

INTRO:¹

You may've heard me reference it before, but a few years back Yale University/one of America's oldest university's, began offering a course which QUICKLY became THE most popular course in it's 300 year history. A course for which ¼ of the entire student body registered, AND which when it went online immediately garnered 22,522 enrollments/now up to more than 3.7 million in only 3 years time. **What is that course?** Well, it's a course called, "Happiness: The Psychology of The Good Life," taught by Professor Laurie Santos, who states that the reason she developed the course is because, as she says, "*All of us wanna be happier. The problem is, we have a lot of misconceptions about what really will make us happy.*"² **And it's true isn't?** We DO wanna be happy, and YET don't seem to have a lot of clarity as to what actually makes us happy. Like is happiness found in affirming whatever feelings you have, which of course is a very modern thought? OR as generations before have believed is it found in things like self-denial and sacrifice/the opposite of total affirmation? Or take recent trends. **Remember the Minimalism trend a few years go?** Where editing your life/getting it down to the essential small things ya really love would bring happiness? It was great for a minute UNTIL during COVID it got replaced with a new trend: Maximalism, where the goal is now to surround yourself with more, cuz of course we got tired sitting around the house all day with just our favorite fork and coffee mug. **The point is:** We wanna be happy, BUT are often conflicted about how to attain happiness. What I want you to see from our passage today, is that, as we've come to END of this set of instructions, you know, from Jesus to His Disciples on the eve of His crucifixion - known as His "Farewell Discourse" - what I want you to see is that Jesus' closing words/before He'll pray and head to the Cross/His closing words are about your joy! And not some half-hearted/half-cocked happiness that we often pursue, but a **very nuanced and true joy!** So let's look at **What That Joy Is** and then **How To Experience It.**

TEXT:

First, What Jesus's Joy Is: And to understand this you gotta see just how many really categorical statements Jesus makes throughout this passage. Remember, He's been talking to His disciples, who are scared/sad at the prospect of Him leaving. You see there in **vv. 16-19**, He's again telling em He's gonna depart - not forever, cuz of course He knows He's gonna resurrect and that they're gonna, as He says, "*see Him in a little while,*" but He will have to depart and they're confused about that. SO...He starts to comfort em. But notice, NOT by simply giving em answers to their questions. A lot of times, when we're scared/sad, we think what we need most from God are the facts **right?**/so we can understand why. But more often than not, what God gives us...is Himself. Hopeful reassurances that no matter what comes our way/whether we understand it or not, He's still got us!...And so Jesus begins speaking, quite categorically, about their joy. Says for example, "*You will be sorrowful, BUT your sorrow WILL turn to joy...You have sorrow now, but I WILL see you again/your hearts WILL rejoice, and NO ONE will take your joy from you.*" **You see how categorical that is?** That He doesn't say, "*Hey guys, some of*

¹ Works Consulted:

- Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King! With Study Guide*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 232-236
- "infallible Joy: John 16 - March-April 2017" - Tim Keller
- C. H. Spurgeon, "*Joy in Place of Sorrow.*" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 43 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1897), 325.

² <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/23/us/yale-happiness-course-pandemic-wellness/index.html>

*you are gonna have joy, but the rest of you?" Or "You'll experience joy, but I'll tell it's gonna ebb and flow." No! He says, "you WILL rejoice/no one will be able to steal your joy after my resurrection!" **Think about that!** How the joy of which Jesus is speaking here/this resurrection-based joy can't possibly be that kind of saccharine happiness that comes with just not having discomfort. Cuz you see, He assures the disciples that they WILL have discomfort/WILL be sorrowful/even affirms their PRESENT sorrow there in v.22...No! The joy of which Jesus is speaking here is way deeper than I think we're used to. Cuz of course, we all know those people who have, what you might call, a kind of "party joy" **right?** They're always the life of the party/real jokester all the time. BUT if you were to start pulling back the layers, what you'd prolly find is...sadness. In other words, they're like "babbling brooks" in that there's "lots of noise" and what APPEARS to be happiness, but it's all "pretty shallow." ...The opposite of what Jesus is talking about here, which is more like a river, where there might be "currents" of turmoil and sadness on the surface of your life, but BELOW is deep water and a kind of stillness that permeates everything! THAT'S the kind of joy of which Jesus is speaking here: A joy that can actually coexist and even grow with sorrow...Just like, as He says, a mother giving birth.*

