

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor David Bennett
13 December 2015
The Gifts of Christmas Series
Key Verse: Luke 2:10-11

“THE GIFT OF JOY”

Good morning Fil-Am, it is so good to see so many of you here this morning, we wanted to let you know that your presence is not taken for granted and greatly appreciated. This morning we are continuing our Christmas Series, and the topic of today deals with the issue of **JOY** specifically the “**Gift of JOY!**”

JOY is mentioned over 650 times where it talks about **JOY**, Rejoice, Rejoicing, Glad, Gladness, and Delight!

What is **JOY**?

- ✓ **JOY** is a gift from God
- ✓ It is delight in life
- ✓ Our response to knowing we are on the right path of life.

Note: **JOY** is not a "feeling" ... **JOY** is more than mere 'happiness' ... real **JOY** comes from outside of us, it is what happens when...

- ✓ We realize we are **known** by God
- ✓ We realize we are **loved** by God.

Many people believe that everything has to line up in order for me to have **JOY**, but I am here this morning to tell you that I could be....

- ✓ Suffering,
- ✓ Homeless,
- ✓ Struggling with life
- ✓ And yet **STILL** be filled with **JOY!**

So the same question again, what is **JOY**?

Some have said that **JOY** is the flag that flies over the castle of our hearts announcing that the King is in residence today! (**Does the King reside at your home?**)

Joy is a gift from God, more than mere happiness, a desire for life. How can I experience this kind of **JOY**?

One very proven method of achieving this **JOY** is by Drawing closer to God, because when we are in the presence of the Lord, we are "filled with **JOY**".

Eternal pleasure can only be experienced through intimate fellowship with the Eternal Lord.

Once there was a little boy who was really mean.

No matter what his parents tried, he continued to be self-centered and selfish. Christmas was coming soon, so the little boy, in his usual selfish way, made his "Dear Santa" letter it was twelve pages of gadgets and toys.

When his parents saw the very lengthy letter, and they were outraged.

The father picked up the little boy and carried him to the living room, setting him firmly on the floor right in front of the family's nativity scene. "I want you to sit right here and look at this scene until you remember what Christmas is all about.

Then I want you to write a letter to Jesus."

So the little boy sits there a while and then returns to his bedroom. Finding paper and pencil, he begins to write:

"Dear Jesus, if you will bring me all the presents I want, I'll be good for a whole year."

Then he thinks for a moment and tears up the paper. He starts again:

"Dear Jesus, if you'll bring me all the presents I want, I'll be good for a whole week,"

But once again he tears up the paper. The little boy quietly leaves his room and returns to the living room, looking intently at the nativity scene.

He gently reaches down and picks up the figure of Mary. Returning to his room, he places the figure in a shoebox and sets the box in the back of his closet. Then he writes another letter:

“Dear Jesus, if you ever want to see your mother again...”

That is not a way to achieve inner **JOY**...

Today we’re going to learn about another gift that God wants to give you, to give me and that is the Gift of **JOY**.

An angel appeared to some shepherd’s in their fields and said:

Luke 2:10-11, (NASB) *“¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great **JOY** which will be for all the people; ¹¹ for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

This is what the nation of Israel had been waiting to hear!

- ✓ Their **Deliverer** had come!
- ✓ The **Messiah**,
- ✓ The **Chosen One**,
- ✓ The bringer of **Deliverance** was here.

The news of the birth of Christ brought **JOY** to the hearts of the people. It was not an insignificant kind of **JOY** that expresses itself in a moment of laughter.

It was the kind of **JOY** that settles deep down in your gut the kind of **JOY** that remains even when there’s nothing to laugh at, or nothing to celebrate.

It is a deep-seated **JOY** that cannot be taken from you no matter what circumstance you might find yourself in.

