

Joy is for life, not just for Christmas

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 December 2023

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well I'd like us to turn back together to John chapter 16. We've been studying this gospel over the past year or so. We've come to chapter 16 and I want to read verses 20 to 22 again together. John 16 20 to 22. Truly truly I say to you, you will turn into joy but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth she has sorrow because her outward has come but when she has delivered the baby she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you. Well today as you know it's Christmas Eve and often at this time of year we will look at passages that will speak of Jesus' birth. So it's maybe a little bit unusual for us to be in John chapter 16 but I wanted to come to this chapter partly because we're going through John and we were aiming to reach the end of chapter 16 by the end of the year but even more so I wanted to come to this chapter because what Jesus teaches us here is actually incredibly relevant to so much of what we see going on in our culture around us at this time of year and it's so relevant to what's going on in our hearts as well. And I've tried to capture that in our title which is joy is for life not just for Christmas. Now I'm sure you'll know that that phrase is usually associated with dogs, puppy is for life or a dog is for life not just for Christmas and in that sense it serves as a warning. It's a warning to people to say well look don't just get a puppy for the for the fun first two weeks. Bear in mind that after the first two weeks of a puppy you're going to have about 12 to 18 months of torture before you have a well-behaved dog at the end of it and well some of us have still not got the well-behaved dog after nearly 10 years. The great point is this at Christmas this time of year particularly the culture around us it brings lots of things that are exciting it brings lots of joyful things there's the excitement of presence slow down there's the joy of seeing family and friends being able to slow down and and share time together there's the sheer delight of not getting any emails for a few days and then there's the big big big joy of Christmas dinner so lots and lots of wonderful things and these things are all brilliant these things are all temporary. Have any of you said to yourself this year I'm not going to bother with anything for Christmas this year because the joy from last year is still still more than enough for me. None of us think like that because the truth is the joy of last Christmas is a distant memory because after all the happiness of Christmas time it doesn't take long for all the busyness and pressure and struggle of life to dominate again. The gospel speaks into that and that's why our title is not a warning when it's talking about puppy stories this phrase is a warning but for us and and because of the gospel this is not a warning it's a promise a promise of astoundingly good news in the gospel joy is for life not just for Christmas in other words Jesus did not come to give

Christmas joy he came to give you eternal joy and I want us to think about that a wee bit together and to help us we're going to use we're gonna for our headings we're gonna take two key phrases that you see in the passage that Murdored the first phrase is he will the second phrase is no one will and I hope that these will make sense as we go through them and we'll look at each one in turn. In chapters 13 to 17 of John's gospel Jesus is preparing his disciples for what's about to happen to him and for what is about to happen to them authentic and that preparation and part of that preparation serves as an authentication of Jesus and his message because as verse 4 says he told them these things so that when their hour comes they might remember what he's told them so the things he's talking about they're going to happen when they do happen they will remember that Jesus told them that serves to authenticate him and his message and what Jesus is making very clear to them is that he's going to depart we've seen that in chapter 14 we're seeing it again here in chapter 16

Jesus is emphasizing that he's going to leave them and to the disciples that just sounds bad but Jesus is explaining to them that his departure is not bad news at all in fact it's simply the next stage of God's redemptive plan the next part of God's perfect plan to save his people and so in these verses Jesus is revealing more about how that plan of salvation is going to be accomplished he's telling them that he's going to be crucified he's telling them that he's going to rise again he's telling them that he's going to under that he's going to ascend to his father all of that is described in the language of departure he's saying I'm going but that departure is not the end after that departure there's going to be an arrival he's going to send the Holy Spirit to come and to apply everything that Jesus has accomplished to all who trust in him and that ministry of the Holy Spirit that Jesus spoken it has spoken about in chapter 14 that he speaks about now is such good news it's good news for the disciples it's good news for us that's why Jesus says I tell you the truth it's to your advantage that I go away because if I don't go away the helper the Holy

