

The Fruit of the Spirit - Joy (Part 1)

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[0 : 0 0] Well for a short while today I'd like us to turn back, well we'll turn actually to Galatians chapter 5 because we're going to continue our study in the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5 verses 22 and 23. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control against such things there is no law. Now we are working our way through these and today we are going to focus on joy. Joy is at the heart of the Christian message and Paul reminds us of that in the letter to the Romans. He says, the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Paul says the kingdom of God is a matter of joy and so we are being reminded in Romans and in Galatians and throughout the New Testament that both inwardly and outwardly joy should characterise us as Christians. Now remember when we're talking about the fruit of the Spirit Paul is using that image of fruit to emphasise the fact that he is talking about something that is both inwards and outwards. The fruit of a tree is outward but it reflects the inward reality that it is a fruit tree or an orange tree or whatever kind of fruit it may be and so the fact that we are Christians by faith in our hearts is visible and evident to all by the fruit of the Spirit showing itself in our lives. So in other words our joy should be visible to everyone and the New Testament even goes on to say that despite the fact that as a Christian life can be hard at times, nevertheless as we read in Philippians 4 Paul tells us that we can rejoice in the Lord always. Now Paul says rejoice in the Lord always. He is making a very big statement.

You think of everything that happens in life? Can we rejoice always? Well that raises a question that I want us to explore. Why should we have joy as Christians? That's the question I want us to ask and we're going to spend some time on it today and we're going to spend more time on it in a fortnight's time. We'll do this in two parts. I want us to start just by asking a very simple question. What gives you joy in your life? Now I don't mean in terms of particularly theological issues but just in general terms what kind of things makes you joyful? Well I asked myself this question and I can think of eight things that give me joy in life. It's not a particularly comprehensive list. There isn't much order to it. These are just eight things that certainly I find give me joy and I hope that it's something that you can relate to. You can maybe think of others but I'm fairly sure that these eight things will be common to us all. So I'm going to put them up and we can just go through very quickly. First of all family and friends. That's a source of joy isn't it? Our togetherness as families is a wonderful, wonderful source of joy. Now it's not always like that for people and the pain of that is immense and the reason it is painful is because it is so precious in the first place because families are a source of immense joy and the same is true of our friends. We think of our friends, we think of our families. They give us joy. So that's the first thing. Second thing, nature. You look outside on a beautiful day like today and you think wow. It gives us joy. It's absolutely thrilling. Now today it's nice. Most of the time in the winter it's it's it's dark and cold but think of a summer's day when the sun is shining down and you can hear the birds singing and everything is just beautiful. It fills you with joy and nature really is an amazing source of joy. In fact even in the winter you can get joy. When it snows there's a lot of joy in our house and I'm sure it's the same for anyone else who's got children. So nature. Number three, achievements. Now when I say achievements I don't mean in terms of competition or in terms of selfish gain or anything like that but just in terms of finishing a task you think of the feeling of finishing your last exam. That was a wonderful feeling. Think of all these exams you have to do in school or in college or university and you reach the last one and it's finished and it's brilliant and it might be the same in work or even just getting the pizza home or finishing the lambing or whatever it may be that sense of getting something done when you have that sense of purpose that sense of fulfillment it gives you joy. The fourth thing I thought of was music.

Music gives me joy. Now I should say it not all music gives me joy sometimes some music has the opposite effect. In fact I can think of music that once gave me joy as a teenager that now doesn't give me so much joy but I suppose we are all like that. We go through different different tastes. Anyone remember the water boys? I was a big water boys fan when I was a teenager. Now maybe not so much but music has a powerful way of giving us joy. The fifth thing is victory.

[6 : 21] Scotland yesterday in the rugby that gave me joy. Andy Murray, Winnie Wimbledon that gives me joy. Victory gives us joy. Now sometimes of course in sport one person's joy can be another person's sorrow when Rangers beat Celtic that's joy for half of you sorrow for the other half of you but victory brings joy that of course applies in competitions but it also applies in conflict.

