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**Uncommon Joy**  
**Acts 2:28**

One expects to hear gloom, complaining and negative comments when visiting someone who is sick or suffering or hurting, because frankly, that's what you usually get. Especially when its been long-term and drawn out filled with discouragement and frustration. But every once in a while I will go visit someone who has been fighting terminal cancer, maybe someone who has been debilitated for years, who has experienced great personal loss of one they loved, business failure, relational failure and I brace myself waiting to listen understandingly to the hurt and gloom and yet...I'm incredibly surprised by the joy that flows out of them. I came to offer encouragement hope and understanding...and yet I'm the one who walks away encouraged and filled with joy. Isn't that infectious? I love to hear stories of people who have suffered and yet experience great joy. Fact is I love to hear stories of people who haven't suffered yet are loving life and filled with joy. Don't you just want to grab hold of a piece of that kind of joy? Where does that kind of joy come from? How did Paul and Silas stuck in a Roman prison experience that kind of joy? How did Corrie Ten Boom stuck in a Nazi concentration camp experience that kind of joy? How does Joni Erickson paraplegic from the neck down experience that kind of a joy? How can you and I experience that kind of joy and happiness?

Some hear may think that the pursuit of happiness has nothing to do with God and the Bible. Some may have grown up thinking that if one listens to the God of the Bible then it's going to take away all the fun, all the happiness and joy of your life. So...you've spent your life so far playing games with happiness. In high School and College maybe you tried the party life to manufacture a little happiness. People were smiling

and laughing, it provided some thrills and escape from the harder realities of life, but Monday mornings always came and left you empty, waiting for the next weekends party. You may have tried relationships maybe marriage is where happiness is at but quickly found that marriages and kids are great but tough and certainly not the source of happiness. Maybe you have tried the businessman earn the money to buy all the stuff route. Maybe you tried drugs to drown out the pain. Maybe sensuality. Maybe friends. Maybe education. Maybe a hobby, leisure or hunting and fishing and yet even many of those are great things you are still coming up empty. Still in search of true happiness and satisfaction. Well, then you're in the right place this morning, because the Bible does not condemn our search for happiness. In fact, the Bible causes people to get really serious about pursuing it. The Bible causes us to stop playing games with our trivial pursuits of happiness and start tackling after the core of joy that lasts and is thirst quenching and satisfying...totally independent of what has happened that day, good or bad. The Bible is not life changing because of the demands of a new duty, but because God wants to release the power of a new pleasure. Wouldn't you like some of that kind of joy? Wouldn't that be worth pursuing? Wouldn't you like to have a joy that's full, and forever? To those who know that Bible best it doesn't squelch joy, rather it wants us to experience joy to the fullest with something that is satisfying and lasts forever.

Jesus knew where that kind of joy came from. In the first chapter of Acts v. 3 the writer Luke tells us that Jesus presented himself to many people, alive after his resurrection. That convincing proof and power we celebrate this Easter morning. Then for 40 days after Jesus resurrection, he gave convincing proof that he was really alive, that his death and sacrifice for sinners really was validated by God. That everything He taught really was true. That His death was not a defeat but actually a victory over evil and Satan. The resurrection is a stamp of approval by

God the Father in one whom he said, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased...listen to Him." Jesus then ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of the Father where He will reign until He returns one day a second time to gather in all His people who know and love Him.

40 days after Jesus resurrection, Jesus ascends into heaven and the story of Acts continues to describe this small group of faithful followers waiting Jesus promise of help that the Holy Spirit would come down upon them in power. They have been devoting themselves to prayer and study of the Bible and we know that Peter their leader has been thinking about Psalm 16 written by David because he quotes it in the first sermon he gives in chapter 2 as he explains to those interested listeners what it was that had just happened. Those who have your Bibles can read this part of Psalm 16 in Acts chapter 2:25-28. Peter then explains in the following verses that when David was writing this Psalm He was looking ahead, speaking prophetically of the Messiah, the Son of David who was promised to be that Messiah by God. This is Jesus who was resurrected by God "whose body did not undergo decay in the place of the dead" David wrote this Psalm not speaking for Himself, but as if He was the voice of Messiah. Peter was reading this section and it hits home with him. This is exactly what happened to Jesus v.31.

So now we make the connection between a longing for happiness, joy and gladness. Look at v.28. Remember David is writing prophetically is as if Jesus were talking. "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence." Psalm 16 goes on to say "your presence is fullness of joy at your right hand there are pleasure forevermore." There it is. Not partial joy but total and complete, forever lasting joy.

