

**7 – Greater Joy**  
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Sometimes I agonize over what to preach. In this Greater series, I made a list of everything I could preach on involving the word greater. One of those subjects was greater joy, but I did not want to preach on joy because I've preached on it many times, including last Christmas.

But God gave me a dream. In this dream, I finished preaching and began the altar call. Suddenly, I started singing an old hymn I haven't thought of in years.

“At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,  
 And the burden of my heart rolled away,  
 It was there by faith I received my sight,  
 And now I am happy all the day!”

When I sang the phrase “burden of my heart” the Holy Spirit moved. People began flooding to the altar to give their burdens to the Lord. In my dream, the church had an overflow room and I went into the room and began singing At the Cross and people began running into the sanctuary to release their burdens.

I woke up from that dream feeling led to preach the sermon I did not want to preach entitled Greater Joy. You might wonder where I get that from the dream I experienced. Well, the two phrases that jumped out at me were “the burden of my heart rolled away” and “now I am happy all the day.” I saw a connection between joy and freedom from burdens. Specifically – the fact that burdens can steal your joy. We'll talk more about that later.

First I want to show you some passages that talk about greater joy. Psalm 4:7 says:

***You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine.***

This was written to a people whose economy and livelihood was based on agriculture. Having an abundant harvest was the most joyous time of their lives. So they understood what it meant when the Psalmist said God gives joy that is greater than a great harvest. This joy was greater than any other joy they could experience in life. And it's the same for us: **God's joy is greater than any other joy!**

Here's what Peter says about greater joy in 1 Peter 1:8-9.

***You love Him, though you have not seen Him. And though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.***

Inexpressible joy is joy that is greater than our capacity to describe! Joy that is greater than words! **Joy that is based in faith is greater than happiness which is based on circumstances.** In fact, joy is something we can have regardless of circumstances. Happiness comes and goes, but joy is greater because it endures.

There are two main biblical meanings of Joy. One is “rejoicing with a shout of gladness.” This means to experience and show great joy! The other biblical meaning of joy is “calm delight.” So, in the Bible you will find joyful people laughing, leaping, shouting, singing, dancing, playing instruments and celebrating. You will also find them full of a calm delight, even in tough times. **You see – joy is a choice. Just like being miserable is a choice.**

When the angel announced the birth of Christ, he said in Luke 2:10-11

***Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.***

The Greek word translated “great” here is “mega” which means “big, huge, exceedingly great.” Jesus came to earth to give us mega joy! But many of us don’t experience the greater joy that Jesus came to give us. Why is that? It’s because we have an enemy who comes to steal, kill and destroy and one of the main things he wants to steal is our joy. Why is that? It’s because he knows that Nehemiah 8:10 says:

***The joy of the Lord is your strength.***

He knows that if he steals our joy he steals our strength! But we must not allow the devil to steal our joy!

This week, I felt led to study what the Bible says about joy robbers. What things steal our joy? I did a search of every time the word joy is used in the Bible and there are many! I was looking for verses that had anything to do with greater joy and verses about the loss of joy. I found 35 passages – which is too many to preach in one sermon! Those 35 passages had 16 common themes about greater joy – still too many to preach in one sermon. So, I’ll preach briefly on seven of them today.

## **1- UNBELIEF CAN STEAL OUR JOY**

Romans 15:13 says:

***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.***

We are filled with joy AS we trust in God. Joy is a product of faith, not circumstances. Joy is more about what you believe than what you achieve. **It’s impossible to have true joy apart from faith.**

## 2- PRAYERLESSNESS CAN STEAL OUR JOY

John 16:23-24 says:

***I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in My name. Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be full and complete.***

If we don't pray we don't receive. We have not because we ask not. So, if you want joy, ask Jesus for joy and He will give you joy that is full and complete! Greater joy!

