

## “FINDING JOY”

Luke 6:17-26 Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019

As we continue our sermon series on the Fruits of the Spirit, we come to JOY, other wise known as cheerfulness, calm delight; gladness multiplied greatly; to be exceedingly full of joy! The Fruit of the Spirit is JOY!

Joyful people can be found any place and in some of the strangest of places! Being joyful is not dependent upon circumstances! Now it must be pointed out at the very beginning that there is a natural joy possessed by lots of people, a natural joy in the beauty of music or nature. There is a human joy in delightful relationships. There is joy in the satisfaction of a job well done. There is a healthy enjoyment of life. But we must also note that this kind of natural joy, at best, is fleeting. It's not permanent.

Sherwood Eliot Wirt was asked by Billy Graham to be the editor of a new magazine in 1958 called *Decision*. Not only was he the editor, but a warm relationship has grown between these two men over the years. “Millions of people have heard Billy Graham preach from the pulpit—but many have never heard him laugh,” writes Wirt. “I can testify that he loves to laugh!! At team meetings and with his family, his laughter often rings out, hearty and robust.”

Wirt has written a delightful book, *Billy*. He writes: “Like Nehemiah, Billy is a man of joy. The joy of the Lord is his strength; and the joy of the Lord brings laughter. He feels the joy of being alive in God’s creation. He is thrilled by the prospects of future bliss in heaven.”

Graham, Wirt notes, has written:

One of the characteristics of the Christian is inward joy. Even under difficult circumstances, there will be a joyful heart and a radiant face. Unfortunately, many Christians go around with droopy faces that give no outshining glory to God. A true Christian should be relaxed and radiant, capable of illuminating and not depressing his surroundings.

I have found in my travels that those who keep Heaven in view remain serene and cheerful on the darkest day. In all ages people have found it possible to maintain the spirit of joy in the hour of trial.

There are times when I feel I don't have joy, and I get on my knees and say, 'Lord, where is the fruit of the Spirit of joy in my life?' I find that the joy is there down deep---it is a deep river. Whatever the circumstance, there is a river of joy.

There is a fascinating story out of the past which gives us an insight into an exciting bit of verse which has been set to music. Horatio Spafford had booked passage to England on a ship for his wife and four children. On this crossing in the North Atlantic, the ship ran into trouble and sank, taking his four children to a watery grave but his wife miraculously escaped drowning. As soon as it was possible, she sent this succinct message: "SAVED ALONE." After being reunited with his wife, while on the returning voyage home, as the ship neared the place where his children had drowned, it is thought that this was the time he wrote the words that described his own grief and faith at the same time. It is one of my favorite songs and it ends with these words: IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL. IT IS WELL...IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL." (H. G. Spafford wrote these words in November 1873 and P.P Bliss set them to music.)

Sorrow, hurt, and grief are the most natural reactions to tough trials and testing but from the Book of James 1:2-18 we make an exciting discovery. In the worst of times we can still say, with the help of the Spirit at work in our lives developing joy in all kinds of circumstances that it really "is well with my soul."

How do we discover this "joy that lasts?" One of our major problems in this area is that we have focused on the wrong things, the wrong input, the wrong attitudes. We have missed what joy is all about. We have lost our focus, we have lost sight of what is important in maintaining joy and living the joyful life.

After forty some years of married life, this lady's husband died. For several months she sat alone in her home with shades drawn and doors locked. Finally, she decided to do something about her loneliness. She went to a pet store. As she looked over the dogs, cats, fish, and even reptiles, nothing seemed right. Then the owner showed her one of his prized parrots. "Does it talk?" she asked.

"Absolutely—a real chatterbox. Friendly disposition and a wide vocabulary. That's why it's so expensive. But what a friend he could be to you."

"Sold!" She bought an elegant large cage. Took him home in anticipation. At last a companion, something to talk to—perfect. But the parrot wouldn't say a word.

She went back to the pet store and complained to the owner. “Not one word! I haven’t been able to get a word out of that bird.”

“Well, you need to buy a mirror. A parrot needs a mirror so while looking at himself, he’ll talk.” She bought a mirror. It didn’t help—not a word from the bird.

Back she went to the owner, “The parrot still isn’t talking.”

“Did you buy a ladder?”

“No, I didn’t know it needed a ladder.” She bought the ladder—but no use, the parrot still didn’t talk. Then it was a bell, the next week a swing. Not one sound from the cage.

Then she suddenly burst into the pet store shouting, “It died! My expensive bird is dead at the bottom of the cage with the mirror, bell, ladder, and swing!” Oh, was she every angry!