I've obviously had the pleasure of my wife giving birth to 3 beautiful girls. But I'll tell you, the actual process of that, not a joyful one. Actually, quite traumatic. And that's in a time of epidurals and modern medicine. JESUS is speaking here in a time, in which, when mothers went into labor, their life was literally on the line. This is not a "happy" occasion in the sense of there being no discomfort...And YET, Jesus says our joy - again because of His death and resurrection - is like that mother, who when her baby is born, no longer remembers the anguish of delivery. NOT that the anguish is gone, but that it's, in a sense, swallowed up by the greater joy of that child. In other words, it's a joy that's deeper than just parties, people, experiences BECAUSE it isn't just able to coexist with sorrow, but is actually HEIGHTENED by sorrow! As Charles Spurgeon said, "*For the Christian, every sorrow is a birth pang of joy!*" **Think about that!** Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, every quote-unquote "contraction" you have in life/every sadness, hurt, hardship that in some way squeezes you, can, instead of defeating you, be something that pushes you to depend on the one thing that can never be taken FROM you!

Maybe no one said it better than Joni Eareckson Tada, who you might know, when she was a teenager, broke her neck, in a diving accident, and becoming a quadriplegic has been confined to a wheelchair for almost the last 60 years. She says this about her suffering/**listen**: "*I sure hope I can bring this wheelchair to heaven. Now, I know that's not theologically correct. But I (do) hope to bring it and put it in a little corner of heaven, and then in my new, perfect, glorified body, standing on grateful glorified legs, I'll stand next to my Savior, holding his nail-pierced hands, (and) I'll say, 'Thank you, Jesus,' and he'll know that I mean it, because he knows me...And I'll say, 'Jesus, do you see that wheelchair? You were right when you said that in this world we'd have trouble, because that thing was a lot of trouble. But the weaker I was IN that thing, the harder I leaned on you. And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be. It never would've happened had you not given me the bruising of the blessing of that wheelchair.'*" And then she says this, "*And then the real ticker-tape parade of praise will begin. And all of earth will join the party. And at that point Christ will open up our eyes to the great fountain of*

joy in his heart for us beyond all that we ever experienced on earth. And when we're able to stop laughing and crying, the Lord Jesus really will wipe away our tears. I find it so poignant, she says, that finally at the point when I do have the use of my arms to wipe away my own tears, I won't have to, because God will."³ **You see how much more nuanced and true Jesus' joy is?** How we're not talking about, merely, the absence of discomfort, which if that's your definition of happiness will either make ya a very plastic, not-in-touch-with-reality kind of person, cuz you always just want the superficial OR a very fearful, anxious person, cuz you're always AFRAID of any discomfort. **Jesus's Joy is so much more true than that!...Do you want it?** Cuz if you do, then **Second and Finally**, you gotta see **How To Experience It**: And it's really a kind of 3-Step Process involving **Thinking, Appropriating, and Applying/Thinking, Appropriating, and Applying**. Here's what I mean: Notice how often Jesus uses the word "see" throughout the passage. In **v.16**, He's talking about the disciples encountering Him after His resurrection and He says, "you **WILL** see me" and "you're **GONNA** see me in a little while." Then in **v.19**, He addresses their confusion by again saying, "you will see me." And then, of course, in **v.22**, He even says, "I will see **YOU** again."...And in every one of these instances, what Jesus is doing is saying, something's gonna happen where they're gonna see Him resurrected. And not just observe Him, but see Him in a way that things start to click for em. That they start to say, "wait a second. If He's alive, He must really be God. Which means the Cross must not really be defeat. And if the Cross isn't defeat then **THAT** means, joy really is in Christ and there's no true joy outside of Him. In other words, in "seeing" Him resurrected, they're gonna be propelled to think out the Gospel in such a way that any sorrow they once had gets overshadowed by joy. **Ya gotta think!**

