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## LIKE THAT CRAZY DOG John 15:9-17

Raising kids is an adventure, isn't it? It includes healthy doses of confusion, frustration, terror, joy and laughter. But it certainly has some delightful moments. When Carissa was 4 years old Playmates Toys came out with a talking doll they called Cricket. Carissa saw the commercials for this doll on television and absolutely had to have it. She told me, "Daddy, I really want Cricket." The problem was the thing was expensive. It was \$100 back then, which would be worth just about \$200 today, not anywhere close to fitting in our budget for a doll for a 4 year old girl. I said, "Carissa, it's just too expensive. It's \$100!" She answered, "But Daddy, the batteries are included."

Then there was the time when Toby's friends were at our house. Our neighborhood was full of boys when our kids were little and this particular day four of them had come over. They were all playing with Legos in Toby's room. They were good at scattering those toys all over creation, but not so good at putting them away. When the time came for them to go home they took off and left a huge mess in his room. You couldn't see an inch of floor space because it was totally covered in toys. Laurie went in the room and began the laborious process of putting everything away. Toby didn't seem inclined to pitch in. Laurie said, "Toby, why don't you help me pick up all the toys." He responded, "You can do it." She said, "Yes, but I need some help." He answered, "Well, Jesus is in your heart. He'll help you."

It's nice to be able to look back on those interactions and laugh about them. Isn't laughter a wonderful thing? It is a happy sound and an enjoyable thing. I submit to you that we who know Jesus should be people who laugh. It should be characteristic of us. That's because we have reason for joy. We'll see that today as we look at John 15:9-17.

## GOD WANTS US TO HAVE JOY

In verses 9-10 Jesus said he had loved the disciples and urged them to obey his commands. He said as they obeyed his commands they would remain in his love. We will come back to this command in a few moments, but note why Jesus told them these things. In verse 11 he said it was so that they might have joy and that the joy they had would be total joy. He wanted them not just to have joy, but to be "filled with joy."

Jesus said he wanted *his* joy to be in them. The usual portrayals of Jesus in the movies annoy me because they often depict him as a sort of ethereal, super spiritual, bordering on the wimpy, an almost girly man. Jesus lived a rugged life with no air conditioning in a place that was often hot and dry and he did hard, physical work as a wood worker all day 6 days a week. Mind you, as a wood worker he had exactly zero power tools. He was certainly very strong and tough. The men who were drawn to him were blue collar fishermen. I doubt if those guys would have been eager to follow around some girly man. In addition to being a rugged guy he was also joyful. I doubt if he would have thought "my joy will be in you" was a good thing if he was a dour, brooding pessimist. What makes this promise a good thing is the joy was characteristic of Jesus and was obvious to those who knew him. One thing that confirms this for me is the humor that Jesus often displayed in his teaching. Because of cultural differences we sometimes miss it, but it shows up a lot in the gospels.

In Matthew 17:24 some authorities ask Peter if his teacher, meaning Jesus, pays the temple tax. This was a way of saying it was time to pay up. Oh great, tax time. The ancient Jewish version of April 15. There's nothing funny about tax time. However, after asserting that he wasn't required to pay the tax because the temple belonged to his Father, Jesus opts to pay it to keep from causing people problems with him. In verse 27 he says, "Go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

There were a lot of ways Jesus could have come up with the money for the temple tax. Don't you think this one was more than a little funny? Don't you think Peter got a kick out of that? Talk about fish tales, this was a whale of one, if you'll excuse the expression. Jesus wanted to make his point in a dramatic way, so he came up with a plan guaranteed to make people laugh. In that ancient culture it was a real knee slapper. Only a guy with a quirky sense of humor would devise this plan. Can't you see Peter telling that story to his friends? I suspect he said "That Jesus...you never know what he's going to do or say next." Peter had lived his life by that lake and made his living fishing it. I'd bet my own last drachma that in all the years he fished there he had not once found a coin in the mouth of a fish. And note that he didn't catch this fish with a net but with a line. That means the fish had to bite the bait with a coin in its mouth. If you look for it this kind of thing is scattered throughout the gospels. Jesus was actually a very funny guy.

