

July 10 & 11, 2021

Fruit of the Spirit: Joy

Text: Habakkuk 3:16-18, Acts 5:40-42

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Last week, we started a new series called “The Fruit of the Spirit.” When I was in the planning meeting and found out the theme for our summer preaching series, I couldn’t help but smile. Why?

Raspberries 2020 and 2021

Shortly after my wife and I moved into our house in 2013, I really wanted to have raspberries. You see, a few years before that we were at a friend’s house and they had a raspberry patch, and the mom described how her kids would simply snack on the raspberries. So, in the spring of 2014, I planted just a few raspberry shoots. Since then, things have expanded dramatically. You see, for years I spent time weeding and adding necessary nutrients to the soil in order to encourage growth. However, in the spring and summer of 2020, I decided to take a sabbatical from my usual raspberry maintenance and, I internally wondered, Did all my work make any difference? As the summer progressed, my family will tell you that my efforts did make a difference because we had the worst year for berries. Starting in the fall, the pendulum swung in the other direction, and I have been diligently tending my raspberries, adding the necessary nutrients, regularly watering and weeding, and keeping the gardens well cared for. While I am terrible at taking pictures, the difference is dramatic!

God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, produces the fruit of the Spirit. The Fruit of the Spirit is godly character inside us. Last week, we discovered that there are four ways to produce a bumper crop of fruit in our life ...

- (1) We need to learn to love in a godly way
- (2) We must say “no” to our flesh – our ungodly desires
- (3) We must follow the Holy Spirit’s direction and guidance
- (4) We need to let the Spirit produce this fruit.

One aspect, or to keep the analogy, one flavor, of the fruit of the Spirit is joy. Joy is produced by the Holy Spirit, and our joy is intimately connected with our faith. So my goal for us today is to find joy!

Let’s pray before we dive into what God has for us today.

Today we are going to be looking at a number of passages, all of which are necessary if we want to find joy. All of these passages rest upon what we discover in Habakkuk, the first passage you heard today.

Habakkuk is a minor prophet, but his message is not minor at all. This book is a part of the minor prophets because it is small in length. His message was most likely written at some point

between 640-615 BC between the fall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Babylonian empire. Habakkuk is an awesome and awful book that describes the coming judgment upon the house of Israel that remained after the judgment of the Assyrians. The people were about to experience the severe judgment of God at the hands of the pagan nation of the Babylonians. As Habakkuk makes his prophetic pronouncement, he is left trembling and in fear. But what we will discover was that he still was able to find joy, and he was able to because of three realities.

If we are going to find joy, we need to discover these three things as well. We will come back to Habakkuk at the end of our study, but now turn in your Bibles to Psalm 16. Let's look at how David begins the psalm and how he ends it.

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." ... You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:1-2, 11

This is a psalm of David, and what this psalm reveals to us is that God's presence is what brings joy, and in his presence, we find goodness. The author states that he has "no good apart from you" and that presence is the fullness of joy and pleasure. One of the things made clear through God's presence is his goodness, and if we are to experience the joy that comes by the Spirit of God, we must grasp the grandeur of God's character as good.

The goodness of God is such a necessary, yet unappreciated, piece of how we can find joy. Imagine with me the opposite. The palatable horror to dwell on the inverse that God is not good makes us cherish the character of the God of the Bible.

So, if we are to find joy, we first need to rest in His goodness. Again, **the first reality for joy is God's goodness.**

Now let's turn to John 15:10-11. There is a lot in this passage, and you'll investigate more of that next week, but there is something significant I want to show you...

"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." John 15:10-11

The joy that Jesus has for us is intimately connected with the relational reality of God as our Father. It is our kinship with God that forms the foundation of his unconditional love. It is that unconditional love that undergirds the foundation from which we experience his joy. Simply dwell on the permanent relational status of family. Your family is your family, my children are always my children, my parents are always my parents. The same is true with God; He is always your father. You are a part of his family, and his family is forever. **The second reality for joy is God's kinship with us.**

The third reality is where we get back to the book of Habakkuk, and this is the most significant piece. As I mentioned before, Habakkuk is proclaiming his prophetic message to an audience that is aware of a massive catastrophe, the Assyrian conquest. He tells them that another devastation is coming, one that will devastate all aspects of life. Habakkuk says,

I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Habakkuk 3:16-18

Habakkuk paints a picture of a nation that has been utterly ravaged by war and economic collapse. This collapse comes not only from another people, but from the land itself. In spite of all this, Habakkuk finds joy. How does he find joy? Look in the second part of v. 16. “Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.” As I read this initially, I first got a false picture of someone shaking their fist saying, “Some day you’ll get what is coming to you.” However, that is not how to see this. One of the most quoted verses in Habakkuk is 2:4, and it says, “... *the righteous shall live by his faith.*” The book hinges upon that section, and that is the foundation for Habakkuk’s quiet patience for God’s justice and, in turn, his joy. But that is still not the reality that we are searching for. Faith in God and trust in his justice are not what brings us joy, but the source of that faith and the source of his justice are that reality.

This reality, **the third reality that brings joy is that God is a king**, and not simply a distant and powerless monarch, but a king with ultimate authority. Again, the reality of the goodness of God and the kinship of God are great, but they mean nothing without his authority. In the day of trouble, Habakkuk has faith that God is on his throne and He has authority even when catastrophe strikes. He finds joy in one of the most devastating occurrences in the history of the Bible – the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the death, exile, and humiliation of the people. But Habakkuk responds with joy, “... *yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*” He does so because He understands that, in spite of bad circumstances, God is good; in spite of human loss, God deeply loves him and his people, and in spite of powers beyond Habakkuk’s, God is King.

