

An abstract image featuring a large, dynamic splash of blue ink or paint against a light, off-white background. The ink forms intricate, swirling patterns that spread outwards from the center, creating a sense of movement and depth. The colors range from deep navy blue to lighter, misty blues.

IN THE FACE OF JESUS

Sermon Growth Guide

June 22, 2025

There is Joy



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There is Joy, Luke 7:18-23

Key Verse: Luke 7:22.

“So he replied to the messengers, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.’”

Big Idea: Love is willing the good for the other even at the sacrifice of the self.

Foundations

According to Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. As you follow Jesus, His Holy Spirit is at work in you bringing those nine characteristics to ripen. He is doing that so that your life more accurately reflects the life and character of Jesus. Doesn't it stand to reason that we should find these nine characteristics on full display in the life and ministry of Jesus?

In a world increasingly marked by anxiety, addiction, and disillusionment, the hope and joy found in Jesus Christ shine all the more brightly. In Luke 7:18-23, Jesus answers John the Baptist's doubts not with rebuke, but with the evidence of the Kingdom breaking in—healings, restoration, and Good News for the poor. This moment reveals the deep joy of Jesus, the joy of God's promises fulfilled. It is on the foundation of the hope of the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ that we stand, filled with joy!

C.S. Lewis wrote that we are “far too easily pleased,” settling for fleeting pleasures when infinite joy is offered in Christ. Joy, unlike happiness, is not rooted in circumstances but in the hope of what God has done and will do. It is resilient and enduring. As followers of Jesus, the Holy Spirit grows joy within us—fruit that bears witness to a better life and a better kingdom. In Jesus, even in dark times, we glimpse the joy of a world made new.

Understanding God's Word

Read Luke 7:18-23 together. When have you wrestled with doubt like John did in verse 20? How did you bring those questions to God? Jesus doesn't rebuke John for asking honest questions. What does that reveal about God's character? How might this inform the way you relate to God when you're struggling? Jesus responds to John's doubt not with theology but with evidence of God at work (v.22). Where have you seen God at work in your life or others' lives recently? When have you experienced joy in your walk with God? How might we cultivate joy even in trials?

Applying God's Word

John couldn't get to Jesus, so he sent his disciples to ask questions on his behalf. When have you experienced another believer helping you “see Jesus” more clearly in a difficult time? How can we be those kinds of people in our group? What expectations do you find yourself placing on God? Where do those expectations come from? Think about a time when your life didn't go the way you had hoped. – Looking back now, where can you see God's hand at work in that situation?

Witnessing God's Word

In what ways can we “go back and report what we have seen and heard” like John's disciples (v.22)? – How can you share stories of God's faithfulness with someone who may be struggling?

One of the greatest moments in cinematic history occurred in *The Wizard of Oz*. Maybe it's been a while since you've seen it, but the film begins in Kansas with Dorothy and her dog Toto getting into trouble. Dorothy runs away with Toto and gets caught up in a tornado/cyclone which carries her off to the magical land of Oz. Adventure ensues. The amazing part was that the entire movie was filmed in that brown-ish sepia-tone for the first 20 minutes. Then, as Dorothy steps into Oz, everything is in vibrant color... "Technicolor" to be precise. Dorothy moves from dull/drab Kansas to the wonderful world of Oz. Maybe you've experienced a bit of that driving west from Kansas to Colorful Colorado! Absolutely Amazing.

Thankfully, we weren't made to live in sepia-tone... in black & white... We were made to live in full/vibrant/rich color! But, I think our world has messed with the hue/tint settings and is living in sepia-tone again... I mean... our literal TV screens have once again been filled with tragic footage, photos, and dialogues this week. My social media feeds are currently filled with flags. All kinds... Ukrainian, Russian, American, Iranian, Israeli, Palestinian...

My feeds are filled with flags and anger. Angry faces, angry messages, hate-filled comments, hopeless comments... tears... Our world is in a difficult spot. It's not only international conflicts...

Last year, the CDC published a survey noting that diagnosed mental or behavioral health conditions among adolescents increased 35 percent from 2016 to 2023. Now, 1 in 5 adolescents have a diagnosed condition.¹

Politico published a survey a few months ago which noted only 19 percent of Gen Z trusts the federal government "to do the right thing most of the time."²

Sports Betting has become a massive industry, growing from 13.1 billion in 2019, to 57.7 billion in 2021, and 121.1 billion in 2023. With that, there has been a dramatic increase in calls to addiction assistance / gambling hotlines.

Drug overdoses have skyrocketed. In 1985, 3,612 people lost their lives to an overdose of a controlled substance. In 2024, it was over 80,000.⁴

These polls and studies together create a concerning portrait: our world appears anxious, polarized, and addicted. **Surely, you have your own faces and names to place over these statistics. You've experienced this in your own

circle. Or in yourself. Surely, you have experienced where the color has been drained, where sepia-tone has taken over.