Recently, a friend of mine posted on social media a quote that said, "My problem is: I think too much and feel too deeply and that's a dangerous combination." And apart from the very Michael Scott nature OF that quote, I did think, "ya know, that does seem to be a common sentiment these days." That because we're constantly inundated with more fear-based/anxiety-driven information than any one human could ever process, the thought is, we just need to turn off our brains more and think less. So ya know, if something's painful, forget about it/stuff it down. Or at least avoid it. And if that doesn't work then think positive thoughts about it. Cuz ya know, those are the 3 main, self-help ways we're told to deal with grief, sorrow, and trouble **right?** Either forget about it by going out/having fun/indulging yourself in some way, which frankly just makes you a more self-centered person...Or avoiding it by always keeping your life busy, distracted, noncommittal, which just makes you more of a shallow person...Or think positively about it, which just makes you a kind of un-realistic person. Those are the ways. But see, Jesus is saying, "No! Your problem isn't that you think too much;" it's that we don't think enough. We don't think through the implications of the Gospel **DEEPLY** enough. Or as **Romans 12:1** says, don't understand that it's by the "renewal of our minds," which is to say, setting our minds on the who Jesus is and what He's accomplished, that "we're actually transformed," in this case from sorrow to joy. Because think about it: The more you think about the resurrection, the more - **don't you?** - have to begin to say, "why am I sweating all this small stuff? Why am I so worried/

³ <https://www.epm.org/blog/2016/Nov/7/joni-suffering-sorrow-wheelchairs>

so sad/anxious,” when, the very fact of the resurrection is/**listen**: If Jesus Christ was actually raised from the dead...If he really got up, walked out, was seen by hundreds of people - which is essentially the first fact in the history of Christendom/that a number of people say they saw and even talked to Jesus/without that fact there is no Christianity. There are no Gospel accounts. There is no Church...So if Jesus really raised from the dead, as He’s saying He’s gonna do here, then Friend, I don’t mean to be trite, but that means: everything really is gonna be ok! Cuz whatever you’re worried about right now. Whatever you’re afraid of/saddened by...it’s gonna be ok. Cuz remember, we’re not just talking about Jesus resurrecting or even those who believe in Jesus resurrecting; we’re talking about - and this is where Christianity/the Gospel is utterly unique - we’re talking about the world being resurrected...Meaning, plenty of religions talk about a future afterlife and a non-material world. In other words, you get a sort of consolation for the world you lost through pain and sorrow here. Only Christianity though says, it’s not just Jesus or us that are gonna be resurrected, but the whole world - all of life cleansed of sin and suffering,⁴ because as Jesus says there in **v.33**, *“Though, you’ll have tribulation in this world... I’ve overcome the world.”* Everything really is gonna be ok. ***Ya gotta think through the Gospel!***

But Too, ya gotta **appropriate** it. Cuz it’s one thing to think through it, but it’s another to really make it your own **right?** Cuz you see there in **vv.27, 30, 31**, even **33** Jesus talks about *“believing/taking heart”* in Him. A number of years ago, I knew a gentleman - absolutely brilliant - phd in aeronautical engineering. Could tell you everything there was to know about flight. Lift, thrust, drag, the physics, mechanics, ALL of it. He knew ALL the things, cuz of course He’d THOUGHT through ALL the things. But here was the problem: For as much as he knew, he was just as much...afraid to fly! **Think about that.** He’d thought through everything/even assented TO everything, and YET hadn’t placed his confidence in anything, with respect to flying. Hadn’t appropriated it...Friend, the same is even more true with respect to the Gospel and your joy. You might be able to say, *“Yeah God’s loving to’ve been willing to die for sin. And He’s powerful to’ve been able to rise from the dead,”* but if you don’t add into that...“for me”...That “He’s loving enough to’ve been willing to die FOR ME, and powerful enough to be able to take care of life FOR ME,” then when the real sorrow comes - because you haven’t appropriated what you know - you won’t be able to...“take flight,” as it were over and through that sorrow. Cuz what you’ll have are just facts, rather than a foundation for your heart. ***Have you appropriated and really placed your confidence in the resurrected Jesus?*** Ya gotta think AND appropriate.