There were a couple of groups that really liked being around Jesus. They flocked to him. One was people like the friends of Matthew and Zaccheus. They were people

who were not welcome in polite society. They were more than a little unrefined and they liked to party. And they loved being with Jesus, a fact that his enemies tried to use against him. I think that is a pretty strong indication that Jesus was a lot of fun to be around. The other group could not be more of a contrast. It was children. They loved Jesus. Do kids love grim, dour people? No, they love to be around happy, joyful people. That's what Jesus was.

Do you think of Jesus as joyful? He was. Do you think of God the Father as joyful? Romans 14:17 says the kingdom of God is about righteousness and joy. The kingdom of God is about joy. That is one of its focal points. Joy characterizes it. Where God is there is joy. Where God rules there is joy, and not just a little joy but total joy! That's why in Revelation it tells us there will be no sorrow in God's eternal kingdom. There will not be sadness there, there will be joy. To the degree that we experience the life of the kingdom of God we will experience joy. God wants us to have that without limit!

We know God wants us to be joyful because he commands us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16, "be joyful always." Romans 12:12 tells us to "be joyful in hope." Philippians 4:4 tells us to "rejoice in the Lord always." In case you missed it Paul repeats himself. "I will say it again: rejoice!" Why do you think he felt it necessary to say it again? It was because he didn't want us to just skim over that instruction. He wanted us to get it. God wants us to be joyful and rejoicing.

Joy is a beautiful thing. Robert Louis Stevenson near the end of his life said, "To miss the joy is to miss everything." *The Theological Dictionary of The New Testament* in defining the Greek word *chara*, which means joy, said joy "is the culmination of existence." It is the thing that everyone wants. We are all looking for it and are never really content until we experience it.

When Anna and Toby saw the title of the sermon they thought I might be talking about their dog, Doc. I can understand that, because that dog is nuts. He is a sweet, intelligent dog who is almost pathetic in his people orientation. We're talking neurotically needy. But this is a dog who acts like he's had way too much coffee. Wired, hyper, frenetic, all apply. He appears to be in need of a solid dose of valium. But he reminds me of the other dog I was thinking of in that he is always enthusiastic, up and happy. One old Peanuts cartoon began with Lucy, the cranky fussbudget, asking Charlie Brown, "Did you ever know anyone who was really happy..." As she is finishing her question Snoopy the dog comes wildly dancing along, glee written all over his silly doggy face, totally unconcerned with how he looks to anyone. Then Lucy looks at Charlie Brown and says, "Did you ever know

anyone who was really happy and was still in their right mind?" Hopefully that is like us. We should be in our right minds, but like that crazy Snoopy, carefree and going through life with abounding joy.

Let's think about what joy is. We all want joy, but we may not always accurately understand what joy is. When we don't know what joy really is we misperceive where it comes from. When we don't know where it comes from we end up looking for it in wrong directions. We will be like those people looking for that missing Malaysia Air plane in one area when it is in a totally different place. The search will inevitably be futile and fruitless.

It is difficult to be happy in unhappy circumstances. But it is possible to be joyful in unhappy circumstances. I know that because the Macedonian Christians mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8:2 lived in severe trial and extreme poverty, yet their joy overflowed. Happy and joy are related, but not exactly the same. So what is joy? It is not an anesthetic that keeps us from feeling any painful or unpleasant emotion. Even if you're filled with the joy of Jesus if you had a loved one that happened to be on Malaysia Air flight 370 you would not be giddy and happy now.

Joy has several components. It is grounded in peace. It means being at peace with God, being at peace with who you are, and feeling secure in him and in your eternal future. If you have no peace and are insecure and fearful there will be no joy. Joy is grounded in peace.

Joy also has a confidence component. This is grounded in trust in God's goodness, his sovereignty, his love for you and his ability to wring good out of any and every situation. You know somehow he will make good out of the lemons life may hand you. You know that he leads you always in his triumph, so you look at the future not with fear and trepidation, but with trust.

