The Joy of Love

Love the Way Jesus Taught It

By Steve Viars

Bible Text: John 16:16-33
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Many of us experience the joy of watching a little baby be brought into the world. I've often wondered how a person could go through an event like that and not have a profound belief in the power of God because his creative majesty is on such incredible display when a baby is born. When my wife, Chris, was pregnant with our first daughter, Bethany, it was a very busy time in our lives. I had graduated from Grace Seminary here in Indiana, we had moved out to New Jersey where I was working on my final degree at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, Chris was working hard to help pay for my tuition. I was also serving as a Christian school administrator and an assistant pastor along with my academic work so we were running and we were running hard and then the great news came that we were expecting our first child. But Chris's pregnancy was difficult. She was very, very sick from day one and we were kind of holding out for the, "Well, after the first trimester, it will be better." It didn't happen that way in our particular situation, actually her particular situation. I need to be really careful on this one. She was very sick the entire nine months.

Then the due date came and went and so finally the doctors decided to induce labor so we got to the hospital that morning and it seemed like everyone else had decided to have a baby that day as well. So, they didn't even have enough rooms so they're setting up hospital beds in the hallways with these little moveable privacy curtains around the beds which are anything but private and so you have these young moms in labor screaming out in pain. Those sounds are just roaring down the hallways. That'll get the attention of a young couple who's never had a baby before. Then they started Chris on the medicines to induce the pregnancy and the good news is that the contractions became very strong very quickly. The bad news was the contractions were not having the desired effect so she's going through all this terrible pain all day long and not getting any closer to being able to deliver our baby.

Another complicating factor was that the doctors and the nurses were so busy because they had so many patients there that they really weren't coming into our hospital room very often. I know this will surprise you but I sort of just took charge of the operation in their absence. In fact, at one point the doctor came in and I was sitting on that little stool,

you know, with the wheels on the bottom, kind of directing the whole operation. He taps me on the shoulder and says, “Do you mind if I sit there for a minute?”

Then at the height of her contractions, one of my good friends shows up with a cheese steak hogie from our favorite hogie shop for me. He said he realized Chris probably wouldn't be able to eat but he was really concerned about me getting hungry in the middle of this ordeal. If I could just offer some advice to you young husbands out there: there are about 100 reasons why it would be wise for you to instruct your best friend not to bring an onion laced cheese steak hogie into the room for you while your wife is trying to deliver one of your children. Just write that down somewhere, okay? That little tip will serve you well.

Eventually Bethany was born. She came out screaming her head off and Chris is holding her trying to console her. She's screaming her head off and then eventually I took Bethany in my arms and she immediately quieted down and actually smiled and somebody took that picture at that very moment. It was quite an ordeal. Quite an ordeal for sure and I’m not going to lie and tell you that Chris immediately said, “Hey, let's do that again.” But like any mother, the joy of our baby being born overshadowed the anguish of the birth and here's why I raise that this morning: it's because Jesus uses this exact same picture to teach his followers important truth. They are about to experience the grief of their Master being put to death and even after that, they are going to live in a world where there is trial and tribulation but because of the provisions that are being made for them, their focus doesn't have to be on the pain and the misery, their focus can be on the joy that comes because of what that death accomplished.

With that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible this morning to John 16. That's on page 86 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you. We're in the New Testament this morning so please turn to John 16 or to page 86 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you and that will bring you to John 16. Our church's theme this year is “Loving Our Neighbors” and so the last several weeks, we've been working our way verse-by-verse through the Upper Room discourse which is the marvelous and intimate conversation that Jesus has with his disciples before going to the cross. We've been calling this “Love the Way Jesus Taught It” for a lot of reasons including the fact that the Apostle John introduces these verses by saying, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having,” here it is, “loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” Love the way that Jesus taught it.

