

Victory of the Lamb – Welcome to Victory –

Acts 4:23-31 - “I have a secret . . .” Pastor Bill Limmer

Did you guys have one of these growing up? The one I had growing up was white and had like yellow and red and clowns on it. I had trucks and cars, lincoln logs, puzzles, nerf balls, etch a sketch and kinds of other toys inside. And every now and then there was a toy that I forgot all about. It was a great surprise. What was in your toy box? Share with someone sitting close by you what you was in your toy box.

The reason why I bring this up is because this morning we are continuing our “Welcome to Victory” (welcome to Victory slide) series. In this series we are looking at our mission and our core values here. And core value fun and joy. If you don’t think we have any fun around here you haven’t been looking at our FB videos, Instagram, and if you haven’t, I invite you to jump on board like us and follow us. And have a little fun. And here is a picture of my office (picture of office) upon returning from a conference.

But before we drill down into this core value, I want to make sure we are all on the same page. In week one we saw that since Christianity is a movement we will continue to be a movement too, reaching today’s people with Christ victory. We saw that since that is our mission that our mission field of Victory is not just this physical location but everywhere that you and I go, from home to work to school, to recreation, to vacation to our social media platform. (Picture of Victory, and all of our houses). Our witness field is quite expansive. We prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill us and to pour out through us so that we can be a witness to and for Jesus. Last week Pastor Ben shared with us that we are welcoming congregation, and not only that but since Jesus is devoted to us we can be devoted to one another.

Let’s look at Acts 4 and the Scriptural core value of joy. Acts is a history of the movement of the early Christian church. Here are verses 23-31 **On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.**

On their release. Peter and John are not getting out of school early. Peter and John are not coming back to their family and friends with vacation photos from Florida. They aren’t getting home after some early Black Friday shopping at Best Buy or Wal-Mart. They were before the corrupt and powerful congress of the church. The same group of people that had Jesus crucified. Their lives were at stake because it was now illegal to share the person and message of Jesus Christ. They were released by the tribunal only because they couldn’t figure out a way to look good while doing the wrong thing.

Peter and John are back before their family and friends and **reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.** They tell them about the abuse of power, the threats – not just physical but also emotional and spiritual. They were told in no uncertain terms to keep their mouths shut about Jesus. They were not to teach or preach in the name of Jesus ever again. They were threatened and the stakes were clear. We are not talking about losing a job promotion because they were Christian, but we are talking about imprisonment and even death if they continued to tell others about Jesus and give Jesus credit for what was going on in their lives. When facing persecution and intimidation, it is not really a great set up to have a day filled with joy

But Peter and John and back with their family and friends and this is what they do together: ²⁴**When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.** ²⁵**You spoke by the Holy Spirit**

through the mouth of your servant, our father David: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one. ²⁷Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. After the threats, they pray. As it is recorded it is a seven-verse prayer. Before they ask for anything the first five verses prayer are about praising God who is the creator of all things, who knows all things, and is ruler over all things and who is in control of all things, who is greater than all powers. They were praising God in the middle of their threatening circumstances.

After their praising this is what they prayed. ²⁹**Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”** Did you notice they didn’t pray for protection? They didn’t pray for a relief from the struggle. They didn’t pray that God would get their enemies. They didn’t pray for a job transfer so they could share Jesus somewhere where it is easier. They prayed that God would give them great boldness right in the middle of the opposition. They prayed that God would heal people who are hurting and who are sick. They prayed that Jesus would be glorified like none other, not even close.

³¹**After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.**

I have to ask you 2 questions. What robs you of joy? What brings you joy?

I know that some of us have had a doctor after reviewing the test results come into the room we were waiting with empty stomachs and racing hearts and give us a diagnosis of a dreaded and life changing illness or disease. I have yet to hear anyone get pumped up about a cancer, heart disease, lung disease diagnosis.

Loneliness is a joy robber. It is the desire to have relationship but have no one. You can be in a big crowd, or at dinner with family or friends, look great on the outside but you can still be lonely on the inside. Some of you know about that.

Circumstances like illness and loneliness can be joy robbers.

