

Christ in Us
Part 3 – Indestructibly Joyful
Luke 10:17-22

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ April 26, 2026 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church



¹⁷The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

¹⁸He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

²¹At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²²“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Luke 10:17-22, NRSV)



We talked about love last week. Now let’s talk about joy. That is the second aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of Christ’s Spirit, which he wants to see formed in us. As a reminder, Paul tells us in Galatians 2:20, “**It is no longer I who live, but it Christ who lives in me.**”¹ By the power and presence of the Holy Spirit living in those who have come to trust Christ as Lord and Savior, our lives are to increasingly bear the fruit that we see in Jesus’ lives, the very character of Christ. Paul summarizes that fruit when he writes later in that same letter, “**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**”² We are now going through the various aspects of that fruit. Today our focus is joy.

To better understand the joy of Christ which he intends to see produced in our lives, we are going to look at what, at first, might seem like an odd place to look.

When we pick up the story here in Luke 10, Jesus has just sent out 72 of his followers on a mission trip into the neighboring towns to bring healing, and to share the good news of the Kingdom of God. The trip is wildly successful, beyond what these disciples might ever have expected. Apparently they even found that the Lord gave them power over demons. So understandably, the disciples are filled with joy when they return to report all this to Jesus.

But Jesus’ response is less enthusiastic than they might have expected. Yes, he agrees that these disciples did miraculous things through his power. But then he rebukes them for placing their joy in their success. In doing so, we are given a stark contrast between the joy that we often seek in life and the joy that Jesus wants us to seek in life.

I grew up in Denver as a Broncos fan. By the time I was 25 I had watched my beloved team lose the Super Bowl four straight times. When you’re a kid it’s heartbreaking to see your team lose the big game. It didn’t get any easier as a young man. And then in 1998 the Broncos made it back to the championship against Brett Favre and the heavily favored Green Bay Packers. I was not optimistic. I will never forget the moment of jubilation when victory was sealed in the final minutes of the game, jubilation certainly highlighted by all those previous defeats. Finally, everything was right with the world. And then they won again the next year. Life from that point forward was most certainly going to be charmed.

It wasn’t. Let me let you in on a little secret, those of you who have never seen your team win it all. The joy is sweet, no doubt, but the joy doesn’t last. It’s shockingly fleeting. And then next season you don’t even make the playoffs. And what is true in sports is true in almost all of life. You see, our problem is that we are stubbornly prone to tie our joy to things which cannot sustain joy. And then when those things fail us, as they will always inevitably fail us, joy evaporates, making us imagine that joy, just like all good things in life, doesn’t last. And the let down can be harsh.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, this and all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

² Galatians 5:22-23

When I used to live in Nebraska, they would advertise suicide hotline numbers on the radio the day after the Cornhuskers football team lost a big game. Some of us might scoff at the person who would let the failure of a sports team lead them to such despondency. But are any of us really all that different? What is it that you are counting on in life to make you happy, and to keep you happy. Granted, maybe it's something far more important than sports, something like a successful career, or a strong marriage, or thriving kids, or, like these disciples, success in the Lord's work. Well, let me ask you, can you count on those things any more than you can count on your favorite team finding success on the field?

Did you know that there is an actual website called *happiness.com*? I'm not promoting it, but if you go there, and pay a little fee, you can discover what they call the five secrets to maintaining happiness in your life.

Today you get them free of charge. They are, in order:

1. Be in possession of the basics: food, shelter, etc.
2. Get enough sleep
3. Have relationships that matter to you.
4. Take compassionate care of others and yourself
5. Have work that really interests and engages you.³

I trust you see the problem immediately. Most people in most places in most times in our history don't have these things, certainly not all of them. Many of *us* don't have all of them right now! And even if you do, it won't be long until you don't. Who here would say that your work never failed to interest and engage you? Even things like family, which many of us hope will bring us lasting joy, ultimately fail us. If nothing else does, death will eventually come and strip it all away.

Don't misunderstand me. There is nothing wrong with feeling happiness over a good meal, a good night's rest, a fulfilling job, a loving family, or even a Super Bowl victory. Life is full of good gifts from God and I think we are meant to enjoy them. Happiness itself is a gift from God. And there is also nothing wrong with sadness. Life is full of hard things, and sadness and disappointment, even grief, these are very good and natural responses when something we value is taken from us, or when things don't go as we hoped things would go. There is nothing in God's Word that even suggests we should just paint on a happy face regardless of how things are going in life. That's not even how Jesus lived his life!