Last Sunday we heard from one of the graduates of our Faith Bible Seminary, Sasha Mendez, from Brazil who spoke to us about the challenges of love because Jesus says in the verses preceding the ones that we're going to study this morning, “if the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you.” And we're still called and empowered to love those who might choose to view us or treat us like that.

This morning we're going to study the latter half of chapter 16 which are Jesus' final words to his disciples before, in chapter 17, he directs his words to the Father and, Lord willing, we'll study that on Easter Sunday morning, next Sunday, together. But we're calling the latter part of chapter 16 "The Joy of Love" because this dynamic is very similar to what is experienced by a young mother after having given birth to her little baby. I think that will become very clear as we read. John 16, beginning in verse 16,

> "16 'A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.' 17 Some of His disciples then said to one another, 'What is this thing He is telling us, "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me"; and, "because I go to the Father"?' 18 So they were saying, 'What is this that He says, "A little while"? We do not know what He is talking about.' 19 Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, 'Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, "A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me"? 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament," just like a mom when she's giving birth, "you will weep and lament but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. 21 Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. 22 'Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice," and here's a promise, "and no one will take your joy away from you.'"

Here's the reasons that's true, verse 23,

> "23 'In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive," here it is again, "so that your joy may be made full."

Second reason, verse 25,

> "25 'These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. 28 I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.' 29 His disciples said, 'Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. 30 Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God.' 31 Jesus answered them, 'Do you now believe? 32 Behold, an

> hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.'"

Now, not everybody is in agreement about what Jesus meant in verses 16-22 when he said how in a little while the disciples would no longer see him and then again after a little while they would see him. And there is no cardinal doctrine at stake on that particular point but the position that we're going to take this morning is consistent with what we studied several weeks ago about what happened after the resurrection, namely, that Jesus remained on the earth for how many additional days? Forty additional days ministering to his disciples after he had risen from the dead and then as Luke explains in the first chapter of the book of Acts, promised that the Holy Spirit would be given to them after his ascension. A promise that was fulfilled ten days later on the day of Pentecost.

So, plug all that back into the verses we read, the point of verse 16, "A little while, and you will no longer see Me," was referring to his pending death on the cross for our sins and Jesus made it clear that when that death occurred, the world of people who had been crying out for his crucifixion would rejoice while they, his followers, would simultaneously grieve. Their pain would be similar, he says, to that of a mother giving birth to a baby. But then, three days later, he would rise from the dead. There is some good news, huh? And after that little while, they would see him again beginning his post-resurrection ministry culminating with the gift of the promised Holy Spirit of God. The net effect, according to verse 22 would be, "your heart will rejoice and," here's a promise, "no one will be able to take your joy away from you."

Now, I would suggest that statement is shocking for dozens of reasons including the fact of everything that Christ could have been focusing on at that particular moment. His attention is on the sufficiency of the provision for them. For them. Yes, you will grieve because of what's about to happen to me and from last week's verses, you're going to grieve because you're living in a world that will sometimes hate you and from the end of the verses we just read, you'll also be grieved because of a world which sometimes includes trial and tribulation. So, there are lots of reasons potentially to grieve but Jesus' love for them and for us includes such significant provision that they and we are still able to rejoice. We're able to rejoice.

Well, that's quite a promise. How is that true and what does it mean for people like you and me to actually act on that today? That's what I want to talk to you about this morning. Three reasons we can have joy because of our loving Savior's provision. I would encourage you to think about this last week and to ask yourself how joyful were you and whether or not you have access to these provisions and whether or not you were making full benefit of these provisions.

Three reasons we can have joy because of our loving Savior's provision: the first one is the joy of answered prayer. Now, I need to say to you that there are some very important theological issues at stake in these verses that have actually set biblical Christianity, especially as it has been articulated after the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s. It sets us apart from other religions and I'm not interested in getting into some sort of a spitting match here this morning with somebody else but I want to be sure that we all understand the nature and the significance and ultimately the implications of the provisions that Christ made for us. No one will be able to take your joy away from you, Christ promised, because of your unfettered access to the Father. The Lord is preparing them for the day he will no longer be physically present among them. That's why he said in verse 23, "You will not question Me about anything." Why? Because he will no longer be physically present. But, then he says, "Truly, truly," which is Bible speak for listen up to this, "if you ask the Father for anything He will give it to you," because your sin will be forgiven and because Christ's righteousness can be directly placed on your account. As a follower of Jesus, you can walk directly into the throne room of God the Father.

