Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Rejoicing Always
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:16
Code: 52-27

It is our great privilege this morning to return to our wonderful study of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. And I invite you to take your Bible, if you will, and open to that great chapter. I want this morning to preach on just one verse, verse 16, a verse with only two words, 1 Thessalonians 5:16 simply says, "Rejoice always." And I want to use that as a beginning point to speak on the subject of Christian joy.

Now you know this is part of a larger series, starting in chapter 5 verse 12 we began to discuss this matter of growing a healthy flock. Paul, concerned about the health of the flock in Thessalonica gave the instruction about how the sheep are to treat the shepherds and how the shepherds are to treat the sheep and then how the sheep are to treat the sheep. And now he comes to a new relationship, not the relationship of sheep to shepherd or sheep to sheep, but the relationship of sheep to great Shepherd. And here we get in to a look at the inner life of the believer. If the flock is to be healthy, not only does the relationship between shepherd and sheep have to be right, between sheep and sheep, but between sheep and the Great Shepherd, our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, to God Himself must be right.

And so, beginning in verse 16 and flowing down through verse 22, the Apostle Paul gives a series of exhortations that deal with the believer's inner life, our relationship to God Himself. He begins with those two brief words "rejoice always."

The discussion of Christian joy is, of course, crucial and essential to all of us who name the name of Jesus Christ. Much can be said, much should be said, much has been said. But I want to begin our study today with a statement that might surprise you. In fact, it may appear hard if not impossible to believe. Then I want to tell you why that statement is true and teach you its significance and its application. Here is the statement. "There is no event or circumstance that can occur in the life of any Christian that should diminish that Christian's joy." Let me say that again, "There is no event or circumstance that can occur in the life of any Christian that should diminish that Christian's joy."

In fact, let me go even further than that. If there is an event or circumstance apart from sin that does diminish your joy, you have sinned...you have sinned. Does that sound ridiculous given the woes and the pains and the difficulties of life? Nevertheless, no matter how it sounds the command of Scripture is explicit, rejoice...how often?...always. Any failure to do that constitutes disobedience and sin. Therefore we can say that there is no event or circumstance that can occur in the life of any Christian that should diminish that Christian's joy. It will if we react improperly to it.

Now how can we so live? How can we so live that we rejoice always? How can we live in undiminished joy? How can we transcend all events and all circumstances that occur so that nothing touches our joy? That's really what we're after today in this study.

Let's begin with the command itself, rejoice always, and make the note initially that this is not the only place that such a command is enjoined upon us. Joy is discussed both in the Old and the New Testament and there are numerous locations in Scripture where similar commands are given, not the least of which would be Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice." It's almost as if he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always," and then knows someone will say, "Except..." and so he says, "Again I will say rejoice."

In 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 13, Peter says, "To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing." We are commanded to keep on rejoicing, to rejoice always, to rejoice always and again I say rejoice. And so the command here in verse 16 is consistent with other portions of Scripture and other injunctions.

Now someone might say, "Well now wait a minute, what about Romans 12:15 where it says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep," does that not negate the command to be always rejoicing? Isn't there a time for weeping?

Yes there is. What Paul is writing about in Romans 12:15 is simply identifying with the experiences of human emotions being suffered by those around you or endured or enjoyed. If people around you are happy, then be happy with them. If people around you are sad, then share their sorrow in an empathetic, sympathetic way. That's simply an outward identification with normal human emotion and we're to share that. But even when we are weeping, we still are not relieved from the responsibility to rejoice.

You say, "Can you do both?" That's right. Second Corinthians 6:10 Paul writes, "As sorrowful yet always rejoicing." The normal experience of human emotion in sorrow does not preclude the responsibility to transcend that and rejoice. In fact, the emphasis of our text lays that out. In the English it says, "Rejoice always." In the Greek it says, "Always rejoice." And the emphasis is on the adverb, at all times be rejoicing. The emphatic note is on the "at all times." Apparently this word "rejoice," chairote(?), was an essential element in early Christian vocabulary because it pops up all over the place. When Jesus came out of the grave, one of the gospel writers says, "All hail," but the actual word is "rejoice." It probably was a greeting that was very frequently used. Frankly, it sure beats "hello" in my book. The word rejoice was used certainly by the early church. You remember that out of the council came those who had been worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ and they came saying that it was their privilege to have so suffered and they were rejoicing over that. There are a number of occasions in the book of Acts, not only that one in chapter 5 verse 41 but a number of

other ones, where we see the incessant unending independent joy of the early church. Paul and Silas not being the least were praying and singing hymns of praise to God while locked in a stinking dungeon with their limbs stretched as far as they could reach and then slammed into stocks. The agony of the stretching and the taut muscles cramping would be beyond description and yet they were singing hymns and experiencing Christian joy.

