

When you choose a word to describe 'church' most people do not include the word 'fun.' When you ask people to describe Jesus most people do not include 'fun' among the characteristics that identify him. It is sad in a way that people do not associate fun with the church or with Jesus. Of all the people and places in the world that should be identified with the word 'fun,' Jesus and his church should be at the top of the list.

Think about these ideas for a moment.

Have you ever seen children throng around someone who wasn't fun?

Could you imagine going on a road trip with someone who wasn't fun?

And how many people climb trees to see someone who isn't a joy to be with?

To many people the Bible is a book that is intimidating and daunting. But when read with an understanding of the cultural context you see that Jesus, and the prophets before him, often used humor, satire and irony to illustrate truths.

The stories that Jesus tells about the kingdom of God portray a kingdom marked by joy and celebration. Banquet tables, feasts and celebrations abound from the beginning of the Bible to the end. Jesus even performed his first miracle at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, which by the way often lasted a week. Jesus feasting, especially with sinners and tax-collectors, was even criticized by the Pharisees- if there was ever a bunch that wasn't into fun it was the Pharisees.

While the word 'fun' may not be in the Bible (ok, so depending on your translation you may find one or two mentions), fun can be found from beginning to end in the images and activities that are to mark the people of God.

God wants his people to be marked by a spirit of joy, laughter and celebration. But too often we let our joy be determined by our circumstances. And as we learned last week, we need to find contentment not in our circumstances but in Jesus Christ, who is all we need.

Still we live in this world that teaches us that joy is found in things. And we need to learn that our joy is not dependent on things but on our relationship with Jesus.

One of my favorite Old Testament passages is found in the prophet Habakkuk. Here the prophet testifies to the fact that rejoicing is not dependent on the circumstances around us.

¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,

though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

In an agrarian society like Israel was at the time this was written; crop failures and dead livestock were not something to be joyful over. But Habakkuk proclaims that rejoicing in God is not tied to the circumstances around us.

As disciples of Jesus, our lives; our joy, our laughter and our ability to celebrate; is not tied to our circumstances but to our relationship with Jesus. And the way we live our lives says something to the world around us about the faith that we have in Christ alone.

Last week we made the declaration that when our faith is in Jesus Christ he is all we need! And when our faith is found in Jesus Christ the circumstances of our life do not limit our joy.

There is a short story by GW Target called *The Window* that brings this truth home and challenges us to realize that joy comes to those who determine to pursue it in spite of their circumstances.

It seems that there were two men seriously ill who occupied the same small hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the only window in the room. The other man had to spend all his time on his back.

The men talked for hours on end about family, jobs, everything in life. And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for that hour when he was enlivened by all the activity and color of the outside world.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Lovers walked arm in arm amid flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene.

One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band, he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Then the thought entered his head: *Why should he have all the pleasure of seeing everything while I never get to see anything?* It didn't seem fair.

As the thought fermented the man felt shame at first. But as the days passed and he missed seeing more sights, his envy eroded into resentment and soon turned him sour. He began to brood and he found himself unable to sleep. *He* should be by that window- that thought now controlled his life.

Late one night as he lay staring at the ceiling, the man by the window began to cough. He was choking on the fluid in his lungs. The other man watched in the dimly lit room as the struggling man by the window groped for the button to call for help. Listening from across the room, he never moved, never pushed his own button which would have brought the nurse running.

In less than five minutes the coughing and choking stopped, along with the sound of breathing. Now there was only silence- deathly silence.

The following morning the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths. When she found the lifeless body of the man by the window, she was saddened and the attendants to take him away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it all himself. he strained to look out the window beside the bed.

It faced a blank wall. (G. W. Target, *The Window and Other Essays*)

This sad story is also a reminder of something we learned last week, that we need to live lives that demand an explanation.

The man by the window didn't let the blank wall hinder his ability to live each day with joy and laughter and celebration. And just as he was able to see beyond the blank wall he wanted his roommate to share his joy.

Our God is a God of celebration and rejoicing; and God wants us to join in the celebration and to invite others into that joy-filled adventure that is found in being a disciple of Jesus.