The Apostle Paul would later explain this in those crucial three chapters, the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians where he helps us to understand the gospel indicatives. He helps us to understand who we are in Christ. He helps us to understand our identity and he talks about this matter of access. He says in Ephesians 2:18, "For through Him," Christ, "we both have our access," there it is, "in one Spirit to the Father." Or, Ephesians 3:12, "In whom we have boldness and," here it is again, "confident access through faith in him." That's why it was so important and miraculous that the heavy veil in the temple was torn in two after Jesus died for us. We sang about that earlier today and the symbolism could not have been clearer about what was accomplished for us. Thread it all together: yes, you live in a world that sometimes hates you but you can still find the strength and the wisdom to overcome that hatred with love as hard as that might seem in the heat of the moment. Why? Because you have unfettered access to the Father and as counter-intuitive as that may seem, to treat others differently than they are choosing to treat you, when you benefit from your unfettered access to the Father or you pray about that and you receive wisdom and strength to do differently, ultimately, here's the promise: your heart will be filled with joy. There is no joy in retribution. There is no joy in giving that other person a piece of your mind. There is no joy in getting even. And you and I both know it's like gravel in your mouth to respond to the sin of others in an equally sinful way. But when you make benefit of your provision, unfettered access to the Father and you pray about that and then you act on what God's word would tell you to do and you empower, you choose to benefit from the power that God gives you in prayer, yeah you do it differently but you end up with joy.

Theologically we're talking about the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. Peter said it this way in 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen race. You are a," what? "A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." You have direct and unfettered access to the Father. That theme is especially prevalent in the book of Hebrews which explains the sufficiency and superiority of Christ to a group of

persons, believe it or not, who are actually thinking about going back to the Old Testament temple worship and the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 4, “Therefore since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession for we don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin. Therefore,” here it is, “let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.”

Now, I realize, you might say, “You know, this is just arcane theology that really has no practical implication to the way I live today.” Listen, I’ve seen with my own eyes men and women crawling across a cobblestone courtyard as long as a football field on their knees trying to earn merit before God so that then their prayers would be heard. I've looked at walls filled with paintings the size of license plates that you might put on the back of your car that were testimonials by persons about how they cried out to Mother Mary or how they cried out to some saint and their prayers were then answered. You can look over that entire wall of statements like that in vain to see any mention of Jesus, in vain to see any mention of the Father. That's because in some religions the notion is that you have to earn merit before your prayers will be heard thus the bloody knees, literally, in the cobblestone courtyard. Or the belief that God the Father is aloof and unreachable and God the Son is primarily concerned about justice in this world and the person who is truly compassionate and easy to relate to as Mother Mary or one of the lesser saints, so we can and should pray to them or through them.

That was one of the primary issues in the Protestant Reformation and this church, certainly, is reformed in the sense that we affirm joyfully the great solas of the Protestant Reformation, believing that salvation is by grace alone, sola. Sola Gratias, and that salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone. Listen friend, in case you say, “Well, you're just belaboring a theological argument that doesn't affect us,” there is no joy in legalism and there is no joy in praying to or through the wrong person and all that sadness and all that emptiness is entirely unnecessary because of the finished work of Christ. As a believer priest you have unfettered access to the Father.

