Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Joy
Selected Scriptures
90-122

Well, this morning I want to go back to our study of the anatomy of the church, and I want to talk about another attitude. A lot of people were prevailing on me to keep preaching on forgiveness. Some people said to me last week's message on forgiveness was so potent that they thought I knew their life story and I knew what was going on in their life. In fact, several people said to me – not just one, but several – said, "You know, that was for me, and it started uncovering things in my life that I need to deal with, and I don't know if they're all out, so could you keep preaching and keep exposing me until I get all dealt with?" That was a wonderful, wonderful response.

You know that people love the truth and love the Lord when they love the reproof and the correction that the Scripture brings to bear upon their life. Very encouraging. But the Lord will bless us, I think, as we even move on from that matter of forgiveness. Obviously, we'll touch it again. But I want to move to the next attitude in this whole matter of the internal systems that need to exist in the church. We've talked about how the life of the church flows through certain attitudes, spiritual attitudes, like faith, and obedience, and love, and humility, and unity, and of course, forgiveness. And I want to talk about another one of those – in fact, two of them today – both of them come out of the same passage of Scripture.

So turn to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5. There would be a number of places in the Scripture we could go to pick up this next spiritual attitude that should characterize the church. There could be a lot of scriptures. In fact, most notably the book of Philippians would be a place to go, because it rings this chime again and again. But I want us to go to 1 Thessalonians, because it's so concise, and it's so inescapable, and it's so direct. In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, and verse 16, we read this very short verse. "Rejoice always." That's it. In fact, in the original language the adverb comes first, and so it goes like this, "Always" – and the command is in the presence tense, to the latter part would be – "always continue to rejoice – always be rejoicing."

Now, that is the command of verse 16, and the attitude I want to talk about is joy – joy. There's plenty of reason in the world in which we live to be sad, distressed, disturbed, upset, concerned, anxious, stressed out, full of fear, doubt – but not for the Christian. We are commanded to rejoice always. And that's not an isolated command; seventeen times in Paul's letter to the Philippians he talks about joy. Just a few of those come to mind – Philippians, chapter 2: "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. And you, too, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me," no matter what's going on – even if I am a prisoner, and even if I might lose my life and wind up being a sacrifice to get the gospel to you, I rejoice. I share my joy with you, I expect you to rejoice and share your joy with me.

In chapter 3, verse 1, of Philippians, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." In chapter 4, verse 4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice." We are commanded to rejoice. We are

commanded to have joy. I'm going to make a statement now that might seem a little bit hard, if not impossible, to believe, but I mean what I say, and I'm going to try to show you why. Here's the statement: There is no event and there are no circumstances in life that should diminish the Christian's joy. Let me say that again. There is no event and there are no circumstances in life that should diminish the Christian's joy.

In fact, let me go further than that. If there are circumstances or events that do diminish your joy, you have sinned – you have sinned. Does that sound ridiculous given the woes of life? Does that sound like an impossible thing to believe? But the Bible commands, "Rejoice" – how often – "always." In case you didn't get it, "again I say rejoice." Now, let's look at this command here, and let's see why what I just said is true, why there is no event or circumstances that occur in the life of a Christian that should diminish that Christian's joy. Let's look at the command, first of all. "Rejoice always," and as I said, it is not isolated; such a command is repeated, certainly in Philippians, and elsewhere.

I think about 1 Peter 4:13. It says, "Keep on rejoicing, even to the degree that you share in the sufferings of Christ." Paul said, "Even though I am suffering, I'm rejoicing." Peter says, "To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, to that degree keep on rejoicing." It's sort of like as your suffering escalates, so should your rejoicing. Scripture has a lot to say about this – a lot to say about it. You remember that in the discourse that our Lord had with the disciples in the upper room on the night of His betrayal. John 13 shows Jesus sitting down at the table with the disciples, and from then flowing through chapter 17, He has this amazing dialogue in which He leaves a legacy to them.

