

Steps to Joy (Audio Poor)

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon teaches that true joy is found in a relationship with God and the freedom that comes from living in accordance with His will.

Duration: 41:15

Scripture: Psalm 16:11, Matthew 6:33, Luke 2:10, John 1:4, Romans 15:13, Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the theme of joy and its connection to the message of the angel's song in Bethlehem. The preacher challenges the misconception that religion is meant to make people miserable and unhappy. Instead, the preacher emphasizes that God's desire is for people to experience fullness of joy. The sermon highlights the importance of living out one's faith in all aspects of life and reminds listeners that true joy can only be found in being free from sin and being right with God.

Transcript

Now we'll return to the scripture that was read earlier, 1 John chapter 1. If it were necessary to choose one verse as a text, and it isn't, and I don't, I would choose the fourth verse. The angel's song across the plains of Bethlehem will bring glad tidings of great joy, which will be to all people. John's word in this first chapter in the fourth verse was, and these things write we unto you that your joy may be full.

Some have had an idea that God's great desire was to make man miserable and unhappy, and that this is probably the prime effect of religion. I'm not sure that what it is the effect of religion, but it certainly is not the effect of Christianity, and certainly is not the result of the gospel having its full worth in the heart and blood. God knows us.

He knows what it requires to make us happy. He knows what we need to be fulfilled and complete. It was a great lie that Satan perpetrated on the human race when he succeeded in proving to Eve that she could only be happy if he took things into her own hands and ran her own life.

As he succeeded in persuading her that God was her enemy, that he was her friend, that life was bad and death was good, that sin was noble and righteousness was wrong, and so inverted the human race and destroyed the possibility of happiness or joy under his domain. And thus he's then put to it through the centuries to get some substitute for joy. And he has succeeded across the years in finding just enough to act as a panacea and narcotic, to dull the senses and to lead men through life without giving them what

they need or seek, and out into eternal death without having discovered that he's destroying them.

And the while he has succeeded in poisoning their minds and prejudicing their hearts and corrupting their spirits, destroying their eternal soul, somehow persuading them in the midst of this that he's their friend. Inconceivable. Absolutely beyond comprehension that it should be thus.

Perhaps sometimes the friends of God have contributed to this. You've been told, of course, about the little girl at her grandfather's home on Sabbath, when she was supposed to sit friendly on the horsehair sofa, folding her hands and looking at a book, and not to speak unless spoken to. And finally she was excused from this and permitted to go outside on the condition she didn't walk or run.

There she saw the little chickens as they were clucking and chirping, and she said, you're not Christian. And she saw the little lamb in the field gambling. I don't quite know what it is for a lamb to gamble, but this is what it was doing.

And she said, you're not a Christian. And then she saw the little colt with its mother in the pasture and kicking up its heels and dashing, said, sure, certainly not a Christian. The rooster on the fence with his head back crowing, and she said, you're not a Christian.

And she got into the barn, and there the old mule with a sad face put his head back and gave his long bray, and she said, now there you are, a good Christian. And I rather think sometimes that this is a caricature that the world has succeeded in taking. And I presume that all of us to some degree have contributed to this misrepresentation of our wonderful God and all his grace.

And I believe that it's your responsibility to realize that you're not only preaching while you're talking, but you're preaching while you're walking, and while you're working, and while you're at home, while you're shopping, and all the various activities of your life. I think this is necessary, that we should be reminded at some time of the year, and perhaps more frequently than we do, that these things are written that your joy might be full. We bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

No one is happy, no one is joyful until he is free. And no one is free if he's doing what he doesn't want to do. This is why we find today that Satan's lie is so astounding, because God wrote on the heart a law.

It's called conscience. There he inscribed not only the fact that he is, and the description of himself, but he also inscribed on the fleshly table of the heart the code of conduct, and the standards of behavior that he expects of man. And this is that light that lights every man that comes into the world, and this is the law upon the heart.

And Satan has had to come and somehow succeed in erasing this, and defacing it, and proving to a man that what his heart tells him about God isn't so, and what his heart tells him about himself isn't so. And thus his success with the human race is all the more astounding. And so he's had to lead men into blindness, and blind their minds, and blind their hearts, and silence the continuous monitor of their spirits.

