

Joy

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 December 2023

Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] Good morning, everyone. It's getting a little bit cooler, which is nice, right? Let's start with something very simple. The person next to you, can you tell them what is your happy place?

Let's bring it back. Let's bring it back. What do we got? What do we got? What do we got? I'm a... Christina. Hey.

Hey, baby. What's Paul's happy place? It's next to the Christmas tree. Where's Paul imagined himself being the happiest place, Paul?

Watching the cricket. Watching the cricket. What's cricket? Oh, dear. Cricket is some sport that people play in cardigans, even in the summer.

That is what they do. That's cricket. Annabelle, what's your happy place? I said here first. Oh, cute. Maybe some people know I'm a huge Disney fan.

[1:21] You're a huge Disney fan. My only happy place would be the happiest place. Disney. Wow. You know what? You know, we were just at Disneyland the other day because there's apparently there's a world of frozen Arendelle there that's super cool.

We went there. And actually, as I was walking down Main Street, I'm not going to lie. I think it probably is the happiest place on Earth. Like, that's the advertisement. And I genuinely think it is. Actually, maybe that's a great way for me to jump in. We're going to be talking about joy today. But, of course, when we're talking about Disneyland, we're talking about the happiest place on Earth. But that might not be the same as the most joyful place in the world.

Now, why is Disneyland the happiest place in the world? I'll tell you why. The Main Street, it's just decked out in lights, decorations. You've got this beautiful castle that's in front of you.

And then there's Mickey running around in some place. There's a huge Christmas tree in the middle roundabout there that just is glorious. It really, truly is a happy place. Because your surrounding, your circumstances are just beautiful.

[2:24] That's what makes Disney Main Street the happiest place. But happiness and joy are different, right? Happiness is a reaction.

It's an emotion. It's fleeting. When I stand in the middle of Disney Main Street, especially when I'm sitting on that taxi thing that kind of just takes you down just that one road. It's a pretty useless taxi, but it's great when it's really hot.

I'm just surrounded by a circumstance that allows me to be happy. A happiness reacts, but joy transcends. Joy is something different. I'm a football fan, and the team that I support is Arsenal.

The last few years are a little bit better, I'm not going to lie. But the years before, and actually something that I've found that's really a big problem of mine is when I wake up in the morning, I'll confess, it isn't the word of God that I open my eyes to.

It is the, especially on the weekend, it's the football scores. I wake up, and you know what? When I wake up, and I just open the app, and I look at the score, and Arsenal lost, or they did something stupid.

[3:28] I'm like, oh. And that sends me down at the beginning of the day, just being not really that happy. And it's kind of like, actually, those of you who are really, really serious football fans, you know that that can take over your whole weekend if your team doesn't win.

But that's happiness. Joy is different. Technically, if we're to have the joy that the Bible talks about, we should be able to stomach any loss that your football team has, and still be filled with joy.

Joy. You can go to work and go to a job that you don't really like, and yet still have joy. You can have some problems in your family, and some arguments that are happening, but yet somehow deep-seated in there is a joy that transcends even the circumstances, even the relationships.

Do we have that kind of joy? Do we know what that kind of joy even is? Yes. That's what we're going to really talk about today. And I've told this story before, but some of the times that I've had the most joy was actually when Alicia was born.

She was in hospital for a whole month, and she had surgery at five days old. She was in intensive care for the whole month. By all standards, that's not a happy time. And it wasn't. It definitely wasn't a happy time seeing your daughter get kind of poked in all kind of places.

[4:42] Vivian, our good friend from the UK, will probably remember the time that we went through. But there's a joy that I learned to have during my time waiting for her at the hospital that kind of transcends the circumstances that I was in.

It wasn't happiness for sure, but there's a peace. There's a joy that's like, man, we will get through this. We will go to the end. And when I was in hospital for a month, when I was younger, I had the same thing.

It sucked to be there. It wasn't happy. But I started to experience this joy that started to emerge through, maybe in week two or three, that I was like, oh, this is different. Actually, this makes me feel the most human.

If you've been in a hospital before, you probably understand a little bit of that. There's no other place in the world that helps you come face to face with your humanity and with your futility. And it's in that moment you're like, oh, but there is some joy that happens there. The Apostle Paul writes this letter. He writes this letter to this church in Philippi. And actually, this letter, which is what we refer to as Philippians, it's all about joy.