I call that section the legacy of Jesus, even wrote a book on it. And one of the things that Jesus leaves His own is joy – and eight times in that section, He refers to joy or full joy. He even says, "Everything I'm saying to you is so that your joy may be full." I'm leaving, I'm going to die, I'm going to be crucified, I'm not going to be here, I'm not going to be with you. You're going to have a lot of trouble. In this world, you'll have tribulation. They'll pursue you. Those who are leading the synagogue will come after you; they'll take your life. If they've persecuted Me, they'll persecute you – and all of that. But I'm telling you all these things because I want you to have full joy.

Wow. In the midst of frightening circumstances, the death of the Lord, the loss of Him who was their life, as He was going to leave them, in the midst of the anticipation of terrible suffering, and persecution, and even death, in all of that, He said, "You should have full joy." Continually this is stressed. And adversity doesn't change it. Let's go back to Matthew, chapter 5, for a moment. It doesn't matter how severe the difficulty is; it doesn't change the requirement. Verse 10, of Matthew 5: "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."

Boy, that's not always easy to do when you've been insulted, persecuted, and all kinds of evil things have been said against you falsely. Rejoice and be glad. There's a very similar passage in Luke's gospel. Luke 6:22 and 23 says, "Blessed are you when men hate you," and the word "blessed" means happy. "Happy are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, because you're associated with Christ." Listen to this: "Be glad in that day and leap for joy." Leap for joy? Jump for joy? That's like when you come home and after a day at work, and you're whistling a tune and singing a song, and a smile is from ear to ear.

And you're skipping along and just kind of feeling in a bouncy mood, and maybe you do a little jig, and your wife says, "What happened to you?" "Oh, I was persecuted today, I was insulted, ostracized, and all manner of evil was spoken against me." I was having a conversation not long ago with a friend, and he was telling me about how terribly he was being treated, and about how terrible things were being said about him, and terrible insults and misrepresentations were being poured out against him. And he was sick of it, and he was tired of it, and he didn't like it, and it wasn't fair. And I was listening, endeavoring to be sympathetic, to a degree. And I finally said, I said, "Could I ask you a question?"

I said, "Apart from the fact that you don't seem too joyful, have you ever thought about what it is that God is trying to accomplish in your life through all of this?" "Well," he said, "well, He's probably trying to show me I ought to be careful who I say things to." "Oh? I wouldn't think that would be the point. I'm not talking about that – what do you think He's trying to do to you? What do you think the Lord is trying to accomplish in you? Do you think maybe He'd like to make you more like His Son?" Boy, that's a convicting thing to say to somebody who is just wallowing in their misery, and feels justified. "How about leaping around for joy, does that seem like a thing you ought to be doing?" "Are you kidding?"

But if you obey this command, rejoice how often? Always, even when you're suffering, even when you're persecuted, alienated, ostracized, all kinds of evil is spoken against you, even when you're mistreated, and misunderstood, and misrepresented, and you are to respond by rejoicing, how can one do that? Well, certainly the apostle Paul, he was good at it. He had to be, because his whole life was one of pain. James was very instructive when he said, in chapter 1, verse 2, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." You ought to be happier about your trials than you are about the good times, because the trials are much more refining, aren't they? They're much more spiritual productive, aren't they?

They're much more likely to strip off your self-centeredness. They're much more likely to convince you that you're not in control of everything and break your pride. They're much more likely to humble you. They're much more likely to make you dependent. They're much more likely to enhance your prayer life. They're much more likely to give you sympathy with the pain of Christ, and everybody else's pain. Oh, they have such a good work. James says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, because the trials of your faith" – or the testing of your faith – "produces endurance, and endurance has a perfecting work."

Do you rejoice in your trials? Do you rejoice in your suffering? Do you rejoice in your pain, in your difficulty? Well, that is what the Bible calls you to do. Now, you say, "Well, wait a minute, it says in Romans 12:15, 'Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.' I mean is that a contradiction? I mean isn't there a time to stop rejoicing?" Well, in an outward sense. Yesterday I was in this conference in Chicago preaching all day, and preaching on the great authority and power of Scripture. We had a great time. But there were other speakers speaking, and I was standing outside the auditorium while someone else was finishing up. And one of my dear, dear friends came out, and he came up to me, and he was just frustrated. You could see it everywhere.