We hear today, and literally see today in literature, the fact that it's now part of the casual philosophy that no one can be joyous or happy as long as they have a moral standard. The head of World Health has said that he will consider that the world is afflicted by one of the World Health Organization, by one of its prime diseases, as long as there is any remembrance of mosaic morality in human intellect. And he will consider that this is the last disease to be erased, and only then can the human race be well.

Well, obviously this is part of the casual philosophy that says that when men do what they want to do and follow their glandular impulses without any qualms of conscience, then and then only are they happy. But this is wrong, because a person is then doing something outwardly that his intellect has said is all right when his heart tells him it's wrong. And so he's now been brought into bondage, not to any outward standard, not to the scripture, but he's been brought in bondage to his own conscience.

And so no one can be joyous, and no one can be free, and no one can be blessed as long as he is doing anything outwardly that is in disagreement with what he is inwardly. And this is why the libertarianism of the present hour, moral liberty that is spotted as the pathway to joy and release, is but a dead-end street that puts people into the swamp of disintegration and destruction of their personality and their possibility of happiness. Because God wrote the law on the heart, and no one can be happy when he's doing what he doesn't want to do.

And if he is murdering when God has said, thou shalt not kill, even though his intellect has erected a standard which says murder is justifiable and all right, his heart tells him it's wrong, and so he's not in bondage to any outward system, but he's in bondage to his own conscience. He's in bondage to his own heart. This is the reason why we find with the decrease of morality, and more social morality, and the flooding of the land with pornographic literature that seems to make a wrong right and an accepted standard, and with all of the attacks on Victorian morals, we find the increase in mental disease is almost geometric.

We were told a few years ago that one out of ten of the American people were going to have to have mental health therapy, but now it's been revised downward until they say it's approximately one out of eight people now living that are going to need or require mental health treatment. Now, when you think of the fact that Satan has said that if you'll just forget God and forget his word and forget all of the standards that are there and then brought as the heritage of history, you'll be happy, and you can see what an elaborate and enormous lie this is. And consequently, it's necessary for us to recognize that a person can never be truly joyous and truly happy until he is doing outwardly what he wants to do inwardly.

And our Lord Jesus Christ came to make us free. Whom the Son makes free is free indeed. He came to give us life and to give it more abundantly.

And so there are two things he had to deal with. First, he had to find some way in his grace whereby he could free us from the tyranny of doing what we're told out from the outside we can and should do when it's in contrast with what we have been told by the inside, by the conscience. That's the first thing.

And the second thing he had to do was to bring us into a vital living relationship with God, because we were made for God. God carved into us, and this image I use because I think this way. When God made you, he carved into you an empty place so immense that only he can fill it, and you can't be joyous in the true sense of joy until he fills it.

You're made for him, and consequently you're only happy and fulfilled and the complete being he wants you to be when he fills the place he made. Now, if you understand this, then you will realize that sin isn't only sin against God, but it's sin against yourself. Sin isn't only something that is going to anger God, but it's also going to destroy you.

Someone has said it's impossible for you to break God's law. You can't break the law of God. The only thing you can do is break yourself on God's law, because God's law says thou shalt not, and when you do

it, you haven't broken the law.

You've just been like someone that's fallen off a cliff to the rocks below. You didn't break the rocks, the rocks broke you. And you don't break the law, the law breaks you.

It so fractures you, it so shatters you, that there is no possibility happiness. I rather think that that little mother goose rhyme, Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men can't put Humpty Dumpty together again.

There is in this an amazing wisdom. All the philosophies and all the teachers and all the panaceas and all the psychological techniques can't put the human spirit together again. That fall that broke you, that fall that shattered you, was of such a nature that all that man can do in all his ingenuity can't put you together again.

The only way that you could ever be put together again was for God to become flesh, God to take upon himself your likeness, a body like yours, nature like yours, so that he could be tempted in every way as you were. And by thus invading life, he had the means of invading death, and he could now take the consequences of that great fall, which was death. The soul that sinneth, it shall die.

