

Fullness of Joy

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Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 0 0] Our scripture today is from 1 Peter 1, verses 3-9, and John 20, verses 19-31.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In all this, you greatly rejoice, though now, for a little while, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[1 : 2 5] 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.

For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. And from John, On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

After he said this, he showed them his hands and sighed. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again, Jesus said, Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit.

If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. Now Thomas, also known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came.

[2 : 5 5] So the other disciples told him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

A week later, his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, Peace be with you.

Then he said to Thomas, Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.

Thomas said to him, My Lord and my God. Then Jesus told him, Because you have seen me, you have believed.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

[4 : 1 6] But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. So friends, let's pray together. Almighty and gracious God, we are indeed grateful for this day, grateful for the ways in which you continue to shine down in our lives.

Lord, now we ask you that you would shine brightly in each of our hearts. Let that light break through into where there are dark places, where there are unsure places, where there are places where we don't want to go.

But let your light shine, Lord. Let your light shine so that we may indeed reflect that light back out into your world. Give us what you know we need. In Jesus' most holy name we pray.

Amen. So, we're on a new journey now. A new journey called A Living Hope. A Living Hope.

[5 : 18] And we want to make sure that we get why this is such a big deal. And we're going to talk a little bit about that at the end of this message. But I want you to make sure you understand that a living hope makes a difference.

compared to a not living or dead hope. That even sounds weird. A dead hope. But, it matters.

And we want to make sure that we hold on to it. Now, in relationship to that, our first message is called fullness of joy. Anybody want more joy?

Yeah, I figured there was a few of us out here, right? Need a little more joy. Joy. And so, what we want to spend our time with today is how we get to that place. How we get to that place and how your living hope is key to it.

Now, if you want to talk about fullness of joy, all you got to do is think about what we are experiencing right now. Right? We got these amazing days.

[6 : 19] I saw in the news this morning where a meteorologist said that the last time we had three 80 degree days in a row was August. Okay?

That's just realities of living in western New York. All of y'all know that. Which is why some of y'all don't spend all of your time in western New York. We ain't mad at you for that. That's just our reality, right? So, but that's the thing.

is when you have this chance in front of you, you take advantage of it. And so, we got these beautiful days and everybody's going to try and make sure we maximize this afternoon, right?

So, you get outside in that beautiful day. And you don't want to get outside in that beautiful day and just make it all about stuff you got to get done. You want to be able to enjoy the day, right?

And see, but that's what we get now with this fullness thing. I want y'all to make sure you understand it. That's what we're trying to get at with this fullness thing. Because you can see a beautiful day from inside the house or inside the office.

[7 : 21] You're not experiencing the fullness of that beautiful day. If you spend your day outside, but you got to spend it grinding, you're not really experiencing the fullness of the day.

You get to experience it, but not in its fullness, right? So, think about your joy. Because your joy joy can be there with you.

You can experience it. You can know it. But, are you seeing joy just through the window while other people outside enjoying the fullness of it? Or, maybe you get to be outside and you can feel the warmth and you can feel the sun, but you got to do all this other stuff so you're not 100% in your joy.

that's where we are headed. This idea of living in the fullness of our joy. So, we're going to talk about one thing that keeps us from experiencing that fullness today.

And that thing is doubt. Doubt is real. And, we ain't going to be polite church folk about doubt today. Right?

[8 : 30] Because we know what to say. We want to make sure that we don't appear as those folks who have doubts. But, this is safe space, y'all. You ain't got to be 100% right in order to be here.

In fact, good thing, because none of us would be in. So, this thing about doubting, it's a very human experience and it's very much the journey of pretty much every disciple I've ever encountered.

Especially those who want to be fully honest about their journey. Doubt is hard. Because we hear these Bible verses, we see our heroes of faith, those whom we love, who have mentored us on our journeys.

We see these big, bold expressions of faith. And we're like, I don't think I'm there yet. And that's okay. That is totally okay.

But if we are going to be real about why we not, may not be there yet, we got to name what's holding us back. We got to name what's holding us back.

[9 : 35] So, let's get clear about how we are using the term doubt. Let's get clear about how we're using that. Because doubt's a common sense word. We use it all the time. We know what doubt means.

But doubt in a faith context, when we want to apply it in a real way, what we're talking about here is that there's something about who Jesus is or something about what Jesus does that we just haven't bought all the way into yet.