The point here is that Jesus knew that satisfied joy, gladness, happiness was found in the presence of God the father. For Jesus, the Easter's resurrection meant that he was heading home to return to the

joy of being in the presence of His Father. Back home where God the Son and God the Father would delight in each other's presence.

God's plan for Jesus beyond the grave was to fill Jesus with gladness and joy of being in His presence. Well if it is in God's presence that joy is made full and complete, then why then did Jesus leave heaven in the first place? I Timothy 1:15 is very clear; "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Christ died to save sinners" Simply, powerful the good news message. Christ was willing to leave heaven and the joy of the presence of His father in love to save sinners. He came because of us.

One may well ask; well that is nice that Jesus is now exalted at the right of God and enjoying pleasure and joy forevermore, but can I experience that joy? Can that joy that Jesus experienced in the presence of God be ours right now? Be full and forever? The great thing is that Jesus wants us to have that joy. He not only enjoys that glory and gladness for himself, he wants us to enjoy it too.

Look at John 17 "Father, I desire that they also whom Thou hast given me be w2ith me where I am..." v.13 "But now I come to Thee...that they may have My joy made full in themselves." Jesus longs for us to experience the same joy that he has in the presence of God the father. He wants His joy to be made full in ourselves v.13. He wants us with Him there.

Death brings the believer into the presence of God. But that is not what God has for most of us for many years. Since we know this is not a call to death, but a call to life, How can we experience the joy that is full and lasts forever? If Jesus says that it is in the presence of God that we discover full forever joy, then need to understand what it is that draws us into His presence. This morning I want us to look at two things that the Bible says draw us into His presence and thus brings us joy.

First one is obedience. Obedience draws us into the His presence.  
In John 15:11 Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy

may be in you and that your joy may be made full.” There it is again. Jesus longs for us to experience His same joy, full and complete. What are these things that He wrote for us to experience this kind of joy? In John 15 Jesus illustrates the relationship between God and the believer by talking about a grape vine and its branches. Jesus says that He is the vine and we are to be the branches. As long as we abide, or remain or stay attached and vitally connected to the vine we will receive the life giving nutrients and power that we need to bear fruit. Jesus is calling out to you, “let me be present in your life, for when I am you will experience great joy.” Abide in me and I in you and live and dwell in me. When that happens and you hang out with Jesus you are going to know His words, His truth and His heart and His will. And you will want to do it and God is going to help you do it. When you obey, follow what He teaches...then you will bear some great looking fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, JOY, peace, patience, kindness... It is that heart of obedience that draws us to Him and in His presence there is fullness of joy. At His right hand there are pleasure forevermore. Joy flows from a heart of obedience that delights to do what God wants because a heart that delights in what God wants to do longs to be in His presence. And in His presence....that’s where the joy is. Jesus says “Listen to what I have to say. Let me be a presence in your life because I want to bring on gladness and explode joy into your life.” I have spoken these things that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full.”

Sometimes doing what God tells you to makes little sense to other people. When I gave up a rising career in Engineering project management making lots of money with benefits, perks and titles people would ask why? You seem like a normal kind of guy. I would tell them. I want the greatest joy that God has for me. I like engineering. I even like all the benefits it offers me and my family. But I really am convinced that this is what God wants me to do. If I do what I know I’m convinced He wants me to do then He must have even greater joy in store for me. Why?

As I obeyed God in what He revealed for me to do, then in my obedience I moved closer to His presence and in His presence there is fullness of joy.

So what is God telling you to do that you need to start doing more or stop doing less of? Since sin keeps us from the presence of God it would follow that obedience ushers us into His presence and as we ask God what it is He wants us to do and actually dare to do it. We are going to find ourselves more often experience the presence of Christ in our lives and as we experience the presence of God, Christ will be in us and our joy will be made full.

Joy is found in the presence of God. Obedience draws us into His presence. Obedience while not easy is at least positive. There is another thing that draws us into His presence that is not at all easy and yet there is nothing quite like it to draw us into the presence of God. That's suffering.

I know I can hear it already. You are telling me that suffering is the pathway to joy? What kind of masochistic theology is that? Am I supposed to bludgeon myself into joy? I don't like suffering. I spend most of my life trying to avoid suffering. Most of us think that suffering is a sign of problems not pleasure. I am not saying that suffering = joy. But I would like to strongly suggest that a right response to the suffering can draw us to the presence of God like nothing else I know. And it is in the presence of God that we find fullness of joy.