Habakkuk finds joy in God’s goodness, kinship, and kingship. What these three realities show us is that joy comes not from circumstance, but from the Spirit of God and our faith in God’s paternal goodness and sovereignty.

So what does this look like for you and for me?

In order to develop this further, I think we should look at examples of joy being manifest. This is where we turn to our second passage in Acts 5:40-42.

... and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. Acts 5:40-42

When the fruit of the Spirit was present in the life of the apostles, when they experienced suffering for following Jesus, because of God's goodness, and their inclusion into their family, as well as God's kingship, they rejoiced. The joy created in them an counterintuitive response to the circumstances. Please let that sink in.

Another example can be found in Philippians 1:21-24. Paul writes,

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Why is Paul comparing life and death and seeing both as good outcomes? Because he has the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. He knows that God is good, that He is his heavenly Father, and that his kingship means nothing happens outside his authority. It means that death is not a limit, but the means through which Jesus conquered, humiliated, and extinguished the sting of the grave.

Speaking of Jesus, let's turn to another example. Hebrews 12:1-2,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Why did Jesus go to the cross, experience shame, and sit victorious on his throne – for the joy! He laid down his rights (Phil 2:6), and experienced suffering for the joy that would come. One of the things I frequently forget is that I am supposed to be like Jesus. I am supposed to count it all joy when I experience suffering. I am called to lay down my rights daily and do it for the sake of others.

It is the Holy Spirit of God inside of us that produces the fruit of the Spirit, and one flavor of the fruit of the Spirit is joy. Joy is sourced in the fact that God is good, God is our father, and God is King. That joy now influences our response...

Because God is good, I can rejoice when things are bad.

Let me be the first to say that things that we have been experiencing collectively over the past 16-18 months haven't been great. Rob mentioned it last week that we are being squeezed, and

when I am squeezed – am I joyful and rejoicing in God’s goodness. Honestly, sometimes yes and sometimes no. So, since I am the one being dissected, let’s look specifically at the times I am not rejoicing when things are bad.

When I react and do not rejoice about God’s goodness in the bad times, I am either forgetting God’s goodness or I am doubting God’s goodness. So I tried ways to remember God’s goodness, and all of those efforts involve remembering the Gospel.

When I doubt God’s goodness in times that are bad, I am questioning either the legitimacy of God’s authority or how good He is. Essentially, why do bad things happen to good people? I am probably the only one that struggles with that question. But what I must remember is that we are in a Kingdom that is now but not yet. That we live in a world that is at war and that the enemy is striving to destroy, and creation itself is broken because of our sin. Instead, we should be surprised when good things happen if we are truly digesting the truths that we find out about humanity in the Bible. If it were not for God, not only would we remain in a broken world, but we would also remain in our sin, and, in turn, our death and condemnation.

Because God is our loving Father, I can rejoice when I am not loved by others.

When someone does not love or cherish me as they are supposed to, do I rejoice? With the Holy Spirit inside us, we can rejoice that we always have a loving Father, even when or if we are not loved by our family, friends, or when people where we live and work do not treat us right. When we are beaten, persecuted, wronged, marginalized for our faith, do we freak out and talk about how hard, unjust, or ungodly the world is? Do we react and turn back to our rights, or do we rejoice in the reality that we are walking in the steps of Jesus, who not only was unjustly murdered but also gave up some of his divine attributes so that he could save us?

We can rejoice, just as the apostles rejoiced because we have the privilege to take part in the same sufferings that Jesus experienced.

Because God is King, I can rejoice when things seem to go against what He would want.

There is a lot that takes place in this world that seems to be against what God wants. I know many of us are more keenly aware of those realities now more than ever. However, there are some in this world that have lived with those realities for a long time. The suffering that the Church experienced globally is evidence that there are rulers and authorities that are reigning in opposition to God’s ways. Is God limited by ungodly rulers? Absolutely not. This is why Habakkuk was able to say, “... I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”

At the beginning of the pandemic, when all of us were simply reacting to bits and pieces of information, I began to ask myself the question, “God what are you telling us?” One of the things that helped me manage a lot of my stress was to wake up really early in the morning and just run – I thought it was better than my other stress reliever, eating. I delved more deeply into

his question because it was a question about God's authority and kingship: If God is on His throne, then what is He doing?

Then I discovered the answer, and when I did discover it, just like Habakkuk, I rejoiced. It gave me clarity regarding what I should do and encouraged me. The answer was not what He was doing, but what He already did. In the Gospel of Luke, the author highlights the saving power of Jesus from sickness many times. One could conclude that if Jesus had streamlined his healing process, much of the ancient Near East could have been healed. However, His focus was on the true joy set before him. Jesus stepped into history at the proper moment, as a part of a people with an understanding of sin and the necessary process of dealing with sin; He prepared his disciples, died, and then rose again so we might live. While He healed because that was a piece of what He will ultimately do, back then He dealt with sin, condemnation, and granted us salvation. Now we can have the Holy Spirit within us, God is truly with us, and we can have joy. This is what God did, and in these times God is doing what He has been doing for almost two millennia, using His Church as people who are meant to be experiencing the fruit of the Spirit to bring the message of Jesus to a poor, sick, and dying world.

You know the best way we can do that is to do life with joy confidence in God's goodness, drawing close to Him because He is our Father, and trusting Him because He is our King. When we understand these things, there is nothing that can steal our joy.