Finally joy has a bedrock positive rejoicing attitude that underlies one's entire life because one has something that is so big and so good that it even overshadows the inevitable disappointments, hardships and stresses of this life. On Christmas Day a few months ago Laurie and I did something we didn't really relish doing. We flew to Atlanta to go see Michael and Carissa. And we had to take Carissa's rabbit. We were told by several people that at least it would be mellow because people don't travel on Christmas Day, so the flight should be easy. What those who said this didn't count on was that we, the Myatts, were flying on Christmas Day, which meant it was going to be chaos. And it was. It was busy, crowded and crazy. Carting around a rabbit added to the fun. On the flight we were watching a movie

to distract ourselves, but my headphones broke. We had a layover in Houston and figured we'd find a nice restaurant in the terminal and have a fun Christmas dinner there. But our flight was a little delayed, it took us quite a while to find our gate for our next terminal, and in the end for Christmas dinner we split one of those pre-packaged sandwiches that cost about \$250. Despite all the inconveniences, discomforts and annoyances of traveling that day we were filled with joy. We were going to see our daughter and son-in-law. That was much bigger than all the nuisance stuff we had to deal with. So we traveled with joy. Life is going to have its hardships and losses. We cannot stop that. But in our God we have something that is bigger and better than any of those losses, so we derive our joy first and foremost not from pleasant circumstances, but from his love for us.

No one is going to argue with having joy, but most of us wish we had more joy than we do. So how do we increase in joy? There are two things Jesus said in this passage that if we put them into play in our lives will result in increased joy.

#### JOY COMES FROM KEEPING HIS COMMANDS

Literally Jesus said in verse 10 "if you keep my commands, you will remain in my love." He then said he told them this so that his joy would be in them. In other words, experiencing his joy is dependent on keeping his commands. **LET ME REPEAT: REAL JOY IS PRODUCED BY KEEPING JESUS' COMMANDS.** Few of us really believe this but it is true. However, this leaves us to ask if we have to obey God's commands in order for him to love us. That's certainly what this sounds like, but that would contradict the idea that it is only by his grace that we are accepted and loved. Is it something God does for us as the New Covenant seems to say, or is it something we earn by keeping the commandments?

If we have to earn God's love by keeping his commands then where do you draw the line? Does anyone perfectly keep Jesus' commands? No. Jesus commanded that we never get angry with anyone, that we never lust, that we love our enemies and that we be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. Where then does that leave us?

Either that means no one remains in the Father's love, no one is accepted and loved by God and all are rejected by him, or there must be some level of obedience that earns us a passing grade. Since we all fail God must grade on the curve. Did Jesus mean then that you have to keep his commands the majority of the time? Or 70% of the time? What's a passing grade in this class? And if the minimum grade is 70% what is going to happen to the guy who keeps the commands 69.49% of the

time? He's going to argue about that one occasion when it really wasn't his fault so his score actually should be 69.51%, thus giving him a passing grade.

None of that fits with what the Bible tells us. Still, it sure sounds like Jesus was saying if you want God to love you, you have to keep the commands, in other words we earn his love. Jesus repeats the idea in verse 14 when he says, "You are my friends if you do what I command." That sounds like if you don't do the commands you're not his friend. That doesn't sound like a recipe for joy. Do what I want or I won't be your friend. Sounds like a stressful relationship where you are always walking on eggshells afraid you're going to do something wrong and lose the friendship. It most certainly does not sound like grace. How else can we understand this?

Let's think about how the disciples would have understood what Jesus was saying. When they heard Jesus talking about his teaching and his commands they understood him to mean all that he stood for and taught. The emphasis was that they were to keep *his* teaching, not someone else's. In that day it was the norm for people to follow a particular rabbi or in the Gentile world some philosopher. The disciples of a particular rabbi accepted and lived by that rabbi's instructions, his commands, his teaching. The disciples understood Jesus to say that the way we live in the Father's love is by accepting Jesus' authority and teaching and letting it be what rules in our lives.

