

Let's begin this morning in prayer. We are going to step away from our journey through Hosea. This morning is Palm Sunday, and what I want us to do is look at John 17 and, in particular, v. 13 and following. In John 17, Jesus is very close to going to the cross and dying for the sins of His people. He is preparing to leave His disciples, and He leaves them, but before He goes, He will preach one more sermon and pray for them.

So, you will know where we are in John's Gospel; chapters 11-20 make up one block of teaching that deals with Jesus' death and its implications for his disciples. In chapters 11-13, Jesus explained to His disciples that His death would achieve life for His people because His death would deal with Satan and their sin. Chapters 13-17 are considered the *Upper Room Discourse*.

The *Upper Room Discourse* can be divided into two parts. The first part is the disciples' questions about Jesus' departure. The second part deals with the importance of God's people persevering in a world filled with trials and tribulations. John 17 is Jesus' High Priestly prayer for His disciples. In John 15:11 and John 17:13, Jesus told His disciples that He spoke *these things* to them while He was in the world so that His joy would be in them while they endured all that the world would throw at them.

In John 17, Jesus pulled on every thread He had woven into the fabric of His teaching from John 11 to John 16. In John 17, Jesus emphasized *giving or receiving* or some form of *giving or receiving* at least 30 times.

Regardless of the exact number, Jesus' point clear. We are created to receive what we believe from the truth of God's word. We do not invent what we believe, He gives it to us, and we receive it and by receiving it we are filled with joy.

The question I want to ask is: *what is the secret of having this joy? How do we receive with joy? How are we filled with joy?*

First, let me try to define what Jesus means by joy in v. 13. Jesus is not talking about happiness. Happiness depends on circumstances being right so that you experience happiness. For example, if you are having a birthday party and someone gives you the gift you have always been wanting, you are happy, but deep down inside, there may not be any joy. So, the experience of happiness is dependent on the situation, but *joy is not dependent* upon a situation. Joy may include happiness, but it does not have to have happiness to exist.

Joy is a gift from God. Joy a gift of grace that comes through faith in Jesus. Joy is something deep in the spiritual heart of a person that exists because the Holy Spirit of God put it there. God creates joy in the heart of a person because He has enabled that person to believe in the truth of His word and the person of Christ. Joy is the confidence that comes from resting in the sovereign control of Almighty God, no matter how horrible or bizarre the circumstances in life may be. So, we may call it sovereign joy because it comes from our Sovereign God.

Let me show you what I mean from Scripture. In Acts 5, Peter and the disciples were arrested by the Pharisees for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Jewish Council could not hold them in prison, so that beat them and told them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. Acts 5:41 says, "*Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.*" The circumstances seem to indicate that they should be unhappy. They should be moaning, groaning, and complaining to God but

they were not. Jesus gave them joy and He turned the whole experience upside down because He filled their hearts with joy.

In Acts. 16, Paul and Silas had been arrested, beaten, and thrown into the darkness of a Philippian jail. They should have been licking their wounds but instead they were singing hymns to God even though they had been arrested for preaching the gospel. You see . . . joy is not dependent on circumstances. Joy is dependent on being given the gift of faith to believe in Jesus Christ.

To understand the secret of the sovereign joy, we need to answer two questions: First, *what are “these things” that Jesus prayed for in v. 13?* Second: *What is the secret of having the joy of “these things”?*

I. What are “*these things*” that Jesus gave us to fill us with joy?

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus is pulling on teaching threads He has been teaching since John 11. They are culminating in John 17 and flowing out as He prays for His disciples. Jesus is praying deep biblical doctrine for His disciples.

In v. 13, He called these deep biblical truths that fill our hearts with joy: “*these things*.” Take your Bible, and we will walk through the text. I want to show you *nine truths* that, when laid hold of by faith, will fill your heart with joy.

### **1. Jesus is sovereign over all. (vv. 1-2a)**

*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,<sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all flesh*

Why is it important for His disciples to know He has all authority over all flesh? It is because He is about to be arrested, beaten, tried for crimes He did not commit, sentenced to death, and it will look like He is not sovereign. Events were about to unfold that would shake His disciples to the core and it would look Jesus was not in control of these events. So, before these events even occurred, He reminded them He was sovereign. He had been telling them during His ministry that He was going to be condemned to die on the cross, and then He would rise from the dead on the third day. He wanted them to know that even though these things happened to Him, it was all part of God’s sovereign plan. He was still in control.

