



During Lent, we prepared ourselves for Easter by considering the Seven Deadly Sins - the most basic categories of evil humanity is capable of. We saw that our human story began in a Garden, where God gave us the choice of the Tree of Life or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (which was the ability to determine right and wrong for ourselves). Instead of choosing the Tree of Life like God wanted, we chose the other Tree, and we've been eating of its fruit - all those deadly sins - ever since.

On Good Friday, we saw that the Cross is the final incarnation of that other Tree, that Jesus became our sin and took its consequence - Death - on himself. Jesus died in our place.

But then, on Easter, God raised Jesus from the Dead. And Jesus' resurrection was a reboot for the whole world. Jesus is new humanity, Creation 2.0. We saw last week that when we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection, we once again have access to the Tree of Life. Though Jesus' death and resurrection, we have eternal life. We become a part of the new creation. Right now. Resurrection happens in the midst of Death.

We saw John the prophet's vision of this new creation in Revelation 22, where the Tree of Life bears fruit that is medicine for the whole world.

So now that we've celebrated the resurrection, we want to ask: What is this fruit? How are Christians to be fruitful in a way that brings healing to the world?

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he writes about what a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, a life marked by Resurrection looks like. Here's how Paul describes Humanity 2.0:

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. -- Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)

We've seen the fruit of that other tree: Pride, Envy, Greed, Gluttony, Wrath, Sloth and Lust. But that's who we were. Now we want to explore who we are today, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Now that we're on the other side of Easter, we're going to look at the fruit of the Tree of Life. So from now until Pentecost, we're exploring what it means to be Love, Joyful, Peaceful, Patient, Kind, Good, Faithful, Gentle and Self-Controlled.

Last week we began with Love. Today, we consider Joy. Ready?



When we think of the word Joy, we probably equate it with Happiness. But what do we mean to be 'happy'? For the most part, we think of happiness as an emotion that comes as a reaction to something good that happens. Happiness is essentially a byproduct of our circumstances. If things are good, we're happy. If they're not, we're sad, angry, frustrated, confused, scared... something.

This is not the spiritual fruit of Joy. While it's true that Joy and Happiness can often look the same, they're not identical. Happiness is caught up in our circumstances, while Joy comes from a place below our day-to-day happenings. Joy is a deep-seated, foundational trust in God's provision and promise. Joy believes, even in the midst of bad circumstances, that everything is going to be okay.

That's different from what we think of as Happiness. Because Happiness is based on our circumstances, it's essentially external. Happiness is something that happens to us. Sometimes. If things are good.

But Happiness goes away when things aren't good. And that's a problem, because the story our culture tells us is that things are never actually Good. We're taught to be wanting machines, that we owe it to ourselves to satisfy our desires. That if we can acquire enough, we'll be happy. Our first official document - the Declaration of Independence - declares that a God-given right of every human is the "Pursuit of Happiness".

And somehow, here, happiness has a price tag. We tell ourselves there's not enough to go around, that we have to get ours, have the most toys, buy buy buy. And if we do all this, then one day, we'll have enough. We'll be Happy.

Happiness is when you have enough (which never actually happens). Happiness is always just around the corner. We might paraphrase Little Orphan Annie: Happiness, like tomorrow, always seems to be just a day away.



Could anything be further from the biblical story? The Scriptures teach us that our lives are founded on God's provision and promise. First, that the world is a good gift from God, that God is a lavish gift-giver, that we already have more than we could ever need. And because of Jesus' resurrection, we know that the world is going somewhere. Somewhere good. God is making all things new, including our lives, including our circumstances. The technical, theological term for this understanding of God and creation is GRACE. Grace says God has already given us everything. That all we need to be "happy" is already here.

And Grace says our confidence in the future is based on what God has already done in Jesus.

We can say that Joy is based on Grace. The foundation of Joy is God's provision. God's promise.

What's really cool is that in Greek, the words Grace and Joy are two forms of the same word. Grace refers to the reality of God's interactions in the world. And Joy is the attitude that flows from understanding Grace.

If you get Grace, then you act Joyful.

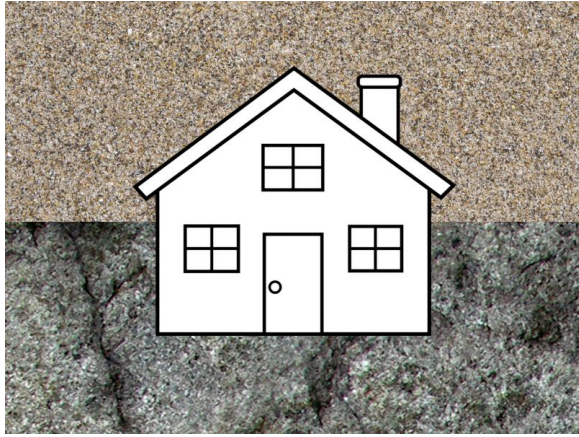


Let's look at how Jesus connects these in

Matthew 7. This is the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. A major theme of this Sermon is God's provision. And Jesus ends his Sermon with a picture of a Joyful life contrasted with a Happy life. Beginning in v24, here's what he says:

Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash. -- Matthew 7:24-27 (NLT)

Two ways to build a home: on a rock-solid foundation or on sand. In the ancient world, builders didn't pour concrete foundations (our modern technologies make it easy to build a house pretty much wherever we want). So if a person wanted to build a house, they had two choices: they could either try to find some shallow bedrock or a stone large enough to serve as a foundation OR they could just put up a house somewhere without a foundation.