In other words, we doubt it. There's something about who he is or what he promised or what he can do that we just aren't 100% behind yet. And so, we doubt it.

We just straight up doubt it. And our story today is probably one of the biggest and most well-known examples of someone who struggled with doubt.

Now, I don't call him Doubting Thomas. Okay? Because none of us deserve to be defined by a weak moment. That has followed him for millennia.

[10 : 45] Literally, he had one bad day and it stayed with him for thousands of years. That's how he's known, right? For those of you who don't know your Bible history to this level, Thomas went on to be a tremendous evangelist.

He went over to what is modern-day India, in fact, and won souls to the faith. There are still churches built that they believe originated from Thomas' ministry in southern India. So, he was a real apostle.

He was a real apostle. Believed he was burned in oil for his faith, in fact. So, that being said, we ain't going to define him by this moment, especially since we were just talking about it.

It's a moment that we all go through. So, that having been said, let's look at the story, and let's see what we can learn from Thomas today about how we wrestle with doubt and make it to the other side and experience the fullness of our joy.

Everybody follow that piece, right? So, we're going to learn from Thomas, figure out how to wrestle with our doubt, so that we get to experience our joy more fully.

[11 : 52] So, it's a pretty well-known story. So, it's Easter Sunday. It's the day of the resurrection. Mary has already come and broken the news to the disciples, and they sitting in their feelings, okay?

And while they in their feelings, somehow, Thomas is not there. Now, we don't know why Thomas isn't there, and Scripture ain't going to tell us why Thomas is there.

We just know he's not there. While the others are gathered, Jesus appears to the group. A resurrected Jesus makes it into this room because he's God and has a conversation with them, charges them, and so they are now transformed.

They are now excited. They are in this new place, and Thomas shows up after this. So, Thomas is doing what I think anybody with a brain in any sense would do.

Thomas is dealing with a couple different levels of issue here. There's what I call the tip of the iceberg, the part of the iceberg that's above the water. Thomas is having some real problems with what happened.

[13 : 20] And we pull that out of the dialogue in the story. Okay? Now, I may be going a little further than I should with this, but when I read this, this is what I see. So, if you're with me, and you want to look at the story in John 20, I'm at verse 24.

It says, Now, Thomas, known as Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, we have seen the Lord.

But he said to them, unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

Okay, why is that important? Thomas is dealing with what actually happened. Right? Now, let's remember, Thomas is part of this experience.

He has seen Jesus do extraordinary things. He was there when he fed 5,000. He was there when he healed the paralytic. He was there when he cured the blind man in the temple.

[14 : 30] He was there when he raised Lazarus. He was there when he raised the widow of Nain's son. So, he has seen Jesus do the extraordinary. So, the extraordinary should not be news.

Right? Should not be news. Which is kind of why he gets drugged because it's like you should know better. Right? But that being said, he comes back and so everybody's like, dude!

Okay? Okay? And so he's like, wait a minute. What? So, he's like, he may be willing to say, look, y'all saw something.

Okay? Y'all saw something. But this idea of a fully risen Jesus, see, that's the hang-up. A risen Jesus takes us to another place, especially if he knows, like we read earlier in the story, that doors were locked.

Like, they hunkered down because they're worried about getting arrested themselves. So, he's like, well, y'all probably saw something, but this may have been a ghost, collective hallucination, who knows what.

[15 : 50] but risen Jesus in a locked room that I had to sneak into myself, which is why we get that statement.

Unless I see the nail holes in his hand and put my finger where the nails were, unless I put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.

Okay? So, he's hung up on what happened. And he's saying, look, this resurrection thing, I am not sure, I'm 100% there.

But then we get a deeper issue. And I think this is the harder part, right? This is the piece that's under the iceberg. Because if you, Thomas, and as I said, you've been on the journey with everybody, you've seen these things, you were in the upper room for the last supper.

You had all this amazing stuff happen to you. You walked away from your old life, you parted the new life, and you understand what's going on. Yet, Jesus is risen from the dead.

[17 : 09] Jesus comes back and appears and talks to the entire team without you. Just sit with that for a minute.

Now, Thomas, I'm going to make an assumption here, which is always dangerous, but I'm willing to bet that Thomas probably believes something that y'all have heard me say before, that Jesus doesn't make mistakes, Jesus doesn't do anything by accident.

