

The Psalms Greatest Hits Volume 6: Joy

Rev Luke Ham

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For those who have been with us for the past few weeks, I hope you have been enjoying our series on *The Psalms Greatest Hits* as much as I have.

For those who a recently joining us, Ron and I have been examining multiple themes found in the Psalms including Trust, Presence, Confession and Grace. And each week have been taking a modern song and relating it to Psalm.

And today we have before us what is called a Psalm of Ascent. A Psalm or Song of Ascent is section of 15 Psalms that many scholars believe were sung by worshippers as the ascended the road to Jerusalem during a Pilgrimage. Others believe they were song by Levite Priests as they ascended the Temple steps.

But regardless of the original use of these Psalms, we find many of them are cheerful and all of them are filled with hope.

And our specific Psalm, Psalm 126 is considered one of the most joy-filled Psalms there is.

So with that in mind, this morning we will be exploring this theme of Joy and how it applies to our lives and the life of the church.

But before we get too far into the role Joy can play in our lives, I want to first start out by clearly stating what we won't be talking about today.

Because when the psalm refers to joy, it does not mean the tendency that some people have to be happier than other people. It is not about those people who are more naturally wired to smile, who can wake up in the morning and are super cheery, even before they have had their first cup

of coffee. The joy we will be discussing today is not this matter of temperament.

It is also not about faking it....what we are looking for is not the pretend happiness that makes you crack a smile on your face even when you are screaming on the inside.

What we are exploring today has nothing to do with imposing joy on others by going up to someone who just found out that something terrible has happened and telling them to “rejoice in the Lord always...”

After all, if you did that, the understandable reply might be, “Let me kick you in the knee and see how much rejoicing you’re doing after that.”

No, the Joy I want to explore with you this morning is rooted in three aspects or outlooks: Thankfulness, Redemption and Community.

So let’s start off with Joy as it relates to thankfulness.

We are no doubt all familiar with the saying “Money can’t buy happiness...”

Although for disclosure I recently heard a comedian challenge this notion by saying They Say Money can’t buy happiness but Money can buy a Jet Ski.....and have you ever seen a sad person on a Jet Ski?

Well setting aside that point, I think most of us at least intellectually can agree money alone doesn’t buy happiness....we might not follow that with our heart...but we can agree it is a reasonable assertion.

And we can say that with a pretty good amount of confidence because when we look around Danville, Alamo and San Ramon we see a lot of people that have everything they need....we see some people who have way more than they need.

Yet, even with all of their abundance they still face the same problems that we all do.....fighting with their spouse...dealing with children who

are emotionally distant....stress and long hours at work....and the list goes on and on.

And we even see some folks who say that the money they have is one of the root causes of their stress....or the fighting in their family.

There are some folks who even though they are well paid they are still living paycheck to paycheck because of the way they are spending their money....in order to drive the right car and belong to right club/

So we know money doesn't buy happiness.

But at the same time, wealth doesn't preclude you from experiencing joy. Even though some hip hop rappers say Mo' Money Mo' Problems that isn't always the case is it?

I have met plenty of wealthy people who have a healthy and balanced life.

So, whether wealthy or poor there is another factor I believe at work here....its thankfulness....it is appreciation for what we have.

Now, I realize that is a lot easier to say as a person who has a roof over his head....as a person who has access to food and clean drinking water.

But, I have seen firsthand folks who have next to nothing.....but are still filled with Joy and Thankfulness for the little they do have.

As someone who grew up in the church and who has been working in the church for the past 10 years, I can safely say I've been on at least 40 mission and service trips in my life.

And almost always there is someone on the trip who shares that they amazed at how joyful the people they are serving are even though they have so much less than us.

In the Old Testament there are numerous passages that remind God's people to leave some of what they have for the foreigner, the widow and the orphan.

And the reason is to remind the people that they too once had nothing. It helps them to stay grounded...it helps them to remember where they came from....it help them to be joyful and appreciate of what they have.

Indeed the road to discovering joy must start with thankfulness.

Thankfulness is the soil that Joy grows out of. It seems so simple, yet is something we need to constantly remind ourselves of if we are to make room for joy...

Second, I will like to assert that Joy comes into our lives when we seek out redemption and celebrate it.

Last week, Ron used the story of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard as he shared on the theme of Grace.

This is the story where the manager goes out and hires workers first thing in the morning and they agree upon a fair wage...but then the manager goes out and gets more workers at 9am and at Noon and a 3pm and even right before the work day is about to end...and then when it comes time to be paid....what happens? They all get paid the same wage...and in fact those who started later in the day were the first ones to get paid.

So of course the ones working all day grumbled....and this morning we heard another parable that puts it in a different way. The Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The prodigal son is a story most folks raised in the church are familiar with....but at the same time I think that even though it is a story we know well, we often overlook what happens at the end....we are so excited that the Father forgives the older son that we begin to lose focus on what happens after that.....And ironically, the ending of the story is the part that is most important for us who are already in the church....the ending of the story is the most important for those who call ourselves Christian....who try to walk they path that Jesus taught us.