You think of when people heard that World War II was over that would have been a moment of joy. Victory brings joy. Sickly good news brings us joy doesn't it when we hear good news we rejoice. We hear of a couple getting engaged if we hear of a baby being born if we hear of friends coming to stay if we hear of a church growing good news is a great source of joy. Seventhly love is a source of joy as well. Now I don't just mean in terms of falling in love but love of your family, of your friends as a community as a congregation love is a great source of joy when someone shows you that they love you it gives you joy and then the final one is home. There is nothing like the joy of a homecoming and so there's eight things just general everyday things that give us joy in life and I hope that that you can relate to these we may not be experiencing these today but I am fairly sure that we can all look back to moments in our lives and think of when we have had joy from these things. Life is often very very far from perfect but at times life does give us joy. Now some people think that becoming a Christian stifles joy in your life. Some people think that becoming a Christian is going to spoil all of those things and it's going to take away the joy that we have. People can often think that the Christian is to be a very solemn person in terms of being almost melancholic. A Christian is to be solemn but in terms of being serious but not in terms of being depressed but that's the impression people give a Christian solemn detached almost a bit depressed. That's how some people I think perceive the Christian life. Is that the truth? Of course it is not the truth. The truth is the complete opposite. The truth is that the good news of Jesus Christ gives us every reason to rejoice. In fact we have these eight things as

Christians but the only difference now is that as Christians they are even better and God brings the joyful things in life to a whole new level and today and in a fortnight's time I want us to think about these things but I want us to think about the theological version of these eight things because they are all a source of immense joy and so today we're going to do the first four and after I'm back from holiday God willing in two weeks time will do the other four. So first of all family and friends well at the heart of Christianity is family. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ we are adopted into God's family. It's at the very heart of the gospel and there are three great theological truths that arise from that adoption. First of all it means that God himself is our Father. God is our Father and that means as a Christian God looks at you and he says my precious precious child. Secondly it means that Jesus Christ is your brother and Hebrews 2 tells us that Jesus is not ashamed to be our brother. He's not ashamed to look at you and say that's my brother that's my sister we are in the same family. He is proud to have you in his family and thirdly it means that every other Christian is part of this great family. Our relationship as Christians is one as brothers and sisters and that's why fellowship is at the heart of the Christian church. Now the word fellowship simply means having something in common and as Christians we have something amazing in common. We are one family we have the same Father we have the same brother and

God by his spirit is dwelling in the hearts of each one of us and that's why in the New Testament you see that believers took immense joy not just in God but in each other. Paul uses the word joy I think 21 times at least 16 of those times are in reference to his fellow believers. For example we read Philippians 4 therefore my brothers whom I love and long for my joy and crown those Philippians were Paul's joy same as seen in 1 Thessalonians 2 19 for what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus that is coming is it not you for you are our glory and joy.

[12 : 42] Isn't that amazing Paul had joy because of God and because of everything that God had done in Jesus Christ but he also had joy because of his fellow believers and that makes perfect sense because as believers we have so much in common we are on the same team we have the same hope we have the same savior and that's why whenever you meet a fellow Christian even if it's somebody you've never ever met in your life there is a real and there is a powerful bond and I'm sure you have experienced that you meet a Christian and they are your friend even though you've

