

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

HOPE.PEACE.LOVE.JOY

Week 3: JOY Discussion Questions

1. What do you think is the difference between happiness and joy?
2. What can make it difficult to feel joyful?

Read Isaiah 5:1-7

3. If God's people of the Old Testament were 'the vineyard', how have they been found wanting?

Read John 15:1-8

4. By contrast, what is Jesus like?
5. Many Christians are disturbed by Jesus' language in v2 and 6. Why do you think that is, and do you think it is right to be disturbed?
6. What do these verses teach us about our purpose in life?
7. What benefits does Jesus promise for his disciples? Which of these do you consider the most important?
8. What does it mean to 'remain in' Jesus? How do we do it?

Read John 15:9-17

9. How is love within the Trinity like the love between Jesus and us?
10. In the Christian life, what is the connection between love, joy, and obedience?
11. What do you think is the basis for Christian joy?
12. How does the message of Christmas contribute to your sense of joy?

Advent Christmas Gifts: Joy - John 15:1-17

**Opener: Christmas gifts: joy: much more than mere happiness (tingle tastebuds versus full tummy)
/What joy? Terrible news from America**

Context: Jesus' friends have just received some bad news: he is leaving them... and yet he can give them the secret of real joy

Big Question: What is real joy?

Part One: v1-8 – Real joy is knowing Jesus

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

In several parts of the OT, God's ppl are referred to as a grapevine, but sadly, it is usually a vine that has gone wild and produces bad grapes: Israel had constantly turned away from God to do evil. But now, God the Son has turned up. He has lived the perfect human life. He is the true vine. And when ppl follow Jesus, they are united to him and are therefore part of the true vine:

Now I know this part is not joyful! But to be true to Jesus' words here, I have to point out that this is not good news for everyone. When people reject Jesus, when they refuse his kingship, they are like the Israel of the OT. When people reject Jesus, they are like branches rejecting the vine. They never really belonged on the vine. They are fruitless and will be removed.

BUT Notice the promise for those who love Jesus:

V3 – ARE clean because of the word I have spoken to you

V4 – I WILL remain in you (spiritual union –IN CHRIST)

V5 – He WILL bear much fruit

V7 – prayers WILL be answered (if their desire same as his)

V8 – bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. THIS IS TO THE FATHER'S GLORY – which is our purpose in life.

John's Gospel has already contained some of the deepest and most joyful words in the whole Bible: JOY – 1) God turned up: he took on our humanity and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14); 2) Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full (Jn 10:10); now we see that part of his purpose in coming; the very way that we CAN have life to the full is...by being united to him! He came to live and die and rise for us, but also to commit himself to eternal relationship with ... YOU.

Illustration:

Wisteria at King St: things die away from the vine! VERSUS beautiful wisteria vine at my parents' place.

Application:

1) Do YOU know Jesus? My question is not, "are you a churchgoer/ Anglican?" Have you accepted him as the rightful LORD of your life? If not, the time is now. All your ministers are always glad to discuss this with you.

2) If you do know him, remain in him. When we have tasted full life that he offers, we'd be nuts to leave.

3) At Christmas time, rejoice in the amazing news that God turned up, giving life, inviting us into eternal r/ship. But our search for joy does not end there... we've already seen that real joy is KNOWING Jesus, now...

Part two: v9-17 – Real joy is GROWING in Jesus

⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

Illustration: Grandad: past and present

>> it’s the kind of joy that doesn’t go away, even when you life takes a turn for the worse

Application:

1) When Jesus returns, don’t you long for his word of ‘well done, good and faithful servant’? Persevere, remain in him and keep growing in obedience and love, and that joy will be yours.

2) If we feel down or depressed, does that mean Christian joy is dead? Does it mean we have lost our faith? No! read the Psalms and you will see men who were in all sorts of pain, and yet they have joy in knowing God and obeying his word.

3) A happy and blessed Christmas, esp as you enjoy this and God’s other Christmas gifts to us: Joy to the World, the Lord has come/ Let earth receive her king/ Let every heart prepare him room/ And heaven and nature sing.

Pray that God will stretch our minds to understand this next bit, because the joyful relationship into which Jesus invites us here runs as deep as God himself.

Some people like to put God in a box, but let’s remember he is our creator, he has always existed and he is three persons in one unity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three have existed from eternity ago, always in perfect relationship. That’s deep! Why am I telling you this? Because of:

V9 – READ IT – As deeply and powerfully as God loves his Son, so Jesus loves his followers: the Twelve, and us.

Not only that, but he has chosen his followers (v16), he has called them his friends (v14) But there is responsibility with this privilege:

To love someone you need to treat them at least as well as they deserve. When it comes to God, that involves our obedience. Jesus’ desire is to love his Father and do his will. If we love Jesus, we will do his will; we will do what he wants! What he commands!

Will this be a burden to us? A chore? No, the exact opposite...

v 11 READ IT - it will be joy- for Jesus and for us. I’m not talking about just feeling happy or upbeat or whatever. I’m talking about the deep satisfaction of the soul; about fulfilling the purpose for which you were made. If Jesus made us for a purpose and gives us commands so we can fulfill that purpose, then obeying his command is real fulfillment and real joy.

So what is his command? V12 (READ IT) – not always easy! IT takes sacrifice – for Jesus – v13 – the supreme sacrifice. But if all his followers love each other the way he has loved us, what will this church be like?! We are doing well; but pray that we will keep on growing in our ability to fulfill this command and love each other. And that is how we grow and bear fruit; how we produce results that will last the test of eternity. Just as there is much rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, there is rejoicing in heaven over the obedience of Christ’s church. In Rev 19, John has this vision: ⁶Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

⁷Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Friends, as we ready ourselves for heaven by living in obedience to our Lord’s command, Heaven is filled with joy.