

Fruit That Is Always In Season: Joy Hebrews 12:2-3

When we lived in NJ and NY Pineapples were not on our radar to grow. A great deal of other fruits flourished in the cooler climate. When I thought of pineapples grow in places like warmer climates like Hawaii. We found that we could grow them here in Florida. As long as you do not have a hard freeze like we had this year they will grow. We had several plants and one or two survived the freeze. Pineapples are incredibly low-maintenance as they need little water and soil and can grow in full sun or partial shade. What's more, pineapple plants multiply quickly, which means you can grow a lot of fruit with minimal effort. Basically all you have to do is place the top of a store-bought pineapple in a hole you've made in a pot of soil or outside. Arrange the soil to support the top. Water it and the rest will take care of itself, or so this website promises.

Just as pineapple can grow well anywhere, **so can joy, the fruit of the Spirit we want to consider today in our continuing sermon series: Fruit That Is Always In Season.** But doesn't it seem impossible that you can have joy no matter what the climate of your life?

Can you be joyful when you're struggling to make ends meet?

Can you be joyful when you're separated from loved ones, or having health issues?

Yes, even in situations like those you can be joyful because joy is something the Holy Spirit produces—not something you yourself have to conjure like a \$20 bill you dig out of your purse to pay for a movie ticket.

Listen to our text from Hebrews 12:2, 3. **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart”** (Hebrews 12:2, 3).

Let's get one thing straight. **Joy is not the same as happiness.** One devotional writer observed that happiness is circumstantial. Hitting green lights all the way from Avon Park to Lake Place makes us happy. Getting rear-ended in the parking lot makes us unhappy. A compliment from a friend, coworker or maybe even a church member makes us happy. Being criticized by friends makes us unhappy. Happiness hangs out at backyard BBQ's and waterparks. But it's an infrequent guest at funerals and in ER waiting rooms. (

Joy is different. Joy isn't a feeling. It's more of a knowing. What did the author of our text say? **“For the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus' joy came from knowing He was about to make peace between sinful humanity and our holy God. **Did He feel happy when he anticipated the agony of the cross, abandonment by his Father, the weight of our sins, and death? No—he was overwhelmed with sorrow!** He was so sorrowful that he sweat drops of blood in Gethsemane when he thought about what lay before him. **But even in sorrow he knew the joy of doing his Father's will: presenting the world with the forgiveness we could never earn.** By allowing himself to be mounted on the cross, the Son of God turned that instrument of torture into a giant sewing needle, and with the red thread of his blood he mended the tear that our sins had caused between heaven and earth.

The pain of the cross brought Jesus joy because it was pain with a purpose. And it's also here at the cross that we find the source of our joy. If you want to see God's heart, then you need to go to the cross. For there you not only see his love for sinners, you see his absolute dedication to us sinners. For if God gave up his Son so that you and I have eternal life, he will also give us everything else we need until we're enjoying the glories of heaven. The Apostle Paul put it like this in Romans 8. **“If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”**

That should change the way we all look at our challenges and troubles. The pain we feel isn't evidence of God's abandonment. **It's a reminder that I'm not in heaven yet...but with Jesus I am going there!** And that's a reason for joy. So our struggles are not just something to be endured, we can rejoice in them because God uses them to refine our faith. When we have this proper perspective we can find joy no matter the situation. We don't like being thrust in situations where we don't know the outcomes, but this forces us to trust God's promises that he has the future in hand, and that future looks eternally bright for us who are in Christ Jesus.

You wonder where joy is when you are frustrated by you job or when troubles and pain come your way “Baptize” those troubles. What do I mean by that? Well through baptism you were adopted into God's family and given a new name. You're no longer despised, but loved.

Through baptism we have been changed. **Baptism also changes how we see our burdens.** We see them not as overwhelming killjoys, but challenges through which God wants to reveal his love more thoroughly—like how you turn down the lights so you can better see the movie on the projector screen.

As a youth I wanted to earn money, so I started cutting lawns. Why that was my skill set at the time. With each subsequent opportunity to work I learned a little more, I learned more and more skills. But the one thing I wanted most was to be a Pastor. I knew that there was a lot of academic work beyond High School, 4 years of college and 4 years of graduate school to achieve my goal. In the process of achieving my goal God afforded both myself and Susan opportunities to experience both good and bad experiences. But without some struggle, pain, frustration and fortitude I would still be cutting lawns which has a great skill set but it would not have been what I was “called” to do, to be a Pastor.

I would be living like many Christians who are living without much joy in their life. Why is that? Far too many settle for the lower bar in life and they don’t challenge ourselves. It is far easier to pick the lower fruit rather than strain or climb for the higher fruit on the tree of life. **We lose joy when we focus on our problems rather than on God’s power. But what did our text encourage?**

It encouraged us to fix our eyes on Jesus. To fix your eyes on Jesus means to give him more than a passing glance. Isn’t that what you do when you want a new gadget like a tablet? You fix your eyes on it, seeking the best deal. Then after you’ve made your purchase you read the user manual from cover to cover. No? You don’t do that? Well you’re probably not enjoying the full potential of your new toy then. Likewise if we only ever throw glances at Jesus and his Word, we will never fully enjoy all the blessings he has in store for us. And as a result we will lose joy.

Another thing that kills joy is selfishness. Think of the older son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He wasn’t overjoyed to see his younger brother return. In his conversation with his father, it became clear that he had never really found joy in working for his father. He had only stuck around hoping he would get something for his troubles. But yet if you wait your life for your golden goose to land in your front yard you too will be disappointed.

But look at Jesus. Why did he find joy in dying on the cross? Not because of what it would do for him, but because of what it would do for us: give us heaven. **We too then will find joy when we do things to serve others. But what if people don’t notice and thank us for what we have done?** That kind of sucks the joy out of serving doesn’t it? It will, if you’re serving to get thanks instead of to give thanks. And that’s why we want to fix our eyes on Jesus who scorned the shame of the cross, who let himself be hung out to dry (for that is what crucifixion really was) so that we would be gathered into God’s arms and into his family.

Let me close by reading our text again with a different translation. “Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honor, right alongside God” (Hebrews 12:2, 3 Message Translation).

Like Jesus, you too can put up with anything and have joy as you do it because you’ve also been promised a place of honor alongside of God in heaven, thanks to Jesus. Amen.