The problem comes when we root our joy in things that are fleeting, when we make good things into ultimate things. And that's exactly what the disciples had done here when they rooted their joy in their ministry success, a temptation I know all too well as a pastor. Jesus doesn't tell them not to be happy about the fact that even demons submitted to them; he tells them not to make that success a source of joy. There's a big difference, and the difference is highlighted in the sort of joy we see here in Jesus himself.

In verse 21 we read, "**At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit...**" Let's stop there. Jesus, we're told, was full of joy. The Greek word translated "full of joy" is a compound word that comes from the two words "much" and "jump."⁴ So literally, the text reads, "At that time, Jesus, jumping much through the Holy Spirit..." Jesus wasn't just happy, he was so full of joy that apparently it couldn't be contained. He was jumping for joy! One commentator says that this is the most exultant description of Jesus in all of scripture.⁵

Is that how you think of Jesus, jumping for joy? Is that how you think of God, a God bursting with joy? I've always loved this painting of Jesus, in part because it's so unusual. Sometimes you can find paintings of Jesus smiling, but mostly he's portrayed with a sort of reverent seriousness. Yet here he is laughing with his head thrown back. And there is great biblical evidence to suggest that this painting is accurate. For one, Jesus loved to go to parties. It seems in the Gospels that Jesus is almost always either headed to a feast, enjoying a feast, leaving a feast, making more wine for a feast, or miraculously creating a feast. At one point the ultra-serious religious leaders even accuse Jesus, "**Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!**"⁶ Of course, Jesus was no glutton or drunkard, but he did enjoy a good party. And look at his parables, so many of them full of wit. Beyond that, children were drawn to him. Children do not tend to be drawn to overly serious people.⁷

In that stunning passage in Hebrews 1 that describes the coming of God in the person of the incarnate Christ, the writer borrows words from Psalm 45 to describe what God the Father has given to God the Son. He writes, "**God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.**"⁸ Above your companions! Some of us may need to rethink our perception of Jesus, so that we might come to see him as the most joyful being in the entire

³ Cited by Timothy Keller, "Real Joy", *Gospel in Life*, November 7, 2025.

Listen at <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/real-joy/id352660924?i=1000735742361>

⁴ <https://biblehub.com/greek/21.htm>

⁵ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 313.

⁶ Matthew 11:19

⁷ I'm indebted here to Jonathan Landry Cruse, *The Character of Christ* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2023), 30.

⁸ Hebrews 1:9 (NIV), citing Psalm 45:6,7.

universe. And if Jesus is the perfect image of the invisible God, then God himself is the most joyful being in the entire universe.

I can't help but think of that famous passage from the British theologian, G.K. Chesterton, where he compares the joy of God to the joy we see in children. We've all been around a small child who finds something pleasing and wants you to do it again, and again, and again. How many times will a two-year-old want you to play peek-a-boo? As many times as a Labrador retriever will want you to toss the tennis ball! And yet the joy never seems to diminish. Chesterton writes,

It is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.⁹

If you do not have a perception of your Father in heaven as one who is full of bottomless joy, expressed even in the creation of one single daisy, and furthermore that this joy is necessarily expressed in Christ, his Son, you need to ask for his help in reimagining who he really is. Remember, joy is a part of the fruit of the Spirit of Christ! And we can see the reason for that joy in this passage if we pay attention to Jesus' prayer in verse 21. He prays, **"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do."** In a word, the source of Christ's joy is in the fulfillment of the pleasing will of his Father, in his good purposes, in his unshakable plans, whatever those plans might be.

To be clear, Jesus was not always happy. Isaiah 53:3 describes him as **"a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity."** We see this in his life. He wept often, knew loneliness, endured betrayal, suffered beyond description. His head was not thrown back in laughter in these moments. And yet joy never left him. Again from the book of Hebrews we read, **"For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."**¹⁰ It's impossible even to imagine any worse circumstances in life than what Jesus faced on the cross. There was no happiness in his sacrifice and suffering. And yet there was joy. Why? *Because the circumstances*

of the cross were according to the pleasing will, the good purposes, the unshakable plans of his Father, and he knew that though there would be weeping for a time, laughter was coming in the morning.