And so the Lord Jesus Christ could, by having clothed himself with what you are, invade death in your place. And he died for you, he died for me. This was the consequences of the fall.

This was the result of it. And ever since man's hell, he's been having, using the king's horses and the king's men to try to patch up, and it won't work. It just won't work.

Because the God of this world doesn't know how, when he has destroyed what is right and good and meaningful, to patch it up. Oh, he plasters a few possessions on. Says, see, now you're not so bad as you were.

Look, you've got money in the bank. How much money does it take to be happy? Ask the multimillionaire that's going twice a week to his psychiatrist, and has his, his coffers filled with gold, and feels so insecure. How many millions does it take to feel secure? And the person that's attained to the great high position in this field, the actor, actress, that's now spent all their life trying to become well-known, and now just trying to spend all their lives to get through the day without being recognized.

Isn't it amazing? Isn't it fantastic? And here they are in the very pinnacle of achievement, and yet so utterly, utterly, they haven't been put together. And while we were climbing, they said, if I can just get my name in two-foot letters over Broadway, if I can just get that first million dollars, if I can just, then I'll be happy. And the God of this world leading them on, trying to put a plaster here and a patch there, and though he can somehow heal that which has been broken, but he can't.

The only way it could be healed was for God to become flesh, and to live, and to die, and to be raised from the dead, and then to come to you, because he died for you, was buried for you, and raised for you, will remake you. This is the only way. And this is why John says, these things write unto you that your joy may be full.

What's he writing? He's writing about the one that was in the beginning, by whom all things were made, who became the Word, the expression of God, the revelation of God's love, and grace, and mercy. And Satan has simply gone on trying to deceive, and to destroy, and confuse, and rob of meaningful existence

during time, and eternal suffering beyond time. And it's God that did something about our plight, and he's the one that left heaven's glory, he's the one that took upon himself our form and likeness, he's the one that invaded time so he could invade death, and carry with him to us into eternity, and he's our friend.

And he said, the sun has come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly. And he said, these things I write unto you that your joy might be full. And Christmas often means, above everything else, that God's on your side, that he's concerned about you, that he loves you, and he knows what you need.

And for once, if you haven't done it before during the year, you want to thank him that he had your interest at heart. He was concerned about you, and that everything he's done, he's done in your behalf, and for your sake, and for your joy. This is the first problem.

What about sin? What about the violations of his law and our conscience? And of course, he not only forgives the past, but he gives us a new heart. He sort of takes the rubbish off of the conscience, and it begins to rise up again. And there it is.

And there is that heart that had been buried under all of the ideas, and axioms, and philosophies, rules of practice, and teachings of the God of this world. And out of that then comes the teachings that God inscribed upon the heart. And the new heart is simply the heart that he put into Adam, that had been broken and covered by sin.

A desire to please God, and the knowledge of what we need to do to please him. And so now, as a Christian, with the past under the blood, you've received Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior, if you have, and you know that he is yours. And you can look back and say, yes, there was a time when I knew I had no joy or peace.

I was dead in my sins. But now Christ has come into my heart. You may not know when.

You may not know the day. But the important thing isn't the day or the hour. The important thing is that.

That. Whereas once I was blind, now I see. Oh, this is wonderful.

No joy. No possibility of joy until the past is dealt with. No possibility of joy until you know you're right with God.

But how often that joy is broken because you've done something that was accorded with the laws of the past, the deep grooves that have been carved into your mind, the traits that you inherited and the disposition you developed, and the attitudes that you acquired and the learned responses to the situations that you carried with you from the old into the new life. And as a Christian, you sin. Led aside by your lust, your appetite, your desire, and you sin.

Maybe something having to do with your time. Maybe it has to do with your mind. Maybe it has to do with your appetite.

Perhaps it has to do with your words that you sin, you grieve God, and your joy is gone. Now thank God that he took your joy away for that little while. For if he left you in joy while you would sin, it would be the same effect as having no nerves in your hand.

You may feel a little uncomfortable when you touch the stove and your hand burns. But oh, when you feel the pain and the flash and throb go through your finger because it's been burned, you ought to thank God that you still have nerves. Because if you didn't, you could have left your hand right there and it burned off.