"Oh," he said, "oh," he said, "I just can't believe it." I said, "Well let's talk about it." So he came over and he started to cry. And, of course, that gets to me, you know, when my friend is crying, and I put my arm around him, and I, for a moment, understood what it was to weep with him who weeps. That didn't affect my joy. He was traumatized by something that was happened that broke his heart. It

didn't affect my joy, and it really didn't affect his either. Through my sympathy and empathy, I smiled at him, and I just suggested that maybe the Lord was still on the throne, and maybe He had a purpose to unfold.

There's something about outward identification with normal human emotion; of course we share that. There's something about a tender embrace for someone who is in pain and sorrow. There's something about sharing a tear. There's something about understanding sympathetically someone's sorrow and showing them compassion. But that doesn't touch the deep-down abiding joy. It shouldn't. I think the balance is expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:10. The apostle Paul says, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." That's the balance he's talking about – as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Sure, there's a place for normal human sympathy, but always rejoicing. Under those tears and under that sympathy is this unending joy, at all times rejoice.

This is so much a part of the early church, by the way, that their greeting – and I wish we could get this started – their greeting was *chairōte*. You know what that is? That's rejoice – that's rejoice. And you know who initiated that? Jesus did. On the morning after His resurrection, you remember He came out of the grave, and then He met with His disciples. The first thing He said in their greeting was, "All hail." What a crazy translation. All hail, as if Jesus was British. I suppose if Americans had translated the word they would have said, "Hi." The word is *chairōte*, rejoice; that's what He said, and that was the right thing to say, wasn't it?

After the resurrection, He comes into these guys, and they're all moaning and weeping because He's gone, and He shows up and says, "Rejoice," and that became the greeting. It's sure a lot better than "hi." Can't we get that started? Rejoice – good morning, rejoice. That's the common greeting that they used – rejoice. And well they should, because there was constant reason to do it, and it was a command. And you need to be reminded of that command a lot. In Acts 15:23, they sent a letter, you remember the Council of Jerusalem sent a letter, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch, in Syria, and Cilicia, who are from the Gentiles, greetings." Greetings? They really said "rejoice – rejoice – rejoice."

And certainly we have every reason to rejoice. We're commanded to. Scripture says our joy is to be great, it is to be abundant, it is to exceeding, it is to be animated, unspeakable, full of glory and awe. All of that is what the Scripture says. It's not like the joy the world has. The world's joy is a whole different deal. I mean, when you think about the joy of the world, I suppose if you wanted to sort of define it biblically, this is how the world's joy would be described biblically. First of all, it is derived from earthly pleasures. The world's joy comes from earthly pleasures. For example, in Ecclesiastes, chapter 2, verse 10, chapter 11, verse 9, both those places, it talks about earthly joy, and it says that people rejoice by following the impulses of their heart.

In other words, when you get a passion, or a longing, or a desire, or a lust for something, and you get it fulfilled, you have joy – that's earthly joy, completely connected to the fulfillment of earthly desires. But Proverbs 14 says this is delusive, because it says the end of joy may be grief. People want, want, want, want, and they rush toward that want, driven by their impulses; they fulfill that want, and very often, not long after they have fulfilled that lust, it turns to grief. It is short-lived, this pleasure; it's only as good as the time you're enjoying the pleasure that you can enjoy the joy. The joy doesn't last beyond the pleasure. That's why Job, chapter 20, verse 5, says, "The joy of the godless is momentary." It is completely connected to some pleasure. When the pleasure ends the joy is gone, and often turns to grief.