In other words, Jesus is telling his men the way to be in the Father's love is to accept that Jesus is Lord and to submit to his will in our lives. We've already seen that none of us is going to live that out perfectly. That's not really the point. The key point is saying, "Yes, Jesus you are Lord and I want your way to rule in my life." Because we are flawed, sometimes not very rational people, there are going to be times when even though we are saying, "Yes, Jesus, you are Lord and I want to rule" we are blithely trampling all over his will. Jesus died for us to pay for our sin because he knew this is how we are, but the key is taking that step of committing to the Lordship of Jesus in our lives.

As an example of our often irrational fallibility in another area, I can say I want to be in good shape and I believe that to do that I need to exercise regularly and eat a healthy diet. I commit to do that and want that to be the rule in my life. But I'm not going to see the whole project as a total failure because a couple of days I didn't exercise and I ate that apple pie on my birthday.

The key is saying, “Jesus is Lord. He is going to rule in my life.” This is why in John 6:29 after the people asked Jesus what work they had to do to have the Father’s “seal of approval,” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” It is to say, “I believe Jesus is Lord, that he knows what is best, that he has obtained eternal life for me through his work, and that his commands are what should rule my life.”

Psalms 1:2 speaks of the man who is blessed and says, “his delight is in the law of the Lord.” He doesn’t just try to follow God’s commands, he delights in them. Psalm 119:14 says, “I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.” Jeremiah 15:16 says “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight.” The prophet depicts God’s truth as being like delicious food. Laurie made her apple pie for my birthday. Her pie was found and I ate it. It was my joy and my heart’s delight. That’s how Jeremiah felt about God’s instruction to him.

Well, okay, apparently those religious people are just weird. They like having a long list of rules to keep. It makes them feel good about themselves, I guess. Another thing you should remember about Jesus is that he did not appeal to super-religious people. They mostly didn’t like him at all. The people who loved him were the ones who couldn’t cut it in the hyper religious world. They were the ones that had no hope of keeping all the religious detailed rules. Some of them were average folks like us who tried their best but knew they really didn’t cut it. Some notable others were people who were total busts on the religious front. They were complete, hopeless rejects. They didn’t even try when it came to the religious details.

Here is what Jesus said to those people in Matthew 11:28-30. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Back in the first century the yoke was a common symbol for a rabbi’s teaching. When a person submitted himself to a rabbi he took that rabbi’s yoke. Jesus claimed in these verses that his teaching, his commands, were light and that taking them on would result in rest for weary souls. That does not sound like a burdensome list of do’s and don’ts.

How is it that obeying Jesus’ commands produces joy? First is the motive behind obeying the commands. What makes Jesus’ yoke light is the reason we obey. If we must obey in order to gain approval, to meet the standard required, then the task is indeed a burden unless the standards are awfully low, which they aren’t. The point

of the gospel is that we don't earn that acceptance. Jesus said the "work" we must do is to believe in him, agree that he is Lord and that he has done what is necessary for us to be approved. We receive that approval as a gift. The obedience then is not a required performance, it is a response of love. That means we can breathe a sigh of relief. Our souls can be at rest because the big question has been already settled for us.

When I was in high school I went out for two sports. At our large public high school there were always many more guys who wanted to play on the team than there were spots available. Anybody could go out for a team, but not everybody was going to make it. I went out for basketball and did not make the team for the obviously unfair reason that I had no talent. I had no talent for baseball either, but for some reason I survived a couple of cuts then we got down to the last cut. On that day the coach would post the final roster and anyone whose name was not on it was done. Cut from the team. Up to that time everything you did in practice was done to prove something, to convince the coach to approve of you and keep you on the team. Every drill, every swing in batting practice, every sprint, was fraught with peril because your very baseball life was at stake. The final cut was a "I can't bear to read the list" sort of experience. But seeing your name on the list was an incredible relief and joy. After that practice was different. You were on the team. You weren't going to be cut even if you had a bad day in practice. From that point on practice was about trying to improve, working on your skills. Now the analogy is not perfect, because for most there was still pressure in practice. It came from wanting to earn a starting position. For me there was no pressure because I wasn't going to get playing time and I knew it. But the point is once you believe in Jesus, once you've declared him Lord, you've made the cut. Now you keep practicing, but for a whole new reason. It is not because you have to make the team.