Because, so often we are the older son...we are looking at people who have screwed up and thinking why do they get a free pass? Why do they get to have everything handed to them even though they didn't seem to earn it? How come they can be so selfish for so long but after they say they are sorry and come back all is forgiven instantly?

Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

The Father says to his son: We HAD to celebrate.... We HAD to rejoice.....

For us to find joy we need to come to realize that Grace and redemption are absolutely...100 percent NOT fair and that is the absolute best part about them!

We need to look around the world and celebrate when grace is offered...when debt is forgiven...when gifts are given freely and with no strings attached.

And we also need to realize that being obedient doesn't mean we don't haven't had the same access to grace or to God the entire time....Son...Daughter....you are always with me, all that is mine is yours.

Just had grace leads us to joy, so does being obedient....that's the amazing thing about our multi-faceted God....there are so many ways to come to that realization of joy in our life....but the commonality in both of them is maintaining a relationship with our parent....that is what God wants.

Not for us to be just going through the motions at church...and not to just run off...but to be in a genuine relationship with God and whether

we are in an obedient season of our lives or a season that is in need of Grace, God will always be there....and that is where we find our joy.

And we are called to seek out, recognize and celebrate when others are redeemed just as much as we celebrate our own redemption or our own obedience.

So we open ourselves up to Joy when we are thankful and content in what we have.....we find joy when we seek out redemption and grace and celebrate those it is offered to....

And what is the best way to celebrate? Well if we base our answer on this parable it is to throw a party! Which brings me to the our third aspect of Joy----The Church.

Now perhaps, you have never associated church with a party before...

But why can't it be one? What if we all changed our expectations about what a worship celebration was..... What if we all entered this space and recognized it as a party....as a celebration of grace, love and redemption?

Being a community centered on Christ means we must also be a community that focuses and shares our joy.

Because the reality is there is so much to celebrate here! We celebrate those folks who had every reason physically to skip worship today...but they came and Graced us and God with their presence anyways.

There are people here who are celebrating incredible milestones.... Birthdays, anniversaries, new jobs, new relationships.

There are people here who are dealing with incredible loss....yet they are here....they are here to connect with God and connect with every single person in this sanctuary....in their darkest hour, they are choosing to not be alone, but to enter into this space of grace and love and hope....that is worth celebrating....that is worth throwing a party for!

Not because we want the Joy to simply cover up the pain, the sorrow, the loss....Because joy is not meant to be a pain killer...those feelings of pain and loss and sorrow are real...they are necessary...but we bring forth joy to stand beside the other feelings we are experiencing.

So many times we want things to be black and white.....we say we are either happy or sad....we are either joyful or sorrowful....someone is either loving or anger....but just like God is multifaceted, so are we....so is this celebration of worship.

So no matter what the situation....let's not simply cover it up with joy but let's also not fall into the trap of thinking there can't be joy even during the most difficult times.

I will be honest with you....when Ron and I were dividing up the various themes for this series I was really excited that one of mine was Joy....because I thought this would be so easy to preach on.

But when I started writing this sermon, I quickly found out just how complicated it can be.

But, I have faith that if we start to work together to be thankful, to seek out and celebrate redemption as a community of faith....as a weekly celebration...as a continuous party....that the joy we find in God and in one another can and will sustain us through any storm....

The joy has been around us the entire time..... God tells us that everything that he has is ours....it always has been our....so let's stop getting hung up on how others may have it compared to ourselves and start celebrating! Start sharing in the Joy of the Lord. Rejoicing with those who have been shown grace!

For our song selection today, I choose a very contemporary song....Pharrell's "Happy."

But we are not going to simply listen to the words this morning....

We will be watching a video of a flash mob performing it.

For those not familiar with the term....A flash mob is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place and perform a choreographed dance to music that is played.

Usually it is triggered by a seemingly random act that cues all the participants to start. In the video we are about to watch, the trigger is mock robbery...and has the apparent thief who stole someone's purse running through the main square.

Before we play the video, I need to give you a little background on why it was made.

The family...the husband and wife that you will see in this video standing on the side watching the performance and having a strong emotional reaction as the dance takes place had lost their son in a drunk driving accident 6 months prior.

And during the funeral this song was played as a testament to contagious happiness and joy that the son brought to his family and friends.

So 6 months later as the trial was about to start and these parents were about to re-live the pain of their loss all over again, hundreds of people planned, rehearsed and then gathered to allow a piece of joy to stand with these parents as well.

Joy in the midst of tragedy. Joy there not to overcome the pain and loss. Not to cover it up, but to stand beside it. An expression of Grace. A testimony to fact that these parents are not alone...that they are loved...they are cared for...they are cherished.

Let's watch....and let the party continue....