

Victory of the Lamb – Fueled Series – Joy

Nehemiah 8:10 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Friday was national donut day! Dude – that was cool! Discounted donuts and free donuts all over the place. What brings you joy? Share with someone sitting next to you what brings you joy. Some days it seems easier than others right. It is hard to beat the joy of parents welcoming a child into the world. When our kids are like kindergartners and they bring home a picture of truly only God knows what, we place it on the frig and it brings us and them joy! When I was a little kid, we would occasionally go to an amusement park called Western Playland. I remember when I was on all these rides whether it was the swings, or the scrambler, and I would go by my parents who were standing by the fence of the ride. They always had these huge smiles on their faces. I remember thinking, what's with them. I am the one on the ride and they are just standing there. And they look like they are having more fun than me. That actually may have been the first time I thought my parents were crazy. Fast forward a couple of decades, and we have our kids at the fair. They are going on the rides and I am standing by the fence. And as they go by they are smiling, and sure enough there I am, smiling more than they are. It is a blast, it is a great joy, to see someone else, especially your kids happy and having a great time. You know what else brings me great joy? - when people come to faith.

Today we are continuing our Fueled series, where we are look at the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5:22,23. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control.** Today we are going to look at joy but as I mentioned earlier it seems like some days are easier than others to have joy.

Joy robber #1 is circumstance. Couldn't help but think about D Day this week and how we have joy because of the sacrifice of so many. In this Old Testament book called Nehemiah, the people were captive in a foreign land. And what would make them happy is if they could go back to their country. In time a few of them were blessed to go back but when they got back they weren't happy because the fortified wall around the city offering protection was destroyed. They would be happy if the wall were rebuilt. They started rebuilding the wall and then they faced opposition. There was a threat of attack. And so literally what was happening were some were building the wall, while others were standing guard protecting the builders. It was just one thing after another. Their circumstances were never quite what they wanted them to be.

How about you and your circumstances? On a scale of 1 to 10, with one being low and ten being high, how happy are you? If you aren't a ten, what would make you happy? Here is a way to do that – **I would be happy if _____** Fill in the blank. I would be happy if I, made more money, was healthier, lost weight, was on vacation, married the perfect person. Happiness seems always to be just out of reach. Or if you get what you were thinking was going to make you happy, having it, you realize that's not it. Joy based on outward is cool enough, but it is always changing, kind of like the weather in Wisconsin. Christian joy is outside of circumstances. Nehemiah 8:10 **for the joy of the LORD is your strength.** Our circumstances may very well be tough or even terrible, but our circumstances are no obstacle to God. He redeems even the worst of times.

Joy robber #2 is guilt. The very word "guilt" can lead our hearts to drop and our demeanor to the quietness of shame. Guilt has a tendency to follow us around like a shadow. Guilt is a heavy emotion which can weigh us down making us feel as though we have a backpack full of rocks. This weight pulls us

down as we pass through each day consumed by thoughts of the past. An ancient King named David knew all about the weight of guilt. King David had everything going for him. He had absolute power which led him to think that he could have absolutely everything including his friend's wife. And so, he did. And some of you know the story gets worse, in an effort to cover up his sin, he has his friend killed. Not shockingly, he was physically and emotionally affected. His words were: **my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. . . my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.**

Are you feeling guilty of your past? Is your past robbing you of joy? An addiction, a revenge, a relationship destroyed by your thoughts, words or actions. Living in the past will not change anything. David found relief from guilt and joy as he confessed his sin and was forgiven. before and after sin confession. **Blessed (joyful) is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.** Psalm 32:1

Joy robber #3 is comparison. Comparison is one of Satan's all-time favorite games. So if you are comparing yourself to anyone, anything to make yourself feel better or worse, know who is playing you. If we are trying to make ourselves happy, joyful and confident by comparing our lives to others it will work but only for so long. We will be able to find someone who is not as smart as we are, as pretty as we are, nicer than we are. But then we run into others who are smarter, prettier, nicer, and we are devastated. Social media has at least an impact on this: we look at the pictures on FB and Instagram at someone's five second highlight and compare that to our kitchen with dirty dishes in the sink, toys on the floor, kids screaming, the car that needs repairs, and our favorite pair of pants that got ink on them somehow. Did you ever think that maybe the grass on the other side of the fence is greener because it is fake. Comparison is a thief of joy.