In the Old Testament God made rejoicing a part of life for His people. God instituted feasts, or celebrations, that commemorated significant moments in the life of God's people. One of those feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles is described in Deuteronomy 16. This feast was tied to the harvest and called for a joyful celebration of God's abundant blessing on the Israelites. Listen to these words:

¹⁴ Be joyful at your Feast—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. ¹⁵ For seven days celebrate the Feast to the LORD your God at

the place the LORD will choose. For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.

The feasts that God initiated were times of great joy. The whole community of faith gathered and celebrated God's blessing in their life. And look at the outcome of those celebrations- your joy will be complete.

Is your joy complete? Is your life a celebration of God's presence in your life- in the good times and the bad? You see the world is watching, and we need to live lives that demand an explanation.

Jesus certainly lived a life that demanded an explanation. In Luke 15 we get a glimpse into that life and into three parables that Jesus told. Chapter 15 begins by telling us that the 'tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to hear Jesus.' You see, Jesus life attracted people; and I think it did because he lived each day with joy.

But the killjoys- the Pharisees- showed up as well and started muttering about Jesus welcoming and eating with sinners. That is when Jesus told his three parables; about a lost sheep, a lost coin and two lost sons. Now I want you to notice something about the end of each of these parables; they all end with a celebration. The shepherd who finds his lost sheep; the woman who finds her lost coin; and the father who finds one lost son; all celebrate the joy of being found and restored to community.

In those parables Jesus tells about the celebration on earth and in heaven that occurs when the lost get found. You see God is into celebrations!

But sadly, Jesus leaves one person out of the celebration in the final parable. Everyone who was there when Jesus told this parable knew that he was talking about the Pharisees when he spoke of the elder brother.

The Pharisees, sadly, had forgotten how to celebrate and live joyful lives. These keepers of the Law had taken all the fun out life with their 600+ rules and regulations. They had gotten so caught up in being right that they forgot to live in the joy of being found.

Sadly, I think there are many in the church today who forget that God is a God of celebration. And the world has as a result seen a demonstration that says being a disciple of Jesus and being a part of the church isn't any fun.

I think we owe it to Jesus, to one another and to a lot of people lying on their backs to start picturing a life of joy and celebration.

If we live with a spirit of joy, laughter and celebration; people will inevitably demand to know why we are having so much fun.

When you choose a word to describe 'church' most people do not include the word 'fun.' When you ask people to describe Jesus most people do not include 'fun' among the characteristics that identify him. It is sad in a way that people do not associate fun with the church or with Jesus. Of all the people and places in the world that should be identified with the word 'fun,' Jesus and his church should be at the top of the list.

Think about these ideas for a moment.

Have you ever seen children throng around someone who wasn't fun?

Could you imagine going on a road trip with someone who wasn't fun?

And how many people climb trees to see someone who isn't a joy to be with?

To many people the Bible is a book that is intimidating and daunting. But when read with an understanding of the cultural context you see that Jesus, and the prophets before him, often used humor, satire and irony to illustrate truths.

The stories that Jesus tells about the kingdom of God portray a kingdom marked by joy and celebration. Banquet tables, feasts and celebrations abound from the beginning of the Bible to the end. Jesus even performed his first miracle at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, which by the way often lasted a week. Jesus feasting, especially with sinners and tax-collectors, was even criticized by the Pharisees- if there was ever a bunch that wasn't into fun it was the Pharisees.

While the word 'fun' may not be in the Bible (ok, so depending on your translation you may find one or two mentions), fun can be found from beginning to end in the images and activities that are to mark the people of God.

God wants his people to be marked by a spirit of joy, laughter and celebration. But too often we let our joy be determined by our circumstances. And as we learned last week, we need to find contentment not in our circumstances but in Jesus Christ, who is all we need.

Still we live in this world that teaches us that joy is found in things. And we need to learn that our joy is not dependent on things but on our relationship with Jesus.

One of my favorite Old Testament passages is found in the prophet Habakkuk. Here the prophet testifies to the fact that rejoicing is not dependent on the circumstances around us.

¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,

though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

In an agrarian society like Israel was at the time this was written; crop failures and dead livestock were not something to be joyful over. But Habakkuk proclaims that rejoicing in God is not tied to the circumstances around us.

As disciples of Jesus, our lives; our joy, our laughter and our ability to celebrate; is not tied to our circumstances but to our relationship with Jesus. And the way we live our lives says something to the world around us about the faith that we have in Christ alone.