There are times when the word "rejoice" seems such a normal part of Christian vocabulary that we would assume they were very very familiar with it. Paul in that very lovely gracious benediction that closes out 2 Corinthians says, "Finally, brethren, rejoice...rejoice." It is well possible that it was a greeting frequently passed among them. Upon seeing each other they would not only say "Grace and peace," but they might as well say "Rejoice." In our Lord's final time with the disciples recorded in John 13 through 17, He mentions joy and full joy eight times. It was part of his legacy...a joy transcendent, a joy beyond human emotion responding to positive circumstances.

It is continually stressed in other admonitions, injunctions and exhortations of the New Testament and over and over again all of us as believers are commanded to rejoice at all times, no matter what is going on, no matter what the conditions we are called to an unconditional independent joy...even in times of the severest adversity the command is not rescinded. For example, in Matthew chapter 5 you're well familiar with the words of our Lord in verse 10 and following, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me, Rejoice and be glad."

In Luke chapter 6 we find also in verse 22 similar words, "Blessed are you when men hate you and ostracize you and cast insults at you and spurn your name as evil for the sake of the Son of Man, be glad in that day and leap for joy." The severer the persecution, the higher the leap. In John chapter 16 and verse 20, a marvelous passage of hope and promise. Jesus says, "Truly, truly I say to you, you will weep and lament but the world will rejoice." Sure, when Jesus dies the world will rejoice, the disciples will weep, "You will be sorrowful but your sorrow will be turned to joy." He says there there will be a day when you will no longer have sorrow, your heart, verse 22, will rejoice and no one takes your joy away from you.

Paul in writing to the Colossians in chapter 1 said, "If I have to give my life getting the gospel to you, I rejoice." James says, "When you fall into various trials, count it all joy." Peter says essentially the same thing in 1 Peter 1:6, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while if necessary you have been distressed by various trials."

No, serious problems in life, serious trouble and pain does not rescind the command to incessant, unending, ceaseless joy. And Scripture further says our joy is to be great, our joy is to be abundant, our joy is to be exceeding, our joy is to be animated, Psalm 32:11, our joy is to be unspeakable, our

joy is to be full of glory, our joy is to be with awe. And so we are to rejoice always.

Now at this point I need to say something and it is this, such joy is not natural so if you're saying, "That's impossible, what he's saying is impossible, it can't be done." You're right from the human viewpoint. It is not natural. It is, however, supernatural joy and that's the kind of joy we're talking about. We're not talking about happiness which comes from happenings or happenstance or because something just happens to be good. We're not talking about a shallow superficial emotional response to positive circumstance. We're talking about not a natural joy but a supernatural joy. It is a joy at another level. It's a divine level. That is why it says in Galatians 5, "The fruit of the Spirit is love...what's the second one?...joy." That is why in Romans 14 you have in verse 17 that marvelous statement that the Kingdom is made up of joy in the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual joy. It is a Holy Spirit joy. It is a supernatural joy.

So we are commanded to rejoice at all times and then we are instructed that it is not natural, it is not normal, it is supernatural. It is a ministry. It is a gift. It is a product. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Now someone will immediately then say, "Well if it is not natural and not normal and doesn't rise out of my own humanness and I have to depend upon the Spirit of God to produce it, then why am I being commanded to rejoice? If it's the Spirit's work why is He commanding me to rejoice?" And the answer is the same answer you have to give in all those aspects of Scripture which involved human volition. Every command in the New Testament is a command toward holiness which can only be produced by God, every command of the believer, is a command to holiness which can only be produced by God and yet my will is involved in that. And so while joy is a product of the Spirit of God, it is not bypassing my volition. It is not bypassing my will. The Holy Spirit gives this supernatural Christian joy, it is spiritual, it is supernatural, it is divine, it is a work of God in the inner man, yet I must exercise my will over the flesh for that Holy Spirit work to take place. I must be involved. It is a work of God but not without my will. The experience of Christian joy flows from God through the Spirit and then it has to flow through me.