But Finally, ya gotta **apply**. And what’s great is, right there in middle/**vv.23-26**, Jesus gives the perfect application...Prayer! Or what He calls, *“asking the Father in His name.”* And to be honest, it feels a little tangential to everything He’s said, UNTIL you realize that prayer is like the best help for BOTH thinking AND believing. Because see, in praying, what happens is your thoughts about God are driven to belief IN God...AND your belief IN God starts to become really well thought-out. That’s what prayer does. And not any prayer/we’re not talking about mindfulness or something. But rather praying in Jesus’ name, which is to say praying both humbly and confidently - humbly because you realize that when you come to God on the basis of

⁴ Wording and insight taken from Tim Keller @ <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CsdniEIOxET/?igshid=MmJiY2l4NDBkZg==>

who Jesus is and what He's done for you, you can't possibly then just come only with your list of wants and needs. Not that those wants and needs are necessarily bad, but if when you pray it's just all the time, *"God I want this. God I need you to do this. God please help with this,"* then you understand, you aren't praying in Jesus' name; you're praying in your name. There's a lack of humility, because you're assuming that God owes you something/usually some form of happiness rather than understanding that it's only because of Jesus that you can even think about happiness in the first place. You gotta come humbly...But you ALSO gotta come confidently! Because to pray in Jesus' name ALSO means you understand that HE'S the basis by which God sees you...I've shared this with you before, and Jesus alludes to it there in **v.27**, but when God looks at a Christian - YOU if you've believed-on and placed your confidence in Christ - there's a sense in which He doesn't see you. Rather, He sees you IN Christ, which is to say as His Son/ regards you with the kind of love and acceptance that a father regards their child...Now different children seem to understand this differently, but generally speaking, when children are young, if they've grown up with a father they can trust, it causes em to be filled with like a crazy amount of confidence IN their father. In my family, Charley Grace is this way. There will be days where I'll walk in the door and she'll coming running at me to give me hug. But instead of, say, grabbing me around the waist, she will project herself, through the air, in flight, onto my neck, believing I'm gonna catch her. And to this point, I'm 100%...To this point. But she just has so much confidence that I'll hold her cuz I ALWAYS have...When you pray in Jesus' name, you're praying with the confidence that as a good Father who regards you as His child, every prayer He answers OR seemingly doesn't answer is, therefore, Him in someway holding you up...So you see, there's this humility that drives you down, but then this confidence that fills you up...the combo of which/and this is why prayer's such a great application - makes you like a kind of "spiritual tugboat," meaning it's hard for sorrow to capsize you because you've got an inner ballast that's low to the ground/"humble," but also full of steel/ "confidence."

Friends, if I might say, the reason some of you don't have that deep river joy that Jesus is talking about here, is cuz you've just never thought about it. You've become content to dabble with fleeting/superficial happiness, that really can't coexist or grow with sorrow, rather than really thinking through the implications of a resurrected Savior...While for others of you, it's because though you've maybe thought it through/perhaps been in church/raised in church, you've never appropriated and really believed on Jesus for yourself...And then still for others of you, the reason is because you're not praying in Jesus' name. Sure, you know the Gospel/you believe the Gospel. But when you actually interact with the One behind the Gospel/IF you interact with Him in prayer at all, you do so essentially praying in YOUR name rather than His. So Friends, wherever you're at in those/whatever has you down, sad, fearful, or anxious today, just come to Jesus, knowing that, as He's says there in **v.24** and **33**, *"Ask, and you'll receive, so that your joy may be full...Because I have overcome the world."* Come to Him!...**Let's Pray:**