The owner replied, “Well, I can’t believe that. I’m shocked. Did it ever said anything at all, ever?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact it did. As it lay there taking its last few breaths, it said very faintly, ‘Don’t they have any food down at that pet store?’”

In focusing on the right things, again from Philippians 4:4-9, we can extrapolate six words that sum it all up:

WORRY ABOUT NOTHING

PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING!

In order to do that, there are also three simple steps: Rejoice (verse 4); Relax (verse 5); Rest (verse 7)! The bondage of worry is because worry forces us to focus on the wrong things. Paul had found the secret to everlasting joy.

There is another key—Paul wrote in verse 11, “For I have learned!” It’s a process of learning and living it out. He said, “I have learned!” But the real question is, “Have you learned?” Now what had he really learned? “I have learned –THE SECRET OF BEING CONTENT IN ANY AND EVERY SITUATION!” (verse 12). What a simple discovery! Simple in concept—sometimes quite difficult to work out in the real life world of reality.

Speaking of that reality check, I would like to share with you a portion of a letter written to us on the 2019 General Conference from the Mountain Sky Cabinet. It begins:

We write to you this weekend, days before the historic gathering in St. Louis for Special Session of General conference. As you may know, this special session was called because of an impasse at the 2016 General Conference regarding the role of LGBTQ persons in the life and ministry of The United Methodist Church. At that time the delegates asked the Council of Bishops for guidance and leadership to help the church move forward. The bishops created the *Commission on a Way Forward*, consisting of 32 clergy and laity from around the world, to craft plans for the future of the church. The bishops were regularly in conversation with the commission to provide feedback and guidance.

Three plans were presented to the bishops in May of last year. The majority of bishops supported the One Church Plan, which removes negative language regarding LGBTQ persons from the *Book of Discipline* and allows annual conferences and boards of ordained ministries to determine requirements for ordained ministries as well as allow clergy and local churches to consider ministries with LGBTQ persons based on their cultural context. The majority of bishops believe that the One Church Plan honors the different places that United Methodist are in regarding homosexuality while holding us together in mission. Should this plan pass, no vote is required of local churches.

I share this with you this morning to keep you informed about what is transpiring in our denomination and how it may affect us if the One Church Plan prevails. There are many unknowns for the future but we do know “there is mutual love and commitment to each other and to the mission that holds our churches together even in the face of differences. This is the hope we hold as we look towards General Conference.” We are asked to be in prayer for our delegates as they go to St. Louis and for our church as we peer in to an uncertain future but with God’s love for us always sustaining us through the tough patches.

In the final greetings that Paul penned is one of the most intriguing verses in all of the Bible. “All the saints send you greetings, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO BELONG TO CAESAR’S HOUSEHOLD”! (Phil. 4:22). This Caesar is the infamous Nero—the man who purportedly fiddles while Rome burned. He was the Nero who was the major persecutor of Christians—the one

who threw them to the lions in the coliseum. He is the man who burned Christians at the stake. Exactly who in this household was he referring to as “saints”?

Legend tells us that while Nero was out of town, his wife listened to the message of joy Paul was proclaiming and turned her life over to Christ. When he returned he was furious. Could this have been the turning point in the decision to behead Paul?

But there must have been many others because Paul talks about saints. What happened to the soldiers who were chained to Paul—no escape for an entire watch while he joyfully talked of Jesus Christ!? What a man! What a way to live—joyfully in spite of circumstances!

The point is that we all should be joyful, in fact it could make us laugh out loud! Jesus Christ has invaded and infiltrated the very citadel of unbelief—under Nero’s nose! Therefore, my weary, joyless friend, “REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS, I WILL SAY IT AGAIN: REJOICE!” (verse 4)

And so---perhaps we have discovered that the joy of the Lord is the answer to living a meaningful life. It’s one very important element in completing the character of a Christian. This particular fruit gives us a taste of what heaven must be like!

And the ransomed of the Lord will return, They will enter Zion with singing: everlasting JOY will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away (Isa. 35:10)

David wrote that this fullness of joy is everlasting: “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasure at your right hand” (Ps. 16:11).

Sometimes, in order for us to really understand the implication of this truth, God may allow life to strip us of all outward circumstances that would normally bring a sense of happiness so that we might focus on our relationship with Him. The classic example of this comes out of the writings of an Old Testament prophet who had apparently learned the hard way—hear this and rejoice!

Though the fig tree does not bud and there  
are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails

and the fields produce no food,  
thought there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD,  
I WILL BE JOYFUL IN GOD MY SAVIOR!  
(Hab. 3:17-18).

And the Fruit of the Spirit is,,, JOY !