

The Power of Joy, Part 2

Psalm 32:1-5; 2 Corinthians 2:7-11; 6:10; 12:9; Matthew 6:12, 14-15

Slide 1

“This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

The reason we can rejoice is because we have the *“joy of the Lord.”* Right? Remember last week we learned that joy is the reason we can have peace regardless if a situation is unpleasant or not.

I can't emphasize this enough... having joy isn't about what we see. Having joy is about Who we know.

It's about Who we've put our faith and trust in. Having joy is about knowing that as we go through a situation, good or bad, we mean the world to Him.

I'm sure each one of you has been in a situation that had declared war on your emotions and left you feeling helpless. Then, for some reason, you calmed down and a sense of peace took the place of the agitation.

You couldn't explain it. It seemed to just happen. Do remember what God told Paul when he was being attacked by the messenger of Satan?

2 Corinthians 12:9a, *“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

When we're in the place of feeling helpless, which describes the word *“weakness”* in this verse, God's grace can bring His joy into the situation. Especially when we feel helpless and don't have a solution.

We waste a lot of time looking for happiness, which is just an emotional response. Happiness is not joy. The “*joy of the Lord*” is independent of our situation or circumstance, whether it’s good or bad.

Now, this morning my message focuses solely on joy as it relates to forgiveness. Unforgiveness directly impacts the joy that we’re supposed to have in our lives.

This includes the unforgiveness that exists in our lives because of unconfessed sins and the unforgiveness that exists in our lives because we choose to not forgive others, which is also a sin.

Since our joy is tied to who we are in Christ, if we have unconfessed sin, God’s forgiveness isn’t made available to us, as David knew when he wrote Psalm 32.

Also, if someone has hurt us and we’ve refused to forgive them, this impacts God’s ability to forgive us, which in turn impacts His joy reigning within us.

In our society today, there’re many Christians who are dealing with unforgiveness. You may think, so what, but the results of this are anger, frustration, depression, and a total lack of joy.

It’s like a bad memory that creeps to the forefront of your mind in the most inopportune moment.

You can be enjoying a day out and suddenly you see someone who hurt you and the memory of that hurt floods your mind and now your day’s ruined because you saw that person.

In reality, your day was ruined because you have not forgiven that person. I read an article from the Mayo Clinic titled “*Forgiveness: Letting Go of Grudges and Bitterness.*”

The article gave examples of how people who've experienced hurtful situations throughout life are left with wounds that caused lasting feelings of anger, bitterness, and even thoughts of vengeance.

It stated that if we don't practice forgiveness, we might be the ones who pay the price – something we should already know from reading the Bible.

The article wasn't just talking about the emotional and physical price we pay for unforgiveness, but also the impact on our spiritual well-being.

The article acknowledged that while forgiveness means different things to different people, in general it involves our decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge.

The act that hurt or offended us might always be with us, but forgiveness can lessen its grip and help free us from the control of the person who harmed us.

It states that forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting or excusing the harm done to us or making up with the person who caused the harm, but that it brings a kind of peace that helps us to go on with life.

Forgiveness leads to healthier relationships, improved mental health, less anxiety, lower blood pressure, fewer symptoms of depression, a stronger immune system, improved heart health and improved self-esteem.

When we allow the negative feelings of unforgiveness to crowd out our positive feelings, we find ourselves swallowed up by our own bitterness or sense of injustice. Joy dissipates feelings of unforgiveness and bitterness.

So, this morning we're going to examine forgiveness, as it relates to joy, from two perspectives:

- The joy we receive when God forgives us and thus teaches us to do the same with others, and...
- The joy we receive when we forgive others.

Let's begin with what David wrote in Psalm 32.

Slide 2

David was one of the greatest saints and kings described in Scripture. He served as king over Israel, was the writer of numerous psalms, and he was an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

But, at the time that David wrote Psalm 32, he was one of the greatest sinners portrayed anywhere in the Bible. He sinned with cunning schemes, committed adultery, and then had the husband killed to cover up his sin.

You know the story. It's the one about Bathsheba and her husband Uriah the Hittite, one of David's 30 most trusted soldiers, found in 1 Samuel 11.

Psalm 32 is a joyful testimony from the hand of David thanking God for His gift of forgiveness. Listen to the first five verses.

Psalm 32:1-5 says, "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin."

In verses one and two David said, *“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.”*

The word translated as “blessed” in these verses is the Hebrew word *esher* which means either “happy” or “joy.”

The way David used this word in those two verses basically implies a state of prosperity and happiness that comes when a “superior” bestows his favor on someone. In this case, it was God bestowing His favor on David.

The way Job uses this word in Job 5:17 implies “joy.” *“Blessed is the one whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.”*

So, how can someone be “happy” when they’re being corrected by God? It’s because of the joy that resides in the knowledge of being a child of God and knowing He cares for them.

