

Fall Retreat 2021: Friday Evening Session

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[0 : 00] I do pray for this church, and I do pray for Sean regularly.

So to be here with you is a great joy. I seek Sean out when I can. I always make sure we spend time together at the conference, I try to connect to the regional assemblies because I have an immense respect for him.

And I think our family of churches is greatly served by having him as a leader and a growing influence in our midst.

And so to just be here, spend some time with you, this particular topic, I did not choose it, but it is one of great importance to me.

And I'll talk about that in some of the other sessions, a little more biographical. But this is a very meaningful subject for me.

[1 : 16] Give ourselves some background thinking about joy. Who can complain about a conference on joy?

It seems about as safe a subject as you could possibly have. Joy, however, it's important we don't think of it as a side issue or kind of a garnish on Christian life.

You know, joy is a nice thing. We all should have joy. And who would argue with that? And I'm not sure we think about joy as something central and fundamental to Christian life.

And yet it is. The Bible is emphatically clear that joy is central to Christianity. Joy is actually at the heart of what it means to live before God.

Joy describes in Scripture how the heavenly host declared the birth of our Savior joy to the world. Joy describes how the disciples responded when Jesus was raised from the dead.

[2 : 33] Joy describes the believers when they were filled by the Holy Spirit. Joy describes how we should receive the commandments of God.

Joy describes how heaven responds every time a sinner is saved. Joy describes what our attitude should be when we pray for fellow believers.

Joy describes the effects of the Spirit or the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy describes us when we will gather for the marriage feast of the Lamb.

In all of these areas, as the Bible speaks of them, it speaks of joy rejoicing taking place.

Joy, and this is a fundamental thought. I want to grab it and take with us through the weekend. Joy is meant to be the natural condition of those who know God, those who love Him and are in a relationship with Him.

[3 : 58] That should be our natural framework if we truly know and love God.

Not just what it will be like when we are in heaven and all the imperfections and everything that bothers us is removed. But even in the midst of the grittiness of this earth.

In Romans 14, verse 17, That's what the kingdom, he says, is about.

Philippians 4.4 Rejoice in the Lord. How often? Always. That should be our demeanor. Rejoice in the Lord.

Always. Again, I'm going to say it again. Rejoice. Psalm 211. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

[5 : 09] I won't get into it in this session. Michael Reeves, if anyone's familiar with him, anything he writes, read it. Michael Reeves recently wrote a book, Rejoice and Tremble, which is talking about the fear of the Lord and what actually is biblically the fear of the Lord.

And the conclusion, as he walks carefully through Scripture, the fear of the Lord is to be filled with an overwhelming love for and rejoicing in God.

That is most fundamentally the fear of the Lord. That Rejoice and Tremble by Michael Reeves would be a book worth reading.

Yet, with all of this, joy doesn't always describe us, does it? Perhaps, joy rarely describes you.

It's something that pops in every once in a while. But it's not a regular part of life. We're going to look at the value of joy and how it can grow in us.

[6 : 24] And since we typically don't need lessons on joy when life is going smooth and we're happy, we're going to spend a significant amount of our time looking at joy when life is hard.

That's when it's a challenge. And I believe that's when it's most honoring to God and glorifying of him.

And as we do this, I will be preaching to my own soul. Just in the last two days, just Wednesday and Thursday, conversation with a woman who came to us because her brother stalked and murdered a woman.

And she's, how do I process my brother? My neighbor, the ambulance is at their house and go over and the wife, probably a stroke, is being rushed to the hospital.

The husband's upset and, you know, trying to minister. They're not believers. They never go to church. Trying to connect with them. Spent several hours yesterday morning with a woman and her husband.

[7 : 44] She had been sexually abused for years by her stepfather. Stepfather, we were together with the stepfather and her mother trying to mediate in some way.

It was not a pleasant conversation in any way. I had a call from a church because I serve on the Response Committee for Sexual Misconduct for Sovereign Grace.