[5:49] In fact, it's the epistle of joy is how someone talks about it. But the interesting thing is, where does he write it? Where does he write the book of Philippians? Derek. In jail. In jail, in prison. And yet, in this book, the four chapters, he references and talks about joy 16 times.

He's trapped. It's completely out of his control. Yet, somehow, he has joy. And then that famous Bible verse that Steph Curry made really famous, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Paul managed to find the secret to joy, even though he was in prison, even though he was getting to the end of life. He can say, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Before that, he says, I have learned the secret.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. If you were in prison, or if you were trapped in the hospital, would you have joy?

That's a good question just for us to reflect on. The likelihood is no. But my guess is that if we were to really understand the heart of God, if we would truly understand why we were here, it would take you a while, but it won't take you too long before you realize that actually you are capable of joy, even when you're in prison, even when you're in the hospital, even when circumstances aren't going the way that you want them to.

[7:05] You won't have happiness. You're not happy about being there. You're not happy about being in the job that you're in or the current life situation you're in, but yet you will have joy. Happiness reacts like you would on Disneyland Main Street, but joy transcends.

I want to open up the word and talk about two people who I think had that secret. Had that secret. Paul says, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. Two people that ties in with our Christmas theme is actually two pregnant ladies.

Two pregnant ladies, Elizabeth and Mary. And I want to read it to you. So if you can turn with me to Luke chapter 1. Luke chapter 1. We are right on topic here.

We're talking about the Christmas story about Mary and Elizabeth. Chapter 1, verse 39. Actually, we haven't done this for a while. Can I invite us to stand for the word of the Lord? Well done to the people who were on beanbags.

You made it. Chapter 1, verse 39. In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah.

[8:15] And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women.

And blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my

womb leaped for joy.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. And for he has looked on the humblest estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones. And exalted those of humble estate.

[9:15] He has filled the hungry with good things. And the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy. As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

This is the word of the Lord. Take a seat. And reading that passage just reminded me, Ellie, your song choices were on point. My goodness. So, picture this.

Two pregnant ladies. One whose husband meets an angel. Completely silenced by it. And tells, hey, you're going to have a baby boy.

It's going to be called John. And so Elizabeth is pregnant. But I want to tell you a little bit more about Elizabeth. She was advanced in years. So she was an old lady. She tried long, many, many years. And yet she still couldn't have a baby.

And in that society, at that point, children, well, they still are deemed as blessings today. Most of the time. But children were a real blessing. When you do something well and you get a child, that's a huge blessing.

[10:13] That's a gift. So imagine Zechariah and Elizabeth all these years. Actually, chapter 1, verse 6.

And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and the statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Wow. If I made it into the Bible and had that description, and righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and the statutes of the Lord, that would be pretty cool.

That's a good CV. And so they've done everything right, yet they don't have a child. And of course, the stigma that would come. Can you imagine Christmas dinners? Can you just like, oh, you're still waiting?

Are you guys going to have children? Can you imagine the shame, the stigma that comes from getting that constantly, every Christmas, every family meal? I have reason to believe that the Jewish culture was probably quite similar to the Chinese one.

Both love food, and both fellowship there, and of course then just throw shade there across the dinner table constantly, right? So that's the backdrop. And finally, finally her husband goes to work, meets an angel, comes back mute, and she has a baby.

[11:24] Like all her dreams, all in one Christmas. And then, so she's pregnant, and she's like, wow, this is a huge thing. And then her relative Mary has a similar encounter, and is also pregnant.

And both of them have joy. I mean, as I just read that, can you just imagine the interaction, the encounter when they both met? Ah, you're pregnant. Ah, you're pregnant. Ah! So there's just constant joy that fills the room.

And this leads me to my first point. In order to have joy, there's one thing that needs to happen. You can't have jealousy. With jealousy, there is no joy. Can you just imagine again, just being in Elizabeth's shoes.

She's taken years, you waited years and years and years to get the social standing that she's really wanted, to get the baby that she's really wanted, to have the silent husband that she's always been waiting for.