The angel said that this “good news of great **JOY**” was “for all the people.” Not only for the people of Israel, but for all people of all time who would willingly accept this good news into their hearts. In fact, Peter writes to those, like us, that have never seen Jesus face to face:

1 Peter 1:8, (NIV) *“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.”*

- ✓ How can I accept this gift of **JOY** that God wants to give to me?
- ✓ How can I continue to live with this level of **JOY** and satisfaction throughout my life?

This morning we are going to look very briefly on four statements that, if lived out, will allow us to not only receive God’s gift of **JOY**, but will enable us to walk in **JOY**

throughout our lives.

I am going to ask you to personalize these statements in your own life today, the first point we will discuss is...

1. I WILL ACCEPT GOD'S FREEDOM

Say it with me out loud (**I will accept God's Freedom**)

At a farmer's market in a little village there was a covey of quail walking in circles around a pole. They had strings attached to their legs, and they continued to walk around and around the pole hour after hour.

A man came into the market and asked, "How much will you take for all of them?" He paid the owner the agreed upon price and then began to cut the strings off of their legs.

"What are you doing?" the owner asked in disbelief? "I'm setting them free," said the new owner.

However, in spite of the strings being cut giving the quail their freedom, they continued to walk around the pole in the same old circle.

They didn't even realize that they were free and that they could go in a different direction..

It was not until the man began shooing them away did they move from this set routine.

Jesus says, "If the Son sets you free you are free indeed."

We need to realize that we are free today from all kinds of things because of His freeing us.

- ✓ We do not have to go in the same direction, we always have.
- ✓ We don't have to continue to march around in circles of guilt and sin and drudgery.
- ✓ We are free indeed.

What does that include?

The **truth** shall **make you free**.

These are some of the most uplifting words in the Bible. Many people toil under bondage, sometimes never even realizing that freedom is available.

- ✓ Do you suffer under the burden of **spiritual conflict**? The truth shall set you free.
- ✓ Do you strain under the **worry of death**? The truth shall set you free.
- ✓ Do you try in vain to escape the **bondage of sin**? The truth shall set you free.
- ✓ Are you pulled in different directions by **temptation**? The truth shall set you free!

Whatever chains entangle you today; there is hope.

You can know **the truth** (not a truth, but the **TRUTH**) and the truth shall make you free!

Prior to the beginning of the wars in the Middle East, in both Iraq and Afghanistan I like many, had no idea of what conditions were like for the people living in that region of the world.

The world watched in horror at the way the Al-Qaida, and the Taliban and their dictators treated their citizens.

The people were living in complete and total bondage with no real hope of freedom.

When their strangle hold over the people in certain regions were eased, the world could see the news reports of the women removing the veils from their faces, for the laughter in the streets, the children with smiles on their faces, the music and dancing. The **JOY** of freedom is evident on the faces that were so recently enslaved.

You see the same **JOY** on the faces of those who have accepted the freedom that is offered through Jesus Christ.

Until we come into a relationship with this Messiah, this deliver, we will continue to live in the **bondage of sin and death**.

While we have the outward trappings of freedom, internally we are **dying** without Christ.

However, God offers us freedom from our **sin**, freedom from **guilt**, freedom from **condemnation**.

Romans 8:1-2, (NASB) *“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”*

There is nothing that can bring us greater **JOY** than the knowledge that God has set us free from the bondage of sin.

Maybe you have been a Christian for some time, and for whatever reason you have

allowed this gift of **JOY** to lapse.

Pray like David did: **Psalm 51:12**, “Restore to me the **JOY** of your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.”

Saints please know that David is not praying for salvation!

- ✓ He is already saved.
- ✓ He is praying for a restoration of that **JOY** that was once his.
- ✓ Accept the gift of God’s **JOY** through the freedom he offers,
- ✓ And then accept it **again**,
- ✓ And **again**, and **again**.

- ✓ God **gives**,
- ✓ God **restores**,
- ✓ God **makes whole**.

If you are not yet a Christian, accept God’s offer of freedom **TODAY!**

If you are already a Christian that has lost your **JOY**, open up your heart to Him today,

Admit your failure to rely on His gift, get it all out in the open, and **simply receive**.