So, you know, another call. You never get a call dealing with sexual abuse. They're never good calls. A church, a pastor trying to work through that.

We had an accusation of a man in our church who's a member by his wife saying that he said that he had molested her when she was younger.

That's 48-hour span. Joy wasn't my natural response.

[8 : 49] Joy wasn't my natural response. And I had to labor and work at trying to find some semblance of joy. And each of you have your list of struggles, of burdens, of what gets in the way.

And so we preach to all of our souls because this is something we need. And it is something very good.

So we begin in 1 Peter 1, our first session. You've got just those blank pages just waiting for notes to be written down.

If you're a note taker. 1 Peter 1, we're going to read verses 3 to 12. Joy is easiest when we can clearly see and experience the grace of God.

When we're very aware of what God is doing. It's much easier to be joyful. I've found over the years that it's not just hardship that interrupts joy.

[10 : 10] Because I think we all recognize hard things will come. We're not surprised that we have hardships. We realize that's part of life in this world. I think what is more difficult and challenging for us in this than that a hardship comes.

Something difficult is uncertainty. Life's uncertainties, if they last, wear on us more than hardship.

The unknowns of getting settled in life. Where am I going to be? Where am I going to work? What is my life career going to be? Who am I going to be with? How is life going to work?

The whys of loss. The whys of betrayal. The whys of abuse. The uncertainty of where this world is headed.

The news is never joy-inducing. And just looking at trajectories of the world. The question of how your specific problems and burdens will turn out.

[11 : 26] What's going to happen with this? What is the truth? What is the truth? All of those can make meaningful joyfulness difficult.

So here's the main point for this session. God gives us surpassing clarity that should bring us surpassing joy.

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Which brings us to our text. God gives us surpassing joy. The apostle writes, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

[12 : 49] In this you rejoice, though now for a little while necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen Jesus Christ, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours, searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you. In the things that now have been announced to you, through those who preach the good news to you, by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Our heavenly father, I thank you for each one here, for what this represents, their desire to be here, to know you, to deepen in how they think of you and experience you, how they deepen relationships with each other.

[14 : 40] And Lord, you who are abundant in grace, I ask that you would multiply that grace and grant these desires, that you would fill their hearts and refresh them and deepen them.

May we see Christ wondrously before us. May our love abound for he who is worthy, and may our love for one another abound as your love for us abounds.

And so in this time, help us. We ask of you. In Jesus' name. Amen. God's people have always known that he promised to deliver, a deliverer to them.

They just weren't sure how. As soon as Adam brought the curse of sin upon himself and humanity, God immediately began promising a deliverer.

And these promises saturate the history of God's people and the message of the Old Testament. They're found throughout.

[15 : 58] And all that is taking place in the Old Testament, even if it was recognized or not as it, it was God pointing his people to the deliverer to come.

There were consistent themes that came up over and over again that God's people clung to for centuries, that God's deliverer would bring true and lasting righteousness to his people, that he would bring relief from suffering, that he would vanquish their enemies, that he would be a great king who would reign over an everlasting kingdom, and that the peoples of the world would be drawn to him.

All of these were truths and themes that the people of God believed and looked toward. And obviously, people being people, they wanted to know when, how, who.

All of these were on their mind. Verse 10 emphasizes how earnestly they searched. They searched and inquired carefully.

The searching was searching through scriptures, seeing if there were any clues, anything they were missing concerning the promises of God. The inquiring, they were calling out to God, Lord, make your way clear.

[17 : 32] But what did become clear to them is that they would not live to see the fulfillment of it. Verse 12, it was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves, speaking the prophets and the words that they uttered about the deliverer.

Now, why does Peter bring this up here? He's talking about the prophets and people centuries before, searching, inquiring.

Peter's speaking to an audience in a very different context. He's speaking to people who know exactly who the deliverer was. They know who, when, how.

And they're living in the reality of knowing who, when, and how. And that's really why Peter brings this up.