And here we have, and I've finally got the baby that I want. And yet my relative, teenage Mary, who's not even married yet, has a baby too.

[12:30] She knows nothing. She knows nothing about what it means to wait. Can you imagine the bitterness that could have come from Elizabeth's heart? And yet she doesn't. She's just so excited.

She's filled with joy, which tells me that with joy, there has to be no jealousy. What is jealousy? Because jealousy is looking at what somebody else has and really wanting that thing, right?

Because I look at Gabriel today, and some of us, six of us, have noticed that Gabriel has a new hairstyle. Can you see? Just incredible what a girlfriend does to you. And I look and I see, he's now going to be called Astro Boy from now.

But of course, there may be, and those of you who hang around me long enough will know that I'm quite sensitive, or I'm quite alert and aware to people's hairstyles and their hair choices, for no reason, really.

But jealousy is me looking at Gabriel and going, ah, I want that hair. That's why hanging out with someone like Derek makes me really happy. All right? Yeah? No jealousy there.

[13:38] In fact, stood next to Derek, I am called Longhair. And he is... But in order to have joy, you need to surrender jealousy.

Theodore Roosevelt said, comparison is the thief of joy. Comparison is the thief of joy. So the reason why you are not joyful, there may be something to do with the fact that you are actually jealous.

You're like, oh, I'm not jealous. Well, what is jealousy? Jealousy is looking at someone who has something that you want. Actually, envy is closely tied to that. Envy is looking at someone and going, actually, not only do I want what you want, I don't want you to have it.

That's envy. The fact that you have hair makes me upset. It offends me. That's envy. So jealousy and envy are both, actually, big problems when it comes to joy.

And I totally agree with Roosevelt. Comparison is the thief of joy. Because you get jealous when you look at someone and go, oh, well, I kind of want what they want. I kind of want...

[14:41] Why don't I have what they want? They say that, actually, children start comparing when they're seven years old. That's when they start being aware that they're different to other people.

We moved to Hong Kong five years ago. And actually, what day is it today? 17th. I think we arrived today, five years ago. Yeah, I think we arrived today, five years ago. Ruben was six. And so he was just before that.

And I remember so clearly. We were so, so blessed. And we got into this school. And it was just a wonderful time. And then we would catch the MTR from TKO to Kowloon Tong, where the school was at.

And I remember Ruben asking me, shortly after he turned seven, he's like, oh, Daddy, why don't we have a car? Why don't we have a car? I said, well, Ruben, we don't need a car in Hong Kong. It's okay. We had a car in the UK.

He's like, oh, but we didn't have the car that all my friends have. I'm like, what's the difference with our car and your friend's car? Well, their cars do this. It opens up like this. And it was like, oh, oh, that's interesting.

[15:40] That's interesting that he starts to be aware and alert what other people have. And that really is the comparison that really then leads to jealousy. But then really, because I told him, it doesn't matter.

We don't need this. We have the big machine that does this on the MTR. That's even better. Our car could fit so many more people. And it's not a subjective traffic jam.

So it's good. Do you have comparison in your heart? If you're not fully joyful, and I think joy is a hard thing to come by. To have real joy.

I mean, Grace, I think you exhibit joy to me when I'm around you. I'm like, oh, she's joyful. It causes me to be joyful. A couple of weeks ago when we had Watoto, the kids were like, oh my goodness, that joy is infectious.

Absolutely infectious, right? And we had them over for our house for dinner. And they were just like, they don't have much, yet they have joy. And I think the joy is the most invaluable thing in the world. I'd said before, last year when I was in Nairobi and I was meeting kids, and they had kids who were living in the slums who don't have anything.

[16:40] And I just saw this group of kids just huddled around this one kid. Why? Because this one kid had a pair of rollerblades just as a gift to him. And of course, that pair of rollerblades had probably been passed down six different owners.

And it was completely falling apart, yet those kids had joy. And I was like, man, that is priceless. Not comparing anything. And yet here we are, they're just filled with joy.

Do you compare? Do you look around and go, well, people at my age, all those people at my age have this already, have that already. They're doing this already. That's the thing that stops us from

having joy.

Because comparison then leads to jealousy, which ultimately then leads to us just completely feeling as though we have this void. So in order to get to joy, I think we have to surrender any jealousy we have.