In fact, Ecclesiastes 7:6 says that worldly joy is like kindling wood, it just burns up. James said it often has turned into mourning; let your joy be turned to mourning. And that means it has the implication of judgment. It's very possible that when you have fulfilled your short-lived pleasure, the pleasures of sin for a season, when you have fulfilled it and it's turned to grief, and in the aftermath you've got the hangover of emptiness, what you have to look forward to is the judgment of God for such indulgence. That's why Isaiah 16:10 says, "The joy of the godless will be taken away." That's judgment. So we're not talking about that kind of joy.

We're not talking about some kind of pleasure fulfillment. We're not even talking about something that's sort of a personality trait. Some people are naturally more bubbly and buoyant than other people, and some people have a sort of a natural approach to life where they can put a positive spin on things better than others. Some people – we call them "moody" people, don't we – who just seem to sink under everything. They just tend to be that way, as if their sort of psychological makeup was some excuse for their failure to obey the Word of God. We're not talking about some kind of natural characteristic, some kind of ability to bounce above things.

We're not talking about a sort of a Norman Vincent Peale positive thinking approach, or Robert Schuller positive thinking approach, where you try to recreate your own fantasy world of positive things in the midst of a negative reality. We're not talking about playing mental games. It's not a natural thing we're talking about here. We're talking about something that has to transcend that, because that's only good for so long, and in some rather shallow circumstances. We're talking about a supernatural joy here. We're talking about something that belongs only to Christians, something that's deep-down. It is, as to its source, identified in Galatians 5:22 as a fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy."

In fact, in Romans 14:17, it says the kingdom of God is made up of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." We're talking about a spiritual joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, like spiritual peace, and righteousness, and love. We have a love that is not earthly love. We have a righteousness that is not self-righteousness. We have a peace that is not the peace the world gives. And we have a joy that is different. It's a deep-down joy. It's not the kind of joy the world knows. It comes from God through Christ, is dispensed by the Holy Spirit. And no circumstance – I say it again – no circumstance, no event should cause the absence of that joy.

There's only one thing – one thing – that legitimately should steal your joy. What is it? Sin, and it shouldn't steal it for very long, because you immediately should – what – confess that sin, and rejoice in God's forgiveness. Now, let me give you a definition of this joy, just so you know what it is. It isn't a natural joy, it isn't this worldly joy, it isn't something that some people have because they put a positive spin on life. Here's what it is: It is the experience of well-being – it is the experience of well-being that springs from the deep-down confidence that God is in perfect control of everything, for my good and His glory. Okay? It is the experience of well-being, and it is an experience and an experience of well-being.

It is feeling okay, good, on top, positive, triumphant, victorious, not because of the circumstance, but because of the deep-down confidence that God is in charge of everything, and that it is all moving for my good and His glory. All of us can respond to everything in life with joy, if we believe that God is affecting His glory and our good out of that. That's why I said to my friend, "What do you think the Lord's trying to do through this? Think He's trying to make you more like Christ? Boy, you ought to be

happy. You ought to say, 'Thank You, Lord, for this trial, thank You, thank You.'" All of us should be in the habit of constantly expressing joyful wonder when you just think about what God is doing in your life.

Now, that's the command – rejoice always. Let me give you the reasons to obey it, okay? And I'll just give you a little list here – real simple, straightforward. Here's reasons for you to be thankful. Number one: because joy is an act of proper response to the character of God – proper response to the character of God. And I'm starting right where I just left off. Joy starts because I know my God is sovereign, gracious, loving, merciful, kind, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and He has my well-being in His mind. Right? That's the deep-down confidence – I know my God. And my God says, "They might mean it for evil, but I mean it for good." My God says, "I work all things together for good to those who love Me."

Wow – wow, I know my God, and I can rejoice in my God. I can't always rejoice in my circumstances, but I can rejoice in the God who controls my circumstances. I can rejoice in the character of my God. Are you not glad that your God is unchanging? What if God changed the way He operated from time to time? Hoo – what a frightening thing that would be. What if His grace was whimsical, and only dispensed on certain occasions, when He felt like it? What if His justice came and went? What if He had mental lapses? What if He had a few moments, you know, like Greg Maddux had yesterday in the baseball game in the third inning? What if God had lapses in His abilities? Most of the time, He's pretty good, you know, seven out of eight innings, he's great. What a frightening thing that would be.