It is like living in a prison cell, your whole life and yet the doors are not locked, all you have to do is walk into his freedom, instead of staying locked up in bondage; **we are free** in Christ Jesus our Lord!

John 8:36, (NIV) “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

The first step we talked about today is...

I WILL ACCEPT GOD’S FREEDOM, the second point is...

2. I WILL DWELL IN GOD’S PRESENCE

Let’s all say this together (I will dwell in God’s presence)

It is impossible to have real **JOY** without experiencing the presence of God on a continual basis.

Think of God like you think of water. If I am thirsty, I continually return to the source that will quench my thirst.

In my spiritual life I must continually return to the source of enjoyment if the **JOY** is going to remain in, and dominate, my life.

Let's say I told you that I derive **JOY** from my wife and children, which I do, but that I never spend any time with them.

I go day by day, week by week, month by month, and never speak to them, never do anything with them, and basically ignore that they exist.

Now if they are truly a source of **JOY** in my life, yet I never spend time in their presence, the level of **JOY** in my life will begin to evaporate.

The people who live with the greatest level of **JOY** are the ones that spend time with the source of **JOY**, which is God Himself.

Psalms 16:11, (NASB) *"You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever."*

When is the Psalmist filled with **JOY**? When he is in the presence of God.

How do we spend time in the presence of God? When we pray and when we meditate on God's Word.

The Prophet Isaiah records for us what God's response would be to those outside of Israel who came to Him for salvation:

Isaiah 56:7, (NIV) *"...These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer."*

Prayer is one aspect of dwelling in God's presence. As I speak to Him He reveals Himself to me in ways beyond my understanding. Knowing that God hears me and that He cares, that He understands, and that He will act upon what I am revealing to Him through prayer fills me with joy unspeakable.

The other aspect of dwelling in God's presence is spending time meditating and studying what He wants to reveal to me in His Word.

Jeremiah 15:16, (NASB) *"Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts."*

To dwell in God's presence I dwell upon the Words that He has written to me. I take a

passage of Scripture and simply reflect on what God is telling me.

I speak to Him in prayer and He responds to me through His Word.

And through that two-way communication, on a regular basis, God will fill me with the **JOY** that only He can bring. If you don't have the **JOY** I'm speaking of, take this simple step beginning today.

The first step we talked about today was...

I WILL ACCEPT GOD'S FREEDOM, the second point is...

I WILL DWELL IN GOD'S PRESENCE, the next point is...

3. I WILL OBEY GOD'S INSTRUCTION

Let's all say this together (I will obey God's instructions)

Someone described the BIBLE in the term of an acronym.

Basic, Instructions, Before, Leaving, Earth

Do you want to know how to live life to the fullest and experience abundant **JOY**?

You can if you simply dig into God's word and apply the principles that are written down for you....

There was a story in a local paper down south on Memorial Day where some rafters were going to go rafting down a river and it turned into a very scary experience.

When they started out it seemed like they were in control of the raft, and they could control where they went and were pretty secure that they were in charge of their destination.

However, when they came to the very first rapids, the big waves threatened to engulf them.

The water swirled around and pushed and pulled at them. "No matter how hard they paddled or even in what direction they decided to paddle, they had no choice but to go through the rapids and down the river."

It was the river, and not them, that was in control.

Saints it is the same way it is sin

You may think you have it all figured out, think you can control it, but you will see that YOU are not in control.

No matter how hard we try, sin and evil plunges us straight ahead into the abyss of ruin and destruction, and takes us further and faster than we ever intended to go.

When we come to Christ and decide to totally go His way, we can be certain that sin's power is broken.

We are no longer under sin's control. He is able to set us free from the downward spiral.

Many people don't believe this.

You might not believe it. "I can't change," you say. It is more a matter of saying, "I really don't **WANT** to change."

