

# The Key to Lasting Joy

Message for Sunday, September 15, 2019  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Luke 14:12-24

## Children's Message:

John 10:10, New Living Translation:

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.  
My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.

If you were to take a fish and place that fish on the beach, you would watch its gills gasp and its scales begin to dry up. Now, is that fish full of joy? Absolutely not. How would you give that fish joy? If you covered it with a mountain of money, would that make it joyful? No. What if you got it a beach chair, some sunglasses, and a Coke, would that fill it full of joy? No. What if you bought it a brand new outfit of nice clothing, would that fill it full of joy? No.

How could you fill that fish full of joy? Simple: just put it back in the water. Do you know why that fish can never have joy on the beach? Because it wasn't made for the beach; it was made for the ocean.

Well Jesus says that he wants to give us "life in all its fullness." A life full of joy, full of love, full of hope.

That fish was made to live in the water. You and I were made for a life with Jesus. When we follow Jesus, that's how we find real joy in our lives—joy that nothing can ever take away.

**Message:** "The key to lasting joy"

## 1) False images of both marriage and following Jesus

Begin with a mock wedding service:

◆ **The bride comes down the aisle** as Bonnie plays the "Funeral March" by Chopin ("dum dum de-dum, dum, de-dum de-dum de-dum") instead of the Bridal March!

◆ **The Vows**

The pastor says: "In the presence of God and before these witnesses, do you, *name*, and do you, *name*, take each other as husband and wife?"

**Man and woman both say, "I do."**

Do promise to live by the wedding vow?

To have and to hold from this day forward—no matter what happens, even if you change your mind two seconds later, it's too late, and there is no escape;

For better, for worse—no matter how bad things get, you're stuck with him and her forever;

In sickness and in health—even if you catch it from your spouse, some horrible disease he or she never told you about, too bad;

In joy and in sorrow—don't be fooled by how happy you are right now; you'll probably have your first fight before the day is over. But it doesn't matter how much you beg and plead and cry, now matter how sad, how heartbroken, how suicidal you become—you've got to just suck it up and keep on.

To love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live—that's right: death is the only way out of this. His or hers, it doesn't really matter, so start thinking now about your strategy.

So, do you promise?

**Man: I do.**

**Woman: I do.**

◆ The ring

Pastor: You may give each other your rings now. (The "rings" are actually chains attached to large balls, like old prison movies.)

**The man and the woman put the end of a chain on each other's finger.**

Pastor: Go now and endure your life of misery.

If you listen to how some people talk, that's the image they have of marriage: gloomy, depressing, slavery, loss of freedom and independence. Similarly, lots of people have the same idea about being a follower of Jesus: you can't have any fun, it's a sad life just for losers. Both of these images are false.

Jesus told a parable about a wedding celebration (Luke 14:16-24). You'd think it would be a happy occasion, a great party, that people would love to come to. But instead, the invited guests came up with all kinds of excuses why they couldn't make it.

Lots of the stories that Jesus told had a second meaning. It comes in two layers, like a sour gum ball. We first see (or taste) the obvious; but then Jesus draws our attention to the main meaning of the story. These kind of stories are called parables,

and the story of the wedding celebration is a parable.

It's really a story about being invited to follow Jesus and be part of the Kingdom of God. We see this from the verse at the beginning of the story.

**Luke 14:15, Today's English Version:**

**When one of the guests sitting at the table heard this, he said to Jesus, "How happy are those who will sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God!"**

Jesus took that idea and used it to compare an invitation to a wedding feast to an invitation to become his follower.

## 2) Jesus gives life

Jesus invites us to a life which is as full of joy as a wedding celebration. Some people think that being a Christian is gloomy—like that "wedding ceremony" we had earlier. They think you have to give up everything which brings laughter and sunshine to life. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the very opposite which is true. It is when we reject God and rebel against his ways that we get ourselves into trouble. Following Jesus brings life and joy.

