

This is it everyone, the last week of our sermon series, And the Band Played On. Our final look at themes from the prayer of St. Francis Assisi and his request of God to make him an instrument of peace.

For our final week we focus on Joy. Where this is sadness, let me sow joy. Now I have to tell you something. It was very hard to find instruments that started with the letter J. Think about it for a moment. I finally found a list with about 10 instruments, most of them with names I could hardly pronounce. Then, I spotted it. Of course a jug is an instrument! That is how we end up with the final sermon of this series. Jugs of Joy.

A little bit about the jug as an instrument. Now jugs have been around for a very long time. They have a prestigious lineage. The art of pottery goes back to 29000 BC. Pots were items created through the art of pottery. Over time pots were given things like handles and smaller openings. This led to the pot gaining the fancy name of pitcher.

The earliest record of using the word jug instead of pitcher was in 1400 AD. It wouldn't be until the 1920s that the jug would emerge as an instrument. This is when jug bands began to show up, particularly among our black citizens. And they flourished. The jug became a popular instrument because it was cheap and easy to carry.

Most jugs are made of ceramic. But the jug as an instrument could also be made out of glass, plastic, and tin. Each performs a different sound. Today's example of a jug musical piece is from ceramic and comes from Arlo Leach.

**Play Video (End after first round of song)**

Jugs of joy. That is the topic of our discussion today. We turn to the words written by Peter in his first letter. There are some interesting things to note about the 2 letters of Peter included in the New Testament. First neither of Peter's letters get much attention from the pulpit. It's too bad, the letters attributed to Peter have some really beautiful words of encouragement. Second,

these letters are not addressed to a specific church. Peter's letters, along with those of James and John are known as the catholic epistles. Remember that when these were written, there was no Catholic or protestant church. It was just the church. So when we say catholic epistles, what we're saying is the "universal church". These letters were for any church, not a specific one. There is a lot of speculation over who actually wrote these letters, which makes dating the letter difficult too.

In our passage today, Peter is writing to Christians who are experiencing more intense persecution all the time. Suffering is something they would know about directly or indirectly. Peter acknowledges their test by fire but then has the audacity to tell them to rejoice. And he doesn't tell them to rejoice half-heartedly. No, Peter asked them to rejoice with indescribable and glorious joy. Wha-wha-what? And Wh-Wh-Why?

Right before this, Peter tells them all about Jesus Christ, and what a blessing it is to become a follower, a believer of Jesus. What a blessing it was to know that he rose from the dead, and that heaven is our future home, and that God would take care of us all the way to the final day. In those things, you greatly rejoice, the Bible says. Not just sort of rejoice, or rejoice a little, but greatly, immensely, rejoice. That is where we are to find joy in the darkness, in the sadness - we find it in Jesus, and in all the blessings he brings into our lives.

Joy comes from knowing and believing in Jesus Christ. Look again at how Peter describes this faith: "Even though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."

Inexpressible and glorious joy. Remember back to Christmas and the song "Joy to the World". One of my favorite Christmas carols. "Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing..."

What a joyful and happy song. Whoever wrote this song? It must have been a happy someone with a happy life! Right? Everything going their way. Does anyone know wrote this carol? Yes,

Isaac Watts. And to see the story of his life, you would learn that it was not so happy. He was not born into this world as a healthy baby - he was quite sick all the time and had many physical problems as a child.

Eventually he became a pastor, but that didn't work out for him because of his health. He just couldn't do the normal things that were expected of him to do – because he was too weak and too sick all the time. But God knew something. There was something inside of Isaac Watts, something underneath all of that pain and weakness. An inner joy that could not be touched by all the difficulties Isaac faced. A joy in the midst of his darkness.

One day Isaac was complaining about some of the hymns they sang back in those days. I know that doesn't happen here. He complained and he complained, and he complained. Then a friend got fed up and challenged him. You think you could do better? Go for it. And guess what? He did. Isaac Watts wrote over 600 hymns, mostly hymns of praise. In the hymnal in front of you, Isaac Watts wrote 13 of those hymns... "When I survey the wondrous cross..." "Alas and did my savior bleed"... and "O God our help in ages past...". If you didn't know better, you would think that it was when his health was at its worst, that his writing was at his best. What did Isaac Watts have inside of him? He had a divine gift called "joy."

Does that sound like something you want? (Repeat if necessary) So how do we get that? Especially when our health is bad, or when something else in our life is bad - how do we get to that special kind of joy that sits inside our soul. How do we get that joy in our sadness, that light in our darkness.

We lean on the faith that as it says in vs 3, by faith we have a new birth and a living hope. It is a living hope. It is an inheritance that is imperishable, that will never rot. It is an inheritance that is undefiled, completely pure. It is an inheritance that is unfading. Never needs teeth whitening. No matter our circumstances all of these things are safe guarded because they are kept in heaven for us. Church family...this is better than an assurance protection plan.

Here's what we know. God loves us. God forgives us because of the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus. God promises us a new heaven and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. That is hope. That is the source of the joy described as inexpressible and glorious.

Does this mean we will always have a smile on our faces? No. Did you see Jesus smiling at the funeral of Lazarus? No, Jesus wept. There will be times of pain, heartache, and fatigue as we live our lives on this earth. Days where it is hard to find joy.

But I promise you. Joy is there, deep in our souls. It's a joy that doesn't always show up in laughter, smiling, and relaxation. It's a joy that is willing to acknowledge that: "For a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." Being a follower of Christ does not make us immune from the grief that is part of this world. But being a follower of Christ does give us this assurance during those times, God wants us to remember that he is there for us and has a purpose for us. "These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine."

But honestly, if God really wants us to have joy, then why does he let us experience grief? No one wants to experience grief. But the truth is, grief is when our faith is put to the test. Grief is when we have to exercise our faith, when we have to dig into the Word, when we have to look at those promises again and maybe even again, when we have to pray and wrestle with God and not give up. "These have come for your faith," the Bible says.

In the midst of grief, that's when Isaac Watts wrote joy to the world. Grief is when you are pushed up against God, a writer once said, and when you have nowhere else to turn and you finally place your eyes on God and his love and his promises, and that's when you will find that inexpressible and glorious joy in the darkness.

"Be joyful always," Paul wrote, while he experienced the grief of prison. James the brother of Jesus was eventually martyred for his faith. Do you know what he wrote? Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds."

Why does God love us so much that he would send his Son to be our Savior? Why does God want to be with us forever? Why does he work to turn the problems of our lives into something beautiful? Who knows why? He is our creator. What creator doesn't love their creation? God is full of love for you, His creation. You are blessed. So go on and sing it loud, Joy to the world. The Lord has come. It is through Jesus, it is through God's love, that we have the hope of turning sadness into joy.

Let us pray