We know we can change. He gives us freedom from the control of sin when we give ourselves completely to God.

We can see ourselves being unresponsive to sin. You decide to make the break and He will do the inner transaction. You are free to choose.

This is where our faith comes in. We must believe that when we come to Christ that He does make us **FREE INDEED**.

John 15:9-11, (NASB) *"⁹ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you so that my **JOY** may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."*

Jesus' desire for each one of us is that we our "**JOY** may be full."

And He very clearly tells us that this level of **JOY** is only attained when we are obedient to God's will for our lives.

The motivation for obedience is based in our desire to draw closer to God. How does obedience draw us closer to God?

God's **instructions** for us are all designed to lead us into a more intimate relationship with Him.

His **instructions** are all intended to help us to conform to His image.

The more we follow His **instructions**, the more we become like Him, the closer our relationship grows, and the more advanced our level of **JOY** becomes.

The first step we talked about today was...

I WILL ACCEPT GOD'S FREEDOM, the second point is...

I WILL DWELL IN GOD'S PRESENCE, the next point is...

I WILL OBEY GOD'S INSTRUCTION, and the last point is....

4. I WILL EXPECT GOD'S FUTURE

Let's all say this together (I will expect God's Future)

We accept God's gift of **JOY** when we trust in His promise that we will live forever. There is a wonderful feeling of satisfaction and relief when you know that you will never die, that throughout all ages we will live on and on and on.

*Never be afraid to trust an **unknown** future to a **known** God.* (Corrie Ten Boom)

Another way of saying it I may not know what **tomorrow holds**, however, I do know who **holds tomorrow!**

When citizens travel overseas, they need a passport to enter into another country.

The passport must be stamped, giving the person access to enter the country.

No Passport, No entrance.

In order to enter Heaven, a person must have a passport stamped with the Blood of Christ.

No Passport, No entrance..

This is one thing you need to make sure we have completely right; the rest does not matter if this is not right....

1 John 2:17, (NASB) *"The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."*

1 Peter 1:4-5, (NIV) *"⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."*

I could put you in my car and drive not far from here where we would see some beautiful country roads, and look at some fabulous mansions, and we would see some gorgeous lakes, and forests, and parks, and gardens. And you might think, "It must be really pleasant to live there." And I suppose it is, but how long will those people live there?

They will soon be gone.

On the other hand, every man, woman, and child who takes Jesus as Savior will have an inheritance that lasts forever, and it will blow away any conception you have of joy on this earth.

Every earthly inheritance will fail; even the richest man on earth won't keep his property long. But the poorest man or woman who will take on Jesus Christ will receive an inheritance that will last forever.

When we have the gift of **JOY** in our possession, it is a gift that tells us day in and day out, whether we are rich or poor, beautiful or hard to look at, that we can look forward to God's future today.

Philippians 3:20-21, ²⁰ *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with [c]the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”*

I praise God that I have the gift of **JOY** that says so very clearly that I can live in expectation of God's future.

Are you **free** today? Have you accepted the gift of **JOY**?

Do you have a nagging sense of guilt hanging over your head like a cloud and you can't seem to shake free of it? If so, Jesus can take care of that. Come to Him fully expecting Him to do it.

- ✓ Are you burdened down by the slavery of sin's control?
- ✓ Are you always being tripped up by sin's deception and temptation?
- ✓ Do you want to be free to be what God wants you to be?

Today is the day to accept God's gift of **JOY**...

Can you make these four statements in reception of God's gift of joy today?

- 1. I WILL ACCEPT GOD'S FREEDOM**
- 2. I WILL DWELL IN GOD'S PRESENCE**
- 3. I WILL OBEY GOD'S INSTRUCTION**
- 4. I WILL EXPECT GOD'S FUTURE**

I pray that you realize that Christianity is not just about following a bunch of rules, , dressing up to go to church on Sunday morning. It is about a personal relationship with God, who not only created you but longs a relationship with you!