Hebrew 12:2 says "Fixing our eyes on Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the JOY set before Him endured the cross despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus endured the cross, He looked through the cross to the JOY that was set before Him. Looking forward to the moment when he could delight in the presence of the Father at the right hand of God. Jesus looked through the suffering to the hope of being in presence of God. That joy was His pursuit. That joy was set before Him as He longed to be in God's presence and as He left that the tomb that first Easter morning

He was thinking about home. Only 40 days until I can be once again in the presence where there is fullness of joy.

While suffering by itself does not produce joy. A right response to the suffering that God allows in our life will draw us into His presence like nothing else will. I've got to admit I am still in diapers in the school of suffering. I know little what it means to really suffer. When the doctor's told us my new bride had epilepsy and took away her drivers license and sent her to the cat-scan room...I got down on my knees before God and felt strongly in His presence. When my mother breathed and our family gathered around her hospital bedside and sang to Like a River Glorious. Through the tears there was a powerful sense of the presence of God and joy despite the circumstances. When my good friend died far too suddenly even then, I felt the strong presence of God and rested peace that was not from this world.

Four years ago when I was in Russia. I talked to the Christians who had endured through the years of persecution under the communist regimes. They'd told of the secret police, the KGB knocking down their doors with bats and them trying to escape out the back windows. Of their pastor father spending time in prison and hard labor. Of being denied schooling and job advancement because they named the name of Jesus. And in the same conversation they say they pity the American church because it has never had to endure that kind of suffering. They pity our churches here because we are a mile wide and an inch deep. They pity us because we have never experienced the kind of suffering that drives us to the very presence of God in a powerful way. For in the presence of God despite the suffering and circumstances there is great joy.

Finances that suffer have a way of knocking out our pride and independence. Teens that rebel drive us to our knees. Illness. Job disappointments. Frustrating co-workers, Relational conflicts. Marriage, neighbors, relatives, may even people here at church that drive you crazy. Some of these are more difficult to identify as suffering. So we try

to buck up and figure out and solve...and yet wisdom, godly wisdom has the eyes that see that God wants to refine and work character into our lives. If we respond well. If these things drive us closer to God rather than drive us away then we will set our hope on the joy before us, looking through the suffering to the joy being closer to the presence of God.

So if you find yourself in suffering right now of whatever kind. Instead of focusing on the suffering itself. Look through to the other side of suffering. Think this. I don't like this suffering, but it sure shows me how much I need God. This suffering draws me to God like nothing else will. I like that. I want to enjoy those times of experiencing the presence of God in the midst of this life hurricane I'm going through right now...and I know that it is in His presence that Uncommon Joy

This kind of full, forever uncommon joy is not based on circumstance. Its not about whether your mower works or not when you have just an hour to mow that lawn that is a foot long. This uncommon joy is not dependent on whether or not every time you start mowing it begins to rain. The story of my life this week. This joy depends on how well you have spent time in the presence of God this week.

The Apostle Paul understood all about it when he wrote the book Philippians. He wrote this book about joy from a prison cell. Over and over in the book he implores, commands the readers to rejoice and then says it again, rejoice. Chapter 3:1 Paul says he's going to wrap things up "finally my brothers rejoice in the Lord" He goes on to explain all the different ways and things he chased after to try and obtain that satisfaction and joy that we all long for. He lists his resume' of trying to be good enough and then in v.8 says "I count all things to be rubbish Greek Scubala (dung) in view of the incredible value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I'm willing to suffer it all in order to know Christ. V.10 That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings..." Paul chased it all and decided to stop playing the games and really get down and serious about pursuing Joy.

And clearly states it is knowing Him and power of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is what opens us the way to joy. For it is the power of resurrection that opened up the way to satisfaction and joy in the presence of God.

On Easter Sunday morning Jesus blew the lock off the prison of death and gloom and then Jesus returned to the joy and gladness in the presence of His father. That resurrection open up the way for sinners just exactly like you and I to find a forever satisfaction of joy bathing in the river of His grace. Right now God speaks to all of us and invites us to His grace cup that never runs dry that He longs to pour out and fill up our cups. For Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, he who comes to me shall never hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst. I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me, even though he dies, yet he shall live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? John 11:25-26. The step toward uncommon joy is obedience and the first step of faith, of belief is the first step toward the uncommon joy. For in His presence there is fullness of joy at His right hand there are pleasures forevermore.