So, first of all, we are commanded to unceasing joy. Secondly, we acknowledge that it is not natural, it is supernatural, the work of the Spirit. But thirdly, it demands the cooperation of my will. Now that should lead us to a definition. What kind of joy are we talking about? Now if my will's got to be involved in it, what is it? The Holy Spirit certainly doesn't need it defined, He knows, but I'm not sure I do. So if I have to get my will activated in this process, what is the joy by definition that I'm looking for?

Now listen very carefully, this is the heart of what I'm going to say. Here's the definition. Christian joy is the emotion springing from the deep-down confidence of the Christian that God is in perfect control. Let me say that much again. Christian joy is the emotion springing from the deep-down confidence of the Christian that God is in perfect control of everything and will bring from it our good in time and our

glory in eternity. Let me say that again. Christian joy is the emotion springing from the deep-down confidence of the Christian that God is in complete and perfect control of everything and will bring from it our good in time and our glory in eternity. That's Christian joy.

Christian joy is not an emotion on top of an emotion. It is not a feeling on top of a feeling. It is a feeling on top of a fact. It is an emotional response to what I know to be true about my God. That's the substance of it. All of us should be in the habit of constantly expressing joyful wonder when we contemplate the unchanging eternal relationship with God that we have through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now follow the sequence. We are to rejoice all the time. That is not normal, that is not natural, that is supernatural. It is a work of the Spirit of God but it demands our will. If our will is to be activated in it we have to know what we're talking about. And what we're talking about starts with a deep- down confidence that God is in control of everything and He is working it for our good in time and our glory in eternity. If I can fix that great reality in my mind, then I have that deep-down base off of which my Christian joy can spring. All right? So much for an understanding of the command then.

Now I want to take you in to building that base, that deep-down confidence. But I want to approach it from the standpoint of the question why. Somebody says rejoice always and somebody will always say why...like the little kids. Why? Why do I have to do that? Let me give you some reasons to motivate your obedience to this command and the very reasons that I'm going to give you will help lay the foundation of confidence. Okay? Why should I obey the command to always rejoice? I've got problems in my life, I've got difficulties, things aren't going the way I want, I don't have the job I want, I don't have the circumstances I want, it's not all the way I like it. Why should I rejoice always?

Reason number one...as an act of appreciation for the character of God...as an act of appreciation for the character of God. Oh this is so important. In 2 Chronicles chapter 7, listen to verse 10, "On the twenty-third day of the seventh month...that having to do with the feast Solomon set...on the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people to their tents rejoicing and happy of heart because of the goodness that the Lord had shown." See, that's where it starts. My joy starts in the character of God, a happy heart, a rejoicing heart because of the goodness that the Lord has shown.

Listen to the words of the psalmist in Psalm 28 verse 7, "The Lord is my strength and my shield, my heart trusts in Him and I am helped, therefore my heart rejoices and with my song I shall thank Him." Where's the joy coming from? Your circumstances? No, no, my God, He's my strength, He's my shield, my heart trusts in Him, I am helped. My joy begins in the character of My God, independent of my circumstances.

In Psalm 71:23, "My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to Thee and my soul which Thou hast redeemed." When I think about what You've done for me and I start to praise You, I'm filled with joy.

In Psalm 89 and verse 16, and we can't obviously look at all of the possibilities, "In Thy name they rejoice all the day." I just love that.

What are they rejoicing in? In Thy name. What does he mean "Thy name?" Thy character, because of who God is, because of what He's done. Isaiah 61:10 says He's clothed us with the robes of righteousness.

In the New Testament I cannot resist a reference to Luke 10:20, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." Is that marvelous? God wrote your name in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world, that's because He's a sovereign gracious loving merciful compassionate God, rejoice in that. That's the ground of your joy, the character of God...the character of God. That's where it all has to start. In Nehemiah, one more verse, 8:10 it says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." When you learn to joy in who God is, you become strong.