(toybox) Sometimes what robs us of joy is not so much an empty toy box but a toy box full of unmet expectations. We think we will find joy when we find the person who is going to make me perfectly happy. Only to find out that broken people can’t fix our brokenness. Since they are broken, they are likely to break you even more. And so some marriages are fracturing because someone isn’t happy.

We think the toys that are going to bring us happiness and joy are the house, the car, the trip, the furniture, the computer, the drone, the latest gadget. We think if we have these things, we will have joy because our life will be complete. I want to encourage you, don’t look for joy life in things that aren’t alive.

The biggest joy robber of all – unconfessed sin and unresolved guilt – a secret life. Our bones waste away (This guy David knows all about that) see Psalm 130:3-5, 1-2) ³**When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my**

strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Yikes, I don't want to play with any of those toys but we do don't we. Throughout history, whether it is in the 21st century AD or BC when people try to find joy in someone or something other than God it ends up filling our personal toybox with things like addictions, anxiety, the quest for comfort, control, grief, (guilt at the end) striving to be enough that seems like it is just out of reach isn't moms and dads, isn't students, isn't it those of us looking for love, our toybox is filled with competition and comparisons, chains of expectations, discontentment, an unsettled spirit, money, religion, a bitter and complaining spirit. And for a lot of us our toybox is overflowing with fear that a bad things are going to happen, temptations, guilt and shame.

You see you may feel like you are **surrounded** with hopelessness but you are **surrounded by God.** Whatever is in your toybox, whatever you have tried to fill your life with: We can have joy in the Lord because God is joy and God has joy over us. 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.**" Your worth is not in what you do but in what God has done for you. And here is what God has done for you Hebrews 12: **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. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.** The God rejoices over you. That God took on your sins, the greatest joy robber of all, and made you complete. And he did this out of deep joy. (Ephesians 1:7) **In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.**

When you are seeking out joy you are seeking something that you can't accomplish but something that is already here for you from God in Christ. Joy is a fruit not of your hardwork, luck, or destiny but of the Holy Spirit. Some of you will remember this: The fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy. Galatians 5. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.** As the Holy Spirit leads us to grab on to this good news, we understand that we have God's grace and favor that never changes and that leads us to never ending joy regardless of the circumstance.

Philippians 4:4 **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice.** Rejoice that God is who God is. We can rejoice even in the middle of the joy robbers because our circumstances are not in control, God is! All the loved ones you care about and are concerned about, God is in control. Your hopes, your happiness and health and welfare, God is in control. Jesus is the debt deliverer, fault forgiver, gift giver, mercy multiplier, the one who is mighty to save, the prayer listener, the promise keeper. Rejoice in the Lord who is full of grace and truth, our strong tower, refuge for the weak. God is the potter and he is making you and all things beautiful.

You may not know it but joy is a major theme in the Joy that Jesus has overcome death itself your circumstances, this doesn't mean to suppress sorrow but in acknowledging pain we can trust Jesus that the pain, the loss isn't the final word. I know how this story ends – JOY! Xian joy is faith in the hope and love of Jesus.

I C N U someone who wants joy. And you may think that joy is beyond you. You and life have gone too far down the road but listen to this: God sends an angel to some ancient shepherds and to you and me today and says. (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.** That's why and how we can rejoice no matter the circumstance.

So here is your next step: Empty your toybox of everything and everyone that you have been trying to find joy. Just take it out, throw it out. And for all the truly good blessings in life, family, friends, faith, peace, joy, etc., remember it is God who has brought you the blessing. Here is truth: Psalm 16:11 **In your presence there is fulness of joy.** Rejoice that you are created by the creativity of God, you are gifted by generosity of God, you are loved and saved by God. Restore to me the joy of your salvation remembering that your name is written in the book of life not by your accomplishments, not with pencil but with the blood of Jesus.

That is why it's ok to have fun at church, to enjoy each other's company, why there are smiles not only on the greeters faces but the Victory café's teams faces as well. That is why the music team sings out praises. There is forgiveness here and that is why there is joy here. God is the source of joy. God brings joy. God gives joy.

Remember when I talked about finding a toy that I forgot or didn't know I had and how that brought joy. There is a secret to joy. Here is the secret: **God is joy.**