**Best Friends: Joy -August 14th 2022**

**Slide 1 - Title**

Today we are continuing to talk about Jesus as our best friend! People say that don’t they, Jesus is my best friend. I’ve received a few comments about the poster for this series. To most people it looks like it is meant for kids. It’s cartoony and maybe a little too colorful, but I wanted it to be that way. Because to me, when people use this phrase, “Jesus is my best friend”, often it paints this type of happy-go-lucky picture; care free, fun, rad…Jesus is my best friend. Well, in this series, I just want to turn those tables a little bit. Yes, it is great to have Jesus as a best friend, but what kind of friend are you and I? Do we act like we are best friends with Jesus? And the main question: What does it look like to be best friends with Jesus?

**Slide 2-4 - Scripture**

 I want to take a look at John 15. It’s the same passage we referenced last week, but it is dense and it demands to be looked at again. READ John 15:9-17 I especially want to focus on verse 11: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

 So we need to clarify what joy is because so often it is conflated with happiness. But there is a difference.

**Slide 5 – Split Screen Happiness/Joy**

Happiness is an emotion, it comes and goes, it is based on our circumstances and surroundings. Certain things, or times make us happy. Joy on the other hand, is not emotionally based. Joy is deeper than that. It has a spiritual quality to it. Joy finds its source in our relationship to God. That means that we are able to rejoice even in bad times and bad situations. Joy does not mean that we are always happy…we can be sad and mourn and cry even while being full of joy. Because joy comes from the Lord, we are able to acknowledge the tough realities of this world, and be authentic in our experience of pain and sadness, but we are not without hope and our hope in Jesus gives us the possibility of joy.

It’s been a long time since Saturday Night Live was funny, but years ago they included a recurring sketch that involved two hyper and eager cheerleaders. Take a look at these joyful characters: **Slide 6 - WATCH CLIP**

Craig and Arianna are kind of funny to watch but you wouldn’t want to hang out with them for the day. Why not? They would become very annoying very quickly! They are too excited about every little thing. But here is a moment of learning for us…what do these two do well? They encourage. They are cheerleaders for a reason. They want you to be as excited as they are! In that sense then, I think these Spartan cheerleaders can actually help us. We might not approach people in the same way that they do…we might not wear the same attire, but we can have the some excitement, the same joy.

Now maybe you are thinking, “No, no that’s just not me…I can’t be *that* joyful…” If that describes you, then you are actually onto something. Jesus insinuates that our joy is not complete. He wants our joy to be complete, but without him, we are incomplete. He wants his joy to be in us so that our joy may be complete. In other words, we need Jesus! We are unable to experience total joy as we were meant to without having a living friendship with Jesus. If we go back to verse 11 we find another important clause, right at the beginning, “I have told you this so that…” The result of the telling is the receiving of his joy, so we need to back up a bit and see what it is that Jesus has told us in order for our joy to be complete. So let’s look at the broader section here…we are smack dab in the middle of a long discourse in which Jesus lays out many things for this disciples. So that makes our leap to application pretty easy. Jesus is speaking directly to his disciples, and as I mentioned last week that is me and you. We really can take these words directly to heart. They have been spoken and recorded to and for disciples.

**Slide 8 – Remain in the Vine**

Overall, in this chapter, Jesus uses an overarching metaphor of a main vine and branches that offshoot from that vine. He is concerned here about connection. Remain in the vine! Stay connected! In this connection is life and fruitfulness. Once we get to verse 9 Jesus moves past the imagery and gets into real life. How do we stay connected to the vine?

**Slide 9- How do we remain?**

How do we remain? Verse 10 gives a full on direct answer:

**Slide 10 – Keep my Commandments**

 “If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.” So we obey.

**Slide 11– We obey to remain**

We obey to remain. Simple enough right?

**Slide 12 – Does obedience = Duty?**

But obedience equals duty doesn’t it? Obedience creates a sense of paranoia…you end up always wondering if we are doing something wrong. If I am going to be worried about obeying, I will certainly never get around to enjoying life. Constant obedience actually sounds pretty miserable. It’s like a form of slavery. I end up having to live according to someone else’s command.