Now, you might say, “Well, does that mean I can pray for anything I want and God is somehow obligated to give it to me?” Well, you may have noticed if you're following along carefully in your Bible that I’ve actually not commented on three very important words in this text. It's the words “in my name.” The point being the potential trajectory of your prayers is why you can also have joy. “In that day you will not question me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything,” here it is, “in my name, He will give it to you.” What does that mean? Well, when you choose to become a follower of Christ, you're committing to die to yourself, right? So, it's not about what you want anymore. You're committing to die to yourself and to be resurrected as something a whole lot better, resurrected to new life in him and for him and through him.

So, prayer is not an issue of bending or conforming God's will to yours, it's a matter of bending and conforming your will to his. But as you are praying in that way, for and about things that matter most to God in your heart and in your life, as he chooses to answer those prayers, the net effect will be abundant and lasting joy. It's because of the power and efficacy of the name of Jesus. When you come to the Father clothed in the righteousness of his Son, with the Holy Spirit resident in your heart, praying that God's purposes will be accomplished in you in that particular situation, friend, get ready for some marvelous things to occur and get ready for your heart to be filled with joy that no one can take away from you as you watch those prayers answered.

Just take last Lord's day as an example. We had a marvelous time in the house of God. I hope you were here with our church family last Sunday to enjoy it but just think about what happened throughout that day: we had the privilege of hearing from Sasha Mendez, one of our seminary graduates who is now serving the Lord with his wife and family in the country of Brazil. Think about how many people from this church prayed that we would be able to launch that kind of a ministry and how people have walked right into the throne room of God and asked him to bless our efforts to train people for ministry around the world. And the news we recently gave you that our seminary has now been approved for candidate status with a national accrediting body because humanly speaking, of the tremendous work of Pastor Aucoin and Pastor Green and their board. Then, last Sunday, to see the proof that is in the pudding in the lives of one of our graduates, our hearts were filled with joy.

Do we have some hard things going on in the background of our lives? Sure, we all do. Do we have some people in the fringes of our life who might hate us? Perhaps. Are we facing some tribulations? Of course. But as we see evidence of answered prayer all around us, our hearts are filled with joy.

Last Sunday night we had 39 persons joining our church including 25 who followed the Lord in Believer's Baptism. Well, what do we pray about as a church? Please tell me every day you go into the throne room of God and ask him that he would use you and that he would use us to draw men and women in this community to himself. Well, what does that mean? The persons whose testimonies we heard last Sunday night are flesh and blood answers to that prayer and whatever we might have going on in the background of our lives, you sit there and you listen to those stories and your heart cannot be but filled with joy. God answers prayer.

We also last Sunday night enjoyed students from Faith Christian School as part of our worship time and there are some old-timers around here and I’m not going to point them out right now but that's just what they are. They might be pointing at me too, I don't know, but there are some old-timers around here who could talk about how this church prayed about that possible ministry for years. Not days, not months, years. Think about that. Can you imagine what was going on in their hearts last Sunday night as they listened to those young people give testimony to what Jesus Christ means to them. You're blown

away. How could you not have hearts filled with joy? You're blown away by those flesh and blood answers to prayer.

Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions about that while we're in this neighborhood? One would be this: have you placed your faith and trust in Christ so that you can have the kind of unfettered access to the Father that we're seeing in this passage? I wonder if we have some bloody cobblestone or bloody knees in the cobblestoned courtyard type people who will be with us today who are trying to earn merit before God on your own effort. Legalism will never satisfy. God or you. I wonder if we have persons who are trying to have a relationship with God apart from the truth that exists in his word. Friend, I would just urge you today and I know it's hard because it's an acknowledgment that you can't save yourself, it's an acknowledgment that you need not only a Savior but a Lord. That's not easy for independent Americans to say but Jesus said, "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. No man comes to the Father but by me." And the promise is that if you place your faith and trust in Christ today if you never have before, you will have unfettered access to the Father and there will be the possibility of great, great joy.