Because we do see these promises fulfilled. He brings this up over and over in verse 12. He says, it was revealed to them they were not serving themselves, but you, and things that now have been announced to you through those who preach the good news to you.

[18 : 55] And so Peter wants the people to know, for the major theme of this letter is suffering.

Every chapter deals with suffering. That will be the most central theme of this letter. People who will face suffering. And all the uncertainties, all the difficulty of it.

And he wants them to know, even in their struggles, the certainties that they had, the certainties we have, far outweigh any uncertainty.

There are things we don't know about life. There are some things we don't know about God's specific plan in our lives.

But the certainties, the things we do know clearly are so wondrous, so huge to us that those certainties should overwhelm the things we are not certain about that tend to bring so much angst to us and that at times become magnified in our mind.

[20 : 21] Good wife, a good friend of my wife, a few months ago, her adult son committed suicide suddenly, shockingly, a believing home.

And the theme that comes from them, they're trying to figure it out. Their life is suddenly just filled with questions.

So, if there's anything that questions uncertainty for them, something that big, and yet, what we can be certain about, even with something as brutally hard as that, what we can be certain of is greater.

And that should affect the joyfulness of our hearts. So, let's kind of dig into that a little bit. First, we have clarity about God's plan and promises.

We have clarity about God's plan and his promises. We know the great extent of our salvation. That it's not just about getting a better swing at life.

[21 : 42] Our salvation is that our souls are set free. our guilt has disappeared. The Lord is the one who says, I have cast it behind my back and see it no more.

I have cast it to the depths of the sea. It cannot be found. Our guilt in Christ is erased forever.

ever. Our guilt simply doesn't exist anymore. And so all separation from God, that's gone.

We are joined in who, what can separate us from the love of God and grace Jesus. Evil has been defeated. defeated. Satan has been defeated.

Death itself has been defeated. And this salvation isn't something that's for the rest of our lives.

[22 : 51] It's for all eternity. These are all certain truths. These are certain realities.

believers. Believer, you know the gospel. And the gospel overshadows everything you don't know.

The gospel is infinitely greater than everything you don't know and understand. You not only know, clearly know the extent of our salvation, we also know the great glory of who this Savior is.

For God did not raise up a wonderful man. He became man. God in flesh.

Not just for a period of time, God popping into the world, pulling a body upon himself for a little while until he could get this cross thing done.

[24 : 01] when God became incarnate, God, the Son, from that moment forever will be God in flesh.

He will forever have human nature, a human body. Forever he did that to save us.

God did not come to intimidate. He came to draw us near. And the practices of Jesus, who Jesus pursued, and how the gospels portray, how he interacted with those no one cared about, how he seemed to specifically engage with those who are outcasts, is meant to enforce to us.

He came to bring near. He didn't come to be an elitist, though he certainly could have. He had the mind, and someone who can perform miracles can put himself in an elite situation.

He came to engage with those who needed him. He came to bring us near. And now, through Christ, now, for the first time, humanity was able to see what is the full measure of the love of God.

[25 : 44] He demonstrated his love for us while we were yet sinners. Christ died for us. We knew something of the love of God.

It was not until he held himself on the cross. He could have come down at any moment. Love kept him there, and it was demonstrated to a degree that had never been known.

The majesty of his grace, how magnificent is the grace of God. God, it is now in Christ of the gospel that we see these things in degrees that simply hadn't been seen, couldn't have been known.

Believer, you know Jesus, and he overshadows everything that's fearful, everything that's uncertain.

So our certainties involve the fact that we have clarity about the plan of God, the promises of God. We have clarity now about the person of God, the heart of God.

[27 : 04] God, we know these things in a way that those before us didn't. Those in the old covenant saw shadows.

We've seen the living reality of it. And secondly, we had the beginning of the fulfillment of these things. The plan and promises of God, the fulfillment now is in motion, and it has caught us up in the fulfillment.

It's now our story. It's now our life. It's now part of our reality. It is in part now. There are aspects of our salvation still in part.