Second, another reason for rejoicing always is as an act of appreciation for the work of Christ. Not only as an act of appreciation for the character of God, but as an act of appreciation for the work of Christ. Stop to realize what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you, though you be utterly and completely unworthy, undeserving. That is why the angel said in Luke 2:10, "Do not be afraid, behold I bring you good news of a great joy." What is it? "A Savior." The Savior brings joy. In John chapter 15 and verse 11, another text of Scripture, "These things I have spoken to you...Jesus said...that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full." Everything I say, everything I do is to produce joy for you...for you.

Paul writing in that great fifth chapter of Romans talks about the redemptive work of Christ, His atonement on the cross and he says, "It is in this great work of Christ that we exalt, that we rejoice." In fact, in Philippians 3:3 Paul says that a Christian is one who worships in the Spirit of God and rejoices in Christ Jesus.

I don't care what's going on in your life. I don't care what your problems are. I don't care what the difficulties are. You have an eternal salvation produced in the wonderful work of Jesus Christ and granted to you through the sovereign choice of God and in those matters you can rejoice. Listen to 1 Peter 1:8, "And though you have not seen Him you love Him, and though you do not see Him now but believe in Him you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressable and full of glory...why?...because you have salvation," he says in the next verse.

Thirdly, rejoice always not only as an act of appreciation for the character of God and the work of Christ but as an act of appreciation for the ministry of the Spirit...as an act of appreciation for the ministry of the Spirit. Back to Romans 14:17, "You have joy in the Holy Spirit." It is the Spirit of God who is producing love and joy. He is...He is interceding for you constantly with groanings which

cannot be uttered so that your otherwise wayward prayers are brought to conform to the will of God...Romans 8 says. He is the one at work in you to make things produce divine purpose and goal. The Spirit is the one who links you to Christ and is the guarantee of your future inheritance, He seals you, indwells you, He fills you for service and power, He enables you, He gifts you. Our of appreciation to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we should rejoice always. Nothing can touch the character of God and diminish it. Nothing can touch the work of Christ and diminish it. Nothing can harm the work of the Spirit of God, it will accomplish its purpose. The triune God is at work and that is plenty of reason for unceasing joy.

And now let me move in this little list from the workers, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, to the work they're doing. Here are some more reasons for joy. Number four, as an act of appreciation for spiritual blessings...as an act of appreciation for spiritual blessings. Stop to think about the fact that you, according to Ephesians chapter 1 verses 3 and 4, are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. Stop to think that you have all things pertaining to life and godliness. Stop to think that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and you are complete in Him. Stop to think that you have become partakers of the divine nature. Stop to think that my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus. Stop to think that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. There is no end to the continual flow of gracious blessing in your life and that is reason enough for unceasing joy.

Number five, we ought to rejoice always as an act of appreciation for divine providence, as an act of appreciation for divine providence. What is providence? I've taught that before, I only remind you, providence is a term used to describe God's ability to orchestrate the innumerable contingencies that exist in the universe and make them all work together for your good in time and your glory in eternity. God literally orchestrates every...every single piece of space, matter, time, force and energy so that it all congeals in a perfect plan and purpose. Every thought, every word, every act by every being that exists, every natural, every supernatural thing moves together to fit the perfect plan of God even though from their own viewpoints they are an innumerable number of independently acting agencies.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

Simply stated it's summed up in these words, "All things work together for good to them that love God and are the called according to His purpose," Romans 8:28. No matter what's going on in your life there ought to be unceasing thanks and joy over the divine providence as God orchestrates everything for your good and eternal glory... God, the God who is able to keep you from falling, who holds you fast.

Number six, we ought to have unceasing joy as an act of appreciation for the promise of future glory...as an act of appreciation for the promise of future glory. Or if you want it simple, as an act of appreciation for heaven. No matter what is going on in this life we know this, that the one to whom we've committed our life is going to keep it until eternity. He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. That which I've committed unto Him, He will keep. The Apostle Paul had it so well stated by the Spirit of God when he was inspired to write about his own rejoicing. He says, "I rejoice, I will rejoice." Why, Paul? "Simply for to me to live is Christ, to die is...what?...gain." If I live on in the flesh fine, if I go to glory better, I rejoice because of the hope of future glory.