Christian friend, can I ask you this? Are you taking advantage of the privilege? I mentioned a moment ago I hope every person from this church every day asks God to give us wisdom and strength as a church and as individuals to impact men and women in our community for the cause of Christ. I wonder how many people who are listening to this message, "I haven't prayed about that for a long, long time. In fact, I haven't prayed about anything ever in a long, long time." Well, what do you think I would say to you as your pastor with a smile on my face because I'm so sweet? Get with it, for crying out loud. You don't want to miss the benefit of the provision that has been made for us at the cross. I would encourage you this week to be crying out to God for his blessing on the Passion Play and pray that God would give strength to the many men and women who have been serving so faithfully already, for the many men and women who their lives are going to be a whirlwind this week. And don't say this, "Well, we've been doing it a long, long time. We don't really need God's blessing anymore." If I stood here and said that, you would rush the pulpit, grab me, pummel me and throw me in the dumpster, right? If I said that, you should. I might do it to myself. Well, sometimes we act like we believe that by our lack of prayer and, therefore, lack of joy.

I would encourage you to be praying. We set out for this five years with all kinds of initiatives. I hope you think about that from time to time. We tried to make this as nice as possible so our church family from time to time would look at what we ask God to help us do over the next five years. Well, they are aggressive initiatives and they ought to be. Are you praying about that? Are you asking God to help us accomplish what we believe he wants us to accomplish in these coming days.

I often think about this as a pastor and I'm not saying that this is literally possible but I do think about this: what would happen if you got to heaven and Jesus said, "Would you like to see the room labeled everything I would have done for you if you just would have asked?" I don't want to see that room. In fact, I'm afraid it wouldn't be a room. I'm afraid

it might be a warehouse. Now, I'm not saying that literally that exists but it certainly challenges me and I hope it challenges you because maybe one of the reasons we worry so much, maybe one of the reasons we fret so much, maybe the reason we are sometimes filled with anxiety and run around trying to figure things out ourselves and therefore lack joy is because we don't take advantage of the provision that was made for us in the cross.

Now, what's the second possible reason for joy in this text? The answer is the joy of understandable truth. Jesus spoke in figurative language for a variety of reasons including judgment for those who were rejecting his message and rebelling against his word but after the baby is born, in this case, after he has died and resurrected from the dead as he said on several occasions already in this discourse, the Holy Spirit is going to be given. Understand that logically. What that means is: the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit changes our relationship to the truth. John would later say it like this, "But you have an anointing from the holy one that you all know. As for you, the anointing which you have received from him abides in you and you have no need for anyone to teach you but as his anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie and just as it has taught you, you abide in him." Here's the point of that: some of the concepts the disciples had struggled with throughout the public teaching ministry of Christ, they're finally going to make sense to them and the subsequent way in which they passionately pursued the mission that God had given them demonstrates they finally got it. They finally got it. So much so that in the book of Acts, their critics would accuse them of, do you remember? Turning the world upside down with the good news of Jesus Christ and the new life that is available in and through him. That brought them joy.

Also the Trinitarian emphasis in this passage's discussion of truth. I want to be sure while we're in the Upper Room discourse that we don't miss John 15:26-27. Jesus explained when the helper, that's the Holy Spirit, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father," now, if you're in the habit of writing in your Bible, I would underline these next words, "He will," that is, the Holy Spirit, "will testify about Me," about Jesus, "and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning." You say, "Why is that important?" Here's why: any time you hear someone talking about the Holy Spirit as an end in himself, that's out of balance and that kind of mysticism will not produce lasting joy. The Holy Spirit's role is to work in a way that always magnifies God's Son. But as that's happening, your ability to understand truth, your ability to know truth and most importantly, your ability to act on truth is going to grow exponentially and the result is magnificent joy.