And so the nerve system of the Christian life is the Spirit of God taking away our joy and our peace. And when that peace is disturbed, when that joy is disrupted, you've grieved him. And when that happens, it's to find out how you've grieved him, and what you've done to grieve him, and deal with it.

And this is what John is saying as he writes, you've had fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, and we want that fellowship to go on, and these things have written that your joy may be continuous and your joy may be full. Now he said, if you say that you have fellowship with us, and fellowship with the Father, and you deliberately walk in darkness, you lie, and you do not the truth. The one thing that characterizes the people that have been born of God is their desire to please God, and that when they don't please God, they don't please themselves, and they're grieved about it, and they want to do something about it.

Now if you say you're a Christian, and you can go on deliberately day after day, walking in darkness, then his word, not mine, says you lie, and your professions of being Christian is spurious, and false, and counterfeit, and it's to be disregarded by you and by others. Because you've been born of God, then there's come a new heart, a new desire to please God, a new purpose to obey him, to live in accord with the rules that he's inscribed upon your heart. And you don't want to walk in darkness any more than a lamb wants to get into a mud puddle.

Now I suppose it can, especially if it cares about its gambling, it can get into a mud puddle, and get all soiled in the muddy, muddy water. It can. But it isn't its nature.

Now when you see the pig walk through the fence, and put its nose under, and lift it up, and squeeze through, you know where that animal's going. At least I did when they'd go through our fence, when I was a boy on the farm. We couldn't keep them in.

They just wouldn't stay, but I knew where they'd go. Down below there was a little marshy place in the woods, and the rain would settle, and the water would stand. And so we wouldn't have to track them.

I just knew where it was. Go down there, sure, there it was. Right in the snout sticking out, you know, just so happy was home.

Now a lamb wouldn't be there. It may have fallen in, but it didn't, wasn't intended. That wasn't where it was headed.

And if you've been born of God, you may fall into the mud puddle, but my dear, that's not where you're headed. And he said, here you might be intimidated. You'd say, look, I once loved this, but something's happened.

Now how am I going to get the mud off? How am I going to get the dirt out? How am I going to protect myself so I won't get back in the mud puddle again? And John says, your joy is going to go when you do. And I'm writing this so that your joy will be full. And then he says, because if you've been born of God, your desire is to please God.

And the question is, how and what am I going to do when I displease Him? And so he said, there's a fellowship here in our weakness. There's a fellowship in our frailty. Did you know that? There's a fellowship in our humanity.

Do you understand that? Though you've been forgiven and though you've been pardoned, you can still fall into sin. And there is no experience with God that will immunize you to that. A lot of people are asking God to do something for them so they won't be tempted.

They won't have to fight sin anymore. I wish there was something in the word of God that said that you could look forward to that, but there isn't. There's no experience set forth in this book that's going to immunize you to temptation and the possibility of falling.

But this book is explicitly clear, saying there's no temptation overtaking you, but such as is common to man. And so it's this fact that we are common. That's the same word fellowship, isn't it? It's the same word sharing.

It's the one from which we get communion. So you see, there's not only a communion in the blood of Christ and in the body of Christ. There's not only a communion in our fellowship, but there's a communion in our humanity.

There's a communion in our frailty. There's a communion in the fact that you're tempted the same way everybody else is tempted. And you have the same problems that everyone else has, and sometime the enemy's going to come to you and say, well, now listen, nobody has ever been tempted the way you've been tempted.

Because yours is so extreme and so unusual, and because God has just permitted you to have this terrible temptation that's never come to mortal before, it'll be all right for you if you yield this once. See, every time a person sins, it's rational at the moment. He's had his thinking so upset and so disturbed that it's seemingly become right for him, because we only do now always what's right, even though it's absolutely wrong and we know it.

There's a delusion. And so you as a child of God have been let aside by your appetite, and you got mad, and you fast, or you told a lie, or you were angry, or you sinned, whatever was. Now, since this is a common temptation and a common possibility--and not necessity, but possibility--John says, I want you to understand something.