Spirit will not come to you but if I go if I depart he will arrive I will send him to you and so we looked at this just over a month ago and if you want to go back to that the ministry of the Holy Spirit of the Paraclete is the Greek word that's translated help but in these verses back at the beginning of November we looked at that in more detail and what I want us to highlight here is that the Holy Spirit is going to do three crucial things and it's all captured by the phrase he will and so you can see it there he will convict the world it says in verse 8 in verse 13 when the Spirit of Truth comes he will guide you into all truth and then in verse 14 he will glorify me three he wills all highlighting what God the Holy Spirit is going to do and so I want to look at each one in turn first of all verse 8 he will convict the world concerning sin righteousness and judgment sin righteousness and judgment there's three words that are not appealing to the culture around us I'm sure you've spotted over the last few years politicians in particular love to use the three word or the three phrase slogan to try and capture what they do and you'll often see it kind of written across the front of their lectern just now it's stop the boats is the kind of one that you tend to see a lot back in COVID you had things like hands face space you had stay at home protect the NHS save lives and that kind of three word three phrase slogan is a very effective way of communicating things if we wanted to advertise Christianity if I was being watched by by thousands of people and I had my kind of lectern here with my slogan on the front if I had sin righteousness if anything it meant it's not going to appeal to people if anything it'll put them off sin sounds offensive righteousness sounds elite judgment sounds well judgmental nobody wants to hear these words yet everyone craves what these words are talking about the concept of sin is simply recognizing that right and wrong is real and that morality is not an illusion and nobody in their right mind denies that everyone in their right mind craves that recognition every time we see corruption racism inequality poverty exploitation abuse every time we see those things and we cry that's wrong we're simply concerning that sin is a reality and that sin matters and that our sense of right and wrong really does mean something the concept of righteousness is not an elite thing it's not sort of pious or some people might even think that that's kind of snooty we tend to associate righteous with maybe self-righteous that's not what it's speaking of at all it's just speaking of the fact that certain things are right certain things are good certain things are healthy certain things are reliable like a nobody nobody wants to live in a culture where concepts like right and true and good actually have no meaning but for us to have a culture a collective culture of society for us in our individual hearts for us to crave the reality of right and wrong the big question is who decide who call who sets the terms who decides what's right who calls into account that which is wrong well for all of that to happen what do

you need you need judgment and for that to happen well there needs to be a perfect just judge and the reason that humans don't like the word judgment is because humans are very often terrible at being judges and I'm sure we've been on both sides of the equation I'm sure there's times when you've felt judged in a way that's totally unfair and I'm sure there's times when you have jumped to completely the wrong conclusion about people or circumstances but none of that ever happens with God his judgment is never ever anything anything other than impeccable informed and fair that's why with God every injustice will get called to account every wrong will be put right every inequality will be straightened out and it's only God who's got the character the knowledge and the right to do that because only God is God and a key part of the Holy Spirit's mission is to convict the world of all these things there's another word we don't like it's probably the worst of all I was to say come to church on Sunday and get convicted it's not going to make people want to come but this word is actually beautiful because the basic meaning of it is to show someone that something is wrong and you don't need to think long to realize that that's a beautiful thing it's actually the basis of all good education all good medical care all good parenting all good coaching you're showing somebody who are something's wrong and you're directing them towards a well-known path those of you who know me well will know that among my many weaknesses is the fact that I am hopelessly conflict averse absolutely hate conflict and I just you know if if

[12:19] I went to a restaurant and I was given the worst meal ever I would never have the courage to say I don't want to eat that I would just eat it pay go home and forget I just I can't do it I hate it hate conflict I hate correcting people hate all of that but I can sometimes correct people and I can sometimes do it where I'll take the step and have that difficult conversation but I can only do it when I really really care about that person and the only thing that makes me strong enough to overcome my conflict a version is love when I care too much to not say something and so when Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit convicting you that's telling you that the Holy Spirit loves you enough to tell you that something is wrong the big question is whether or not you're willing to listen verse 13 says that the Spirit the Holy Spirit will guide you into all the truth now this verse and this section is revealing some very very important aspects of our theology about how the whole Christian Gospel fits together first what we're seeing here and when you read that verse when the Spirit of truth comes he'll guide you into all the truth for he'll not speak on his own authority but whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come you've got a beautiful glimpse in this verse into into the harmonious functioning of God the Trinity so the

Holy Spirit is going to speak but that speech is never detached from the message of the Son and the Son's message is never detached from the message of the Father Jesus has told us that earlier in John's Gospel where he says I don't speak of my own authority but the Father who sent me has told me what to say and you're just being given glimpses in John 12 in John 16 of how God Father Son and Holy Spirit are in this beautiful harmony of working together and at different times they will speak in different ways sometimes you read in the Bible you'd hear the voice the Father sometimes the Son sometimes the Spirit it's always the same one united message and so you got this glimpse into the functioning and and revealing of the Trinity the second thing that this verse teaches us about is that's actually telling us a little bit about how the Bible is going to emerge and it's easy to miss this but really important to recognize it remember that at this point the disciples just had the Old Testament scriptures John's Gospel and the other New Testament documents hadn't yet been written but Jesus is telling us in this verse that the New Testament is coming because a key part of the Holy Spirit's work is going to be to guide the Apostles into writing what would become the books that are now the New