The psalmist in the Psalm I read earlier, same thing, the psalmist says, "I have set the Lord continually before me." I look at God, I look at His character, "Therefore my heart is glad, my glory rejoices." Why? "He will never abandon my soul in the grave, He will never allow me to undergo decay. He will show me the path of life." That's resurrection. "I will be in His presence at His right hand to find the pleasures forever." The psalmist had the hope of future life.

In Hebrews chapter 10 there is a great statement in verse 34, talks about those who willingly joyfully accepted the seizure of their property unjustly because they knew they had a better possession and an abiding one. They were joyful even when they lost their property to plunderers because they had their focus on a better place, a better possession.

Why should you rejoice? What reason? As an act of appreciation for the character of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. As an act of appreciation for spiritual blessings, divine providence and the promise of future glory.

Give me a few more right here. Number seven, as an act of appreciation for answered prayer...as an act of appreciation for answered prayer. Do you take it as a little thing that Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in My name, I'll do it,"? Is that a small thing? Is it a small thing when Jesus promised the Spirit in John 16? He promised the Spirit and He said, "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name, ask and you will receive that your joy may be made full." What a prayer promise. I'll send my Spirit and when my Spirit comes to dwell in you and causes you to cry, "Abba, Father," know this...that when you ask I will send what you ask that your joy may be made full. Do you appreciate answered prayer? Do you appreciate the fact that when you cry out to God He hears and answers your prayer and shows you great and mighty things which you may not know?

No matter what's going on in your life, unceasing joy is the fruit of one who appreciates answered prayer. God doesn't have to do that, He does it. He answers your every prayer according to His perfect will for your ultimate good in time and your glory in eternity.

Number eight, another reason to rejoice unceasingly as an act of appreciation for the Scripture...as an act of appreciation for the Scripture. You ought to be so grateful for the guide that you have in the Word of God, for its resources, for its instruction. That no matter what is taken away from you, as long as you have the Scripture you have the most precious commodity. It is more to be desired than gold, yea then much fine gold, it is sweeter also than honey in the honeycomb, Psalm 19 says. And Psalm 119, the psalmist writes in verse 14, "I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies as much as in all riches." I just rejoice in the Word, he's saying. In verse 111, "I have inherited Thy testimonies forever, they are the joy of my heart." Verse 162, "I rejoice at Thy Word as one who finds great spoil." Jeremiah 15:16, Jeremiah said, "Thy words were found, I did eat them, Thy word was in me, the joy and rejoicing of my heart." And when Paul says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly," in Colossians 3:16 he says, "As the Word is richly in you, you will speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns, you'll sing, you'll make melody." There should be joy out of the appreciation of the food and the nourishment of the Word of God that feeds your soul and is a compass and a guide to your life.

Two more, number nine, you should rejoice always as an act of appreciation for Christian fellowship...as an act of appreciation for Christian fellowship. Are you grateful for the wonderful family that God has given you? In 1 Thessalonians 3, our very book, verse 9, I love what Paul says, "What thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account?" I don't even know words to say how much joy there is in just knowing you...just sharing with you...just fellowshipping with you. In 2 Timothy 1:4 Paul says to Timothy, "I long to see you even as I recall your tears so that I may be filled with joy." Just being with you is joy, source of joy. A little letter to Philemon in verse 7, Paul says, "I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love."

The love of the saints, a source of joy. Second John 12, John says, "I have so many things to write to you, but I don't want to do so with paper and ink, I hope to come to you and speak face to face that your joy may be made full." There should be joy in Christian fellowship, unceasing, unending joy. That fellowship can never be broken.