We saw evidence of that this past Sunday night as person after person spoke about how the Lord helped them finally understand the truth. Two of those testimonies came from Annette and Pete Brown. Let me remind you of some of what they said. Annette said, "I spent my whole life being told I was a Christian." Well, that's not true but that's what she was told. "It wasn't until my family and I started coming to Faith that anyone asked me if I was." That's kind of interesting. "I spent a lot of time trying to make sure I was really ready to accept Jesus as my Savior. I struggled with all the worldly temptations and false idols I had gotten so comfortable with over the years. After taking the Intro to Faith class

this past November, I tried to write my testimony. I realized then that my doubts and temptations were just proof that I was a sinner. In other words, I didn't know Christ and I had lost my way and my focus on God. One verse I had highlighted in my Bible a few years earlier was Romans 10:9, 'If you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." She went on to say it seemed too simple. You know, God's truth often does. "It seemed too simple but I stopped and prayed first for forgiveness for my sins and for taking so long to come to him. Then a prayer of thanks for Jesus' sacrifice so I would be saved. Thanks also to all my friends," she said, "at Faith who encouraged me along the way." That's part of what we're talking about this morning: the joy of understandable truth. And what you saw in Annette last Sunday night was incredible joy as a result. And you saw a church family who was rejoicing with her because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The gospel can be understood.

Then her husband, Pete, said this, "I grew up with family connections to a community church, attending and volunteering sporadically. I felt like I was a good person with a good heart, sprinkling in good deeds as I maneuvered my way through life but rarely gave much real or intentional thought to being a Christian or how my poor choices aligned with the teachings of Christ and his ultimate sacrifice. Looking back on most of my life, I had worn a Christian facade, putting on a decent front when called upon to do so but mostly sinning full steam ahead." It's fascinating, the way to say that, by the way. "I believe that I had control of my life and the thought of needing God was usually a distant after thought. It did take several years, several churches, several roles and several moves before we arrived in Lafayette. My family and I began attending Faith shortly into our time here and I was immediately taken by what I was learning, truth, and observing. The greater Faith Church family engaged us like no other had in the past and included us in classes, fellowship, community and volunteering opportunities. God had brought us here to enrich our lives and open our hearts to his presence as these," what? "Truths that began to come to light, I was feeling God's presence increasing in my life, I started to fear how I was measuring up in his eyes. I had been a sinner since birth." That's a little different than what he thought at the beginning. "Never fully understanding what was required to receive his grace until I was exposed to the re-occurring message that God's gift provided for me by the death of his sinless Son, Jesus Christ, was right in front of me the whole time. I couldn't receive it by my deeds alone but I needed to ask the Father for that gift. On February 28, 2013," he said, "in our dentist's office waiting area, I gave my life to the Lord and received Jesus Christ as my Savior. From the outside, it wasn't the theatrical experience I had imagined it would be being surrounded by kids with new braces and people debating insurance coverage. But inside I was thanking him for this gift that I could never repay, for my life and family, asking forgiveness for my sins and that he continued to guide me toward being a better parent, husband and community member. I had become a Christian according to God's will." That's true. "And while I still have much to learn and improve upon, I know that he is with me and providing many priceless resources at Faith."

You see, that's what Jesus was saying to his disciples. It's possible to understand truth because of the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit pointing your heart to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and when persons choose to believe the truth, their hearts are filled with joy. And when we get to observe it as a church family, people who are agreeing with Christ, "I am the way, the truth and the life," our hearts are filled with joy as well.

Time doesn't allow me to do this but there are so many examples of Christian men and women in this church family who this past year could point to a truth from the word that they latched onto in a new way and as a result, were able to put off a sinful habit and replace it with a godly one and this morning, right here in the Easter season, are able to rejoice. Why? Because of the understandable nature of the truth of God. And they would say that even if there's someone in their life who is hating them right now or they are facing some kind of tribulation, they are delighting just like the Psalmist, "I delight in your law. It was good for me that I was afflicted that I might learn your statutes, your truth. The law of your mouth, the truth, is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."

There is the joy of answered prayer, there is the joy of understandable truth and lastly there is the joy of comforting peace. Friend, do you believe that this morning? That in Christ you can have peace? Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you so that in me you might have peace. In the world you'll have tribulation but take courage, I have overcome the world." John MacArthur summarized this text well when he said, "Answered prayer based on the finished work of Jesus Christ and springing from an obedient life is a powerful force in turning sorrow into joy."