And if you believe those two things, what does it tell your heart that he would show up and talk to the team in his resurrection without you in the room?

What would that do to your soul? That's the piece that's under the water. Because Thomas got to deal with that.

what in the world is going on? So as you think about doubt, that's what I want you to make serious note of today.

[18 : 24] Make serious note in your own mind. First, what is the thing on the surface? What is it that you are really struggling with to believe about Jesus?

Jesus? Is it that maybe he doesn't know how to solve my problem? Is it that maybe he can't heal my disease?

Is it that maybe he can't move this mountain that's in front of me? what is the thing you are really struggling to believe?

That's the part above the water. Then the deeper piece may be, what are you telling yourself about why this thing hasn't happened? Maybe he doesn't love me like he said.

Maybe he hasn't forgiven me the way he promised. Maybe he's not listening to my prayers.

[19 : 33] That's the underwater piece. But here's the key. If you can't name it specifically, if you don't have clarity about it, and even more clearly, if you won't name it and confront it, you cannot address it.

You have to get clarity about what you are struggling with. Because that is keeping you from moving into the fullness, the promised fullness of your joy.

And if you won't deal with that, if you won't confront it, don't be surprised that you're looking at the beautiful day from the confines of your room.

That's what you got to get clarity on. And you can see it in Thomas. Thomas is very clear. So he's like, look, unless I can put my finger in that hole, I'm not going to believe.

he has that clarity. So how do you move to the same clarity?

[20 : 55] That's your challenge. Now here's where it gets even worse. Y'all know, right? Everybody's already squirming and it's about to get worse. Here's where it gets even worse.

because we get this part of the story, right? And so, you know what John says next? So a week later, imagine those fun days.

Because I'm imagining, now we don't know this, maybe Thomas took off. Maybe he's like, I can't even stay with y'all because y'all are in this happy place right now. Or, imagine if he did stay.

Because over breakfast, you got James and Matthew talking about, how cool was it when Jesus was here? And you was left out. Then you hear Mary Magdalene and some of the other women talking about, he looked amazing.

And you wasn't there. And you're still struggling with all this stuff that we've talked about. And they are dealing with all this cool experience they just had.

[22 : 07] And you standing outside of it. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday.

So y'all get where this is headed. The thing you got to hold on to in the midst of all of that is this is never going to happen on your schedule.

how Jesus responds to your problem is never going to happen on your schedule. It's going to happen on his. That usually sucks.

Let's just keep it real, church. Because we want answers, we want them when we want them. The last thing we want to be told is if, hey, Jesus, I want to put my finger there, he's like, I'll be back in a week.

That is not what we want to hear. Because what's worse, we don't even get, I'll be back in a week. We get things like, I'll be back. And we have no idea when he's coming back.

[23 : 22] And we just got to hang on. that is hard. Y'all know what I'm talking about? That is hard.

And if you're sitting in your doubt, if you're wrestling with your doubt, without this idea of when Jesus is going to show up and help you with your problem, it's real easy to just let go.

It's real easy to just cave in. that's the danger. That is the danger. But, here's the good news, y'all.

Because I can't just leave y'all in that place. Here's the good news, y'all. Remember how the story ends. Because they didn't know when Jesus was coming back, but he did show up.

Just hear that and hear that first. They didn't know when, but he did show up. And not only did he show up, he showed up and met Thomas exactly at his point of need.

[24 : 39] Thomas. Like, he hit the room, he's like, hey, everybody, Thomas. Okay? But you got to see it like that, right?

that in the midst of all of this, because everybody's happy to see him, but in the midst of all of this, he focused directly on Thomas. Because Thomas was the one who needed him the most.

And he went directly to him. And he said, put your finger here. Exactly what he'd asked for. Put your finger here. that's the same Jesus you believe in.

It's the very same Jesus. And you just have to hang on in the midst of wrestling with your doubt. Whatever that question is, is that Jesus is more than ready, more than willing, to meet you at your point of need.

But you have to hang on faithfully until he shows up. Sometimes that is the biggest challenge we face as disciples.

[25 : 55] It's simply not the big moment stuff. Big moment stuff has its own set of challenges. But being faithful day after day after day, even when the big stuff isn't happening, that in many ways is the harder part of being a disciple than it is to dig in the big moments.