Obviously it was faster, easier and cheaper to stick a house up without searching for a foundation. But you know what happens to a house without a foundation: everything's fine while everything's fine. But when the winds start to blow, when the circumstances get inclement, that house is in trouble.

If you want a house that lasts, that can weather the storms, a house that stands strong no matter what the circumstances, you have to build on a solid foundation.

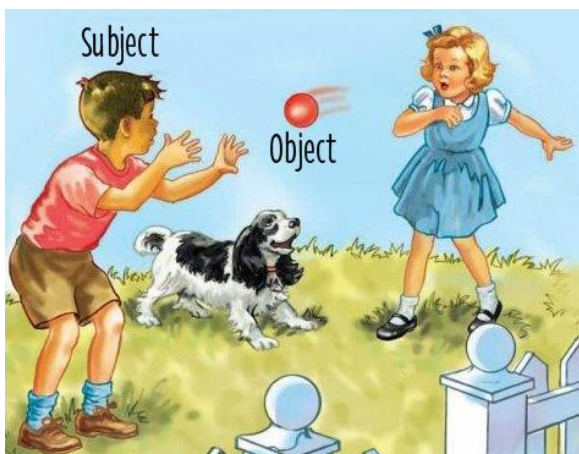
And Jesus uses this metaphor to talk about his teachings. If you build your life on the shifting sands of circumstances, you're in trouble. You'll be fine for a while. Probably. But circumstances always change. Nobody's good forever. The business fails or the economy collapses or the marriage gets tough or there's an illness or accident or any of a thousand other random things that just happens.

If those happy circumstances were what you built your life on, when the changes come your life comes crashing down. And it hurts. It feels like death.

If you want a life that is solid, a life that's strong enough to weather the storms of circumstances, you have to build your life on Jesus' teachings. You have to shape yourself according to the Way Jesus demonstrates. You have to build a life that digs into the foundation of God's promise and provision. You have to recognize that your life is filled with God's gifts. And that no matter what's happening right now, no matter if your circumstances are good or bad, what's happening right now is not the end. God is taking the world somewhere better. And Jesus' resurrection proves that God is faithful to fulfill all God's promises.

You build a life like that, and you'll discover the fruit of Joy. Joy weathers the storms because Joy is rooted in God's grace.

The difference between circumstantial happiness and foundational joy is all about how you see yourself: are you the Subject or the Object of your life? Where are my English grammar nerds?



You remember the difference between subjects and objects in a sentence? The Subject is the actor of the sentence; the object is what's acted upon.

If **Bobby** throws a ball, Bobby is the subject. He's acting. He's steering the sentence, driving the circumstance. The Ball is the object. It has no power, no say. It's the passenger in the sentence, left to the Subject's whims.

Happiness people are objects in their lives. We think Happiness is something that just happens to us. We don't have any control, because we can't

control our circumstances (that's true, by the way. We don't have control over anything outside of ourselves. We can't control the economy or bosses and coworkers or spouses or parents or kids or other drivers or anything). So we just sort of hope good stuff happens. Maybe we pray for it, or do good stuff so God owes it to us - a sort of Christian karma theology. But we're not in control of our happiness. Because we're not in control of our circumstances and our happiness is based on what happens to us. We're objects.

You know how to spot a Happiness person? Listen for them to say, "If _____, then I'd be happy." If I had a different job, then I'd be happy. If I hadn't gotten married so young, then I'd be happy. If I had more money, then I'd be happy. If I'd waited to have kids, then I'd be happy. If I were married, then I'd be married. If I could just be someplace else, then I'd be happy. If I could lose that weight, then I'd be happy. If my boss weren't so (whatever), then I'd be happy. If then. If then.

I'm the object in my life. My circumstances are the Subject, and I'm at their whims. If they're good, then I'm good. If not, then I'm not.

But the reality is: the person whose happiness is based on circumstances is not ever actually happy. Pay attention to the If-Then people. They're *never* happy. Because the reality is Happiness *isn't* external. Our cultural story is a lie! You can't pursue happiness because happiness isn't out there anywhere. You can't chase it down because it's an internal thing.

You have to decide to be the Subject of your life. To take control of yourself. You can't change your circumstances, but you can take control of your attitude. Of your reactions. Of your vision.

