

What's Stealing Your Joy?

John 15:9-11

Preface

Illus: There is a story about a man who was eating limburger cheese one evening. When he went to bed he didn't realize he had some on his upper lip just under his nose. When he woke up the next morning he declared, "something stinks in this room." As he went through the house he continued to complain about the smell. Finally when he stepped out the front door he exclaimed, **"The whole world stinks!"**

For some people the whole world does stinks. Some people bitterly resent the things around them and allow themselves to become miserable. Sadly, some of these people are Christians and there is no excuse for that.

Quote: Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to count it all joy! If we live only for the present and forget about the future, trials will make us bitter, not better."

For Christians, joy is something that no man or woman can take away from us. The reason is because joy doesn't come from the world and the world can't take it away. Only you can allow your joy to be stolen.

Scripture

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain (abide) in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. John 15:9-11 NIV

Introduction

Illus: Friday I met my daughter at the cell phone store. She needed to get a new phone and I was there for one purpose and that was to pick-up the tab. As we began to look, she could not make up her mind which phone to purchase. My patience began to run thin as I hinted which one she should get, not that I cared but a decision soon would be nice. When she finally decided on a phone, much to my displeasure she discovered the phone comes in several colors. Of course the lady offered to bring out samples and then the decision process began all over. Which color do I get? Once the decisions were finally made, they had a problem getting the service to work correctly. After 1.5 hours, we finally left. I lost my happiness but I did not lose my joy.

Anyone can find happiness for a while. . . Happiness depends on what is happening to you at the moment.

But joy is different; joy goes much deeper. Joy comes from a much deeper source - God.

Billy Sunday said, "If you have no joy, there's a leak in your Christianity".

Illus: "At a Presbyterian church in Omaha. People were given helium filled balloons and told to release them at some point in the service when they felt like expressing the joy in their hearts. All through the service balloons ascended, but when it was over 1/3 of the balloons were unreleased..." What a sad day, when 1/3 of the people at Church are not free enough to express joy; to express delight in their hearts.

Many Christians who once possessed a vibrant and exciting faith, end up "down in the dumps" and feeling sorry for themselves.

Illus: Consider a swimming pool that has been drained. It is still a swimming pool but it no longer serves its purpose. It is no longer functional.

Many Christians are the same way. They haven't lost their salvation but they have lost the joy of their salvation. They allow their joy to be stolen and no longer serve their purpose.

So what are some of the things that steal our joy?

1. A thief of joy is legalism

Legalism is the perverted theology that reduces Christianity to a set of rules we try to live by on our own efforts. Legalism is when we load Christianity down with a bunch of guilt-inducing mechanisms that rob us of our joy.

Legalism is when we move from a relationship with Christ to mere religion. Legalism is when tradition takes precedence over the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever felt led to raise your hands but refrained – you were a victim of legalism.

Legalism is when we focus on how short we fall rather than how far we have come through Christ.

Legalism is when we keep score on our good deeds rather than God's grace and forgiveness.

What is the answer to legalism? It is to have a love relationship with Christ just as our text states.

We must realize that we are loved by God not because of our goodness or actions but because of His grace. We must love in return. We must abide in our love for Christ.

Jesus says, *"As the father has loved me, so I love you. So, abide in my love."*

2. A thief of joy is sin

I preached about sin and confession in recent weeks. The reality is that none of us are sinless and we never will be.

Sin must be dealt with. But we aren't equipped to deal with sin – Christ is the one who deals with sin in our lives.

We cannot muster up enough will power to deal with sin. We must confess it and allow God to forgive and work through us.

Confession is not rationalizing or calling sin something else. Confession is declaring our sin and asking God to have mercy, forgiveness and healing from sin.

Sin will eat away at the very core of our souls. As David said, it caused him to waste away at the bones.

Sin and joy simply do not occupy the same space.

We must allow God to deal with our sin by confessing it. In doing so, we rediscover our joy.

3. A thief of joy is the lack of gratitude

Throughout God's word, He tells us to be thankful. Be thankful in all things and in all circumstances.

Being thankful is the miraculous formula to keeping the joy of our salvation. Too often, we fail to be thankful for the things we have.

Too often we focus on what we don't have or what others have and we allow the obsession to steal the real joy in our lives.

Thankfulness is the preventative medicine that keeps us from getting greedy or resentful. Thankfulness has everything to do with joy. If we are not thankful, we will not have joy.

Illus: A few years ago I decided to begin every private prayer with thanking God. I found that when I get through thanking Him for who He is and what He has done, my needs and problems don't seem so big after all.

Thankfulness is the key to keeping our joy.

4. A thief of joy is success

The Bible does not say that a Christian can't experience success. The issue is not success; it is replacing God with success.

It is a mistake to believe that material things bring joy. They may bring happiness for a short time but they do not bring lasting joy.

Illus: When my truck was brand new it brought me happiness. The smell, the accessories and the ride were all things I enjoyed. But today it sits in the parking lot dirty and covered with love bugs. It brought temporary happiness but it never brought joy.

God does not mind you being successful. I believe God wants you to be successful if you do so on His terms and to His glory.

What are His terms? Matt 6:33: *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."*

Joy comes when we put Christ on the throne of our lives and on the throne of our money. Joy comes when everything we have is His and is available for His work. Nothing is taken for granted and nothing is held back. Everything is for His service.

Real joy is when we allow Christ to possess our lives rather than allowing our possessions to control us.

5. A thief of joy is practical atheism

Make no mistake about it, many Christians believe in God but live their lives with little or no confidence in God. Practical atheism is when we say we believe yet we remain disobedient to His Word.

Jesus said, *“¹⁰If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”*

Sometimes we live as if God has no ability to handle the complicated details of our life. We take matters into our own hands and become disobedient and untrusting to His Word.

Practical atheism is when we believe God will save us from hell but have difficulty believing God understands the day-to-day complications of our life. Examples - lifestyles.

Practical atheism is reflected in the lives of most Christians today.

They profess to be Christians yet they in no way live out the integrity, love and compassion of a person saved by God’s grace. They show no evidence of being filled with the His Holy Spirit.

Practical atheism is when we profess to be saved yet we rarely attend worship or serve God with our lives.

What does this have to do with joy? **“Joy is the byproduct of obedience”.**

When we are not obedient to do the things that God commands or calls us to do, we lose our joy. When we fail to acknowledge him before others, we lose our joy.

To experience His joy, we must be obedient and committed to our relationship and worship of Christ.

6. A thief of Joy is _____

What is stealing your joy? Is it death? Is it your job? Whatever is stealing your joy, you can change that today. By confessing, trusting and being thankful, you can have your joy back.

But you must begin by confessing before God what is stealing your joy.

Conclusion

Have you lost the joy of your salvation?

The key word in our scripture text today is “abide” or “remain”. It means to be steadfast and obedient in your relationship with Him. The believer who abides in Christ has his relationship deepened and enriched.

The believer who abides in Christ experiences real joy.

David is described as a man after God’s own heart and yet he sinned and lost his joy. Listen to the groaning of his heart when he confessed his sins.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. ¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Psalm 51:8-12