

## PRELUDE & INTRODUCTION

### How deep is *your* joy?

Is your joy shallow, fleeting, changing with every circumstance and environment?

Or do you have a deeper kind of joy that abides and abounds?

A few months ago, my family and I went to Jamaica for my 30th birthday, and while there were so many different things to enjoy alongside my favourite people, there was one memory I treasure most. It wasn't the a la carte dinners and the all you can eat buffets that exposed my declining 30-year old metabolism, it wasn't the jerk chicken truck just steps away from the water (supplied with fresh beef patties, fries, caesar salad and bottomless jerk chicken).

No. My most vivid memory from that trip was at the beach, kneeling in the sand with the water up to my chest, staring into the horizon at the barely noticeable line separating ocean and sky. This reflective mirror filled my entire field of vision for what felt like an eternity, as I often would linger late into the evening to enjoy the colourful canvas that tenderly tucked the setting sun into its nightly rest. My eyes were filled with the wonder of God's beauty, and my soul filled with a quiet, contented joy. While others spent their *entire* day at the pool, swimming, splashing and drinking, it seemed insane to me to travel *all* the way to the Caribbean sea to swim in a pool. Yet this *insanity* is more common than we think.

How often do we strive and settle for the puddles of momentary pleasure, instead of abiding in the deep ocean of God's eternal joy? But what *is* the difference between momentary pleasure and biblical joy? Theologian Mary Clark Moschella addresses the frequent modern-day contrast of happiness and joy, noting that they are closer relatives than we often allow. But happiness "suggests something milder", its root-word related to "happening" or "coincidence", "happiness has its roots in the soil of chance".

Unpredictable. Inconsistent. Unreliable. Happiness is like a friend that constantly shows up late, if they even show up at all. New Testament Scholar D. A. Carson takes this further, suggesting that all "*human* joy in a fallen world will, at best, be ephemeral, shallow, and incomplete." Joy on the other hand indicates something deeper, more embodied, signifying a transcendent sense of goodness beyond mere personal well-being and having a much grander vision of human flourishing as a whole.

According to Moschella, *Biblical joy* means being fully awake and deeply alive in God.<sup>1</sup>

So how deep is *your* joy?

Do *you* have the joy of the Lord this morning? Or something less?

Do you desire deep, biblical joy?

We're in a series exploring various aspects of the biblical theme of joy, as part of our larger theme for 2023: making space for joy & flourishing. This morning we're going to explore the joy of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and the practical invitation that He gives us today to experience the fullness of His deep joy, a joy that abides and abounds in the love of God.

Are you ready to deepen your joy?

Alright, let's go!

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Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of John chapter 15, verses 9 to 11.

John 15 is in the middle of what's referred to as the Farewell Discourse, running from chapters 13 to 17, narrating Jesus' parting words to His friends, as he prepares them for His imminent death.

Up to this point in the chapter, Jesus has been using the imagery of a vineyard to repeatedly encourage His disciples to abide in Him as their only true life source, in order that they might bear fruit and glorify the Father. The agricultural analogy of a vine would have been familiar to the religious imagination of these first century Jews, it was a common metaphor for the nation of Israel as they remained loyal to God. The implication was that just as a fruitful vineyard produces good wine, Israel's faithfulness to God would result in unprecedented joy & blessing. However, in the Old Testament, this analogy more often served as an image of judgement upon God's people as they continually failed to obey God. So earlier in John's Gospel, Jesus' very first miracle during the wedding at Cana is actually exposing a much bigger problem than "a local wedding party running out of wine": this was a sad symbol of the spiritual barrenness of first century Jews, expressed through their joyless religion. Their hopes of God's justice were crushed

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<sup>1</sup> Shown as: "***Biblical joy* means being fully awake and deeply alive in God.**" -Mary Clark Moschella

under the tyranny of Roman oppression, and their zeal for God's name replaced with hypocrisy and idolatry.

Are we any better than them today? Is there a leak in our joy? Or have we entirely lost the joy of our religion to the worship of lesser loves and contemporary idols?

Is *your* soul “running out of wine”? Have *you* lost the joy of your faith in God? As we look around the Church today, and into our daily lives, it does seem as if we’ve lost our joy.