And lastly, number 10, why rejoice? As an act of appreciation for gospel preaching...as an act of appreciation for gospel preaching. That's so wonderful. Paul in Philippians 1 says, "Christ is preached and I rejoice...I rejoice." In Acts 15 perhaps even more focused on the point we're making, verse 3, "Therefore being sent on their way by the church Paul and Barnabas were passing through Phoenicia and Samaria describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles and were bringing great joy to the all the brethren." Do you get joy out of that? Or do you mope around in your self-focused world and your little narcissistic navel-watching cult, sort of turned in on yourself and just because it isn't all well with you you can't rejoice even though many are hearing the gospel and repenting and believing and being converted? That's an act of appreciation for gospel preaching that leads to joy.

Should you rejoice always? Absolutely. Why? In appreciation of the character of God, the work of Christ, the ministry of the Spirit, an act of appreciation for supernatural blessings, divine providence, future glory, answered prayer, the Scripture, Christian fellowship and gospel preaching.

Third point I want to make, hindrances. You say, "In the light of all of that if I don't have joy, what's the problem?" Well you have some hindrances. Now listen very carefully cause I'm going to go through these rapidly but I want you to hear me.

There are a number of hindrances. Number one, if you're not experiencing joy I want you to check this inventory. Number one, false salvation...false salvation. There are some people who have no joy because they have no true source of it. They don't have the Holy Spirit. They aren't converted. They aren't saved. They're in the church, they're not saved. You remember in Matthew 13:20 and 21 that the seed was sown in the soil that had the rock bed, the rocky soil and it says that they received the Word with joy but it was very short-lived, and the first time a trial came, it was gone. There are some people who will muster up a human joy but it won't sustain itself where there's no indwelling Holy Spirit to sustain it on a supernatural level. And so the first trial that comes along just wipes it out. Supernatural joy comes from the Spirit of God who only indwells true believers. False salvation, cheap grace, can't produce Christian joy, it produces a false substitute that doesn't last.

Second hindrance...Satan himself. I believe Peter says it when he says Satan goes around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. There is a destruction there and that destruction is the destruction of joy and peace and contentment. Satan wants to come at you and tempt you in your trials to steal your joy. That is why Paul says to the Corinthians, there is no struggle you're going to go through that is more than you can bear. But in the middle of that thing, you know, the sad...the power of God is available but the difficulty comes because of the onslaught of the temptation of the enemy. Satan wants to steal your joy. So hindrances to joy...very simple, false salvation which can't produce any true joy and Satan himself who will come after you in the temptation, in the midst of your trial that comes after your joy. So consider the source if you're struggling at that point.

Thirdly, a third hindrance is ignorance...ignorance. Listen to it as simply as I can say it...bad doctrine steals joy...bad theology, an inadequate grasp of God's sovereignty, an inadequate grasp of Christ's perfect atonement, an inadequate understanding of the security of the believer, a failure to comprehend the ministry of the Holy Spirit, a failure to understand all spiritual blessings vouch safe to us in Christ, a failure to comprehend the resource of prayer, any kind of bad theology fails to recognize the reasons for joy and steals our joy. That's why John says when he writes his epistle, "My little children, these things I write unto you that your joy may be...what?...full." I'm teaching you theology so you'll have a foundation for joy. If you don't under...if you don't believe in the character of God that is consistently gracious, merciful, kind and compassionate toward his own, you've got a problem because you may wonder why bad things are happening to you and you may think God is doing it because He's inconsistent. If you don't believe God is sovereign and in control, you may think

things are happening to you because God can't help it. That will take your joy. If you don't understand your security in Christ, you're going to worry every time something comes along that you've lost your salvation and that will rob your joy. Bad theology will steal your joy...ignorance.

Number four, unbelief...unbelief. Unbelief is simply the failure to believe what you know. You can not be ignorant but you can be unbelieving. It follows the previous one, to disbelieve the things that are true. It's one thing to be ignorant, you don't know what's true, it's something else not to believe what you know has been said to be true. If you don't believe, if you can't generate by God's power in your life and by yielding to that power the faith to believe and put up the shield of faith, then all the fiery darts are going to hit you. So if you don't believe in the security of the believer, or you don't believe in God's sovereign and providential control of everything and you don't believe that eternal glory is established and you don't believe that God will never let you be tempted above that you're able and you don't believe that all spiritual blessings are yours in Christ and you're able to do all things in Him, if you don't believe that even though you know it says that, you're going to have a problem. You're going to lose your joy. That's called doubt, doubt will destroy joy.