Elizabeth here, just read, just verse 41. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed, blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

[17:41] I don't know if I would be saying that if I was Elizabeth having waited years and years and years for a baby and now this teen mom relative that I have comes in and just has a baby too. It wouldn't be that.

I think I'd be just kind of holding my tongue. Oh yeah, yeah. We're the same. We're the same. We're not the same. And yet Elizabeth here is empty of all of that kind of jealousy. She has no comparison. She is just filled with joy.

Even before Mary arrives, her baby in her womb is leaping with joy. Comparison. Surrender that comparison if we want to have the joy that actually we so deeply need.

Joy comes when there is no more jealousy. The second thing I think is this. We also need humility. So first, surrender jealousy. The second thing that we need is we need to surrender humility. If we look at that verse, verse 42, Blessed are you among women.

Blessed is the fruit of your womb. And verse 43 says, And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? That is the humility that you'd need to have.

[18:42] Man! Elizabeth, respect. She's like the mother of my Lord. This humility that comes is what allows her to have the joy that she needs to have.

What is humility? Of course, the opposite, you could say, is pride. Now, when you compare, then you lead to jealousy. What you're actually saying is, actually, you're not happy with what God has given you.

Okay? So there is a discontent that you have. What you're really saying when you're comparing and looking is that, Huh, why do I get it? But why do they get that? There's an entitled aspect to this. Because you're like, Oh God, you know what you're actually saying? God, I don't think you're being fair. I don't think you love me. I don't think, I don't think I can trust you. That's what you're actually saying. There's the pride that's coming there.

But when you have humility and when you empty yourself of that, you're happy. You're happy. I'm happy, therefore, when I look at someone with a head full of hair who doesn't have their hair cut by God into this look now.

[19:41] And I'd be like, I'm happy for you that you have hair. I mean, of course, that's just a hair thing. Clearly, I'm over it. I don't need, I don't need, yeah, we're good, right? We're good, we're good. We're totally good. Humility.

If the comparison that leads to jealousy really is a discontent with God, humility is going, actually, God, I don't deserve anything. I'm so grateful for whatever you've given me.

That's a different kind of vibe. That's the thing that leads to joy. You see, verse 44, she doesn't only have it herself, Elizabeth, verse 44. For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Who's the baby? John the Baptist. John the Baptist, he comes, and he's a miracle in himself. And yet, in the womb, he is leaping for joy. He has a humility that actually is, I think, passed down from his mother.

And now, we know that when John the Baptist grows up, he is an intense man. He's living in the wilderness. He's dressed in a really interesting way. And yet, he is, he is fully humble.

[20:45] You see in John chapter 30, John chapter 3, sorry, verse 29 and 30, finally, John the Baptist grows up. So this is the same baby that jumped for joy in the womb. And then verse 29, he says this, John chapter 3, verse 29, the one who has the bride is the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. This leaping for joy at the beginning, even when he was still in the womb, is now complete because he gets to meet his risen Lord.

Well, he's not a risen Lord yet. Not yet. He meets his Lord. The joy of mine is now complete. And then the famous verse comes after that, he must increase, I must decrease. That is humility.

If you want joy, first, you surrender jealousy. Second, you embrace humility. You're like, oh God, I don't deserve anything at all. And yet, you would shower me with all the blessings that you've given me.

My joy is now complete. Just like John the Baptist has that kind of humility. His joy is completed, is peaking through the waiting, through the anticipation.

[21:50] He humbles himself because actually, what is pride? Pride is saying, I want this and I want it now. Right? Humility is saying, God, whatever you want, whenever you want to give it to me, I'll take it then.

That is what we're looking for. Of course, C.S. Lewis says, the famous quote about humility, humility is not thinking any less of yourself, it's simply thinking of yourself less. I think a lot of us struggle with joy because we're thinking of ourselves too much.

Because we're thinking of ourselves too much. And yes, some of us think a lot of ourselves too. But when we're thinking of ourselves too much, when we're just consumed of all our own thoughts, then that's what deprives us of joy. So if we want joy, then not only do we surrender jealousy, we embrace humility and we just stop thinking about ourselves.

