

DATE: June 22, 2008

TEXT: Isaiah 43:2-4a

TITLE: "Fruits of the Spirit II: Joy"



I am continuing this week a sermon series on the fruits of the Spirit. I have a poem given to me entitled "Christian Fruit" The poem was written by Jane Clingan:

Christian Fruit

You may live by the Golden Rule, dear one,
 You may keep every law made by man.
 But if you won't take Christ as God's Son,
 You'll be kept from the Promised Land.

You may try to keep His commands--all ten
 You may live a good life in your town.
 But if you don't know that He died for all men,
 You may not find yourself heaven-bound.

You may go to your church and take part,
 And do what you know is right.
 But unless He is living within your heart,
 You will not see the glorious light.

All of these things we need here below
 But first we must find the root.
 When you are saved and in Him you do grow,
 "Being Good" then becomes your fruit.

So much truth in that poem. We are saved by faith. Biblical faith is having an intimate relationship with Christ. We receive the Holy Spirit who changes our lives... He changes our

personalities. We are transformed into the likeness of Christ. Fruits can be used as a barometer to how mature we are in Christ.... how surrendered we are to Christ.

Two weeks ago we looked at Love. We saw that love is commitment. God loves us, is committed to us; therefore, we must be committed to Him. God loves us, is committed to us; therefore, we must be committed to our family and our neighbors. As we mature in Christ, our love... our commitment increases.

This week we are looking at the second fruit of the Spirit, Joy. Our Lord promises us joy.

In John 16:24 he states.. **“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”** Let me say there is great confusion in our society in regard to the definition of joy. Often people think joy and happiness are the same thing. Biblically, they are not. In premarital counseling one statement I hear again and again is this, **“I just want us to be happy.”** What happens, in reality, is that relationships are a series of rings: first is the engagement ring.... second in the wedding ring..... then begins the suffer-ring. I didn't make that up... I heard it in another sermon. The truth is this: every relationship does

indeed have times of suffering, times of hardship, stress, pain. Is it possible to be happy all the time? No, it is not. Is it possible to be joyful at all times and in all circumstances? Yes, it is, if you understand the Biblical definition of joy.

Happiness is a feeling. You feel happy; you feel unhappy. The word happy comes from the word “Happenstance”. It is based on chance... on luck.... on circumstances. Joy, on the other hand, is a state of being. It is a decision. It is based on Jesus Christ. You can be in difficult situations and still be joyful at your relationship with Christ. You can be struggling with cancer or heart disease and be joyful in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. It is a personality trait of a person in surrendered relationship with Christ.

The question is: If God has promised this joy, why don't I always experience this joy? Scripture commands us to “**Rejoice in the Lord always... again I say rejoice.**” The question is how? The answer is: it is a conditional promise. In order to receive this joy we need to be surrendered to the Lord. We need to be in obedience to the Lord. I want to share 3 acts of

obedience we must choose in order to receive the joy of the Lord.

Act of obedience # 1 We need to focus on giving rather than receiving. *Acts 20:35* states

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

John 3:16 states **"God so loved the world that he gave."** He gave. Giving is the key to joy.

God gave himself to us. We are called to serve one another.

A common expression you hear is, **"I'm just looking out for # 1"**. This is used usually to justify a selfish action. Looking out for # 1 is the sure path to misery. Many men in our society are very goal oriented. Before marriage men often set the goal for themselves of getting married. So they pursue their woman. They call her on the phone. They take her out and spend money. They give nice gifts; they pursue their goal. But then comes wedding day. Many men think to themselves... mission accomplished... goal achieved.... next goal is making a living and building a career. They then move on.... not ignoring their wife... just downgrading her to a secondary concern. That is the path of selfishness. Men justify their actions by saying things like, "I'm working hard for my family." "I want my wife and kids to be comfortable,"... but in reality they

are pursuing their own goal for their own sense of accomplishment.