And here we get to the difference between joy and happiness. When you come across the word joy in the New Testament, it's the translation of the Greek word *chairó*.¹¹ Sometimes it shows up in greetings like "Rejoice!". But in every case the word consistently reflects a deep gladness which is unshakable, because it is rooted in God's gracious activity, which is also unshakable. If the cross was anything, it was certainly a sign of the gracious activity of God, Christ giving himself for the sake of an undeserving and ungrateful world. And so even though the circumstances of the cross were anything but happy, Christ took joy as he faced and endured the cross because he knew what it would bring, and that those results were guaranteed.

Can you see it now? This is why Jesus warns his disciples, and us in turn, to not root our joy in circumstances, even circumstances as good as success in ministry. Because is success in ministry always guaranteed by God? No, it is not. Sometimes you go out to share good news and extend compassion to people, and nobody wants anything to do with you. Sometimes they attack you for coming. So if your joy is dependent on your success, suddenly joy evaporates. But if your joy is rooted in bearing witness to Christ even if nobody responds because you know this is the Lord's will, then nothing can threaten your joy.

This is why Jesus tells his disciples to instead find joy in the fact that **"your names are written in heaven."** In those days this was a common metaphor in Judaism. People imagined that in heaven there was a book of life, either containing the names of those who would come to be with God, or the good deeds of such people, or even God's plans for the world.¹² Either way, the point was that there were things "written" in heaven which were written in permanent ink, maybe even etched in stone, irrevocable because they belonged to God. And this is where the joy of these disciples should be rooted, because these things will never change. Once you belong to God, you always belong to God. Once you are loved by God, you will always be loved by God. Once God determines that you belong to him, there is no circumstance in heaven or earth which can ever undo that reality.¹³

This, by the way, may be why joy comes immediately after love in Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit.

⁹ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Ignatius Press, 1908), 65-66.

¹⁰ Hebrews 12:2

¹¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/5463.htm>

¹² Edwards, 313.

¹³ Romans 8:31-39 articulates this beautifully!

As we talked about last week, God's other-centered, self-giving, sacrificial, agape love for you is unconditional. Nothing can shake it. No circumstances can compromise it. When you discover this reality of God's love for you, you become like the man in Jesus' parable who discovers a priceless treasure buried in a field one day. Jesus says, "**In his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.**"¹⁴ The treasure you have discovered is this love God has for you in Christ, this unconditional love which forgives all, heals all, restores all. The natural response to this love must inevitably be joy, joy which eventually emerges in the life of anybody filled with the Spirit of God.

You may know that at Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace, the Royal Standard flag is always flown outside when the king of England is in residence. And if the king goes to his vacation home, or even on a yacht, the standard follows him and flies in those places. It's a sign to others that the king is present.¹⁵ The standard flying outside the life of a Christian ought to be joy, the sign that the King is present within. Chesterton called joy "the gigantic secret of Christianity." It's true, when things are going well, true joy may be hard to spot. Everyone seems joyful when life is turning up roses. But counterfeit joy gets unmasked and exposed when circumstances go south. That's when the distinction shows up in the lives of those who have come to know and trust the love of Christ. Again, it's not that we should never know sadness or grief. Of course we should – and will! But when the world meets people who do not lose hope even when all hope seems to be lost, the world comes across something completely foreign to them.

So when the scriptures command us to remain joyful, they do so in the knowledge that we have the resources within us to do so. James 1:2 declares, "**My brothers and sisters, whenever you face various trials, consider it all joy.**" Paul says it twice in Philippians 4:4 for emphasis: "**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.**" And 1st Thessalonians 5:16 doesn't mince words: "**Rejoice always.**"

Perhaps part of the secret to this is doing whatever we can do to continue to lean into both the love *and* joy of Christ, trusting that even though we do not yet know the fullness of joy as we will one day come to know it, that Christ, as he lives in and through us, will give us glimpses of that joy along the way to help us remember what is in store. In his autobiography, interestingly enough entitled *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis confessed how he once spent so much of his life before he became a Christian rooting his joy in things that never lasted. It

was only when he came to know Christ that his perspective changed. He later wrote,

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshipers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.