never met them and the amazing thing is that for us today it is even better than it was for Paul because back in the first century I was wondering about the question how many Christians were there in the world in the first century now I don't know the answer to that question I'm guessing 100,000 but I don't know you think about the different churches across the eastern end of the Mediterranean there maybe was more maybe up to 1 million I don't know how many there were but today if you're a Christian and if every Christian in the world is your friend then you have well over 1 billion friends and that's an amazing thought and it's two because you have something in common you are part of the same family and that's why it's such a joy to be together as God's people and that's why one of the highlights of my week is to come up here and to see everybody who has come to church it is so good so good to see you and to be together and every time anyone comes to church you should know that you're surrounded by family and friends and that of course is the reason why the New Testament makes it so clear that division is such a serious sin in God's sight and throughout the New Testament it is emphasized because that has no place in God's church as a Christian you are in God's family so that's the first point family and friends the theological version the second thing is nature as I said you look at the world anyone can look at the world and can say wow what a world as Christians we can look at the world and say wow what a God because the world points us to the glory of the Creator that's what the psalmist says in Psalm 92 for you Lord have made me glad by your work at the works of your hands I will sing for joy you look at what God has made and we rejoice and every day we wake up to an abundance of blessings and so that's why every day should begin this is the day that the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it because as Christians we have so many reasons to be glad we open our eyes and we see God's glory we see God's glory in the rising of the sun we see it in the stars in the flowers of the field in the fruit of the trees in the glory and in the splendor of creation and as a Christian you can look at all the majesty of creation and you can say I know the one who made that now in life there is something very very special about being able to say my father did that or my mother did that your parent did that I had the immense privilege of growing up with a father who did a lot of wonderful work in his career and I constantly constantly hear accounts of people who are cared for by my father and they speak in immensely glowing terms and and I think to myself my father did that as Christians we can look at the world and we can say our father did that the one who made this universe is our father and these are the things that should fill our minds these are the things that we should think about more that's what Paul said in Philippians 4 which we read finally brother whatever is true whatever is honorable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is commendable if there is any excellence if there is anything worthy of praise think about these things how often do we waste our time thinking about nonsense thinking about things that are the opposite of all of those things that Paul lists and yet if we just turn our eyes to the world around us and think about the God who made it we can rejoice in his work and so we think about what God has done and we look at the world around us and we rejoice but do you know what's amazing for the Christian it gets even better than that because our hope as Christians is not just for this world it is for a new heaven and a new earth look at what Isaiah says in Isaiah chapter 65 he says behold I create new heavens and a new earth now that's talking to the new creation what we think of as heaven but it's ultimately a recreation of the universe and new heavens and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind but be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create for behold I create Jerusalem to be a joy and her people to be a gladness now look at what that is saying God is preparing the new creation for every single person who trusts in Jesus Christ and that is to give us joy now you think of the new creation of heaven of the perfection of it where everything that is wrong with this world has gone and everything that is perfect about this world is better you think of everything that God is preparing and God is saying I am making this for you to enjoy it's so that you can have joy in his work that's what he's saying I'm making Jerusalem that heavenly city to be a joy for you that's part of the reason why we why the first catechism says man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever never ever forget part of your chief end is to be joyful and that's because of everything that God is doing for us and so nature gives us joy the third thing is achievements remember we said when we achieve something in life we rejoice it gives us joy now as Christians we are being used to achieve the greatest of things and we are employees in engaged in the greatest work of all and this is a wonderful theological truth that is emphasised by the fact that the Holy Spirit himself has given us all gifts for this work the New Testament makes it clear the Holy Spirit gives every single Christian

gifts in order to serve God now not everybody has every gift but there is nobody who has no gifts we all have some gifts and through these gifts of the Spirit we are able to work in God's service as Paul says in Philippians 2 for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure so we can work for

God and serve him and achieve things for him and at the heart of that is one of the most important words for us to remember in terms of living our Christian lives obedience if you look at Jesus Christ he delighted to obey his father and we are to be the same Samfordi I delight to do your will oh God your law is within my heart that's saying to do what God wants is a joy so as a Christian what is the greatest thing that you can achieve this week obedience to God in every part of your life whether the whole world is watching you or whether nobody can see you and again this all makes perfect sense obeying God gives us joy the opposite is so often our experience isn't it sin never gives us lasting joy has that ever happened to you where you're tempted to do something you think oh this will make me feel good and you do it and it makes you feel horrendous sin gives lasting sorrow and regret but living in

[22 : 44] God's way brings us joy and this is great because this is where we see that the world's standards of success don't matter when you're a Christian people are so often crippled by the world's standards of success and the world defines joy in an utterly deceptive way the world says that your joy is dependent on making sure you get to the top in your work making sure that your home is bigger or better or nicer making sure that your possessions increase making sure that your status is elevated that's the world's lie when it comes to joy but as a Christian it does not matter one bit if you are rich or poor if you're famous or if you're unknown if you're at the top or if you're at the bottom now there's a lot of people in life who are miserable because they haven't reached the top they haven't reached the top in their job and they want to get higher they want to earn more they want to succeed more they want to get on better and they're miserable because they haven't reached the top many people are like that other people are miserable because they have reached the top because more often than not at the top of a job is stress pressure and an immense amount of burden and so people are miserable some because they haven't reached the top some because they have as a Christian you can have joy wherever you are joy at the top joy at the bottom joy working your way up because whatever you are doing wherever you are in your work now when I say work