If you say that you're not capable of sin, you lie. If you say, well, God has done something in me, so I won't be tempted anymore, you lie. And if you say that you can't sin, you lie, because you're still of common claim, and there's no experience of God's grace that's going to insulate you and immunize you against being tempted.

Did you hear me? You'll be tempted, because if there ever came a time when you weren't tempted anymore, you'd be holier than your Lord was, because He was tempted in all points, right as you are. So this isn't what the Word teaches, but what it does teach is that you don't have to yield to the temptation. We'll talk about that another time or later, but you have.

We're dealing now with the fact that you have yielded, and you're in trouble. You're in trouble because your joy is disturbed. You're in trouble because your peace is disrupted.

You're in trouble because the fellowship you had with God is broken. You're in trouble because prayer isn't as it used to be. You're in trouble because there isn't the blessing on your testimony and witness that's there.

You're in trouble because you've opened up the door to the enemy to come in. You're in trouble. Your joy is disturbed.

What are you to do? Pull in the sponge? Raise, throw up your hands? Well, this is nothing to this. No! There's a fellowship here, a fellowship that continues. Not only did the Lord Jesus Christ die for you, and not only was He raised from the dead, but you see, He's able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives, to make intercession for them.

And so we find here in this first verse of the second chapter, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And so at the right hand of the throne on high is seated the Son of God, who knows you. He loved you when there was nothing lovable about you, when you had nothing to offer, and He loved you not for what was in you, but what was in Him.

And He died for you, and He's risen from the dead, and He's seated there, and your name is written right on the palm of His hand. That is, He sees you when He looks at those nail-pierced hands and knows it was for you He died. And so you're revealed into temptation.

You've fallen, and your joy is gone, and your peace is gone, your blessings disturbed, and the Lord is there waiting for you to come. And His name is written there. Now, He can only act in your behalf when you do certain things.

These things you must understand if your joy is to be full. The first thing you've got to do is to judge what you did to be sin. You've got to be the judge.

God gave you the law book, now you be the judge. And you, you judge. That is, you bring yourself as the culprit before the stand, and you open the book, and you say, now John Doe, that's you, see? That's what they say.

I don't know who Mrs. John Doe is, but you bring yourself, and you stand there, and you, you read out what the book has to say about you. You're guilty. You did this, and you're talking to yourself.

And there's no excuse for it. God provided grace, you have sinned. But you've got to be specific.

You've got to be specific as to what it was, and when it was. And you can't just say, oh, you terrible sinner, you were, and God loved you, and God saved you, so now let's not stop. Let's be specific.

Let's talk about what it was. And so it's going to come out something like this. Yesterday, or this morning, when they were talking, you discovered that you were envious.

You envied that person, their position. You envied them, their personality. You envied them, their place.

Your heart is an envious heart. It was a feeling within you. It was deep within you, and God's book, the law book, says that it's murder and envy.

There's no excuse for envy. You have sinned. And who are you talking to? Yourself.

You've judged yourself. And then the response that has to come from your heart is, now envy is a sin, and I have sinned, and I am through with it. I won't defend it.

I won't excuse it. I won't pardon it. It is a sin.

Well, now you've done two things. You've judged it, and you've forsaken it. And now the next thing you have to do is go in through the rent veil, into the holiest of all, into the presence of the Father and God is right hand, the Son.

And you've got to say, I've just come from the law court where I judged myself to sin with envy. And oh God, yesterday I discovered it. And that this has colored my thinking, and this has affected my attitude, and this has influenced my words, and I have sinned with the sin of envy.

Now, immediately that you do that, you release your advocate. Now the Lord Jesus can say, Father, you've heard his judgment. You've heard his confession.

And now hear, I have his name written on my hands, and I was nailed to the cross for him, and my blood was shed for him, and I plead the merit and the virtue of that sacrifice for him. And he is faithful and just to forgive you your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. But it requires this brokenness of spirit.

It requires this judging of yourself. It requires this forsaking of sin. It requires this confession.

Now suppose that the sin has involved others. What are you going to do? Well, there is a community, there is a participation, there is a fellowship in frailty. There is nothing that anyone has ever done that I couldn't have done, nothing that anyone has ever done that you couldn't have done.