It sounds like this: I know my ...job, marriage, boss, kids, car, family, life... isn't perfect. Whose is? But I know that what I do have is all a good gift from God. And God's not finished with me. Because Jesus was raised from the dead I know I'm going somewhere. All my imperfect circumstance are being made new. It's all a part of God's rescue mission. My happiness, my joy, comes from inside, from my convictions built on God's provision and promises.

So is that it? Is Joy just sitting around content in whatever circumstances you find yourself in?



Of course not. Let's look at a wonderful picture of Joy in the Scriptures: Paul the apostle. When Paul wrote his letter to the Church in Philippi, he was in a Roman prison. Paul was the most successful of the first missionaries - he spread the news of Jesus' resurrection all over the Roman Empire. And specifically because of his teaching and preaching, he spent a lot of time in prison.

You can imagine if Paul was an If-Then guy, right? If only I weren't in prison, THEN I'd be happy! We can imagine how we'd feel - angry at God.

Confused. Frustrated. We're doing what God told us to do and we end up in *jail*? That's not what's supposed to happen!

If Paul built his life on the sands of circumstance, he'd be a pretty miserable guy. We'd say he has every right to pout, even quit, if all it ever does is get him beaten, whipped and thrown in jail. But listen to what Paul tells his friends in Philippi, in chapter 4, starting in verse 10:

How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

Paul says, I know a secret. I know how to live on almost nothing - like when you're tossed into prison for following God - and I know how to live with everything. You want to know the secret?

I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.

That's one of the most abused verses in the Bible - when I was a youth pastor, I used to tease my students with it. I'd ask if they were coming to our Wednesday gathering and they'd say, I'm not sure if I can get my homework done in time.

I'd say, You can do everything through Christ who gives you strength!

You hear that sort of sentiment attached to this verse a lot - whatever your struggle, you can do it! But that's not what Paul is saying here. Not that he can overcome, that he can conquer and find happiness on the other side of his bad circumstances.

It's that he can find joy right now, no matter what's happening around him. Because his joy comes not from out here, but inside, from the work Jesus is doing in Paul. The fact that Paul is in prison right now makes what he goes on in v18 to say even more amazing:

18 At the moment I have all I need-- and more! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God. And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. -- Philippians 4:10-19 (NLT)

Paul has everything he needs. That's Grace! God has provided for Paul. And Paul assures the Philippians - and us - that God is faithful to his promises. The same God who is taking care of Paul (who is in prison!) will (future tense!) supply ALL YOUR NEEDS! That's Grace, grace, grace.

So where are you today? Are you an If-Then person? Always looking for happiness, an object at the mercy of your circumstances? Being tossed back and forth by the winds of our ever-changing world? Are you chasing an impossible dream, a lie that the life you want is always just around the corner?

Or are you like Paul? Are you the subject of your story? Have you taken control of your attitude, your responses to the world? Do you build your life on God's provision, recognizing that everything you have, every breath you take is a gift from God? The God who is the seeker of Lost things, who won't rest until he's brought all his children back home. The God who promised

never to leave us or forsake us. The God who is working all circumstances to our good. The God who is taking this world somewhere, who is right now making all things new. The God who lives in you, who empowers you in the person of the Holy Spirit.

We won't settle for happiness based on what happens to us. It's temporary. Fleeting. Elusive. The promises that happiness makes are false.

We are followers of Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. We are a people who build our lives on the solid foundation of God's Grace, God's provision and promises. We believe the world is going someplace good, and our joy comes from that belief.

We believe that broken marriages can be healed. We believe that wayward children come home. We believe that painful, frustrating work environments can be endured and changed. We believe that crushing debt can be paid off. We believe that tired, dull spirituality can be revitalized. We believe that illness can be healed. We believe that Death can never have the final word in our lives. In our relationships. In our parents or our children.

Our Joy is not blind, foolish or naive. We don't ignore suffering. We don't whistle as we walk through the death we see in the world. But those never determine our response. We are the Subjects, not the Objects. Our Joy is grounded in the promises of God and in the reality of Jesus' resurrection.

Whether we're on cloud 9 or in pits of suffering, we know the secret to being content. We know how to have Joy.

Because Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in us. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead calls us, as he called Paul, to go into a dying world. To speak hope to all those places where we see lives collapsed under the winds of circumstance.

Communion Set-Up

Today, the question is: are you the Subject or the Object? Are you ruled by your circumstances, or do you build on the foundation of God's provision and promise?

We respond to that question by coming to receive Jesus' meal. In these crackers and juice, we find the foundation for our Joy. Because Jesus gave us his body, broken for our sin, we can find freedom from our circumstances. Because Jesus gave us his blood, poured out to reunite us with God, we have found the secret to being joyful in all circumstances:

By eating this meal, we once again participate in Jesus' death, which God provided to free us from Death. And we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, which is proof that God is faithful to his promise to make all things new.

As you come today, answer this question: **What does Joy look like in my life this week?**

[Prayer]