I mean paid employment but I also mean unpaid employment so if you're retired or anything like that you're still working for God every day in the different things that you're involved in wherever you are you are living every day in God's service and you can glorify him and that is where we find joy that's why the psalmist says in Psalm 4 you have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound there's loads of people in the world their grain and their wine is abounding their possessions are abounding but if you look to the Lord Jesus you will have more joy than possessions can ever ever give you and this is where we see that we can have joy even when we are suffering look at these verses Acts chapter 5 then they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name that's the disciples persecuted suffering but rejoicing because they're doing it in the name of Jesus James says the same thing counted all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various counts for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness there is a direct link there between joy and trials the two are not opposites as Christians the two can go hand in hand and again it makes perfect sense because God is in control and God is working things for good in our lives and as we seek to serve him sometimes we will have moments of great ease other times we'll have times of great trial but we know that when we eventually get home from work now I mean to our eternal home when we get home from our work here on earth God will say well done good and faithful servant now that and that alone is the pinnacle of what we can achieve in our work just think about it you are working for God God has placed you where you are you are not a nobody you are not a failure you are where God has placed you and every day is an opportunity to serve him by living your life according to his word and as you obey God you are making him happy and that is a wonderful reason to rejoice we can joy in the Lord the fourth thing which is our last thing for today is music music is a source of joy but the best kind of music is the music that is used in the praise of God now the Bible makes it abundantly clear that music is to be used in the praise and the worship of God the Psalms are a great place to find out let all who take refuge in you rejoice let them ever sing for joy Psalm 33 shout for joy in the Lord oh you righteous praise be fixed the upright give thanks to the Lord with the lyre

make melody to him with the harp of ten strings sing to him a new song place skillfully on the strings with loud shouts now the word music is sometimes a controversial term in ecclesiastical circles sometimes it's a source of suspicion sometimes it's even a source of division and that should never be the case but our worship services

should be full of music because the best music is the music that is performed for God but the great thing is that our services are already full of music I have never been to a service in any free church that is not full of music because our singing is music now some people feel that that music should be unaccompanied others feel that it can be accompanied and the free church recognizes the validity of both these views and I think that's a good thing and I think that there's strong biblical arguments on both sides the point I want to emphasize is that both views have one great thing in common they are using music to worship God and whether it is accompanied or not is nowhere near as important as the fact that music is a wonderful way of expressing our joy in the Lord when we sing we are singing for joy in the Lord and Paul tells us that we are to be addressing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ now some would argue that that refers to Psalms only others would argue it refers to Psalms and additional songs again a denomination recognizes both views and I am not taking sides on that today because that's not the point I want to focus on the point I want to focus on is that as we sing to God's praise we are expressing our joy to him we are here making music to God in five minutes when we sing a closing Psalm we are making music to God what a privilege think about it only the best musicians perform for our Queen only the very best but who is good enough to sing for the King of Kings you are you are his choir and we don't need to sing with perfect tune and we don't need to sing with the highest finesse because many of us can't do that but when we think of Jesus and when we think of everything that Jesus has done for us we can sing with abundant joy and that's the kind of music that God wants to hear and that's why singing together is such a wonderful part of our service it's such a great thing to do as we praise God and we rejoice in all that he has done and so music might give us joy but singing to God's praise gives us joy that is greater than any other so that's us done the first four we will continue this in a fortnight's time God willing I just want us to recap as we close in Christ we have so many reasons to be full of joy we are adopted into the family of God we are provided with a beautiful world here and we are promised an even better one we are employed and empowered for the service of God and we have the very best music sung in praise of our King and therefore the reason we lack joy is not because we lack it's because we forget we forget what we have and that is why clear bible-based theology is so important for us because really theology is one long and glorious list of reasons to be full of joy and that's exactly what Jesus meant when he said these words that we read at the very beginning of the service in John 15 11 these things

I've spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full Jesus I've told you all of these wonderful truths why so that you can share my joy and so that your joy might be full you think about that God is saying this bible is in your hands because I want to fill you with joy God wants to fill you with joy that will be with you through all the struggles of life and God wants to shower you with joy for all of eternity that's what God wants for you and that's what's being offered to everybody in the good news of Jesus Christ and yet the unbelievable thing is that so many people say no thank you you make sure you're not one of them let's pray