The consistency of our God's character, the absolute immutability, unchanging, wisdom, sovereignty, power, grace, mercy – that causes joy in my heart. It causes me joy to know that what my God says, He does. What He promises, He fulfills. Secondly, you can't touch the Christian's joy, because you can't touch the Christian's God, because He's unchanging and true. Secondly, joy is a proper act of appreciation for the work of Christ. Joy is a proper response, a proper act of appreciation for the work of Christ. When I realize that Jesus Christ bore my sins in His own body on the tree. That Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, became sin for me. When I realize that God laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

When I realize that I was redeemed, not with corruptible things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. When I realize that when I was an enemy, when I was hated, when I hated God, when I was His enemy, and when I was against Him, and a blasphemer, and a mocker, in mercy and in love, God sent His Son to redeem me. When I understand that the cross takes away all my sin. When I understand that His perfect substitutionary atonement covers me with the righteousness of Christ. When I understand that therefore heaven is eternally mine. When I understand all that Christ has accomplished, that gives me an abiding joy that any trivial passing circumstance of life should not affect.

Thirdly, I ought to have incessant joy as an act of confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit – an act of confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit. When you think about it, what is the Holy Spirit's work? Well, I told you Romans 14:17 says He brings righteousness, peace and joy. In Galatians 5, He produces love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Second Corinthians 3:18, you remember that wonderful verse that says that the Holy Spirit is moving us from one level of glory to the next, ever increasingly like Jesus Christ, and He's doing that all the time. The Holy Spirit is showing us the things of Christ. No man knows the mind of God and the mind of Christ but the Spirit of Christ.

And the Spirit of Christ lives in us, and He shows us Christ, and He leads us into all truth, and He brings all things to our remembrance, and He teaches us all things. And He is the anointing from God that we possess. And He is the *arrabōn*, the down payment, the engagement ring, the first installment of our eternal inheritance – all of that – that the Spirit of God is doing in us. He protects us from sin. He seals us unto the day of redemption. He fills our mouths with praise. And that goes on all the time. So your joy should start in the reality of the triune God, in the unchanging character and greatness of your God, in the glorious finished work of Christ your Savior, and in the ongoing sanctifying power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who lives in you. That's the deep-down confidence that all is well.

Well, let me give you some more reasons. We move from the workers to the work. We are rejoicing over God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, but let's look at what the work is that they do. Fourth, we are to rejoice as an act of reasonable response to spiritual blessings continually given. It never stops. It never stops. For example, Ephesians 1 says, "We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies," and that just keeps going on, and on, and on, and on. God just keeps pouring out spiritual blessing. You say, "Well, what do you mean by that? I don't feel like my life is really too blessed right now." Let me tell you something. Every single time you sin and it is instantaneously forgiven, that is a monumental blessing, the absence of which would catapult you into hell.

Every time God moves you one step more toward the image of Jesus Christ that is a monumental blessing. Every time God refines you through the trials of life, that is a great blessing. God is pouring out forgiveness, He's pouring out provision. God brought you through another day, and spared you some agony the likes of which you, perhaps, could never have known, and would not know, because you never experienced it because of His mercy. Blessings are poured out on you constantly. He is even now – and I think about this so often – preparing a place for us. Some things are going on up in heaven just to get ready for us, blessings we will yet to experience.

God is pouring out His blessing upon us, pouring out His forgiveness, pouring out His guidance, pouring out His wisdom, pouring out His power. All spiritual blessings unendingly poured out upon us. Every wonderful, rich joy in this life comes from Him, and blessings seen and unseen. Do you ever think about the Holy Spirit interceding for you, all the time, with groanings which cannot be uttered? This is going on all the time, the Holy Spirit interceding for you, constantly calling on God to do that which brings you blessing and joy, and brings Him glory. And the Holy Spirit always prays according to the will of God, Romans 8 says, so His prayers for you are always being answered.