Testament and so after Jesus's death and resurrection the Apostles went on to write and to and the the Spirit enabled them to remember and the Spirit taught them about all the implications of what Jesus had done and all of that comes together in the New Testament documents. That's why we call the Christian message Apostolic we will refer to the Christian gospel as Apostolic because God has revealed that full message of salvation to the Apostles who committed to writing and we now have it in the pages of the Bible. Thirdly this this section here is talking to us and about something that theologians will call the witness of the Holy Spirit or the testimony of the Holy Spirit and that again is a very important run into space I thought I thought I missed out the word holy and then I wrote it but anyway it's there so the testimony of the

Holy Spirit the witness of the Spirit basically what that is telling us what that's referring to is the fact that as we now read the Bible Old Testament and New Testament as we do that we need the help of the Holy Spirit as we do so in other words we need the Holy Spirit to eliminate our minds and to give our hearts understanding in order for God to speak to us through his word so we don't just read the book in a kind of cold detached way we do it with the witness of the Holy Spirit helping us and experience actually proves this doctrine to be true you can actually see it in these chapters because Jesus himself is speaking to the disciples yet it takes them ages to understand they need the Holy Spirit's help to understand what's being said and we've seen it in the lives of many we've maybe seen it in our own lives at various periods where you can read the Bible and yet have no interest or no idea in what it's actually saying and that's because reading the Bible is not about researching an ancient religious text reading the Bible is to encounter as we do so speaking to us through his living word and as we do so we're completely dependent on the Holy

Spirit to help us but this is such an important and actually such a reassuring thing to remember because a beautiful consequence of this doctrine of the witness of the Holy Spirit is that if you are reading the Bible and you're struggling to understand it you don't need to try harder and you don't need to get smarter you just need to pray Holy Spirit please help me then the third thing we see is that the Holy Spirit is going to glorify Jesus he will glorify me this sums up the objective that lies at the heart of what God the Holy Spirit is seeking to do he is seeking to glorify Jesus many of you may have heard a famous illustration that's been used to describe this I think and it may have originated with J.I. Packard it's been used many times since where he said he was going to a church to speak about the Holy Spirit and he was thinking how can I illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit what illustration should I use and as he drove towards the church he saw that the church building was being floodlit from the outside and we see that with a more war memorial we see it with some other things other buildings it'd be cool to do it one day here to get floodlights onto our building and he's seen that's such a clear illustration of what the Holy Spirit is trying to do he's not trying to shine the light on himself he's shining the light on Jesus glorifying Jesus placing all the focus on him and it's a beautiful reminder of the magnificent unselfishness that lies at the heart of the nature and character of God it's also a key sign is at work in it that the big sign that the Holy Spirit is at work in a church or in a community is not when everyone is thinking and talking about the Holy

[20 : 01] Spirit so it might be very easy to think that you might go to a church and they're talking all about the Holy Spirit and everything is focusing on the Holy Spirit and and you know I'm not saying that's bad but you know you might think oh wow they're so there's Holy Spirits at work there because all they do is talk about the Holy Spirit that's not actually the sign that the Holy Spirit is at work the key sign that the Holy Spirit is work at work is not when everyone's talking about the Holy Spirit it's when everyone is thinking and talking about Jesus because that's what God the Holy Spirit wants to do he wants to glorify him and focus everyone's attention on Jesus and the great truth that is being highlighted by the Holy Spirit throughout all the generations of history is what Jesus is talking about in these verses and summed up by his statement in verse 16 he's saying to the disciples after a little while you'll see me no longer and again a little while and you'll see me and that's of course talking about Jesus's death and resurrection the fact that he is going to die they won't see him but a little while they will see him as he is raised from the dead and the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit is to keep bringing us back to keep throwing our attention to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus these are the monumental event of the Christian faith these are the realities where the glorious holiness and justice and unrelenting love of God are revealed God himself in the person of his son has come to lay down his life for you to rise in victory to rule and guide and defend and protect you forever God the Holy Spirit wants you to see that to see the glory of what Jesus has done for you and so the Holy Spirit is going to convict the world concerning righteousness he's going to guide you into all the truth he's going to glorify Jesus and there's loads more that we could say about that I just want to pick out one key lesson what I want to highlight is this all three of these things convicting the world concerning sin and righteousness guiding you into all truth glorifying Jesus all three of these are essential if you are going to have joy and you might think well how could that be well I think you'll see it if you think in terms of the opposites can you delight in moral indifference when sin and righteousness and judgment are all just meaningless religious words can you rejoice in intellectual disorientation or or a philosophy of doubt but you don't really know what's true what's false where you just shrug your shoulders at the big questions of life or do you want the truth do you want ultimate truth and can you celebrate a