Because here's the thing, joy is actually selfless. It's selfless. When you look beyond yourself, that is how you will get the joy that you want. And John the Baptist has this, I met Jesus, I'm looking at him, now my joy is complete.

He knows who he is. Now he's a miracle in himself. He has a whole band of followers that actually, he had a lot of hype and he had a lot of ability. And yet now Jesus comes, he's still filled with joy at that moment.

[23:06] Why? Because he's like, now my joy is complete. Hey, I'm only the best man here. So what is another part of humility? It's actually not only thinking of yourself less, it's simply knowing the truth about yourself.

So actually, the C.S. Lewis quote is the one that has been often used when describing humility. It's not thinking any less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less. The one that I love the most is humility is being as close to the truth as possible.

Humilitas es veritas is what it is. You see this term in a lot of places because it's humility is truth. It's knowing exactly who you are and who you're not. And in that humility, you will have joy because you know exactly what you're made for.

And so you don't need to look to the person next to you and go, well, why aren't I like them? Well, you don't need to be them because you are you. Right? So this is the path, this is the journey to joy. How do we surrender the jealousy? How do we surrender the comparison? And how do we embrace this humility? God, you have made me, you fearfully, wonderfully made me into this, whatever I am. It is unique and I am happy with it and I am content because you are my God and I am your child.

[24:10] That's what we should try and be going for. Truth allows you to be truly humble and it's true humility that gives you joy. Truth allows you to be humble and it's that truth that allows you to be truly filled with joy.

Have you ever noticed that people who are proud, have a think now, someone who's really proud in your eyes, do they ever seem joyful to you? No, just someone who's really proud just doesn't seem to be filled with joy because they're consumed with thinking about themselves.

It's interesting, isn't it? And yet those who don't think about themselves anymore, they start to be more filled with joy. Can we surrender that? And that carries on into that link between humility and joy passes on to Mary as well.

So they have their little screaming session because they're super excited seeing each other and then Elizabeth says what she says and then Mary jumps into this song. Her response is this song of praise, the Magnificat, and Mary says, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

That is the humility that you see in Mary that allows her to be filled with this joy. This baby in her womb, she refers to as my Savior.

[25:26] my soul magnifies, I've got this baby, actually it's a miracle in itself, yet actually my soul magnifies the Lord. Again, it's that humility that you see that allows both of these women to have the joy that we so crave.

If only we would just let go of ourselves, if only we would just let go of what we are seeing in other people. Filled with humility, she sings this song, my God, my Savior. Her humility is knowing that she needs saving.

This is interesting because again, earlier in Luke chapter 1, when angel Gabriel appears, the angel says, greetings, oh favored one, the Lord is with you.

She's favored. She's a good person and yet still she needs saving. I think so many of us, we don't have joy because we actually forget that we need saving.

Because if we were saved, if we truly understood of our need to be rescued, our need for a savior, we would be filled with joy when that savior comes. Because when we don't know that we're drowning, then we're like, oh, this sucks.

[26 : 31] But when you're drowning and someone comes to save you, you're suddenly filled with gratitude. You're like, whoa, if it wasn't for you, I would be dead. That's the same humility that met my savior. The baby in her womb, she knows is going to be her savior.

Here's the thing. How many of us really truly understand our need for a savior? Christmas might not fill us with joy because I think sometimes we don't really think we need a savior.

We're like, well, I'm doing fine. I'm doing okay. I'm treading water. But you don't know the joy that comes with being lifted out of the water so you don't have to tread water anymore. When you're trying to strain and strive and not drown, you don't know the gratitude that we all need in order to have this joy.

She carries on. Verse 47, my spirit rejoices in God my savior for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

This is Mother Mary going, he looked on me, the humble estate. Why don't we have joy sometimes? Because we're like, God, why don't you use me? I have so much going for me.

[27 : 44] I have so many gifts. I'm not being utilized. I'm not being maximized for the kingdom. We don't refer to ourselves as the humble estate. Don't we have that?

And then we're like, oh, you know, the stuff that I'm doing is not enough. I should be doing more for God. I should be doing all these crazy things because of my mind. I've got such an intellectual mind. I should be gifting people with this mind. And that's when you don't have joy. I'm so talented. I'm not saying this about me, by the way. I'm so talented musically.

