

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Joy

Presented by Karl Faase

If I asked you to think about Christians and what characteristic comes to mind, I'm guessing that it isn't joy, but it ought to be; the bible is actually full of joy. Consider these verses; Psalm 100 "Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth", "worship the Lord with gladness, come before him with joyful songs". Jesus says (John 15:11), "I have told you this so that my joy might be in you, and your joy complete". And even in Philippians 4, which I'll refer to later, "rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again, rejoice". On the basis of those verses, joy ought to be a key characteristic that comes to your mind when we think about Christian's, but that's not is often the case. We're going to look this today, how we can find joy, and how we can live joyful lives.

This morning, we're looking at joy; the idea that Christian's ought to be marked by joy and that we all want to experience joy in our lives but joy is hard to find, it's actually illusive and in seeking after joy, we often get distracted which causes us to actually miss joy, and the first distraction in joy is chasing after pleasure.

C.S Lewis wrote: "Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is" and because pleasure is in our power, we can chase after it, thinking that it's going to give us joy. When you think about pleasure though, it doesn't actually give us joy; firstly pleasure is self-centred; it's what I want, it's what I feel pleased by, it's within my grasp so a chase after it..

Secondly pleasure is sensual, it's all about experience. The catholic idea of the seven deadly sins actually wraps around the idea of pleasure with lust and gluttony and laziness and envy.

Pleasure is always short term, it doesn't last, it's there for a moment but it's fleeting and it's allusive and we want something that's going to last a long time.

Paul Tillich who's an American theologian and author and writer talks about joy as being "fulfilment, at the centre of our being, a deep sense of fulfilment and contentment, which is way past anything that pleasure will ever give you". Tillich says that we find that fulfilment when we connect in two areas; we find it when we connect with people, and we find fulfilment when we connect with purpose.

Pleasure, because it's so self-centred, doesn't connect us with people, in fact, it will disconnect us from people because we start looking for what we want for ourselves.

Purpose is often found as we give ourselves to something greater than who we are as people, it is found as we serve people and discover purpose, it's the things will give you a deep sense of personal, individual fulfilment. Now pleasure doesn't do that. Because pleasure's self-centred, it's about experiencing something for yourself, it's short-term, pleasure, is actually a complete distraction from finding joy.

As Christian's, the bible says that we can and we should know joy and what we do, as C. S. Lewis says, is we chase after pleasure, and in the process of chasing after pleasure is we actually miss joy.

This morning, we're looking at joy, and experiencing joy, the bible says that joy is within our grasp but we miss it because of distractions, we miss it because of the distraction of pleasure and the second distraction is we miss joy because of the distraction of covering our emptiness with fun.

To again quote Paul Tillich, "of all the dangers that threaten our civilisation, this is one of the *most* dangerous; the escape from ones emptiness, through fun, which makes joy impossible".

It's intriguing when we looked at what the bible says about joy, it actually says something odd about joy. Consider the Letter to Hebrews, Chapter 12, Verse 2, "let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross". The Cross wasn't fun and it wasn't pleasure, we equate joy with fun and pleasure, we won't understand these verses and what the writer to the Hebrews is saying to us; fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross; there's something more about joy than just fun and pleasure. Look at James Chapter 1, Verse 2; "consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance". There it is again, the idea joy can actually come through trials of many kinds.

Paul wrote to his friends at Philippi and this letter is all about joy, in fact it's called; the letter, or epistle of joy and yet these people at Philippi (a church in the area called Macedonia) were actually under a lot of pressure. In fact in 2 Corinthians Paul says this about those particular churches; particularly the Philippian church, "out of their severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity". Paul is referring to their generosity toward him but did you hear what he wrote? It was out of their severe trial, and their extreme poverty but in the midst of that, joy. They experienced joy. We often equate joy with the idea that we'll be fulfilled in fun and in pleasure but the bible actually says something different; that there is joy beyond that, just like Jesus, who endured the cross.

We're looking at joy and the fact that we ought to be able to experience joy in our lives, it's a biblical idea but we miss joy because we chase after pleasure and we miss joy because we chase after fun and the third distraction is that we want to minimise pain; we actually think that finding joy means minimising pain. Pain and joy are not opposites – pleasure and pain are opposites but pain and joy are not opposites. We believe that joy is found by grasping pleasure and avoiding pain. Everybody who is a parent knows that you can experience joy in the midst of difficulty and pain.

Think about what it is to be a parent. If you go back to when you were a young couple enjoying life together and then you decide to have a baby and it changes your life completely. People talk about the joy of childbirth and yet it's a painful, painful process and then the demanding toddler years, when it's all so difficult and you can never get your toddler to do what you want them to do. Once you get past this stage you think it gets easier and then they become teenagers and it changes all again. Being a parent at times can be incredibly difficult and very disappointing and many times you feel like a complete failure and yet in the middle of that you experience joy.

I think this understanding of joy helps us understand what is written in Hebrew's Chapter 12, verse 2. Which says that Jesus "for the joy set before Him, endured the cross" and what was the cross about? It was about self emptied living. It was about committing to purpose. The purpose of the cross is that all people, as they respond to what Jesus has done, would be able to be with their Father, and *that* brought great joy.

George Bernard Shaw has a quote that says this; "this is the true joy in life, being used as a purpose, recognising yourself as a mighty one, being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish clot of ailments

and grievances, complaining that the world did not devote itself to making you happy”. That’s the joy in life, being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one”.

This is what Jesus recognised, that He came to earth with the mighty purpose of saving all of humanity, and *that* brought him great joy; *yes* it was in the middle of pain, *yes* it was in the middle of difficulty but *yes*, what it did is it gave Him great joy to serve God.

This morning we’ve been looking at joy and discovering and experiencing joy in our lives and let me wrap this up by saying a couple of things ...

Reconsider chasing after pleasure, reconsider chasing after fun; they’re shallow, they’re short-term, they won’t bring you lasting joy.

Second; reconnect with life, reconnect with people, build friendships, build lasting relationships and reconnect with purpose; know what your life is about and give yourself to a purpose that’s worthy to follow.

And lastly, reconnect with your faith. A deep, lasting relationship with Jesus, who gave his life to you, that will give you great joy.

If you’d like a daily encouragement in life, why don’t you go to www.dailynudge.org sign up and I’ll send you a daily nudge to keep you enjoying life and finding joy.