Into this killjoy spirituality enters Jesus, and miraculously turns the filthy water of our self-justification into the abundant wine of a joy-filled faith in God. How? First, Jesus refers to Himself as the true vine in John 15:1, declaring Himself to be the long-awaited Messiah of Israel by substituting His own righteousness and covenant faithfulness where God's people had failed. By trusting in Jesus as our Saviour & Redeemer, our failed attempts at pleasing God are replaced by the perfect obedience of God's beloved Son, in whom we now live, move and have our being, through faith. This in itself is cause for much rejoicing, Amen? For Christ is our life, our righteousness, and our peace with God. Jesus lived the perfect life of faithfulness to His Father, and would go on to give His life in sacrificial love for us on the cross so that we could be forgiven, accepted, and adopted into the family of God. When we find our home in Jesus as our true source of life, we “abide in Him” and “He abides in us”. ***This is what it means to “abide”: to stay, to remain, to slow down our busy lives and scattered souls to find rest in the love of Jesus.*** But how does abiding in Jesus fill us with deep joy? Well I’m glad you asked.

Let's read together, John chapter 15, verses 9 to 11. These are the words of Jesus:

***"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:9–11, ESV)***

At this point the agricultural metaphor of the vineyard reaches its limit, for it can no longer supply the sufficient imagery required to depict the kind of unfathomable love into which the disciples are now welcomed. Jesus moves beyond analogy and gives His disciples a glimpse into the divine mystery of His personal relationship with the Father. In the following verses, Jesus calls His followers “friends”, to whom He will reveal the fullness of the Father’s heart. This is an unprecedented shift in the history of the universe, as humans are now being welcomed as personal friends into the loving presence of God. Jesus invites us into the ocean of God’s joy by declaring His eternal love for us.

**"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." (John 15:9, ESV)**

The Greek tense in this sentence signals the "perfection, the completeness of the Father's love for his Son, including his love for Him before time began". Jesus invites His disciples into the deep joy of true friendship, by revealing the perfect relational communion that He shares with the Father. This relationship is revealed throughout this book and culminates in John 17, in which we see the intimate union of the Father and Son on full display in the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. The Gospel of John contains so many facets of the biblical diamond that later Christians would come to refer to as the Trinity. And while we can't get into a deep biblical and historical study of Trinitarian theology here (otherwise this service would eventually turn into an evening service), it is worthwhile to explore how Jesus' loving relationship with the Father in verse 9 relates to the fullness of joy He promises to us in verse 11. In fact, this chapter on "abiding in Jesus" is sandwiched between chapters 14 and 16, which contain two of the richest descriptions of the Holy Spirit as the promised presence of God who will abide in us when Jesus departs. **As we abide in the love of Jesus, who abides in the love of Father, Jesus fills us with the fullness of His joy through the person of the Holy Spirit, who is Himself the substance of God's love and now abides in us.**

**On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" He said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive... (John 7:37-39)**

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Church in Acts 2, and the believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit, they were mocked as being "filled with new wine", leading Peter to clarify that their exuberant joy had nothing to do with alcohol. This is also why Paul says in Ephesians 5:18, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is an unholy waste of time, but be filled with the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

When we abide in Jesus, the true Vine, then the sap that runs through His veins will inevitably run through us, like a river, that bears fruit, and produces the joy of new wine. New covenant. New creation. **The Holy Spirit now lives in us as an ocean of God's presence within, yet flows through us as a river of gladness, filling our world with His.**

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<sup>2</sup> Shown as: **"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is an [unholy waste of time], but be filled with the Holy Spirit."-Ephesians 5:18, ESV**

Are you full of the Holy Spirit this morning? Have you experienced the depth of God's joy flowing as a river of gladness through your heart?

*This* is the source of Jesus' deep joy that abides and abounds..

Jesus' invitation to abide in His love is a gracious invitation into loving union with the oceanic immensity of God's inner life, a robust relational community abiding in everlasting love, joy and peace. While the doctrine of the Trinity has often become a left-brained, mathematical formula of Christian orthodoxy, theologians throughout the course of church history have observed a more vibrant vision of this biblical doctrine.