And Jesus Christ's intercession for you never stops either. He's constantly before the throne of God, interceding on your behalf. There are endless blessings – endless blessings. Number five: joy is an act of proper response to divine providence. And we've talked a little about this, but let me make it a specific point. Joy is an act of proper response to divine providence. By divine providence I simply mean the fact that God orchestrates all circumstances to bring about your good. Divine providence, I've always said, is a bigger miracle to me than a miracle. If I was God, it would be a lot easier, if I wanted to do something specific, if I wanted to reach a certain goal, like if I had an objective, and a plan, and a purpose, and an end, and I wanted to achieve that, to just step in and make it happen.

You know, that's my nature anyway. People who know me and work with me know that if I have a goal in mind, I'd just as soon go do it. Other people they want to say, "Well, now, John, don't be in too big a hurry here. You know, we ought to have a committee, and we ought to talk to these people,

and we ought to get them involved, and we ought to get these people involved, and there's this process here, and we took" – "Okay," and, you know, I sort of step back and say, "Yeah, but I mean you know this is right." "Yeah, sure, this is right." See, if I were God – and of course, that would be an unthinkable thing – but if I were God, I would just say, "Forget the providence deal, I'm doing a miracle now" – bang, it's done.

But God says, "No, we're just going to let all this stuff happen, and I'm just going to control all this stuff – this billions of contingencies – and it's going to all come to the end that I want." What genius is that? And God controls all of that that goes on in your life for His end, which is to conform you to Jesus Christ. You know, imagine if God was just up there saying, "Oh, whew, I didn't expect that deal to happen. Oh, how am I going to fix that?" But what a deep-down confidence to know He's in control of all of it. Amazing. Number six: joy is an act of proper response to the promise of future glory. The reason I wrote the book on heaven was because if Christians don't have that view, you get so messed up just getting stuck down here.

If you can lose yourself in the glories of what is to come, this all of a sudden fades, doesn't it? I mean, you know, when the Apostle Paul told the Colossians, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth," He wasn't trying to say something to them that was going to be excruciatingly painful – "Do this even though it hurts." He was telling them something that would free them from all the debilitating preoccupation with stuff that doesn't matter anyway. I mean, your joy should never ever be touched. I called my sister, who has terminal cancer, and we were talking on the phone, as we have a lot. In fact, I'm going to go up there and see her this week. And I said to her, "Well, Julie," I said, "look," I said, "the worst thing that could happen to you is the best thing that could happen to anybody."

She said, "I know that, I've never questioned that." I said, "You know, the worst is that you're going to be in the presence of the Lord, in the glories of heaven." She said, "And that's my confidence." And she said, "They sent a psychiatrist in here today in the hospital with somebody, and they said, 'We're going to put you in group therapy, and we're going to put you under special therapy, because we want you to get in touch with your inner child.' And she said, "No thanks." She said, "I don't need to get in touch with my inner child, thank you. I'm in touch with my Lord Jesus Christ, and everything is fine – everything is fine." You can face any kind of situation with that kind of hope in your heart.

That's an essential part of maintaining your joy. I never really get too disturbed about what goes on here, because it's so temporary, and I can't fix it all the time anyway. And it makes heaven all the more wonderful and alluring. Well, seventh in my little list: joy, deep-down joy should always be there as an act of appreciation for answered prayer. "Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full," John 16:24. What have I ever asked for that the Lord didn't do, if it was consistent with His character and His purpose? The Lord has answered my prayers over, and over, and over again. And as an act of appreciation for all the answered prayers, and for those prayers yet unanswered that I know He'll hear and answer, my joy can be untouchable.

Number eight: as an act of appreciation for the Scriptures – as an act of appreciation for the Scriptures. Psalm 19, verse 8 – you know that's one of my favorite Psalms. I'd preach on it all the time if I could. I would ring that bell over and over. "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart." The Scriptures bring me joy. Jeremiah says, "Thy words were found, I did eat them, and they were in me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." The psalmist, Psalm 119, just read Psalm 119, how many times does David say that the Word brings him joy, that the Word is his delight? You should

have that deep-down appreciation of the Word of God that brings you joy, thanking Him for all that He has given. Listen to what John said, “These things I write unto you that your joy may be full – full.”