Brothers and sisters, there are many times in life where, from our vantage point, it seems like Jesus is not in control. When that thought comes into your mind—do not believe it! We do not know all that Jesus is up to in the world. He does not tell us everything. He has told us somethings but in contemporary circumstances we really do not know all that God is doing in the world. We do not know the full purpose of the *coronavirus*. We know that God is good and He plans to save sinners and bring glory to Himself but is only somethings we know.

So, when it seems like life is out of control, we must look back at the cross and realize that Jesus death on the cross was by God’s good design, and it all went according to plan. Yet, from the vantage point of His disciples, it seemed like chaos, and all was lost. They were anxious. They were scared. They did not know how they were going to be able to keep going. They needed an injection of truth in their hearts, and Jesus gave them the vaccine before His death by telling them beforehand that His death on the cross was God’s plan and

we know it was God's plan since Gen. 3. Then when He rose from the dead, the vaccine of the person and work of Christ gave them new life.

Right now may be one of those times where you are like the disciples. You're not sure how things are going to work out. You're anxious, not so much about the future but the here and now. You're worried about your family because you have lost your job and no one is working. You're fearful about what will happen tomorrow. Perhaps *sheltering at home* has increased your loneliness. You feel isolated and think you are going to go crazy. In John 17, Jesus is hitting your situation head-on with the power of His death and resurrection because at the heart of *these things* is the gospel that fills us with joy.

## **2. Jesus is sovereign over salvation. (vv. 2, 6-8)**

*"You have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him . . . <sup>6</sup> I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. <sup>8</sup> For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.*

Jesus concluded v. 2 by telling His disciples that He not only has authority over all flesh, but He has authority over eternal life. In essence, Jesus is not only sovereign in this world but He also sovereign in the one to come—eternity. Because God has given Him sovereign authority over eternity and eternal life, He decides who has eternal life.

Now, this may not sound strange to your prideful American ears. "How is that fair?" you may ask. I understand your question. We Americans struggle with authority and especially with a God who has absolute sovereign authority. The problem is we cannot see past our own noses. We are so self-centered. We are not really concerned about fairness; we just do not want to be told that we are not in control. Well, here is a news flash. You never were in control and you certainly were never in control of your eternal destiny. By the way, the fact is that if you were in control of your salvation you would never have believed in Jesus.

For you to believe in Jesus, Jesus must break down your little created kingdom of "self" and raze it to the ground so you will see your wretchedness and turn to Him. Jesus works His sovereign grace into your life by breaking up the hard soil of your heart and plant the seed of the gospel deep in it. Then, by the work of the gospel, He brings your dead heart to life and all of a sudden, you want Jesus.

The truth is we struggle with sovereign grace. We want to be the captain of our own souls. The problem is we always make shipwreck of our souls. This is why we must be saved by sovereign grace. Sovereign grace is what Jesus means when He says in John's gospel *that all that the Father gives Me will come to Me. It is what He means where He says I give eternal life to all whom you (God) have given me. So, when John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life," He knows that those whom the Father has given Him will believe.*

I know what you are thinking. You are thinking, *"The pastor is talking about election and predestination."* Yep, that is what I am talking about, but I am not talking about it because I just want to bring it up. I am talking about it because this is what Jesus is talking about in v. 2.

So, here is what this means for us who believe. If you belong to Jesus, in the middle of life's storms, He holds you fast. You will not be lost because you did not author your salvation, Jesus is. You may struggle. You may even stumble, but Jesus upholds you by the power of His right hand.

Secondly, if you are unsure you are a Christian, do not ask, "*Am I elect? Has God chosen me?*" That is the wrong question. The Bible never speaks of knowing whether you are saved in those terms. Instead, here is how the Bible speaks: *Do you understand that you are a sinner and you have sinned against the Holy God who created you? Do you understand that your sin against God has condemned you to eternity in Hell? Do you understand you stand in great need of a Savior? Do you understand you need Jesus, the Son of God, to save you?* This is how the Bible talks. If your answer is yes to all of those questions, then call on the name of Jesus to save you. Scripture promises that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

### **3. Jesus prayed for the people He Sovereignly saved. (v. 9)**

*I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.*

What better news can you receive than this, if you belong to Jesus, then Jesus prayed for in John 17. Not only that Heb. 7:25 says He still prays for you:

*Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

Brothers and sisters, take heart; yes, your pastors are praying for you. Yes, your small group is praying for you. Yes, our church members are praying for one another, but most importantly, Jesus knows you by name and calls you by name in His prayers as He prays to the Father for you.