But that is how our God has chosen to work and so we have to honor that. But where you are wrestling, however you are wrestling, with whatever you are wrestling, your Lord is ready to meet you at your point of need.

But you have to be willing to receive him when he does. Because what Thomas gets at the end of the story is this huge moment where he doesn't even get to talk.

And what's weird about it is that we don't even know if he did put his finger there. Like if you read it very carefully, we don't even know if he did that. It's just Jesus showed up and extended his hand.

What Thomas does is my Lord and my God. God does it because he gets it. It's like you are who you said you are. You did everything you said you were going to do.

[27 : 23] And yes, me, little old stupid doubting me, I'm sorry because you came through exactly the way you had promised you were going to come through. We've all had that moment.

moment. But whatever you are struggling with now, that should be very encouraging, yes? Because if you've had that moment and you know Jesus has met you in it and you still feel the love, you still know the grace, you know you've been forgiven, so whatever you're struggling with now, you know that Jesus is more than ready to meet you over here.

you don't know when, you may not know how, but you can trust that he will. And that's where you've got to get your heart right now, is trusting that he will.

Because even in the struggle, however the struggle feels, even in the struggle, if you know who he is and who he has been, no matter how hard the struggle is, right now, you can trust him to be him.

And because you can trust him to be him, just keep hanging on. So, again, let's follow our little road map, right?

[28 : 47] So we learn from Thomas. The big lesson is name what you are struggling with. Whatever it is. Whether it's the above water stuff or it's the underwater stuff.

But name it and give it to God. And trust that he's going to show up, even if he doesn't show up just when he wanted him to. If you get that, when he shows up, do what Thomas did.

Recognize it and celebrate it and sign on wholeheartedly. because that's him doing exactly what he said he would do. But you see that?

Did you get that? My Lord and my God. That, friends, is living in the fullness of your joy. Because you understand who he is.

And he's shown you that he will do what he said he would do. So if you want to live in that joy, trust him to be him. Trust him to be him.

[30 : 02] You know, this message we read from Peter, this letter, it's built around this theme, and this is my final point. That letter is written to a group of people who are struggling because they are new to the faith and they feel like this is not working the way I thought and my world around me is acting really weird because I'm making these different choices than everybody else.

And what Peter reminds them, what he has them remember, because I want to read it to you verbatim, is that he tells them this, in all this, meaning your suffering, meaning your doubt, in all this you greatly rejoice, though now you for a little while, I'm saying that wrong, that is not the struggling, that is in fact the resurrection, in all this you greatly rejoice, though for now, for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

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, for you are receiving the end result of your faith.

that is what we are about. So if you can hang on in the midst of that doubt and keep pressing until Jesus steps into your doubt, because he will step into it, then, friends, you will know the fullness of your joy.

[32 : 07] The difference this makes is that a living Savior can do that. A Savior that's in the ground somewhere cannot. You know, the thing about trusting people who are alive, right?

If I need to talk to Kelly, I can call her up. If I need to talk to Louie, I can call him up. If I call Mike and I say, hey, can you come here for a minute? I know he will show up. That is what living people do.

We serve a risen Savior who's in the world today. The grave is empty. And if you have put your hope in somebody who is dead, you can understand why you are not living in your joy.

But if your hope is in the risen Savior, the fullness of joy is yours to have. Amen? And amen.

Loving God, we thank you for the ways in which you are you. the ways in which you continue to show up even when we don't expect you. The ways in which you make our joy real in life.

[33 : 18] That these are not empty promises made by a dead prophet. That these are the word of God, the living God, the risen Savior, the vibrant, on-fire spirit at work in each of us right now.

Lord, let us step into it. Let us step into it, walk in it, and enjoy it so we may experience it in its fullness. No matter what our circumstances are, we can know the fullness of your joy, we can know the fullness of your peace, we can live in a very real hope because you are who you are, our living, risen Savior.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Yes. Yes, indeed. Amen. So we have talked about wrestling with doubt and we just sang about what we promised to do.

Amen. We will love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all our strength. May it be so as we go forward from this place. Now in the name of God, our creator and king, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our comforter and our sustainer.

May God bless us as we leave the love and serve God and all God's children. Amen. Amen. Amen.