Hence, life is not always easy. But all of these things in part are certain of how they will end up.

What will happen? do you realize that's the purpose of the book of Revelation? Contrary to popular opinion among many believers, the book of Revelation was written so that Christians would have one more thing to fight about in case they ran out of other things.

[28 : 17] Let's just have one book that we can argue about for centuries. the book of Revelation has places where okay I'm trying to figure that out but the book of Revelation is actually very direct and its purpose is very clear.

It was given to the church which would suffer to make two things certain to us. What will happen to all who deny Christ and reject the rule of God or their lies?

What will happen to all who are in Christ? That's the purpose of the book. To give us certainty. What's going to happen? We know. We know how it ends up.

When you read the pictures in chapters 4, 5, 7, 19 where it shows us these pictures of worship of what will be going on. Do you realize you're in that picture?

If you could just keep zooming in, eventually you would get to your face because you will be part of that vast throng.

[29 : 34] That's us. There are things still in part, but it's all certain.

we are becoming more like Jesus. Even though we're not fully there, and as you're well aware, no one else in your church is either.

We have peace with God, even though we're not always at peace with one another and certainly not with the world. we are born again of the spirit, even though these bodies do no sickness and death.

We are blessed citizens of Christ's kingdom, even while we live in a world that has misery. The already not yet, there are things we're a part of being completed, but the fulfillment has begun.

So don't let what is still in part overcome what is certain, because what is certain is too wonderful. And Christ who makes it certain is too worthy that we not keep looking to the fulfillment.

[31 : 05] fulfillment. He's too worthy. What he has done is too wondrous. Emmanuel, God with us.

Emmanuel's here. He has come. And our life and our destiny will never be the same. Jesus, he has died.

The blood was shed. The body dead, buried. And so the price has been paid. And the prisoners, they are released.

It is not just the guilt of sin that has been broken. It is the bondage of sin as well. We who will quickly say we believe, yes, our sins are forgiven, then act as though we're trapped by our sin.

We cannot get free of it. that's just the deceiver and the fact that we have well-run tracks in our life. And we do have patterns and habits.

[32 : 13] And there's deception, but we are free. It's it's as if we're going back in our cell because it's a place we know and we're there so long.

We're going back in and as though the door has been ripped off the hinges. Jesus didn't open it. He ripped it off, cast it aside. We go back in the cell old ways and we're picking up the chains and trying to, oh, I can't help myself.

The chains are falling because they're not even in the wall anymore. They're broken and we stand there, see, I can't help it, I have to sin. No.

The chains and bondage of sin are broken as is the guilt because Christ has died and the tomb is empty and the throne it is occupied by one worthy to rule who knows how to rule.

We can't say that about all of our rulers here. We can say it about Jesus. He knows how to rule to rule well.

[33 : 37] He understands justice and goodness and mercy. Who is the one who reigns who is sovereign?

Our king. The one that knows us. That's the one who reigns. And so verse 12 presses this point about our advantage compared to those who believed in God over the centuries in the old covenant.

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you and the things that had been announced to you to those who preach the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven things into which angels long to look.

Peter's telling us these realities are so wondrous even angels are amazed. now I don't know what the experience of angels is but I think we can all agree it has to be pretty wondrous.

It's better than what we experience. The angels with all that they know and see are amazed. The Old Testament prophets had a hazy view of our salvation.

[35 : 08] even as they're giving the prophetic words God gave them that we look at now and go well that's pretty obvious what it is.

To them it was hazy it seemed confusing what's going on here. And yet it says they desired it. They were searching they knew it was good it was wondrous.

Angels are not like the prophets angels see clearly they know exactly what's going on. And it astonishes them. Think of these magnificent beings of mind and experience that we cannot comprehend.

And they are watching the gospel unfold. Thinking how could it be be the creator of existence has become one of them.

How could it be that he is born of them? How could it be that the majesty of heaven allowed himself to be crucified?