Why isn't God using me more? Why isn't the church asking me to do more? Mary looks on herself as a humble estate. Pride is the thing that robs us of joy.

Comparison is the thing that robs us of joy. And it's in this society. I was just talking to Aaron the other day because it's hard doing ministry in Hong Kong because comparison is everywhere.

[28 : 42] Even when you're not with people. Even when you're just walking through the MTR. You're looking at all these posters that tell you all the things that you don't have. And you're like, oh, well, you don't have this.

Your teeth aren't as white as this guy's. You don't have this kind of family. You don't have this. And so you're just like, oh, oh, I don't have, I don't have, I don't have.

And then you meet people. You're like, oh, yeah, yeah, I'm doing this. I'm going to Naseko with my friends this weekend. I'm doing this. I'm doing that. I'm doing that. And you're just like, oh, oh.

Yeah, yeah. And then you're suddenly like, oh, I'm not happy. I'm not filled with joy because I'm constantly comparing. I'm constantly trying to think about myself. Elizabeth for Mary. Elizabeth for Mary.

No jealousy or humility. And then her song, which I won't have time to break down today, the final point is this. In order for us to have joy, we have to show gratitude. In order for us to have joy, we have to show gratitude.

[29 : 41] This song that Mary sings that just breaks out into freestyle rap, at least that's how I like to think it is. Because I can just imagine Elizabeth just starts beatboxing and then Mary starts to wrap this song out.

She's saying, actually, God, my Savior, he's done so many great things. He has done so, if you are lacking joy right now, maybe the first thing that you need to do is stop and go, actually, what are the blessings that he's given me?

Actually, what do I already have? Wait, I am sat here in church on a Sunday morning breathing without any pain in my body, or maybe there is some, but without excessive pain in my body.

And sorry, just to kind of be patronizing, and I can hear, and I can see, and I can speak, and I can eat food without, there are so many things to be thankful for.

For he who is mighty has done great things. What is she thanking? What is the holistic gratitude? It's not even really just about her, what the things the Lord has given to her. She's just giving thanks for who he is.

[30:50] If you look, verse 49, for he who is mighty, verse 50, and his mercy, verse 51, and his strength, and verse 52, and brought down the mighty from their thrones, for he, verse 53, and he is filled with hunger with good things.

She's giving thanks for him. That's what leads to the joy. That's the gratitude that we all need to have. She is focused completely away from herself onto him.

How much do we do that? A couple years ago, I was finding myself being a bit of a grumpy man. Of course, during the whole COVID, I think it was probably towards the end of 2020, and I was just like, everything sucks.

Life sucks, and it really doesn't, but we think it does. Maybe my harshest moment is for me, when the Lord kind of just gave me a little gentle or quite hard slap around the face, was when I was talking to some of my colleagues in Ukraine, and I started first in the sharing, in the little group sharing.

How's things in Hong Kong? I was like, man, things are rough. The restaurants are closing at six. I can only sit on a table of two. We can't even, we can't even, not allowed to go to Disneyland.

[32:02] Disneyland's closed. The happiest place in the world is closed, so I'm not happy. And then they're like, oh, yeah, that's a, yeah, yeah. Oh, James, sucks to be you.

Yeah. And then it was the Ukraine guys time, oh, also, sorry, James, I've got to go. There's a bomb that's just gone off right next to my house. And I was just like, okay, James, okay, James, you need to get a grip.

You need to get a grip. Man. And so what I did, actually, Christine and I, we did this, and those of you who've come to our house and had dinner with us, you'll know what we do. We do something called a gratitude journal.

Every night, every night, we'll sit around the table, actually, we'll just, before we go to sleep, and we'll write down something that we're thankful for. Every night, just like clockwork, we just have to do it. And there'll be days where it's kind of like, I mean, especially Alicia, she'll be like, oh, I don't know what I'm thankful for.

Like, we all have that moment, right? And I'm like, there's always something. The fact that we had dinner tonight, why don't we just put that in? The fact that you have a duvet, why don't we put that in?

[33:08] The fact that you have an incredible, awesome dad, why don't you put that in? In fact, I'll write it for you. There's always something to be thankful for.

