about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Jesus tells a parable about a shepherd who has 100 sheep and one of them wanders off. He’ll leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that has strayed and when he finds him, he’ll put it on his shoulders and come back home and he’ll invite all his friends to come together and say, “Rejoice with me; I’ve found my lost sheep.” Jesus says, “I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

He then tells the story of a woman who lost a coin and went out of her mind because of that lost coin and she tried everything she knew to recover that lost coin and when she found it, she called in all the neighbors and said, “Celebrate with me, I’ve found my lost coin.” What is striking to me and perhaps where the power of the parable lies is that the extent of the celebration seems over the top. I’m happy when I find something that I lost, but I don’t react that way. Don’t get me wrong. In the last 3 months, I’ve had 3 major scares regarding thinking that my wallet was lost. Twice, as it turns out, when I got home and changed clothes, I put my pants across our bed and my wallet fell out of my pocket and between my footboard and the mattress. The third time, I’d carried it in from the gym because I didn’t

have a pocket and laid it down and didn't remember where I had put it. I was happy or relieved to find it, but I didn't carry on that way.

As a transition between the story of the lost coin and the lost son, Jesus says, "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." That word rejoicing is that same word as the fruit of the spirit is joy. If you want to have the kind of joy that Jesus is talking about here, it comes when things that are lost are found so if you want that kind of joy, be around and involved when someone who was lost to God is found for his purposes. When a sinner comes home, there is joy.

Pastor and author Mark Driscoll from Seattle has come up with a list of things that will help us to experience joy.

First, when I spend sufficient time in the Scriptures, which were inspired by the Holy Spirit, I have joy. That is one of the primary ways in which we spend time with God. Being in nature is great and some people say, "I spend time with God in nature, but you need to have a Bible with you if it's genuinely going to be time with God."

Secondly, as the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin as you read his word, you repent. There is a kind of formula or process for experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit. You cleanse yourself of all known sin through confession and repentance and you consecrate, or set yourself apart to do his will. Then you neither grieve the Holy Spirit by doing things he doesn't want you to do or quench him by refusing to do what you've been told to do.

Thirdly, joy comes when we serve with the gifts that God has given us. Take your eyes off of yourself and serve others.

Fourthly, joy comes when you forgive those who have sinned against you, whether they've repented or apologized or not. There is joy in just letting go and leaving it with God.

Fifthly, joy comes when I enjoy what I have and when I give generously. The Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver.

Sixthly, joy comes when we are taking care of our health and we take good care of ourselves.

Seven, joy comes when I realize I'm not going to be on the mountaintop all of the time and that God gives a full range of emotions. And we maximize those moments of joy when they arise. We celebrate them.

Eight, joy comes when I rejoice in the joy of others. We talked last week about wanting for other those things that we wish we could have for ourselves. Don't resent someone else's good fortune and grow bitter. Rejoice with them. Be the first one to pat them on the back and to embrace them.

Nine, joy comes when we respond physically, and then let our emotions catch up. It's easier to act yourself into a new way of feeling than it is to feel yourself into a new way of acting.

Ten, plan fun and capture sacred moments as they come. Driscoll has 5 kids, the oldest of whom is around 14 so he sometimes prays when they're doing something as a family, "Lord, drop a fun bomb on this day," recognizing that as a moment for joy in the Holy Spirit.

God wants to give you joy through His Holy Spirit. Are you experiencing it?

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