God that isn't actually divine are you satisfied with the glory that comes from village or do you want to find or from having the best phone in your class or having the nicest car in the village or do you want divine glory the glory of God Almighty revealed in the courage wisdom strength and gentleness of Jesus the gospel reveals a God who never ever deviates from what is right a God who always always speaks the truth a God who dwells in incomparable glory and yet who in Jesus laid aside that glory to die for you to know that God is to know incomparable joy and any other joy that we pursue in life is going to be inferior and one of the biggest reasons why it's inferior is because it will only ever be temporary and that takes us to our second phrase that we'll just look at very briefly no one will it's found in verse 22 Jesus says no one will take your joy from you now that's speaking first and foremost to the disciples Jesus is preparing them for the loss that they're going to experience when he has betrayed and condemned and crucified and they're going to experience that shattering loss so while the city rejoices that Jesus is being executed they are going to mourn but their sorrow is going to turn to joy the resurrection is going to be so great the resurrection is going to bring joy that is so great that it's going to be the equivalent to the agony of a woman in labor that that whose pain is forgotten when she holds her baby in her arms no one I pulse joy is going to abound when they see Jesus risen and no one is going to be able to take that joy away that doesn't mean that their lives aren't going to be hard Jesus speaks about that many many times in the

Gospels for the disciples and for us that there will be difficulties and struggles but but over all of those the Gospel gives them a joy that no one can ever take away and that promise is for all who trust in Jesus it was a promise given in the Old Testament we read Isaiah 51 as our call to worship the promise of gladness and joy another amazing verse that speaks of it comes in the New Testament where Jude speaks of the one who's able to keep to keep you from stumbling to present you before the presence of his glory with great joy and there are many many other passages like that all expressing the promise of joy that the Gospel gives us and with Jesus joy is for life not just for Christmas in fact with Jesus joy is for eternity and there's one key reason why Jesus can say that there's one key reason why Jesus can say I will give you a joy that no one will take from you I will give you joy that will last forever and the key reason is this it's because in the Gospel your joy does not depend on you your joy does not depend on you and it's so important to think about this because so often that's how our culture it's about achievements think we think that our joy depends on us it happens in loads of ways we think it depends on our achievements if I just do this then I'll be happy it's it can happen in terms of our possessions we can think our joy depends on what we have if I just get this I'll be happy how many of you thought if I just get this Christmas person I'll be happy I can remember that so many times when I was we all this is just the one thing this is the last thing that's the thing and yet the joy fades we can think our joy depends on our choices if I just do this if I just get this right then I'll be happy and maybe you will be for a time many things in life do give us joy but that joy can only ever be temporary the joy that depends on you can only ever be temporary and we know that's true the joy of our achievements fades the joy of our possessions wears off the joy of our choices gets overshadowed by the struggles and bruises of life so often we think that our joy depends on us that is definitely how our culture around us thinks but that joy will only ever be temporary it will always be at risk of being robbed and some people never find it at all and even as Christians we can fall into this trap we think that our joy depends on us we think if I could be a better Christian if I could be better at praying if I could do more if I served more if I learned more if I could understand more in the Bible if I stop making mistakes all of that will give me joy now all of these things are good things to want they're good things to want but if we are focusing on them our joy will be diminished the reason for it is this if we are focusing on the stuff that we need to do it means that we're taking our focus off Jesus and yet it's on him that our gaze has to lie he is the one who's done everything for us the gospel is amazing because it offers you joy that does not depend on

you and that's why you can never lose it because you're not responsible for it it doesn't depend on you and it never will the joy of the gospel lies in the fact that Jesus loves you that he came for you that he died for you that he rose again ahead of you that he delights in you that he is utterly committed to you that he wants to bless and care for you that he has plans and purpose for you that he's come to dwell in you by his spirit you are worth so much in his eyes and to all of these things you contribute nothing you are responsible for nothing it doesn't depend on you it all depends on Jesus and he is saying that for all of these things this is forever my love for you my commitment to you my delight in you and the reality of what my death and resurrection has achieved for you it is all forever joy and that's why the gospel can say joy is for life joy is for eternity not just for Christmas and so I want you to do two things and as you look ahead to the rest of today and to Christmas and to the week ahead I want you to think about ways in which you've maybe gone looking for joy in a place that won't give it to you forever because we all do that and it's good to reflect on that so that's the one side of the coin it's good to think about that but don't stop there I want you to also take your eyes off yourself and off the mistakes you've made and place them on Jesus resting on him thinking about everything that he has done for you and let the warm sunshine of his joy just shine upon you again and again and again knowing that that joy that he gives you is something that no one can or will ever take away amen