Last week we made the declaration that when our faith is in Jesus Christ he is all we need! And when our faith is found in Jesus Christ the circumstances of our life do not limit our joy.

There is a short story by GW Target called *The Window* that brings this truth home and challenges us to realize that joy comes to those who determine to pursue it in spite of their circumstances.

It seems that there were two men seriously ill who occupied the same small hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the only window in the room. The other man had to spend all his time on his back.

The men talked for hours on end about family, jobs, everything in life. And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for that hour when he was enlivened by all the activity and color of the outside world.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Lovers walked arm in arm amid flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene.

One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band, he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words. Then the thought entered his head: *Why should he have all the pleasure of seeing everything while I never get to see anything?* It didn't seem fair.

As the thought fermented the man felt shame at first. But as the days passed and he missed seeing more sights, his envy eroded into resentment and soon turned him sour. He began to brood and he found himself unable to sleep. *He* should be by that window- that thought now controlled his life.

Late one night as he lay staring at the ceiling, the man by the window began to cough. He was choking on the fluid in his lungs. The other man watched in the dimly lit room as the struggling man by the window groped for the button to call for help. Listening from across the room, he never moved, never pushed his own button which would have brought the nurse running.

In less than five minutes the coughing and choking stopped, along with the sound of breathing. Now there was only silence- deathly silence.

The following morning the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths. When she found the lifeless body of the man by the window, she was saddened and the attendants to take him away. As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it all himself. he strained to look out the window beside the bed.

It faced a blank wall. (G. W. Target, *The Window and Other Essays*)

This sad story is also a reminder of something we learned last week, that we need to live lives that demand an explanation.

The man by the window didn't let the blank wall hinder his ability to live each day with joy and laughter and celebration. And just as he was able to see beyond the blank wall he wanted his roommate to share his joy.

Our God is a God of celebration and rejoicing; and God wants us to join in the celebration and to invite others into that joy-filled adventure that is found in being a disciple of Jesus.

In the Old Testament God made rejoicing a part of life for His people. God instituted feasts, or celebrations, that commemorated significant moments in the life of God's people. One of those feasts, the Feast of Tabernacles is described in Deuteronomy 16. This feast was tied to the harvest and called for a joyful celebration of God's abundant blessing on the Israelites. Listen to these words:

¹⁴ Be joyful at your Feast—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. ¹⁵ For seven days celebrate the Feast to the LORD your God at

the place the LORD will choose. For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.

The feasts that God initiated were times of great joy. The whole community of faith gathered and celebrated God's blessing in their life. And look at the outcome of those celebrations- your joy will be complete.

Is your joy complete? Is your life a celebration of God's presence in your life- in the good times and the bad? You see the world is watching, and we need to live lives that demand an explanation.

Jesus certainly lived a life that demanded an explanation. In Luke 15 we get a glimpse into that life and into three parables that Jesus told. Chapter 15 begins by telling us that the 'tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to hear Jesus.' You see, Jesus life attracted people; and I think it did because he lived each day with joy.

But the killjoys- the Pharisees- showed up as well and started muttering about Jesus welcoming and eating with sinners. That is when Jesus told his three parables; about a lost sheep, a lost coin and two lost sons. Now I want you to notice something about the end of each of these parables; they all end with a celebration. The shepherd who finds his lost sheep; the woman who finds her lost coin; and the father who finds one lost son; all celebrate the joy of being found and restored to community.

In those parables Jesus tells about the celebration on earth and in heaven that occurs when the lost get found. You see God is into celebrations!

But sadly, Jesus leaves one person out of the celebration in the final parable. Everyone who was there when Jesus told this parable knew that he was talking about the Pharisees when he spoke of the elder brother.

The Pharisees, sadly, had forgotten how to celebrate and live joyful lives. These keepers of the Law had taken all the fun out life with their 600+ rules and regulations. They had gotten so caught up in being right that they forgot to live in the joy of being found.

Sadly, I think there are many in the church today who forget that God is a God of celebration. And the world has as a result seen a demonstration that says being a disciple of Jesus and being a part of the church isn't any fun.

I think we owe it to Jesus, to one another and to a lot of people lying on their backs to start picturing a life of joy and celebration.

If we live with a spirit of joy, laughter and celebration; people will inevitably demand to know why we are having so much fun.