Blessedness describes a condition of inner peace, contentment, an untouchable joy that comes from knowing Christ and walking with Him. This is what David was referring to.

He had sinned against God and had received forgiveness. When he received God’s forgiveness, his joy returned. If we’re not willing to allow God to correct us when we sin or when we’re wrong, He can’t give us His joy.

Being humble before the Lord is a critical key to experiencing the *“joy of the Lord.”* Verse two states that God doesn’t charge us with guilt after we confess and repent. Knowing that God forgives and doesn’t hold our sins over our heads is pure joy!

Now let's see what David was experiencing prior to his repenting and receiving forgiveness. Verses 3-4, "*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*"

David said when he kept silent it was like he was physically sick, and he could have been. He said, "*my bones wasted away through my groaning.*" His soul was sick, and his body was responding to it physically.

For the better part of a year David stayed quiet about his sin, never confessing, or repenting his acts. David knew he had sinned against God and the guilt was a heavy burden pressing down on him.

He was literally haunted by a guilty conscience. Imagine losing your appetite when you're burdened down by something. Imagine how David felt after everything God had done for him and through him. Finally, it got too heavy, and David had to confess.

Let's see what he said in verse five. "*Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.*"

David finally takes his heavy burden to the Lord and repents. He confesses and receives forgiveness after which he was delivered from his miserable state.

When we confess, we come into agreement with God, acknowledging that what God says about our sin is true. A true confession isn't just saying something with the mouth, it's said with a broken heart and a surrendered will.

Confession is the foundation for receiving forgiveness and the return of joy. When we have unconfessed sin in our lives, we are as David was, walking in a state of unforgiveness.

It's not that we haven't forgiven someone, but we haven't received forgiveness from God because of our unconfessed sin. So, to walk in God's joy, we must make sure that we've been forgiven and that leads me to the second area of forgiveness: forgiving others.

Slide 3

In Matthew 6 Jesus introduces us to what an underlying issue produces in our lives by commanding us to follow His Father's example.

Ephesians 5:1 says we are to *"Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children."* In other words, what we see our Heavenly Father do, that's what we are to do, especially as it relates to forgiving others as He forgives us.

Jesus instructed the disciples, and us, to pray, when it comes to forgiving, as illustrated in Matthew 6:12, *"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."*

The Amplified Bible phrases it this way, *"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven (left, remitted, and let go of the debts, and have given up resentment against) our debtors."*

Jesus said that we're to ask our Father to forgive our debts, our transgressions against Him, AS we forgive our debtors of their transgressions against us.

During the Sermon on the Mount, I believe God thought that one of the most important things Jesus should teach was about the relationship between God forgiving us and us forgiving others.

When the Amplified Bible said, “*and have given up resentment against.*” That means because Our Heavenly Father has forgiven us our transgressions against Him, He no longer holds resentment towards us.

As I read this, I thought about what God said in Psalm 103:12, “*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*”

Who removed the transgression? God removed it. When God sees us, He doesn't see us and our transgressions. He only sees us! That's a reason to give Him praise.

Remember what I said at the beginning, about how unforgiveness can be like a bad memory that creeps to the forefront of your mind in the most inopportune moment?

How you can be enjoying a day out and suddenly you see someone who hurt you and the memory of that hurt floods your mind and now your day is ruined because you saw that person?

In this example your day was ruined, not because you saw the person, but because you had not forgiven that person. This is what resentment looks like.

Now let me ask you a question: Can a person have the joy that comes from the Lord and harbor resentment against someone at the same time?

In other words, can you be in a room that's full of light and also be in a room that's in complete darkness at the same time? The answer is “No” because one cancels out the other!

That's an analogy of what's being described in this verse. The "*joy of the Lord*" is the room full of light and resentment is the room that is completely dark.

To drive the point home about how unforgiveness can affect the joy of the Lord that's available to us, look at what Jesus said as He continued His Sermon of the Mount.

Matthew 6:14-15, "*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*"

When we refuse to let go of the feelings of hurt that are associated with something that has been done to us, when we continue to hold unforgiveness, or resentment, against the person who caused the hurt, it separates us from our fellowship with God to the point that He can't give us His joy.

When we're in unforgiveness, we're not in God's secret place and we're not under the shadow of His protection.

As I thought about what Jesus said in Matthew, I looked at passages that talked about the absence of joy. There's one verse in particular that I want to share with you because it captures the relationship between joy and unforgiveness in an unexpected way.

Slide 4

Proverbs 12:20, "*Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.*"

Each word in this description presents an image of a person whose face is hiding what is really in their hearts. For example, the word "*deceit*" means "sense of deceiving, fraud, false, feigned."

When a person is holding unforgiveness against someone, they become adept at hiding their true thoughts and feelings about the person.