We're in a series on the Fruit of the Spirit. Rather than sepia-toned anxiety, despair, anger, and individualism, the Bible tells us that, as we walk with Jesus, the Holy Spirit works in us to ripen the technicolor fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we're walking with Jesus, over time, we should begin looking more and more like these things. Our relationships/community life/etc. will increasingly take this shape. As we walk with Jesus, the Holy Spirit forms us more and more into the likeness of Christ. Jesus opens our eyes to a world of vibrant color! So, let's turn now to God's Word to see what He has to offer us in place of the brokenness the world puts forth.

Can you imagine the look on Jesus's face in this passage? Jesus exhibited the fruit of the Spirit in all its fullness, and I think, if you were to look at Jesus as he was responding to John's disciples, there would have been a sparkle in his eye... and a smirk on his face. When we look at Jesus, "There is Joy." Let's examine this passage: John the Baptist had been put in prison by the local ruler, Herod, for being critical of his adulterous marriage and other evil things he had done. John's disciples were checking in on him and bringing him news, especially of the comings and goings of Jesus.

At this point, John's disciples have heard Jesus teach with a new authority. They saw Jesus heal the servant of a centurion who was sick and nearing death. They witnessed the event we studied last week where Jesus raised to life the son of a widow who had died!!! John's followers would have been ecstatic about what was happening with Jesus. So, they took word of these incredible things to John the Baptist. But John, rotting away in prison, begins to wonder if he correctly understood who Jesus was. He asks his disciples to go to Jesus, to confirm that he is in fact the promised Messiah. So, they do. They go to Jesus, and ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:20b)

That's a heavy question. It's the question of someone who expected one thing and got another. Have you ever been there? "Lord, I thought you would heal this..." "Lord, I thought you would save my marriage..." "Lord, I trusted you would take care of things... but here I am, carrying a cardboard box out of the office I was just fired from."

"Are you the one in whom we can put our hope? Or should we be looking for something else?" ...

“Should we expect someone else?”

Jesus doesn't scold John. He doesn't rebuke the question. Jesus looks at John's disciples and says, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” (Luke 7:22b) So... “Are you the one who is to come?” Jesus's answer is... “YES! The Kingdom is here! You may not see it in the way you expected—but it is bursting into the world all around you! And where the Kingdom of God is present, there is JOY!”

What exactly is Joy? I saw a poster recently that said, “Everyone brings joy to this office. Some when they enter – others when they leave!” It can be easy to confuse joy and happiness. Happiness dependent on circumstances. It's a sense of excitement, an emotion, laughter, etc. Happiness is being handed a chocolate chip cookie, fresh out of the oven. Happiness is that “new car smell.” Happiness is sitting on a beach sipping a beverage out of a pineapple. Happiness is cheering on as the Broncos win a game... (one of the most rare happinesses of this life)

Joy, on the other hand, is a deep and enduring contentment and satisfaction. Joy exists when we have a strong, lasting hope for something wonderful. Happiness is a warm, sunny day... Joy is knowing that spring will come, even in the dead of winter. Joy is the fruit of a right relationship with God. Our English word “Joy” is connected to a variety of terms in Hebrew and Greek. We see root words translated as “joy, gladness, mirth, brightness, shining” and then some fun phrases like “springing, leaping, exulting, shouting, dancing round in circles!” All throughout scripture, God is both the source and the object of Joy. Joy is the natural outcome of fellowship with God. When we're connected with God, when we're walking with God, Joy bubbles up and overflows! We're moved to gladness, singing, and dancing! Joy and hope go together.

See, Christian joy is rooted not in what's happening around us, but in what Christ has already done and what he has promised to do. Christian Joy is not shaken when “the earth gives way, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.” Christian Joy is not rocked when circumstances here on earth are difficult, when there is pain, conflict, or uncertainty. Christian Joy is based on the coming Kingdom and Christ, our one foundation. And that's what John's disciples get as they present Jesus with their

question. Jesus demonstrates the kingdom in their presence: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” (Luke 7:22b)

Growing up, my wife's family spent a lot of years road-tripping from Colorado Springs to Pheonix for Spring Break. Ashley and her brother always played a game; they wanted to be the first one to spot a Seguario Cactus. One of those big ones. Ashley has described the absolute thrill it gave her to see one, because that meant they were getting close! It meant Pheonix wasn't too much further out! C.S. Lewis describes Joy in much the same way... In Lewis's autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes a feeling of “unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction...”⁶ That is his definition of Joy. An “unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction...”⁷ Almost like an itch that cannot be scratched but which somehow produces satisfaction. See, for Lewis, Joy is essentially a signpost pointing towards something greater. Joy is a Seguario Cactus pointing towards Pheonix. Joy is a hint of a far-off country. Joy is a glimpse of heaven.