The Biblical truth is this: joy comes from making others happy. Isn't one of the greatest joys we have as parents is giving our children gifts that light up their eyes. Or giving them our time that brings laughter to their lips. Playing with them, reading to them, talking to them. Joy. Isn't it wonderful to bring laughter and happiness to our spouses. I love to see Kim happy and joyful. I will do most anything to bring her joy. Why? Because it brings me joy.

I love to serve others in our church. It's one of my great joys as a Christian and as a brother in Christ to go to hospitals and be with individuals and families in times of need, to be with families in times of loss, in times of struggle, in times of joy. What a privilege I have. Notice I did not say it's my privilege as a pastor.... no, it's all our privilege as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to serve one another; it is the path of joy. Not happiness.... I share tears and anger with other people; but it is the path of joy.

Act of Obedience # 2 We are to focus on healing rather than hurting. *Colossians 3:13*

gives this command:

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Have you ever noticed that we replay our hurts and grievances in our minds again and again? And every time we replay the offensive incident, we get angry all over again. If I took the time and went to you with a microphone, every single one of us could recall a time when another person hurt us. We could recall the time.. The place we were at... the words... the emotions. We need to put this habit away. We need to let actions of hurt go. *Romans 12 :2 states this...*

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

God transforms us and notice how this transformation takes place... by the renewing of our minds. We must replace bitterness with forgiveness in our minds.

Before I have shared the story of conflict that took place in my very first church. I was young and a part-time pastor of a small church in Niagara Falls. The choir director came and demanded that I fire the organist. She stated that she would quit and the entire choir would quit if

we did not immediately fire her. The organist was an 80 year old woman that loved to play and needed the small stipend. So I took the issue to the Session. The Session decided that Iverna would be given 6 months' notice and we would collect a special offering for her that would tide her over for 2 to 3 years after that. The choir director rejected this compromise. She and the entire choir quit. Let me tell you how I reacted... I was angry. I was very angry at the choir director and at a number of the choir members. For the next few weeks it was hard to preach. It was hard to not let the anger affect every part of my ministry. I replayed the conversation I had with the choir director again and again in my mind... getting angry every time. I had to learn to give it up. I had to surrender my anger and the relationship to the Lord. It wasn't easy. Every day I had to pray for the choir director and the choir members... and not that God would smite them... that they would grow in the Lord and that I could minister to them. Over a period of time there was healing. There was forgiveness. I could tell story after story like this from every church, from my family, from my friendships. We are an easily offended people. We must give up our offense and forgive. Offended, bitter people never discover forgiveness. At times the

offense is great. I know many children who have been greatly injured by parents. I know a number of people who have suffered abuse... physical, emotional and sexual, from the hands of adults they had trusted. I know of husbands and wives who have been abused sometimes many, many years ago. Forgiveness has to be offered, not only for the person who caused the offense, but for yourself. Only when forgiveness is given is joy discovered. I know people who have gone to their graves with little to no joy because they harbor anger and bitterness at people.

Offer forgiveness.

Let me say when you offer forgiveness, that does not mean you immediately offer trust. I would not have hired that woman to be our choir director again even if she wanted it (she didn't). An abused spouse must offer forgiveness... trust takes much, much longer. The key is the offering of forgiveness. The renewing of your mind by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for those who offend you. Dwell on the things of the Lord not on the past hurts.

Act of obedience # 3 Focus on God's power not on your problem. Our text this morning was from Isaiah. It reads:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God,

God has power in our lives. God is always with us. That truth brings joy. That truth allows us to rejoice at all times. Many of you come to worship with heavy hearts. You are suffering from ongoing pain. You are suffering from broken relationships; yet you still can rejoice in worship because God is here. Because the power of God is present. Paul wrote the words from prison awaiting his execution: **“Rejoice in the Lord always, Again I say rejoice.”** Joy is not dependant upon circumstances; it is dependant on the Power and the presence of the Lord.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. As we grow in our faith, as we surrender more and more to the Lord, as we surrender our hurts and pains, we gain joy. Next week we look at peace.

AMEN