## 3- NOT SPENDING TIME IN GOD'S PRESENCE CAN STEAL OUR JOY

Acts 2:28 says:

***You have made known to me the paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.***

Joy is found in the presence of God. That's why Satan tries to keep people out of church. If he cannot succeed at that, he will try to keep them out of God's presence when they do go to church. How does he do that? By keeping them from praising! We praise our way into God's presence, so -

## 4- LACK OF PRAISE CAN STEAL OUR JOY

Psalm 42:4-5 says:

***My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be: I walked among the crowds of worshipers, leading a great procession to the house of God, singing for joy and giving thanks amid the sound of a great celebration! Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise Him again—my Savior and my God!***

verse is about someone who stopped going to church and stopped praising God. Sometimes those things go together! And that can cause us to lose our joy!

And when this person realized what they had lost from not going to church and not taking part in corporate praise, they knew what to do! To start praising God again. You must get your praise back to get your joy back!

There are many Bible verses that tell us to sing for joy or shout for joy. The word "for" has two main meanings: "the cause of: or "because of". So - we can sing or shout because we have joy. Or we can sing and shout to cause joy! Either way, we should be singing and shouting for joy!!!

## 5- DISOBEDIENCE / LACK OF LOVE CAN STEAL OUR JOY

In John 15:9-11 Jesus said:

***As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If***

***you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full and overflowing.***

**Obedience to God results in joy.** Jesus said that the greatest command is to love God and love people. When we love God, we obey God. When we obey God, we love others. And loving God and loving people gives us joy. Not just any kind of joy, but a much greater, fuller, complete joy!

Notice that **Jesus said that when we obey – His joy would be in us!** Not our own joy, but His very own joy! The kind of joy that enabled Him to endure the cross! That is the greatest kind of joy that has ever existed and Jesus wants to give it to you! That's why Satan tries to steal it!

Satan does not directly take this joy from us! He knows that joy comes when we obey God's commands to love Him and love people. So, the enemy tries to get us to disobey the will of God. He tries to get us upset with people to the place where we do not obey God's command to love them and forgive them. When he does that – we lose our joy.

The only way to get it back is through repenting to God and to others. The way to get it back is by receiving God's forgiveness and by forgiving those who wrong us. Until we do that, we will have no joy!

## **6- NOT SPENDING TIME IN THE WORD CAN STEAL OUR JOY**

Psalm 19:7-8 says:

***The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.***

God's word shows us the secret to contentment, joy, and rest. His word offers hope to the hopeless, faith to the fearful, strength to the weary and joy to those weighed down by the burdens of life. So, to get your joy back, get back in the word!

## **7- BURDENS CAN STEAL OUR JOY**

Synonyms for burdens include problems, weights, worries, and concerns. So, a burden is anything that can weigh you down and steal your joy. Burdens are common to us all. Maybe it's financial burdens – like when you don't have enough money to pay your bills. Or, maybe you have debt and it seems like you'll never pay it off.

Then there are marriage burdens. Marriages take a lot of work, time and energy. If you have children that can be a whole other set of burdens. You're responsible for them spiritually, emotionally and physically.

Life is full of responsibilities and sometimes the burdens just seem too heavy to bear. The great thing is that Jesus sees our burdens, weariness and struggles. AND He cares about what we're going through. 1 Peter 5:7 says:

***Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.***

The word cast means to throw upon, or place upon. God tells us to cast all our cares on Him. The problem is that we usually cast our cares and then take them back. This made me think of fishing because fishing involves casting a net or casting a hook. When you cast a hook, you must reel it back in.

Many of us do that with our cares – we cast them on God then we reel them back in. When we do that – we are placing the burden back on ourselves. Another word for cares is anxiety. Psalm 94:19 says:

***When anxiety was great within me, Your comfort brought joy to my soul.***

God wants to replace our anxiety with greater joy! For that to happen we must do what the Amplified Version of 1 Peter 5:7 says:

***Cast the whole of your care (all your anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns, once and for all) on Him, for He cares for you affectionately.***

Cast them once for all and leave them there! If you reel it back, keep casting it back because you will never have joy if you are weighed down with burdens and cares and worries. The fact that we keep taking them back shows that we don't really trust God with our burdens. We think we should be doing something about it. But what we should do is what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30.

***Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***

Jesus shows us how to lay our burdens down and find rest in spite of the pressures of life. First He says: COME TO ME. Thayer's Greek Lexicon says this literally means "come now." Not later or when it's convenient or when you feel like it...but now. **The time to come to Jesus is always "Now!"**

Also notice Jesus doesn't say He will come to you. He says you must come to Him. And here's the criteria - all who are weary and burdened. Some of us think we must first deal with our burdens before we come to Christ. But He says to bring your burdens to Him and He will give you rest.

Jesus never promised life would never be difficult. We all have jobs to do and responsibilities in life. Sometimes these responsibilities weigh us down. We get weary, overwhelmed and burdened.

At these times...if we will come to Him... He will give us rest! **True rest is only in Jesus Christ.** You see the world tells us that the absence of stress or conflict brings rest... so we try to escape situations that burden us. But escaping only adds a whole other set of stresses and conflicts.

Instead, Jesus wants us to rest in the midst of stress and conflict. And that rest is found when we come to Him, trust Him, have faith in Him, and give our burdens to Him. Next Jesus says: TAKE MY YOKE.

First we come to Jesus, then we take. What a paradox this is - Jesus is asking someone who is already burdened to take a new weight in order to find rest. He tells us to take His yoke upon us.

A yoke is carved piece of wood that is fitted to the shoulders of two animals (usually oxen) and it binds them together. It is used to control and guide animals so they are more effective. The stronger animal would carry most of the weight of the yoke and gently guide the weaker animal. The yoke forced the weaker animal to follow the stronger one.

When we “take His yoke”, we are bound together with Christ. And Jesus is the stronger one. So when we are yoked with Him we must follow Him. That’s because **when we are yoked with Christ - He is determining the direction we go, the speed we go, and He is providing the power to go!**

Being yoked with Christ is a good thing because Matthew 11:30 says: ***For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.***

When we are yoked with the Lord our work is easy compared to trying to do all the work ourselves.

When we take His yoke we also get His burden. So what exactly is His burden? This might seem strange, but Strong’s Concordance says that the Greek meaning for the word burden is an invoice as part of freight or a task or service. You’re probably thinking, “What?” But think about it.

An invoice is a bill that is due for services rendered. If you ship something, then you have the burden of paying for it. If the bill is big, the burden to pay could be a heavy burden.

**The reason why the yoke of Christ is light is because He has already paid it all!** When Jesus died He said, “It is Finished!” That literally means, “paid in full.”

If Jesus paid in full the debt of your sin, why are you still trying to pay? Christ has already paid for every sin you have ever or will ever commit. He took our debts – nailed them to the cross and paid them in full! So, stop trying to add to the finished work of Christ. There’s nothing more you can do!

Trying to do that is like having your car paid off – yet you want to keep making payments. The bank says, “It’s already paid in full” – but you want to pay more. None of us would pay more on a paid off debt.

Yet many people try to do that spiritually. **Christ has already paid for every sin you have ever or will ever commit. Everything that was against us is wiped out, erased, taken away, nailed to the cross and no longer remembered!** And when we truly believe that, it results in greater joy!

**So, stop trying to make yourself pay for what is already paid in full!** Stop carrying the burdens that Christ wants to carry for you!

It’s like the old story about the driver of a wagon who was on his way to market when he saw an old man carrying a heavy load. He had compassion for him and invited the old man to ride in the wagon. Gratefully the old man accepted.

After a few minutes, the driver turned to see how the man was doing. To his surprise, he found him still straining under the heavy weight, for he had not taken the burden off his shoulders.

The driver said, “Sir – set that load down – there’s no need to carry it anymore.” The old man responded, “Oh no, I couldn’t expect that. You were kind enough to give me a ride. I would not expect you to carry my load too.” The old man failed to understand that once he was in the wagon – everything he was carrying was in the wagon also. And **many Christians fail to learn that once you are in Christ – He carries all the baggage you bring with you!**

He carries all your burdens, so why are you continuing to struggle under their weight?

Why struggle under the burden of worry when you can cast your cares on the Lord, for He cares for you!

Why struggle under the burden of lack when all your needs are met in Christ!

Why struggle under the burden of fear when God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind!

Why struggle under the burden of condemnation when you are the righteousness of God in Christ!

I ask you today to come to Him, cast your burdens on Him, take His yoke and will you enter into His rest and receive greater joy!