Jesus wanted John's disciples to understand that the proof was all around them. The evidence of his Messiah-ship was the joy-inducing Kingdom of God events that they were witnessing! And that Kingdom has continued to break out. We live, today, in the hope of the coming kingdom, of eternal life with God, of belonging and being known by the creator... And we regularly witness glimpses of that!

I was around a Camp Elim campfire two weeks ago with some of our 3rd-5th graders and got to hear several say, “I started my walk with Jesus this week...” “I feel so loved and I have a relationship with Jesus because of this week.” That's a glimpse of the kingdom! Last month, I got to officiate a wedding and watched the bride and groom, so enamored with one another, pledge to care for and love one another as Christ loves the church and gave himself up for her... That's a signpost pointing to the relentless love of our creator. Two Sundays ago, I joined with over 300 of you in prayer. We expressed that God is living and active, and we asked Him to pour out his Spirit on our church and our city... We joined hands and glorified God in the streets of Colorado Springs. Another glimpse! Two months ago, I witnessed a dozen baptisms in our Worship Center and heard the proclamations of faith from people whose lives have been changed through an encounter with Jesus. Over and over we watched people

go under the water and come up into new life, surrounded by cheers and tears. That's the joy of the Kingdom. Dead hearts raised. Blind eyes opened... Life in Full Color!

I'm sure you can point to these kinds of moments as well! Moments where the Kingdom is breaking in. Moments where you've felt the joy of the Lord!

When we invite the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, when we look to the face of Jesus, when we ask for and expect transformation. We are filled more and more with the Joy and the Hope of the coming kingdom.

Now, a word of warning is due:

When we turn our lives over to Jesus, is it all smooth sailing? ... Of course not! There's an old kid's song that I really struggle with: "I'm inright, outright, upright, downright happy all the time... (x2) Since Jesus Christ came in, and cleansed my heart from sin... I'm inright, outright, upright, downright happy all the time! No. Just. No... We will have trouble. We will experience pain. We will be discouraged. Let's not forget... in our passage, John the Baptist is rotting in prison. John had big expectations for Jesus; he probably expected Jesus to put things to right and release him from prison, but that's not what God had in store for John. In his letter to the scattered church, Peter wrote, "12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Why would Peter need to tell the church not to be surprised? ... Because they were surprised!! These early Christians, perhaps like the composer of "Happy All the Time," perhaps like John the Baptist, perhaps like you... were surprised that they continued to face trials after turning to Jesus. Peter tells them, "Do not be surprised..." 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4:12-13)

Don't be surprised by the fiery ordeal. The fire doesn't mean God has abandoned you. It means He's doing something in you. We will face trials in this world, but we cling to the hope of the Gospel. We cling to the hope of the coming kingdom, of the promised new life, we look to the face of Jesus, and in that, we experience and grow in Joy. Happiness is a warm, sunny day... Joy is knowing that spring will come, even in the dead of winter.

So, how do we access joy? How do we ready the soil to produce the fruit of joy?

Three super-quick, super-practical ideas:

1) Look for evidence of the Kingdom

Happiness rises and falls with circumstances—but joy is anchored in the kingdom of God. Jesus gave John's followers a litany of kingdom-moments to report... Maybe it's time for you to make a list of Kingdom glimpses in your life. Take 10 minutes this week and write down times in your life you have seen healing, hope, restoration, or beauty from ashes. Where are the signposts that can help point you in the right direction?

2) Share Good News

Jesus tells John's disciples, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard..." Can you imagine their faces as they went back to John? If Jesus's face was joyful in his response, they would have been beaming as they relayed the good news! Who has God put in your path to report the inbreaking of the kingdom to? Take your list of healing, hope, and beauty and share it with someone who needs to know the Joy of the Lord themselves!

3) Look to Jesus

As the author of Hebrews wrote, "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross..." (Hebrews 12:2). What was the joy set before him? ... You. He endured the cross so that you could be saved, so that you could be in relationship with Him, so that you could be a citizen of the Kingdom! Start each day this week by intentionally looking to Jesus. Spend time in the Gospels, spend time talking with him in prayer. Endeavor to know him more each day, and in so doing, experience Joy.

I'll close with one of my favorite C.S. Lewis quotes. Lewis writes, "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us—like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea." C.S. Lewis

Friends, we were made for joy. We were made to see the world in vibrant color... to grow in love, joy, peace and the rest. So, open your heart to the work of the Spirit. Look to Jesus. Even in your dry valley. Even in your wilderness. Even in your prison.

Because the Kingdom is at hand. And where the Kingdom is, there is joy.