Number nine: you should rejoice always as an act of appreciation for Christian fellowship – for Christian fellowship. What a sweet benediction Christian fellowship is. Paul says, in 1 Thessalonians 3:9, “For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before God because of you?” Paul says, “I just have joy because of you.” I can say that. I have so many causes for joy in my life because of you, and how God is using you, and blessing you, and how you’re receiving the Word, and serving the Lord. And how I go places in the world, and around the country, and people come, and tell me what the Lord means, and what the Word means.

When I went back to Chicago, I was at dinner and this guy said to me, “I’ve got to tell you a story.” He said, “I went to a place called Hundred Mile Post.” I said, “What kind of place is that?” It’s a town in Canada. When you leave civilization, going north in Canada toward the Arctic Circle, you go up in the lumber area, they put a post every fifty miles, so there’s Fifty Mile Post, Hundred Mile post, Hundred and Fifty Mile Post, and Two Hundred Mile Post. And it’s up toward no place. And he said, “I got to a place called Hundred Mile Post to speak, and I met a guy. And there was a church there.” And I think he said it was a church of 150 or 200 people, in this place that hardly had that many people.

And he said, “He told me how this story started. Some missionary flew in there. This is a bunch of lumberjacks. This missionary had come in there and given them some Grace To You tapes, 15 years ago. And they had no ministry at all, and this guy started listening to the tapes and he got saved, and he started getting more tapes, and more tapes, and more tapes. And now there’s a church of two hundred people in a place Hundred Mile Post. And this guy was rejoicing in the fellowship, and the fact that there was such commonality, because they were sort of an extension of Grace Community Church, because of the teaching. Is there anything sweeter than that? Christian fellowship when you need it, a friend, someone there to pray with you and be your strength.

Finally, number ten: we should have constant joy as an act of appreciation for the privilege of witnessing – the privilege of gospel preaching. What a privilege to proclaim Christ – what a privilege, what an honor. You remember the apostles in the early part of the book of Acts, and they whipped them, and they flogged them, and they beat them. And then they sent them out of there, and what did they do? They went on their way what? Rejoicing, because they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ; it was such a thrill for them to be able to preach the gospel, no matter what it cost. Well, those are the reasons. You know, there are things that are going to hinder you.

If you don’t have joy in your life, may I suggest what it might be, and we’ll close? First of all, it could be that you’re not saved. That’s right. It could be false salvation. Remember Matthew 13, the seed went into the soil, but the soil was rocky. And it sprung up and there was joy, and the sun came out and burned it, and it died and there was no life there. There can be a momentary sort of initial psychological bump or boost or emotional joy, and it disappears. If you’re struggling, and you just don’t have joy in your life, and you just can’t get on top of it, maybe you don’t really know Christ, and you ought to examine yourself to see whether you’re in the faith.

Secondly, maybe you’re being tempted. Maybe you’re under some very strong temptation, because if there’s anything Satan would like to do, it’s steal your joy. “He goes around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,” Peter says. And so Peter says here’s the solution: “casting all your care on

Him." Maybe you're carrying too much of your load. That will turn into a temptation real fast, because you're not off-loading it, casting it on Him – casting it on Him. Maybe it's false expectations. Maybe you think you deserve more than you're getting, when the fact is you deserve less. Is that not true? What does an unregenerate people deserve? What does a wicked sinner deserve? Hell.

God in His mercy gives them life, and sunshine, and rain, and food, and family, and love, much more than they deserve. God does that even for those who aren't His own, and look what He gives to us who doesn't deserve anything – so much. Why do people expect everything? One woman left the church and went to a charismatic church that preached the prosperity gospel. She came back and said, "I don't want to go there. They won't let you be poor or sick." Hey, in life some people are poor and sick, some people are just poor, and some people are just sick. What do you expect out of life anyway? Happy, rich, successful, constantly healthy, and full of miracles? You set yourself up for a real problem.