Listen to what Jesus said about life when we follow him:

**John 10:10, Good News Bible:**

**"The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness."**

Bertrand Russell, the famous British philosopher who died in 1970, was an avowed atheist. He might be one of those who believed that Jesus means drudgery, not joy. He governed his life by reason and logic, and wherever his search for truth led him. At least that's what he wrote in his books.

Yet his private life showed a different kind of person. As a professor, he found an abundance of young female students who were willing to be sexual partners if it would help their marks. Not surprisingly, he went through four marriages. It sounds more like he was on a search for pleasure than a search for truth.

When Russell died, he said he was as one without any hope or joy.

Malcolm Muggeridge, also British, also lived during much of the same period as Russell. Muggeridge was an agnostic, also not believing in God. But at the age of 79, he became a Christian. He said could resist all the great books and all the great sermons. But when he saw Mother Teresa in Calcutta with the poor, he said, "If this is it, I've got to have it!"

Muggeridge trusted Jesus, and found him to be the source of life and joy. You can, too.

## 3) Good things are good, but they're not the best

**Luke 14:18-20, New International Version:**

**"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'**

**"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'**

**"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'"**

In Jesus' story, the people who rejected the invitation to the wedding celebration weren't busy with bad things. They were doing good things: one was checking out his property, one was getting a team of oxen ready for work, one was spending time with his wife. Those are important things, necessary things. But when they interfere with the most important thing, the most necessary thing, the best thing, that's not good.

When Jesus was asked what the most important thing in life, this is what he said:

**Matthew 22:37-38, New International Version:**

**"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."**

Work is important. Family is important. But when they replace God as the number one priority in your life, that's going to cause all kinds of problems down the road.

#### 4) Everyone is welcome

Luke 14:21, New International Version:

“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’”

Remember, this story is really about the invitation to follow Jesus. The invitation is given to “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” The ones whom society neglects and rejects, Jesus desires for his kingdom.

I can think of no one who better models this principle than William and Catherine Booth, the founders of the Salvation Army. He had committed his life to Jesus Christ when he was a teenager. But he didn’t know what to do with his life. He married Catherine Mumford when they were both 26 years old, and did some occasional preaching, but still didn’t have a definite direction in life.

Ten years after they were married, Catherine, who was also an excellent preacher, was invited to speak at a London church. While they were there, late one night William took a walk through the slums of London’s East End. Every fifth building was a bar. Most had steps at the counter so little children could climb up and order gin. That night he told Catherine, “I seemed to hear a voice sounding in my ears, ‘Where can you go and find such heathen as these, and where is there so great a need for your labours?’ Darling, I have found my destiny!”

He immediately began his ministry, preaching to the scum of the slums—drunks, thieves, prostitutes, gamblers. When people became Christians, Will would send them to local churches in London; but the churches often wouldn’t accept them because of their previous lifestyles.

So the Booths started their own church that same year, called the “Christian Mission,” which eventually became the Salvation Army. When they sent others out onto the streets to bring the message of Jesus Christ, Booth told them, “Go for souls, and go for the worst.”

What motivates a person to do that? Years before, when Booth was a young Christian, one day in his prayers he said, “Lord, I give you everything there is in this man William Booth. Do with me what you will.”

That was the source of his power, his love, his joy. Even though people booed and hissed at him, even though some threw bottles at him and spit on him, even though some other Christians ridiculed him and his methods, none of that mattered. His life belonged to Jesus Christ, and nothing—absolutely nothing—could ever take away his joy.

#### Next Steps:

- Pray: Let Jesus fill your spirit with his joy. Joy is the natural response to experiencing God’s love and forgiveness, and the invitation to a full life with meaning and purpose.
- Choose to be a person of joy. We don’t choose our emotions, but joy is an attitude; it’s how we look at life. You can choose to be a gloomy and negative person, or you can choose to be joyful and positive. With Jesus in your life, the choice is obvious.