The Greek word "perichoresis"<sup>3</sup> was used to describe the "circular, rhythmic dance" of mutual love in the Trinity, each member indwelling and making room for the others in harmonious symmetry and perfect cadence. Ever giving yet ever receiving, eternally emptying of themselves while simultaneously being filled by the others. Father, Son, and Spirit in a divine dance of relational love and ecstatic joy. It is out of this inexhaustible fountain of creativity and grace that our universe was born. We were created and continue to exist as the joyful expression of God's perfect triune love.

Mary Clark Moschella points out that,

"Joy often arises out of deep interpersonal connections and the experiences of loving and being loved."<sup>4</sup>

See, our deepest human need for loving relationships with others, and the inevitable joy that flows from that love, can be directly and ultimately traced back to God Himself. For we were created, male and female, in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). A plurality of personhood intended for intimate relational union with one another. So, in a sense, **Jesus' invitation to abide in His love, is really an invitation to return home, to the original purpose and plan for which we were created in the first place: to live in loving union with God and enjoy Him forever.** For in His presence, there is fullness of joy; and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11) God is the most joyful being in the universe, and the heavens are roaring with the laughter of His delight.

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Before we even existed, God had enjoyed an eternity of loving communion and relational joy in this perichoretic dance that we willfully rejected in the Garden of Eden. Since then, humanity has strived and settled for puddles of momentary pleasure, instead of abiding in the oceanic immensity of God's deep reservoir of joy. Meanwhile, our God sits on his throne and smiles, for though our sin angers and grieves him for a moment, His favour and grace last a lifetime. And His playful providence continues to redeem our broken world in ways we cannot fathom, until one day when the whole earth will be filled with the laughter of the Lord as the waters cover the seas. Even when we are up to no good, God is working *all* things for our good according to His purpose in Christ Jesus. **God's joy is not of this world, but is as steadfast and deep as His love is. And He invites us as friends to share in that eternal joy, so that we might welcome His world of joy into ours.**

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## CONCLUSION

So as we close today, I want to invite you to Jamaica. I want you to imagine yourself in the ocean, kneeling in the sand with the water up to your chest, staring into the horizon.

Breathe deeply, and close your eyes if you'd like.

I don't want you to think about work, ministry, the things you have to do, or even the people around you. For a moment, I want you to focus your attention and gather your scattered senses to be still and know that He is God. Sometimes the most appropriate response to beholding this glorious vision of God's triune love, is to sit silently in awe, and allow Him to shape our hearts from the inside out.

Are *you* abiding in the love of Jesus today? Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you with the ocean of God's presence and flow through you as a river of gladness?

Abiding in the love of Jesus requires us to slow down and stop so we can fully surrender, giving him access to our whole heart. Peter Scazzero says this:

"Doing our part to cultivate a relationship of loving union with God requires time, time that, paradoxically, we don't have because we are too busy *serv*ing Him. We prioritize [labour] over love by failing to slow down for loving union with God."<sup>5</sup>

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Maybe your joy is running on empty because you've been more concerned with "doing for God" rather than simply "being *with* God".

What do you need to do this week, maybe even today, to slow down for loving union with Jesus? What meetings need to be cancelled? What ministry needs to stop so you can return to a pure-hearted, cheerful devotion to the very Lord who called you and gifted you in the first place?

What puddles of momentary pleasures have you been striving and settling for? Maybe your sin is robbing you of God's ocean of joy. Don't waste your life; turn to Christ.

Do you spend regular time in silence, stillness and solitude? Do you have a healthy pace of life that makes space for Jesus to speak and stir your soul? Maybe you need to establish a weekly Sabbath so that your work can flow from your rest and delight in God.

Or maybe you've never experienced the love of Jesus, never heard His voice calling your name, never felt the Father's loving embrace reaching out to you from the cross. Jesus is inviting you right now to abide in His love, so that you might be filled today with His deep wellspring of joy.

Let's take a moment now to lovingly allow God to have full access to all of us in order that He might fill us with the fullness of Himself. As I read this passage again slowly, let's make space in our hearts to abide in the love of Jesus, so that His joy might abide & abound in us. Here are the words of Jesus to you today:

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 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. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."*

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## ***BENEDICTION***

May the Triune Love of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit

Fill us with abundant joy as we Abide in Him

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**Him. We prioritize [labour] over love by failing to slow down for loving union with God." -Peter Scazzero**

In order that the oceanic immensity of His presence

Would overflow out our lives and into our world.

Amen.