

## Christian Joy.

Text: John 15:1-11

Suggested Hymns:

157, 392, 337, 284, 510

1) The Process Of Christian Joy

2) The Source Of Christian Joy

3) The Author of Christian Joy

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 15:1-11, <sup>1</sup> *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*

<sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you. *As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. <sup>5</sup> “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

<sup>6</sup> *If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.*

<sup>7</sup> *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. <sup>9</sup> “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.*

<sup>10</sup> *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. <sup>11</sup> ”These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Few parables of Jesus surpass the parable of the Vine in the number of sermon topics. Some strikingly phrased fundamental Christian truth tempts us to linger with almost every sentence. This fact, no doubt, accounts for the other fact, that the real point of this parable frequently escapes our attention.

Two considerations must be borne in mind for a profitable study of this exquisite saying of Jesus.

Firstly, Jesus Himself gives us the key to its meaning. After speaking it, He did what He often did when teaching a great lesson. He turned to His disciples and unlocked its meaning by saying: *“<sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*

This parable, then, was not meant to be a mere statement of that intimate union between Jesus and the believer which stands out so prominently in this parable.

It was this, but it was more. It was Christ’s recipe for joy, the carefully worded communication to His disciples concerning His secret of happiness.

Secondly, the symbolism of this parable is the Eastern symbolism of joy. The vine made glad the heart of man. But the joy which the vine of the Palestinian vineyard brought to man was intoxicating and temporary. Christ is the true Vine, the Source of real and permanent joy.

Let us therefore consider *Christian Joy*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Process Of Christian Joy.**

Christianity possesses the noblest words in our language. Its literature overflows with terms expressive of the greatest and happiest moods which can fill the soul of a person.

Joy, rest, peace, love, light, these words occur with such frequency in hymns and prayers that an observer might think they formed the staple of Christian experiences. But how quickly we are disenchanted when we come into closer contact with the actual life of Christians!

There are times, of course, when wandering notes from heavenly music stray into our spirits; but these experiences come only occasionally and at fickle moments. When they visit us, it is a surprise.

When they leave us, it is without explanation. When we wish for their return, we do not know how to secure it. It is as if we knew everything about health — except the way to get it. Where does the trouble lie? Jesus tells us.

Joy comes to us by a certain process: *“<sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.”* In its

process, then, joy is a fruit. We read in Galatians 5:22, <sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.*

Joy is not a finished product, which is dropped from heaven into man's bosom. It is one of the richest fruits of the Christian life and, like all fruits, must be grown.

Like all other Christian experiences, joy is a matter of cause and effect. All Scripture, as well as all nature, is a standing protest against the absurdity of expecting to secure a spiritual or any other effect without the use of appropriate causes.

Like pain, rest, or laughter, joy is caused, but cannot be given away. When we aim at giving pleasure, all that we can do is to arrange a set of circumstances in such a way that they may cause pleasure.

Let us look at the practical application. Are you seeking Christian joy? Remember it is a fruit and comes to you by a definite process. Nothing that happens in the world happens by chance. God is the God of order.

The world, even the religious world, is governed by law. And religious experiences are no exception. Christian joy is a fruit which has a long previous history. It is the mature effect of former causes.

Many people are seeking happiness who have not even a stalk on which this fruit could hang. Such people search in vain. Others have never planted one sound seed of joy in all their lives. Still others who may have planted a sprig or two have lived so little in the sunshine that they never could come to maturity.

## **2. The Source Of Christian Joy.**

What is the source, or spring, and the only spring, out of which Christian joy comes?

Positively stated, we have it in these words of Jesus: *"<sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you." <sup>5</sup> "I am the vine, you are the branches." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."*

Negatively stated, we have the following declaration: *"Without Me you can do nothing." "<sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and*

*is withered.” “<sup>2</sup> Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit [the Father] takes away”*

All Christian joy, then, finds its source in Christ, or, more definitely stated, in the union between Christ and the believer. Only right causes can produce right effects. Every other conceivable way of finding joy will fail.

The only infallible recipe is to abide in Christ. To be “*in Christ*” and to abide in Him, on the one hand, and to “*have Christ in us*,” on the other hand, is the royal road to happiness.

What does this dual relation imply, “*I in you and you in Me?*” It is a matter of faith and life; it has to do with the inner and outer life of a Christian. It involves our relationship to God and to man.

Firstly, the inner life of faith, “*you in Me*,” which means “you in Christ.” To know and to believe that through faith we are so intimately connected with Christ that God does not view us as we are in ourselves, but only as we are “*in Him*.”

This means that in God’s reckoning we have lived in Christ’s life, died in His death, risen in His resurrection, ascended in His ascension — to know and to believe that, because we are in Christ and one with Him in God’s sight, we share Christ’s place in the Father’s affection and are loved by Him.

This is that strange privilege of faith which in man’s relationship to God is the root of all Christian joy.