Many of us have been praying for Beth Hopper. I asked Beth if she would tell us some of her story. Let me read it for you as we conclude our time together. Think about whether Jesus kept his promise regarding peace. She said, "In October of 2012, I discovered a lump under my chin. After several months of general practitioner visits, ear, nose and throat specialists, rounds of antibiotics and an ultrasound, I was told that it could just be my normal, that my jowls were going to just be larger than normal. I wasn't really sure this was normal so I talked the ENT into removing the lump. On June 25, 2013 I had the lump removed from my submandible. I just started attending a newer ABF. I felt like I had outgrown the career class at the age of 34, so John and Susan Blake's foundation's ABF seemed to be a good fit for me so I began attending this class with one of my good friends, Melissa Malding. It was during this class that I offered to sign up to make a meal for a Family Promise." That's our ministry to homeless families, by the way, led by David and Sylvia Anderson.

She said, "I had never done this before but I was determined to be more involved in different ministries and not to get too comfortable with what I knew. On July 3, 2013 I was to deliver this meal to the church but I had a quick follow-up surgery appointment that I needed to run to first. Ultimately, it was at this appointment that I was told I had cancer. The lump that was removed was a tumor called adenocystic carcinoma. I thank God that he orchestrated me to go to the church that night right after the doctor's

appointment. I fell into Sylvia Anderson's arms a heaving mess and I passed off the meal to her for this homeless family and told her I obviously was no good to be company for the family upstairs. She prayed with me and offered such comfort."

Then Beth said, "For the first hour, I admit, I took to the internet and I scoured what I could find about this kind of cancer and I cried quite a bit too. But then I stopped and had a talk with God. I prayed, 'Lord, I know you are in this. You are providing me the opportunity to learn from this trial. Open my eyes and heart to learn all I can and grow closer to you. You are in control. This was no surprise and I know that you will work this for my good. Help me to remember this.'"

She said, "I called my family and my friends first, then my deacon to say that it looks like I have the opportunity to start leaning on others and then I started living it. I called Melissa and let her know. She said we could talk to Joe Blake before class and make the announcement to the class so they could begin praying for me. Again, I thank God for providing me the opportunity to be part of the body at Faith. I've been prayed over by countless pastors, sent Scripture by most of the pastors' wives to meditate on and have developed an even stronger relationship with my worship pastor and his family through this experience. My ABF, the foundation's class, wow, I was absolutely floored by how they loved on me. From the very beginning, my class offered to make me meals, do my laundry, pray for me, had their kids make adorable cards for me. There was no doubt I was loved and God strategically placed me in an ABF where others had gone through similar experiences and could share some insight."

"During the last year I've had two more surgeries and endured seven weeks of chemotherapy and radiation. I walk into each of these appointments with a profound comfort and usually a smile because I know where I'm spending eternity. I want others to see that although cancer is scary, God is bigger and only the comfort of Christ's sacrifice for me is going to provide the peace we need."

Then she said, "During each surgery, my parents from Tennessee, were able to stay with me for a week to help me with the everyday things like laundry or even washing my hair. My mom and dad were in shock at how the foundation's class loved on me. We had meals each night, cards and flowers, Scriptures being sent via text and on Facebook. I was just surrounded by love. This comforted my parents more than anyone can imagine. Living so far away, they said the only way they were able to tolerate not being with me the entire time was because they saw how Faith and the foundation's class surrounded me in genuine care. John 16:22 says, 'Therefore you too have grief but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice and no one will take your joy away from you.' Verse 23 says, 'In that day, you will not question me about anything. Truly I say, if you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it.' I know without a doubt that God is allowing me to see how wonderful it is when you focus on the eternal not the temporal. I may technically have an incurable cancer but more importantly I have God who promises to do immeasurably more than you could ask or imagine according to the power working within you."