Five, ingratitude...ingratitude. This is the attitude that never has enough. If you're an ungrateful person, you're going to experience a loss of joy. The person that never has enough, always expects more, always wants more, always demands more, give me more...no matter what the Lord does it's never enough, no matter what they have it's never enough. The Lord gives them a job, it's not the right job. The Lord gives them a partner for life, it's not the right one. No matter what the Lord does it is never enough. There's no reverence, there's no humility. By the way, ingratitude is the ugly child of pride. Ingratitude will kill your joy because you'll never have enough. If you don't learn to thank God for every little thing He does, for everything that He has given you, for every blessing you have, if you're always saying, "More, more, more, more," and you live in that utter discontent, it breeds ingratitude and it steals joy.

That leads to number six, false expectations...false expectations. This is the aberration, by the way, that Jesus has promised to make your life happy, rich, successful, healthy and full of miracles. That Jesus is just going to do tricks upon tricks for you and deliver all kinds of fabulous rich things. That sets up people for a loss of joy when Jesus doesn't deliver. That's why the prosperity gospel is so deadly because it gives people false expectations that they're all going to get healed of all their diseases, that Jesus is going to make them wealthy, that all these good things are going to happen, they're never going to have problems. Those false expectations will destroy your joy because that isn't how it's going to be, folks. Jesus had another plan, here is His plan..."In this world you will have trouble," John 16:33...you'll have trouble, that's a promise...that's a promise, you'll have trouble...not well, trouble; not prosperity, trouble; not successful, trouble. "But I have overcome the world," that's the source of your joy.

Paul learned that Again in Philippians chapter 4 he knows that, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly," he says. It's easy for me, "I've learned to be content in whatever circumstance I'm in." I rejoice greatly whatever is going on, if I'm wealthy or if I'm poor. But if you have false expectations of what Jesus is supposed to deliver, it will steal your joy.

Number seven, and this is the source of the last two, is just plain ole pride...just pride. Self-centeredness...if you're just centered on yourself, you're never going to be happy because you know something? Nothing is more miserable than just having to constantly be fooling with yourself, that's a miserable relationship. Self-centeredness, morbid self analysis, self analytical baggage that makes you focus on yourself is deadly to joy. That's the major major...one of the major faux pas in current contemporary counseling. Psychological victimization and abuse therapy has people all turn inwardly and they start to look at themselves and get in touch with themselves and they use the phrase "listen to yourself...listen to yourself...listen to yourself." And what you're going to hear is a lot of baloney. What you're going to hear is deception because your heart is deceitful. What you're going to hear is unrealistic guilt that can't accept forgiveness. What you're going to hear is hatred and bitterness toward somebody else that you're blaming for your problems.

Let me tell you something, no healthy person listens to himself. Healthy people talk to themselves. Healthy people talk to themselves, they don't listen. They say, "Self, quiet, here's what the Bible says, get in line." I'll tell you something else, that's...that's true in life. Wimpy people listen to themselves, strong people talk to themselves. They discipline themselves, they pull self in to line with truth. Don't be listening to yourself, what you're going to hear will just mess you up. You listen to the Word of God and then you talk to yourself. Pride...pride will just...all that introspection, that self- centeredness will just destroy your joy.

Number eight, forgetfulness...forgetfulness. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," Psalm 103:2 says, "and forget none of His benefits." Forgetfulness will steal your joy. One of the reasons that you keep that memory bank, one of the reasons that God doesn't let you forget is not just so you can remember your times tables, not so you can remember your phone numbers and your addresses, one of the reasons God gave you a memory is so you can store up a cataloging of all of His benedictions. You understand that? And it's good for you to go back and recite them again and again and again. Read how the Old Testament psalmist does that over and over and over and over, keeps reciting the catalog of blessing which was a part of his own experience in redemptive history. Calls to remember, calls to remember, even Jesus to the church in Revelation, "Remember from where you are fallen, Ephesus, and go back and do it the way you did it then and knew the blessing of God."