The word “*heart*” refers to our minds and emotions. The word “*plot*” means “to engrave or fabricate.”

In these first three words are telling us that, in our minds, we’ve decided to deceive the person who’s wronged us by acting as if everything is okay, while at the same time we’re engraving that wrong in our thoughts and building a wall of unforgiveness and resentment.

The fourth word, “*evil*,” brings all of this to this conclusion. It means “bad” in every sense of the word. Now, how does this apply to unforgiveness and the affect it has on joy?

When a person, who’s been wronged, consciously builds a negative mental picture of that person who wronged them to the point that they wouldn’t feel any guilt or remorse if something bad happened to that person, that’s what the first part of this verse is describing.

Think about it. The person has convinced themselves that it’s okay to live a lie and then form thoughts about the person based on that lie and then believe that whatever happens to the person, they deserved it.

Can you see how far removed unforgiveness is from joy? Now the second part of the verse says, “*but those who promote peace have joy.*”

This talking about a person who “determines, devises, guides or purposes” something intentionally.

So, the phrase “*but those who promote peace have joy*” is saying that the person who makes a deliberate decision to walk in peace instead of deceit is truly looking for joy.

In other words, instead of holding unforgiveness, the person releases the one who wronged them and then sees them in the same light that God sees us.

When we see them, we don’t see the wrong that they did. That person once again has a clean slate with us. When that happens, we’ll once again have “*the joy of the Lord.*”

Now let’s wrap this up. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 2. There was a person in the Church of Corinth who had committed a transgression that caused the people to hold unforgiveness toward him.

In verse 7, Paul encouraged them to forgive the person “*so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*” In other words, Paul wanted that person, and the Church, to know that what he had done wasn’t unforgivable.

Paul told the Corinthians in verse 8, “*I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.*” Now I want you to pay attention to what Paul says in verse 10 and in verse 11.

2 Corinthians 2:10, “*Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake.*”

To make sure you understand what Paul’s saying, let me paraphrase it for you, “*You Corinthians, you need to forgive this person and you need to understand that just like I could have held unforgiveness against you, but didn’t, don’t you dare hold unforgiveness towards him. I have forgiven you when I’ve been in prayer in the presence of Jesus. You need to do the same thing.*”

We also see this reference of Paul forgiving them in the first part of verse 3, *“I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice.”*

Just like all of us, Paul had to decide if holding unforgiveness was worth not having joy in his life. As we see here, joy was infinitely more important to him than surrendering to the emotion of unforgiveness.

Now, in verse 11 we see the underlying issue or cause for unforgiveness. This is the reason Paul said we must live a life that freely forgives the wrongs that are done against us.

2 Corinthians 2:11, *“in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”* Remember, in Matthew 6 Jesus commanded us to forgive like our Father forgives us.

Here in 2 Corinthians, we see that the spiritual being that loves unforgiveness is Satan. But why does he love unforgiveness? It's because it opens the door for him to take advantage of us.

Based on what we've read here in 2 Corinthians, what were the Christians doing that gave Satan an advantage? They were doing what we see way too often in the Church today.

A church member was being *“overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”* He was becoming more and more depressed because of his transgressions and the church members responded with harshness rather than the love and joy that comes from the Lord.

When you have time, go back, and read the first chapter of 2 Corinthians. You'll see that the focus of this letter is to help us understand how we're to comfort one another just like God has comforted us.

Paul said that when we don't comfort one another, like God has comforted us, Satan gains an advantage over us because of our unwillingness to forgive.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew about Christians who refuse to forgive. Matthew 6:15, *"But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*

Slide 5

Conclusion

As I close this message this morning, I'm asking each of you to make a deliberate, unwavering, no going back decision to always forgive any wrong done to you.

Don't give Satan an advantage over you and the people you love. Unforgiveness can build a wall in your life that the *"joy of the Lord"* cannot climb.

Remember, God said those who hold unforgiveness have a barrier that He cannot cross with His love and with His joy. You have joy that's available to you, but your steadfast joy will be interrupted if you refuse to walk in forgiveness.

Unforgiveness, both when we haven't received forgiveness from God and when we refuse to forgive others, impacts our ability to have joy.

Unforgiveness impacts our emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. It impacts our joy – the joy that God gives us, the joy that is supposed to be our strength.

Just as you can't stand in a room that's full of light while also standing in a room that's in complete darkness, the joy of the Lord can't be your strength at the same time you're walking in unforgiveness.

So, I leave you with this question: Is the joy of the Lord your strength or is it being hindered by unforgiveness in your life? If you have unforgiveness, get that straightened out so that you can fully experience the *“joy of the Lord.”*

As God instructed Moses to bless his people in Numbers 6:24-26, let me do the same today, *“May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you peace.”*