[36 : 25] Jesus said he could just speak and legions of angels would have come. Imagine imagine the destructive force that would have taken place on that mount if legions of angels had descended in the fury that had to have been in their hearts that the Savior that Christ was being crucified was being mocked shamed tortured imagine if the full force they had was unleashed upon that hill.

and they are there not called for restraint just watching it all happen.

How could it be that those who were defiled and unworthy those who even in that moment were rejecting and mocking Christ are now the beloved of God loved the word of God tells us we are loved just as the father loves the son we're loved how much does the father love the son we can't measure that whatever it is he loves us just as much so how should all this clarity all this fulfillment all this certainty how should it affect our lives sure we could come up with many ways the one central to our purpose this weekend is how it affects our joyfulness with a salvation this great this certain the fulfillment in motion has caught us up in it with such a great salvation our hearts should overflow with joy verses six and eight in this you rejoice now though for a little while if necessary you've been grieved by various trials he is saying this you rejoice in which the context is the gospel is so wondrous even though you have trials we still rejoice because this is far better we'll look at that more in the next session verse eight speaks of this default setting for our soul you haven't seen

Jesus but you love him by the grace of God you love him no you do not see him now you believe in him you who think maybe your faith is weak we tend to how often do you speak to a Christian who says yeah my faith is strong great faith they may think Christians don't say that too often we're thinking our faith is kind of weak because we're aware of our struggles have you considered as a believer how easily you believe that baby Jesus was God in flesh that he was born of a virgin that he really did die and now he's alive and he's up in heaven and when you talk he hears and he actually speaks to your soul and you get it but if you say that to other people and they're kind of whacked and yet those things aren't hard for you to believe when you're in

Christ Jesus is born of a virgin okay God became flesh it was God in flesh and he was dead now he's alive and you go yep okay how is it that we believe those things so actually so easily because your faith truly is a miraculous work of God it is the power of God in you and so you do believe and we do rejoice he says joy inexpressible filled with glory not in full measure but it comes and although we have inconsistency in these things joy can increasingly be our natural disposition and as we live in the joy of

[42 : 08] Christ our lives glorify him and isn't that what you really want to come from your life that Christ really is glorified that somehow your life brings honor to him isn't that what we really want that somehow our life brings honor to God and lists up the name of Jesus being joyful by disposition and we'll look at what that means that is glorifying to him because happiness is directed to circumstances you get a new car and you're happy with all the new drives itself

I haven't had one of those cars yet but I watched the commercials they tell me it drives itself parks itself has all kinds of cool gadgetry a new car you're happy you haven't made the first payment yet you're happy you don't know yet what it will cost you you're happy and then your wife accidentally gets too close to the mailbox as she goes out you're not happy you're not happy I'm just saying for instance if something like that ever happened you just you wouldn't be happy joy is something very different joy is not dependent on circumstances at all it all those circumstances can be very unhappy and joy is there and so that's what makes it the world how why this doesn't make sense and it points to it makes sense if you know him it makes sense if he isn't here it makes sense when he uses your life and that that honors him and even if no one sees it but him it honors him the truth is there's a lot more seeing these things than we think anyone who observes you can be impacted by you and if you're all alone all the angels see you and all the demons see you there are plenty of people who can fill the role of complain nag grumble we don't need more people to do that lots of people sign up every day accuse threaten people of joy stand out they are attractional they are impactful you do want the power of

God at work in you you want the power of God to be at work through you a place to start is to have a joyful heart to be an increasingly joyful person and I'll speak more of that process for me and of impact and so when uncertainties disrupt your soul answer them with the certainties of Christ the certainties of the gospel let's pray our heavenly father we give you praise for what we've spoken of of Christ and Lord I've tried to lift him up and yet the greatness and the glory is so much more than can be portrayed or understood good but the

Holy Spirit gives us some unspeakable sense of it deep in that sense for us that Christ would be greater and what he has done for us would be greater what is true now of us would be greater so help us to work through all of that in these days so that we can live it out the rest of our lives in the name of Jesus we pray amen for you