If you don't do that, and you're lacking in joy, maybe that's the first tip. Just start a journal. Just go to Muji, that's what we do, buy a \$10 little book, and every day, just write one thing.

I think gratitude needs to be practiced. I think so often, we don't practice it. And so just force yourself. And of course, as adults, we don't just go for the low, let's really think about it. What are the things that we're actually thankful for?

What are the things that we see that God is doing? Because it's about not looking at ourselves, right? What are the things that God is doing that you're like, you know what? I am so thankful for that. I'm so thankful for a church community that likes to do this or that, or just the city that I'm in that I get to jump on an MTR that's clean, that has good signage.

Have you been to London and New York? Sorry, New York, but clearly the New Yorker is also okay me saying that. I mean, the subway in New York is just disgusting. It smells.

[34:15] It smells of something very interesting. And actually, I would say the London subway is, the tube is not that much better. And so when I came back to Hong Kong, I was like, oh. Aaron and I, we were walking together one day in the Hong Kong MTR and there was one moment where we were looking for a sign to go to one line.

I was like, we couldn't see it. And I was like, mildly outraged. I was like, this rarely happens. Because in Hong Kong, wherever you stand, I've got a feeling there's a staff, full-time staff dedicated to this.

Wherever you stand in the station, you should be able to see a sign to the exit, to the next line, or something because the signs are just so good. Right? But there was this moment where both him and I were just lost. We're like, we can't see where we're going.

Whereas in London, that's every station. Like, that's everywhere you go. You don't know where you're going. When you're struggling for joy, maybe the next thing to do is a small step.

It's just to think about the things that you are thankful for. Why does Paul, whilst in prison, knowing that this might be getting close to the end of his life, why does he keep talking about joy?

[35 : 21] Philippians 4, when he says, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. Why? Because the Lord is at hand. That's what we talked about last week, right? And so, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with what?

Thanksgiving. God, thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. He's rejoicing because he's keeping his mind on the things that are good and he tells you the secret afterwards.

after that passage, he says, finally, brothers, rejoice in the Lord, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything of excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

So, he's saying, he's telling you the secret to joy. Think about the things that you have. Think about the things that are true. Think about the things that are honorable. Think about things that are just and pure and lovely and commendable and anything if it's of excellence, anything worthy of praise, anything to be thankful for, think about those things.

I have authority over this because I'm lying in prison and I just got out of a beating session and I'm lying on the floor and my face is bloodied and yet I am thinking about the things that will give me joy. Do we have that?

[36 : 37] Show gratitude. Write gratitude. Think about it. Think about the things. Fill your mind with these things and that's why I always come across as being a hater for social media, which I am not.

I do like it. I think there are good things about it but actually social media, Instagram stops me at least from thinking about things that I need to think about and it forces me to always be comparing. Seriously, always. Every time I scroll I'm like I'm comparing. I'm like oh man. What a great life they're living. What a great latte they're having.

Oh I mean their barrister is so cool. Why is my barrister not like that? Whatever is true and honorable and just and pure. Think about those things.

Let us show gratitude. Why does Paul have this? Why does Elizabeth have this? Why does Mary have this? Why does John the Baptist have this? Why does John the Baptist say as soon as he sees Jesus and goes therefore now my joy is complete.

[37 : 38] I leapt for joy in the womb when I couldn't even see him but now I am complete because I'm staring at my savior. because I'm staring at him and he's the one who's going to bring all of this to completion.

It's funny actually both Elizabeth and Mary they say this just before just the final bit. Verse 45 for Elizabeth and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

And then verse 35 Mary's closing line is for he has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers to Abraham and to his offspring forever. What are both of these people having in common when they're talking about joy?

Why are they so happy? Why are they so filled with joy? Because they said God is good for his word. God fulfills his promises. They know what God has said. They know what God has promised them and they say hey this Jesus is the way that God is going to fulfill his promise.

What they're doing is why are they filled with joy? Because they can see the end of the story. They can see the end of the film where actually there is someone who comes to rescue. That's what fills them with joy.

[38 : 40] Do you believe that? That God is truly good and that's why that song was so good Sovereign Over Us. Do you believe that God is ultimately in control? Because when you believe that God is ultimately in control then you will have joy.