### **4. Jesus unites us with the Father for His glory. (vv. 4-5, 10-11, 22-23)**

*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed . . . <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one . . . <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

Jesus is saying He glorified God by fulfilling all the work God gave Him to do, and it culminates in Him saving you. Jesus saved you not because you are so awesome. Jesus saved you because it brings glory to the Father.

Now let that settle in your heart when you feel small and insignificant. It brings glory to the Father for you to belong to Him. He looks at you, and He smiles. You bring Him joy!

Not only that, when Jesus saved you, he took you and placed you "*in the Father*" in heaven. This means you are secure in God. You will never be lost. You are untied with Jesus in the Father by the Holy Spirit.

If you have ever wanted to be in two places at once, well . . . if you are a Christian, you are. You are in this world and God has left you in this world as His representative so that the world may know who Jesus is and that they need a Savior. You are also, spiritually, placed in the Father in heaven. So, yes, you are in two places at once.

**5. Jesus guards us, so we are never lost again. (v. 12, 15-16)**

*<sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled . . . <sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

These verses build on the previous verses. The fact is your salvation is secure, and it is not because you are awesome, but because Jesus is awesome. You will never be lost not because you are so spiritually savvy, but because Jesus guards you in this world. It does not mean you will never suffer hard things but that when you do suffer hard things, He holds you fast because your Savior loves you so.

**6. Jesus gives us His word, and His word sustains and sanctifies us. (vv.14, 17, 19)**

*<sup>14</sup> I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world . . . <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth . . . <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

Building on the truth will never be lost. I want to ask: How does He hold us? He holds us by His Word. His word is a promise to hold us, and His word keeps us in the love of God by sanctifying us in His truth. Taking the truth of God's word into your heart is a means of sanctifying grace. You see . . . believing and knowing that God holds us secure is not just having an emotional experience out of the blue. It is grounded in the word of God by taking the word of God in your heart. If you are not in the word of God every day, your faith will get weak, you will be filled with anxiety, you will be overcome with fears, but God's word is greater than our emotions, and it gives our emotions the correction they need to rest in the word of God.

**7. Jesus sends us into the world to tell the good news. (v. 18)**

*<sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.*

The natural outflow of *these things* is that we are sent to tell others the good news of salvation. Jesus does not ask us to do anything He has not done. The Father sent him, and so He sends us to preach the gospel and, as we share the gospel, watch Him set captives free.

**8. Jesus prayed "these things," specifically for you. (vv.20-21)**

*<sup>20</sup> "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

Verses 20-21 make it explicitly clear that *these things* are for us. So, if you are a Christian, then you and I are the ones Jesus referred to when He said, “*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me.*” He prayed *these things* for us.

## 9. Jesus loves you. (v. 26)

<sup>26</sup> *I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

Jesus concludes His prayer by reminding us that just as the Father loved Him, He also loves us. The Father places His love in Jesus, and Jesus puts the Father’s love and His love in you. If that does not give you joy, then nothing will.

## II. What is the secret of having the joy of “*these things*”?

I want to close with my second point as one final application. The question we need to answer is: *How do we have the joy of these things?* Let me give you two things to avoid and one thing to do.

First, we must avoid concentrating on our own feelings. Many Christians spend the whole of their lives contemplating their own feelings. They do what some call *navel-gazing*. They are continually taking their spiritual temperature and spiritual pulse. All they do is look at themselves in a kind of spiritual mirror.

You will never be satisfied with Jesus if you do this. You will never find the joy of *these things that Jesus speaks of by looking at yourself and by trying to deal with your feelings*. You will only wind up more miserable and unhappier. You will find yourself moaning and groaning about life. Anxiety and stress will rule your heart.

Second, we must avoid breaking fellowship with God. In other words, we must pursue the sanctification Jesus spoke about in John 17. It is true that He has *sanctified us and set us apart from the world, but we are not set apart to simply be different for difference sake*. We are set apart to pursue holiness in Christ.

Failure to pursue sanctification breaks fellowship with God and then we can fall in a pit of despair. Our consciences will condemn us. We may be overcome with guilt. When this happens, our fellowship with God suffers. So, what must we do?

Third, the secret of the joy of *these things* is to meditate upon Jesus. Jesus prayed in v. 13, “*these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.*” The truths Jesus had spoken are the things on which we must meditate. We must contemplate who He is, what He has done, His love for us, and God’s care for us who are His people. We must meditate on these things, the nine truths about Jesus.

Friends, these things are not received by doing more, trying harder, or peddling faster. They are received as a gift of grace that is received through faith. We must lift up the empty hands and heart of faith and let God fill them with the joy of His grace that is found in *these things*?