**Slide 13 – Scripture Romans 6:17 & 22**

Paul address all of this in Romans 6:17 “But thank God that although you used to be slaves of sin, you gave wholehearted obedience to the teaching that was handed down to you (the gospel) which provides a pattern. Now that you have been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness.” And down in verse 22 he adds, “But now that you have been set from sin and have become slaves to God, you have the consequence of a holy life, and the outcome is eternal life.” And what could bring us more joy that that! Paul lets us know pretty clearly here that we, as created humans, do not have the option to exist as free beings.

**Slide 14 – Can we be free?**

We can trick ourselves into thinking we are free, but in reality we are enslaved to something or someone. We come into this world as slaves to sin, our own desires, our own sense of justice, our own version of freedom, our own concoction of joy. That is option one. But through the power of the gospel and Jesus’ great love for us, we can pledge allegiance, or loyalty, (like we talked about last week), to our best friend, and live as slaves, in obedience to him.

**Slide 15 - Chains**

Someone might argue that what I am saying is that we are simply exchanging one set of chains for another. In a way that is true, except one set of chains are rusted and heavy and drag us down to death, while the other set is made of light-weight, shining gold and keep us attached to that vine that gives life. And, like toy hand cuffs, we can choose to untether ourselves at any time. The choice to remain is left up to us.

Our best friend Jesus wants to gives us his joy so that our joy might be complete. And where did he get his joy? By keeping His Father’s commands. This is no counterfeit emotion we are talking about here. This is a spiritual reality, a power that defies the ways of this world. We have all known someone who has faked a smile or put on a happy face inauthentically. This is not that. This joy that we get from our best friend Jesus runs deep, right down to the core of who we are.

**Slide 16 – Chain & vine**

Do you know what I am talking about? Do you know this joy? Is your joy complete? Jesus wants to complete your joy…he wants to chain you to the vine, to show you the glory of living in obedience to the will of the Father. I believe that is where our quest for joy begins…Am I obedient? Or put another way, in what way am I disobedient?

**Slide 17 – Holy Spirit**

Holy Spirit, show me! Reveal those places where I fall short! This sort of self-examination that is open to God’s voice is dangerous.

**Slide 18 – This is Dangerous**

Don’t pray it if you don’t mean it! Because he will show you, he will convict you. Our sins will become apparent and then at that point, we are on the hook to change our behavior and with the Spirit’s power, to live in conformity. That is obedience to our best friend and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an example. Several of our children, one in particular, love to “watch a show” on mom’s phone.

**Slide 19 - Phone**

When any hint of boredom enters their life, they will ask to use mom’s phone. They never ask dad to use his phone, because dad has never once allowed them to do so. They always get a stern “no” from me. If there is any persistence at all I turn to them and say, “Just keep asking me, I love saying no.” So anyway, mom is always getting this request and if mom hesitates to comply in any way, the switched is flipped from request to whine.

**Slide 20 – Whiny Kid**

 Now they are whining to use mom’s phone and the strategy just intensifies from there until there is a meltdown with full on tears and stomping feet. This is not a joy-filled heart. This is an entitled heart that wants what it wants when it wants it. All over a phone…it seems silly, but I tell you truly church, you and I are not far from it. If my children approached their mom with an obedient heart, the “no” they receive might not be what they wanted to hear, but the desire to please their mom would override their desire for themselves. An obedient heart puts the phone in perspective. It says, “I want to please my mother more than I want to please myself. I want to honor this relationship more than I want this certain thing.” An obedient heart is still able to make the initial request, but it is happy to live with the answer it receives. In this way, phone or no phone, the child experiences joy, because the joy is not found in the object but in the relationship.

**Slide 21 – Joy is found in the relationship**

Jesus’ joy was made complete in his own obedience to the Father, and he imparts that joy unto us so that our joy may be complete. What a wonderful best friend! What a good God we serve! What a good God we get to be gently chained to. What a good God we get to obey! If you feel that you are too far from God, or maybe you do not know Jesus as your friend. We are here to remedy that, we want to make sure you know all about Jesus and how much he loves you. He is your best friend and he wants to give you his joy. It’s the difference between a friend who describes the awesome birthday party he went to that you were unable to attend. You get to hear all about it, but you don’t get to experience it.

**Slide 22 - PARTY**

But Jesus is the friend who comes and says “Come to my party, it’s going to be great. It’s happening now. My Father paid for everything, just jump in the van!” We have to accept the invitation, and then we allow him to make our joy complete as we learn to obey just like he obeyed.

Come along to the party! Live in complete joy! Allow Jesus to be your best friend! Amen!