

The Joy of Relationship with Christ

John 15 Part 2

Pastor Guy Gray

The Joy of Being Loved by Christ

There is a shining gem of truth set right in the middle of John 15. In verse 11, Jesus says: *"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."* Joy! This comes as an unexpected word in the midst of the Upper Room Discourse. Jesus is about to go to the cross. Jesus is giving His disciples the most intense and serious of all instructions. But right there in the middle of all this is—pure joy. The Bible tells us that Jesus was a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus literally had the weight of the world before Him in that moment. Yet He speaks of absolute joy; a joy that we too can know. So, where does it come from? What is the deep root of this joy that could not be quenched even by the intensity of the suffering and difficulty that Christ was facing?

The answer is found in verse 9: *"As the father has loved me, so have I loved you."* The joy of Christ is rooted in the rich love relationship He shares with the Father. This is everything. In fact, this is one of the major themes of the Gospel of John. *"The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands"* (John 3:35). *"The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does"* (John 5:20). The point is: this is the essence of the deep, unshakeable joy of Jesus Christ...it is the deep joy of a relationship of love. But we must also remember the rest of verse 9: *"so have I loved you."* Now we begin to understand the nature of the joy that Jesus is guiding us to. It is the deep joy of relationship with Christ. And the starting place is not our love for Christ, but His overwhelming and committed love for us! No wonder the upper room discourse started not just with His words of teaching, but with His symbolic act of love: *"Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love"* (John 13:1). Jesus washed their feet. Jesus was going to the cross for them. Radical Love! This is the starting place for the joy of our relationship with Christ and it is so powerful!

The Joy of Loving Christ in Return

If we begin to know and trust this love of Christ for us, we must also respond to Him. We must love Christ in return. This is what a real relationship is all about...to be loved and to give love in return. So Jesus asks us to love Him back. But the way of love must be more than a feeling; more than even words of love or songs of love and praise. The way of love is the way of obedience. Jesus says, *"If anyone loves me, they will obey my teaching"* (John 14:23); and, *"If you obey my commands, you will abide in my love"* (John 15:10). This is the way we cherish and grow deeper in our relationship with Christ: we listen and we respond. Just like any close relationship, we have to pay attention to the wishes of the one we love and then take action if we want to build a strong, close relationship. This is the way of deeper joy in Christ.

The Joy of Loving the Bride of Christ - His Church

But what is the command of Christ? He tells us right here in John 15. His command is that we love one another (John 15:17). What we need to see is that this command is specifically about loving Christ's followers! This is about loving His CHURCH! Remember, the church is not a building or a program; it is a group of people who have come to faith in Christ. This what Jesus asks: love His followers, His "bride", and His church. This doesn't mean, loving the church theoretically. This doesn't mean to love the "invisible church" of unknown believers scattered throughout the world - the "church universal". It means to know and love the Christians you worship and serve with right here at River West. This is what pleases Christ! It brings Him joy; and if we get it, it will bring us amazing joy as well.

The Joy of "Coming Out" - Openly for Christ

Finally, this chapter turns to the reality of our friction with the world around us. Jesus teaches: *"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first"* (John 15:18). This is Christ's challenge for us to "come out" openly as His disciples! You cannot be a secret Christian. You cannot love and follow Christ and hide it from people. How can you love Christ, but refuse to be identified with the Body of Christ, the Church? It is quite unfashionable to be openly known as a follower of Christ these days. Many people do not want to call themselves Christians or even be a part of a church. Sometimes people talk about being a "Christ follower" - but not a part of any "organized" expression of Christianity. This is most often nothing more than misdirected pride; not wanting to be "labeled" in some negative way as a Christian. But there is no way around it. If you love Jesus you will be misunderstood and criticized by people at times. If you love His bride, His church, you will be misunderstood and criticized. But if you do it all because you know the wonder of His great love for you, you will know a depth of joy that the world cannot imagine. This is the joy of true relationship with Christ!

For Further Reflection

This week, spend time in John 15:10-27. The following questions can encourage your time of reflection.

What struck you the most about the nature of joy as it is presented in John 15?

How deep is your joy today? If you are not experiencing the joy of loving and being loved by Christ, why not? What is keeping you from this kind of joy?

Think back to a time of persecution or friction because of your faith. Was there a hidden joy in that experience? Why or why not?

As you pray this week, ask specifically for the Lord to show you the way to deeper joy in Christ. How is the Lord answering that prayer?