Because joy transcends everything that's happening right now. Why does John the Baptist have this joy that is complete? He's staring at his Savior in the eye and he knows what is going to happen.

Jesus just before he leaves John 15 he says I've told you all these things that you may have joy. John 16 he says and I've come to turn sorrow into joy.

Jesus is invested in your joy. Jesus wants you to be filled with joy because he wants you to know exactly who you are how loved you are.

He says I have said all these things that you may have joy. Let me see. John 15 verse 11 These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

[39:44] Jesus tells us these things. What does he tell us? He tells us that you are loved. Abide in him. Be with me. Stick close to me and you will have joy. So you can have my joy and then you will have joy to the full.

Who put your hand up if you want joy to the full? Yes. The real answer is everyone. We want this joy to the full and it has nothing to do with circumstances because you cannot you cannot stay in Disneyland Main Street 24-7.

Trust me. They close and they usher you out and there's a whole march of people that just pushes you out after the fireworks show. You cannot stay there. But you have joy because you know where you're heading to.

Not the Disneyland car park. You know that you're heading to a place where you'll be filled with this joy. What is this joy? He says my joy. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you. What is that joy? That is the joy of being in union with God. since the Garden of Eden where we turned our back on him. Jesus comes to bring joy that can only come through being with him.

[40:53] In the Psalms it says in your presence there is fullness of joy. In your presence there is fullness of joy. That is what he's wanting to give us. And I don't know where your life is right now.

You may be saying well James you don't know why I don't have joy because I have all this stuff happening in my life. Jesus covers that too I'm afraid. Because in Hebrews it says for the joy that was set before him he went to endure the cross.

So therefore because he went to endure the cross and died the death that you and I should have died because of the joy that was set before him that presence that he's aiming for all of us to have to break down that dividing wall of hostility that talks about in Ephesians 2 because of that joy that was set before him he says if I do this all my children will be united with their father again.

That was the joy that was set before him he went to the death. He went to death even death on the cross. So therefore and this is my final conclusion so therefore whether you are walking down Disneyland Main Street or whether you are walking in the valley of the shadow of death you will still have joy because he walked the road to Calvary because he walked the road to the cross and died the death that we should have died so we would have joy.

That's how the story ends. In that act on the cross he reunites all of us back with our father. Will you accept that?

[42:28] Will you embrace what he did? There may still be very many reasons why you're not happy. there will still be tons of things that give you sadness and grief when we lose loved ones or when colleagues are just annoying or when exams are happening.

These things we can be sad and filled with joy because of Jesus. So will you stop comparing? Will you stop looking at other people and going oh they're so much further than I in the life plan?

Do you realize that God has a plan for you? And so whether you are in Disney or whether you are in the Valley of Dry Bones it doesn't matter. So practical hold on points.

Stop comparing. Think about others more. Stop comparing. Think about if you catch yourself just thinking about yourself think about that's why we scatter. We gather and then we scatter.

Why? Well not just for our own joy but we scatter because we actually in the act the blessing of scattering is that in the act of looking at other people you will then be filled with joy because that's exactly what our Lord did as he looked upon us.

[43:47] Would you stay humble and think of yourself less? And finally would you start a gratitude journal and just thank him more? Just remind yourself to thank him every day.

there's something there's something to be thankful for. The moment he walked that road the moment he went to the hill and went onto that cross the earth shook.

He tore the veil and that simply means that you will then not be shaken by any circumstances that you can have a joy that is complete because of him. We've got some final things that I want to do as we finish here but why don't we just spend a moment now just to reflect.

Just to reflect which is the thing that I have to surrender? Is it the comparison? Is it the jealousy? Is it a humility that I need to lean more into? And what do I have to be thankful for?

Can we just spend a moment now and we'll respond and worship in silence. And maybe Ellie prepared a song maybe Ellie can come and sing that song over us as we reflect and respond.

[45:05] Jesus says You will be sorrowful but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth she has sorrow because her hour has come but when she has delivered the baby she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

So also you have sorrow now but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will ask nothing of me.

Truly, truly I say to you whatever you ask of the Father in my name he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full.

We're going to finish the service with something special actually because there is a