And if you and I haven't, it's but the grace of God. And consequently, when someone comes to you and says to you, My dear, God has shown me that I have sinned against you. Instead of being highly indignant and rearing back and looking down your nose and saying, Oh, well, I've suspected it all the time.

So breaking fellowship and destroying the possibility of reconciliation, there ought to be but a dropping of your head and heart and saying, My heart is grieved that I have grieved you. And I want you to, I assure you that I forgive you, but I want you to know that if but for the grace of God, it could have been me in your place. John is thus telling us that the joy that comes isn't that we have fellowship in sin, for he's told us that we are to sin not.

We are to sin not. We don't have fellowship in sin. We have fellowship in our common frailty, our common weakness, our common possibility of sin.

And so you can become the priest to another and another to you, not that you encourage people to tell you of their sin. That isn't the idea. But that you recognize that we are sharing a common death, for we were under the sentence of death because we'd sin.

A common nature, subject to temptation. A common or a shared salvation for the Lord Jesus Christ died for you and for me. Each of us have the necessity of confession of brokenness in some place in our pilgrimage.

And so when it comes to the time that it's necessary for you to go to your wife and say, dear, forgive me. I have been inconsiderate. I've been impatient.

My words have been sharp. She's going to look at you and forgive you and realize that perhaps she has been inconsiderate or could have been. We share a common humanity, a common frailty, a common susceptibility to temptation and to sin.

And so fellowship includes understanding and sympathy. Someone has said and well said, a Christian ought to be unshockable as well as unshakable. And this is true.

And so John writing to you and to me today said, I want you to understand that God's known your need. He's known all about you. And so he's made provision not only to save you from the past with all its guilt and violence, but to save you from the present so that your joy can be unbroken and continued.

Perhaps I speak to some that would have all honestly have to say it's been years since I've known the joy of which you speak once I knew it. Well, it'll go back to broken fellowship with God or broken fellowship with some person. Perhaps you're praying for revival, but really what you're praying for is to make it easy to do the thing you ought to do and know you ought to do.

If right now on the basis not of what others are going to do, but on what he is doing, you would judge it to be sin, forsake it and confess it. Then you would know the advocacy of your high priest, his cleansing, his pardon, his joy restored. And then when you go to the other, you're not testifying to your sin, but you're testifying to his grace, to his love.

And so that our joy might be full, he brings us face to face with God's grace and mercy in Christ, face to face with our utter dependence upon the Lord and upon each other. Might it be, therefore, that because of what you heard, your joy may be full. Joy of our hearts in prayer.

Think with me just a moment before we pray. Do you know that fullness of joy? Have you known that fullness of joy? Would you like to know it again? Then this is the path. This is the path.

These things have I written unto you, that your joy might be full. See, God knows you, and he knows about you, and he knows that you need to be free, doing outwardly what you want to do inwardly, and that which you want to do inwardly, he wrote on your heart. So when you've broken that law upon your heart, then there's got to be confession, cleansing, and restoration.

Our Father, before thee is a thoughtful people, a people that have heard through the years of thy love and grace and mercy and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet so often we've caricatured and misrepresented our Lord Jesus because our joy hasn't been full. And he made every provision so that it could be.

We remember the joy when we knew our sins were first forgiven. But oh Father, how thou dost want that joy to continue to increase and abound more and more. And we pray that this may become a joyous people, not because of happenings, not because of possessions, not because of promotions, but because of a relationship to thyself.

Oh God, make us a joyous people, joyous not in our failure but in thy grace, not in our sin but in thy pardon and in thy power, released in our lives. It's the joy of the Lord, grant our Father that our joy may be full as we realize thy understanding, thy grace to us, every provision for every need. Do thou, Lord, make this church to be known in this great sad community as a place where the joy of the Lord is the strength of his people.

Might our joy be full. May it be glad tidings of great joy that come to our hearts during these days. Now bless the needy.

If there are those that should stay, Lord, prompt them to stay and seek for counsel and help prayer even now. Dismiss us with thy blessing in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let us stand for the benediction. Thy grace, thy mercy, thy peace, from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be and abide upon us now until we meet again.

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