Perhaps even in the moments of happiness we experience along the way, fleeting as they may be, we can gain hints of a deeper gladness that one day we will find written in permanent ink. With this in mind, Lewis left us a beautiful metaphor. He has us imagine being completely lost in the woods, wandering for days, even weeks, with no sense of how to get home. But then one day you find a signpost that points the way home. This is life-saving news! The best news of all. And for a moment you may stand and stare at the signpost in wonder and joy. But eventually, of course, you follow its direction. And along the way there are more signposts, seemingly placed at just the point where you imagine you may once again be hopelessly lost, keeping you moving on the way towards hope.

With this in mind, Lewis points out that if that were you, you would not stop and fixate on each signpost. You would notice them, be grateful for them, or even for the one who put them there, but then you would move on towards the thing to which they pointed. In his words, "We will not stop and stare at the signposts, or at least not too much, though their pillars are of silver and their lettering is of gold."¹⁶ Why? Because we would rather be home than to stay and linger at the signs that are merely pointing the way home!

I promised you last week that I'd offer one simple practice which might help us cooperate with Christ as he produces these various aspects of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. In terms of joy, you might consider doing this. Consider one circumstance in your life right now which is not happy or easy, something you would change if you could. It could be something on the level of an annoyance, or something very heavy and painful. Once you identify something, then ask God to show you a promise he has made in his Word that speaks to the eventual resolution of this hard thing.

¹⁴ Matthew 13:44

¹⁵ I'm borrowing this illustration from Jonathan Landry Cruse, 40.

¹⁶ I'm indebted to Timothy Keller for citing these quotes and illustration in "Real Joy."

For example, if it is nagging or even debilitating health issues you are facing, find a passage of scripture where God promises that one day this broken, failing body of yours will be resurrected to permanent health. 1st Corinthians 15:42 might be a good choice: **“What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.”** Or if you are in a heavy season of grief right now, a season which seems it may have no end, perhaps you want to memorize Revelation 21:4, a part of that stunning passage describing life when Christ returns and welcomes us home: **“Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, For the first things have passed away.”** Or if what seems to threaten your joy these days is the failure in your life you know God calls sin, a failure that leaves you with stuck with guilt and shame, maybe Romans 8:1 could be your verse: **“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

Whatever your choice, when these hard circumstances weigh heavy on you, meditate on this promise of God which is written in heaven and see if, in time, you might begin to find joy even if the circumstances don't change. Sickness may worsen and lead to death, but one day you will have a body which will never know sickness or death. Grief may persist, but one day every last tear will be wiped away by Christ himself, never to return. The struggle against sin will continue, guaranteed, but in Christ you have already been forgiven! As these realities sink into your heart and mind, joy will increasingly be the flag that flies in your life to let others know that the King is in residence.

I'll leave you with these words from writer Fredrick Buechner. “Happiness,” he wrote, “turns up more or less where you'd expect to – a good marriage, a rewarding job, a pleasant vacation. Joy, on the other hand, is as notoriously unpredictable as the one who bequeaths it.” It's true. He's right. When Christ is present, you just never know where you'll find joy.

Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read the passage again from Luke 10:17-22. Read the previous part of the chapter if that helps you get the context. What stands out to you from these verses?

2. How do you define joy? And is that how most people define joy?
3. By your own definition, would you describe yourself as a person of joy? If so, what is the reason for your joy? If not, what hinders you from being a joyful person?
4. The disciples in this passage were corrected by Jesus because they were rooting their joy in something fleeting like success in ministry. Talk about what fleeting thing you tend to root your joy in. How might Jesus want to redirect you?
5. When Jesus tells the disciples here to rejoice because their names are written in heaven, what is he telling them? And can we rejoice for the same reason?
6. Pastor John Piper said this about Jesus: “Jesus Christ is the happiest being in the universe. His gladness is greater than all the angelic gladness of heaven. He mirrors perfectly the infinite holy, indomitable mirth of his Father...He is glad with the very gladness of God.” Do you agree? Do you think Jesus was the most joyful person who ever lived? If so, what evidence do you have for this?
7. Consider scriptures like James 1:2-3 – **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, & because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”** How can a person suffer and be joyful at the same time? Have you ever had this experience?
8. What do you think about the simple practice Jeff offered, the practice of considering one difficult or unhappy circumstance in your life and applying some passage from scripture to that circumstance which speaks to God's promise to eventually set things right? How might you do this?

Table to Table: A Question for kids and adults to answer together.



Do you ever picture Jesus laughing? If so, what do you think he laughed about? Is God joyful?