Secondly, the outer life of works, “*I in you*,” which means “Christ in you.” The vine furnishes the branches not only with the principle of life, but also with the type of life. No pressure or moulding from without is needed to shape the fruit to the pattern of the parent stock. Every characteristic of form, and colour, and taste, and fragrance is determined by the root and matures from it.

In like manner, “*Christ in us*” is the new Principle of life within us. Christ is the Vine which produces fruit. Christ is the Power which motivates us.

We are the branches into which this life flows. “*He in us*;” Christ uses us as His instruments through which He talks and walks, still going about everywhere doing good.

Having the “*mind of Christ within himself*”<sup>1</sup> and the “*spirit of Christ*”<sup>2</sup> animating him, the Christian development is a growing up in all things to Him who is the Head, Jesus Christ.

This double relationship is Christ’s formula for Christian joy. Acceptance of God in Christ and fruitfulness in all good works of a Christ-like life bring happiness. The infallible source of joy, then, is to be loved by God in Christ and to manifest the spirit of Christ in doing good. “<sup>11</sup> *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*”

### 3. The Author of Christian Joy.

Is, then, joy as a Christian experience our own making? Certainly not! It is only in the same sense in which grapes are our own making, and no more. All fruits grow, whether they grow in the soil or in the soul, but no person can make things grow.

Firstly, God is the Author of Christian Joy. “*I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.*” Man makes things grow only by fulfilling the conditions of growth. But the growing is done by God.

Causes and effects are divine arrangements and fixed beyond man’s ordering. With God as the *vinedresser* right effects are produced by right causes. “*Abide in Christ,*” and the fruit of Christian joy will result.

Secondly, God is the Multiplier of Joy. “*Every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*” “<sup>8</sup> *By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit.*” Even while giving His secret for joy, Jesus does not ignore the cross. But He gives to the cross a very definite meaning and a special value.

Our remarks on “*the benefits of affliction*” are usually as vague as our theories of Christian experiences. Somehow we believe that affliction does us good, but just how we do not usually seem to find.

However, Christ tells us that affliction is part of His Father’s pruning in producing joy. The Greek word for prune also means “cleanse,” and pruning is a kind of cleansing. The branch is purged and bruised, that in sheer desperation it might cling more firmly to the vine. And by sinking more deeply into the vine, from where its life comes, the fruit is more abundant.

For the branches are not only the product, but also the measure of the roots, the one spreading as widely as the other strikes deeply. Our joy becomes more abundant as we sink more deeply into Christ. This is the meaning of God-given afflictions.

God sent the true Vine so we might find life in Him. Branches are useful in bearing fruit. Their source of energy and nourishment depends on being connected to the Vine. Everyone who is connected in faith will bear fruit and have potential to bear still more and better fruit. So the gardener will prune those branches to get more.

We need Jesus if we are to do anything God-pleasing. Without Jesus, we are like a severed branch that dries up and is eventually thrown into the fire and burned. Jesus could hardly speak more clearly or emphatically: apart from Him, we can do nothing.

Through His words, Jesus shapes our wills to coincide with His. That shaping will show in our prayers and in our fruit, which is our works, to the glory of the Father. So Jesus makes us His disciples through His Word, and we show ourselves to be His disciples by our works.

Once again, the key element is the Word. Through the Word Jesus works faith and gives life. Through the Word He nourishes and energises His disciples to live in faith. Through the Word He cleanses His own followers. The Word brings us together with Jesus and keeps us together, like a vine and branches. And we bear fruit.

But a branch by itself cannot produce any fruit. And we by ourselves, separated from Jesus, cannot produce fruit. So we need to keep listening to Jesus' Word and stay close to Him in order to live the Christian life.

The fruits of our faith will demonstrate the faith that is in our hearts. When that happens, the Lord rejoices. Yes, it brings joy to God when we live in His love by faith and produce fruits of faith. At the same time, we can experience no fuller joy than to live this way in the Saviour's love.

One final thought; test Christ's recipe. Instead of spending time in sighing for fruits, rather spend time in fulfilling the conditions of their growth. ***Abide in Me*** and the fruits will come.

Abide in Christ means to remain in Christ. To remain in Jesus is to believe in Him always. Remaining means continuously receiving grace for grace, day by day, in ever greater fullness. So the branch remains and receives life from the vine, and so it develops and grows. This remaining and receiving is mediated by the Word and the Sacrament and is impossible without these divine means.

If you have previously paid a great deal of attention to the experiences of joy itself; then from this time on deal more with its causes.

***And I in you.*** We in Christ, and Christ in us. These always go together. Jesus Himself is in us when by faith we remain in Him. The very Word and the Sacrament through which we remain in Him convey Him to us, to rest in us and to instil His gifts in us producing good works.

Abide in Christ and let Christ abide in you, and you will have joy, and have it abundantly.<sup>3</sup>

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist,<sup>4</sup>

Thus may we abide in union  
With each other and the Lord;  
And possess, in sweet communion,  
Joys which earth cannot afford. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:16

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:9

<sup>3</sup> cf John 10:10

<sup>4</sup> Hymn 510 v 2