What is it that hinders joy? What steals it? False salvation, Satan, ignorance, unbelief, ingratitude, false expectations, pride, forgetfulness...number nine, prayerlessness. This is the attitude I'll trust in my own resources, I don't need prayer, I can figure it out. That will take your joy when you fail continually. Paul again in Philippians 4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice." How

can I do that? "The Lord is near, be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer, supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made." See, the source of his joy was prayer.

So what will steal your joy? Prayerlessness, trusting in your own ingenuity, your own resources. And one last one, and listen very carefully, this is the climax and the conclusion. Feelings...feelings will steal your joy. Emotions, this is the major issue that hinders joy. You get victimized by emotion. This is a major problem. People lack the discipline to operate their life on an understanding of divine truth and thus they plunge in to the random undisciplined sea of emotion. And what they do is, they say, "Well how can we rejoice when we don't feel like it?" You see, for them joy is a feeling on top of a feeling and if you have the feeling then you can have another feeling called joy. They say, "How can we control our feelings? After all, your feelings are not controllable." That's a lie right out of the pit. Your feelings are..they better be controllable, you've done very well so far this morning, you've been here a long time and a number of you have not said what you have thought. A number of you have not done what you felt like doing. You've restrained yourself. If you can do it for an hour and a half, you can do it for a longer time. You keep your emotion in check all the time. Some of you may have felt like standing and shouting "glory," you didn't do it. Some of you may have felt like leaving, you didn't do it. Some of you felt like sleeping, you did it. (laughter)

You...you and I and all of us learn that we must control our feelings. The idea of the philosophy of today...if it feels good, do it...that...we don't buy in to that truly. If we did we'd have...of course, we buy in to it enough to have an escalating criminal society because we're telling people to do whatever they feel like doing and so they do what they feel like doing. And then we have to close down on them.

How can we control our emotions? How can we not be controlled by our feelings? Let me give you some simple things to recognize. First of all, recognize that God created us as rational beings and our feelings are to be controlled by reason. Your emotion is to be a responder to your mind, to reason. We can't all give in to our feelings. We'd have absolute chaos. There wouldn't be any human relationship that would survive. If every person did exactly what he felt like doing and said exactly what he felt like saying it would be the end of the society we know as humanity. Can't be led by your feelings, they can't govern your life. So sooner or later you've got to get your feelings under control and what controls your feelings is what you know to be true. And then we're back to laying down the foundation of all those reasons to rejoice...right?...in the character of God, the work of Christ, the ministry of the Spirit, and all that they provide.

By the way, the unregenerate people can't control their feelings, they can't. They really can't control...society will try to put some constraints and some controls on them but as society loosens up the constraints and the controls, people begin to operate and show more and more the inability to have the control of their feelings. They have some social compunctions to do that but they can't genuinely control their feelings. On the other hand, one of the purposes of God in salvation, one of the purposes of God in the new birth was to restore your feelings to their God-intended role. So as a

Christian we have a new nature and now our feelings can be controlled by the will of God which is given to us through the Word and the Spirit. So now our emotions respond to what we know is true about God, Christ, the Spirit. Our joy is not a result of feelings. It's a result of the knowledge of the truth. I know this, there is the deep down confidence, there is that base of truth from which my joy springs.

Job was no victim of his feelings. He said, "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him." David was no victim of his feelings when he was being hounded by Saul, he said, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom shall I be afraid?" Stephen was no victim of his feelings when he was being crushed to death under the bloody stones and said, "Lay not this sin to their charge." Paul was no victim of his feelings when being mercilessly and viciously attacked by those Corinthian false apostles and he said, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." That's God's truth and so I'll rejoice in my sufferings. Certainly Jesus was no victim of feelings when He said in the garden, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." And on the cross, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." No, the great stalwarts aren't victims of their feelings, feelings will hinder true joy. You've got to discipline yourself so that you live not on your feelings but on truth and off the truth springs the true joy.

The joyful Christian thinks more of his Lord than he does his personal difficulties. The joyful Christian thinks more of his spiritual riches in Christ than his poverty on earth. The joyful Christian thinks more of his glorious eternal future than his present pain. And when you live like that, the command "rejoice always" becomes possible...not only possible, desirable. Let's pray.

Father, it's been good this morning to be so immersed in this truth. Thank You for it. May it be applied in our lives for Christ's sake. Amen.

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