Do you know what these joy robbers have in common? My circumstances, my guilt, comparing others to me. Do you see it now? We rob ourselves of joy when we focus on ourselves. Did you see what brings us joy? Someone who is greater than our circumstances, someone who forgives our guilt, God. John the Baptist said: He must increase. I must decrease. When you are in a battle over you let God in for the win. You see joy begins not with us but with God. Here is something that so many of us have missed in our life. **God is the God of joy.** The fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy. Joy comes from God. Our God is both joyful and the source of joy. Joy is a description of God and a description of what he gives. God is not a kill joy, he is the giver of all joy.

Here are some things that the God of joy rejoices over. **God rejoices over creation.** God had a blast at creation. Boom and there it was. Righteous! That's decent. Day by day. After each day he says, it is good until he gets to the last day, he has saved the best for last – ever wonder where that saying came from, and he makes human beings. And he says, **it is very good.**(Genesis 1:31) Drops the mic and takes a day of rest.

God rejoices over his Son. At the beginning of Jesus ministry, God the Father said: **Matthew 3:17 "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** Nearing the end of Jesus' ministry God the Father said: Matthew 17:5 **"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

In one of the most compelling stories, of all of Scripture found in Luke 15, we learn of a man who had it all, wasted it all, and was simply hoping to return to his family not as a family member but as a worker because he knew he had blown it so bad. But when the Father saw his son coming home he ran to him. Gave him new everything. Threw a party like none other. This is such a cool story because it really

represents you and me, and God. We blew it and God gives us everything new. You can have joy because **God rejoices over you**. You are not a failure in his eyes – and yes he knows about that. And no you can't overcome it but he can and has. Maybe you have thought you have gone too far but God has gone farther to rescue you. Remember the proclamation of Christmas (Luke 2:10,11): **I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people! Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you.**“ If you are a people – this is for you! Start living in that joy of forgiveness. God rejoices over every person who repents. It brings God joy to cheerfully give you grace.

Joy comes from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As the disciples began to be filled with the Holy Spirit they went from fearful, fair weather Christ followers, to obedient, sacrificial joyous Jesus followers. They had joy in the midst of persecution because they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let's summarize where we have been so far. We want to look at our circumstances. Satan wants you to look at your sin. God wants us to look his son. Jesus has come so that you may have joy and that your joy maybe complete. Jesus has brought joy over circumstances, guilt, and comparison: Hebrews 12:2 ² **fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** We can joy in God because he forgives all our sins, removes all of guilt, takes away all of our shame. In the joy of his strength Jesus conquered death for our loved ones and for us. Joy is the inner delight of knowing we are infinitely loved by God and that not even death can separate us from him and his love. Remember when you got your yearbooks in school. You would look for your picture, your name. Have people sign it. Because of what Jesus did you can rejoice that your picture is in the Book of Life. And Jesus wrote your name not in ink, but in his blood.

The Holy Spirit works joy in your heart through the gospel, the good news of the Bible. God is speaking to you today through his Word. There are over 3K promises from God to you in the Bible. Here are some truths for you that invite you to take to heart so that your joy may be complete, and all these promises are for you, no matter who you are:

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28 Cast all your anxiety on him (Jesus) because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7 The Son of man came to seek and save the lost. Luke 19:10 In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood. Ephesians 1:7 Luke 19:10 My Zephaniah 3:17 Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.” I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:20 Take these promises to heart and no matter who you are, they will change your life.

I saw a story recently that every year \$5.8 billion worth of gift cards go unclaimed. \$5.8 billion! These are benefits that have already been purchased, but never get enjoyed. It is the same way with God's promises. All the promises of God are yes in Christ Jesus. They have been purchased by Jesus' blood! Go ahead and open up your Bible. The Holy Spirit is there and will help you claim those promises and make your joy complete.