So sometimes when you don't have joy, it could maybe because you're not a Christian. It could be because you're being bombarded with temptation. It could be because you've set up false expectations, and that connects with pride, folks. It could be pride. It could be the sin of pride, the ugly, ugly sin that says, "I don't have enough. I want more of this, or that, or that." And, you know, the whole culture sells dissatisfaction, right? I mean, they put women on the screen on the TV to make you unhappy with the one you've got. They put men on the screen to make you unhappy with the one you've got. They put cars on the screen to make you unhappy with the one you've got.

They put all that stuff before you to make you dissatisfied. The premise of all marketing is "make them dissatisfied," so the culture blasts you with that. And you, you go home to your wife, and your husband, and your car, and your life, and your job, and it's not the fantasy that they try to sell you, but it is exactly the dissatisfaction that leads to you purchasing or giving up what you have for the deception. Pride will make you chase that stuff. Ingratitude will kill your joy. We'll talk more about that tonight. Another thing is prayerlessness. Prayerlessness will take your joy, and that's back to what I said earlier, because you're going to carry the load yourself.

You're just going to carry the whole deal. You don't need to do that. Just give it up, just get it before the Lord, hand it over to Him, let Him carry it for you. Cast all your care on Him. Philippians 4, get involved in prayer. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, let your request be made known to God." And as a result, the peace of God will take over. And one other thing I might comment on is feelings. If you run by feelings, and operate by feelings, you're going to have a hard time sustaining joy. People say, "Well I just don't feel like being happy. I don't feel like rejoicing. And how can I rejoice if I don't feel like it? And how can I control my feelings?" Let me tell you, you better.

I mean if everybody ran around doing what they felt like doing, what in the world kind of place would we have? We all control our feelings to some degree. It's silly to go around saying, "Well, I just don't feel like it." Well, you control your feelings all the time. You have to. And the way to control the kind of feelings that steal your joy is by your mind being filled with truth. And now I'm getting to the main deal here, and the main deal is this: the number one contributor to the lack of joy is ignorance. You don't know the truth of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, you don't have the mind of Christ, you don't know about God's sovereignty, God's mercy, God's providence, all those things we've talked about.

When your mind is filled with sound doctrine, and you believe it with all your heart, it takes over

control of your emotions. And then you're not running around just flying off emotionally. You are a rational being, and your feelings must be controlled by your reason, by your mind. And your mind, when filled with the truth of God, will control your emotions. I mean it could be as simple as you're flying in an airplane, and the thing – something goes wrong, loses an engine, and you start to bump, and bounce, and flop – emotions take over, initially. And then you say to yourself, "Oh, this could be the most novel experience of my life. I could be – this could be flight 841 to heaven. I could see – I may see the Lord soon. God's work will go on. Isn't this a marvelous potential?"

See, reason has to take over, and whatever is in your mind controls your emotions. Some people would say, "I'm not going to break up, I'm not going to get panicky, I'm going to – control yourself, you don't want to embarrass yourself." You know, the mind takes over at that point in a superficial way, and that person grits their teeth and hangs on for dear life. That happened to me taking off from LAX. An engine went out just on lift-off, and this woman sunk her fingernails into my arm, you know – yikes. And I just – I just kind of smiled, you know. Sure, you have emotional reaction to that, but you're – all of a sudden, I'm thinking about all this that's the reality of what might happen.

You see, you have to – your emotions can be controlled by your mind, so if your mind is controlled by the truth of the Word of God, that's how your emotions are going to respond, right? And so they'll have true responses to the reality that is most important, and that's the spiritual reality. Well, I think you get the message by now. Rejoice always, would you? Let's pray. Father, we thank You for this wonderful morning. Thank You for the joy of being together. We know that the joy of the Lord is our strength, and it gives us the strength to go through all the issues of life. Thank You for giving us reason to rejoice unendingly.

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