Also Jesus' yoke is light because of what it produces. Why did we practice baseball after we made the team? In order to get better, because when you play well it is a joyful experience. If you've never had the experience of messing up royally in an athletic endeavor, you may not know that it feels awful. I am told the converse, succeeding famously, feels terrific and is really joyful. I mostly take that on faith because I never did that much. My point is that as we seek to obey Jesus' commands we will find that they result in life. It is a joyful thing to discover that though sometimes they may be hard, you love the payoff. The payoff is a full life of peace, joy and love.

Jesus does not have a long list of rules. Love God and love people. That is the best formula ever given for having a joyful life. They require some effort at times, but



the result is health at the core of your being, and we all know that in human experience there is nothing more joyful than love.

### JOY COMES FROM BEING JESUS' FRIEND

In John 15:10 Jesus said if we keep his commands, meaning we accept him as our Lord, we remain in the Father's love. You see a similar message in verse 14 where Jesus says if we keep his commands we will be his friend. This is amazing. Jesus says to these guys and to us that we are going to be his friend. Think of some famous person in the world today who you think is fascinating. It could be an athlete, a movie star, a producer, a political leader, a musician, a business leader, a scientist, maybe even a religious leader. I'm going to guess it's not Justin Bieber. This is a person you will never rub elbows with. Now imagine that one day this person shows up at your house and says, "I want to be your friend. I want everyone to know that we're best buddies." How does that feel? Well the most fascinating, the most powerful, the smartest, wisest, best person who has ever lived, Jesus of Nazareth, now says to you, "I want to be your friend."

I want you to think about what kind of a friend Jesus is. He is a friend who has proven his love for us by coming into this world, suffering here and ultimately being killed. He died on our behalf. He was absolutely right when he said, in verse 13, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." No one has greater love for you, no one is a better friend for you than Jesus.

Most of us struggle with believing that Jesus could really love us at least to some extent because we see our flaws when we are honest. There is a lot in us we don't want other people to see or to know, but we know that Jesus sees it all. How could he love us? The Bible tells us that God sees the end from the beginning. Jesus now exists in a way that he can see the whole sweep of human history, including your beginning, end and your life in eternity. Which means that yes, you are flawed but he sees you as you will be in his kingdom.

There are moments when you are raising children that you might think that you have utterly failed. I recall those days when one of our kids threw an almighty tantrum in a store some place. The temptation is to think you are raising a selfish brat that will bring misery to everyone he or she encounters. But what if in that moment I could have seen my kids as they are today? I would see them as bright, intelligent, highly successful people who are a delight to be around. I would see that howling terror of a child through the lens of the future. It would make me patient, knowing this is merely part of the process of getting them to that future state that is what I am aiming for. That's how Jesus sees you. He sees as pure and

blameless, just like him in his kingdom, because that is what the finished product of you will be.

Having Jesus as a friend is amazing. He knows and cares about all that is happening in your life. What I want you to grasp is that right this minute Jesus is here. He is present with us and he is looking at you. He sees what is going on in life and he cares about all of it. He is in your corner, on your side. He wants to bring about good for you.

I don't know if you saw this story, but for some reason it reminded me of having Jesus as our friend. A year ago, in March of 2013, our military had an unmanned drone aircraft flying in international airspace near Iran. They detected an Iranian Air Force F4 fighter jet tracking the drone with the obvious intent of shooting it down. According to Air Force General Mark Welsh they sent one of our fighters to the area. The jet they sent was an F22. The F4 is a Viet Nam era jet. It is a good aircraft, but outdated. The F22 is a stealth aircraft, the most advanced fighter jet in the world today. Good fighter planes are called "air superiority" fighters, but the F22 is called an "air dominance" fighter because it is so much better than anything else in the sky. The F22 pilot took his plane right under the F4 to check out the weapons hanging from his wings. Because of its stealth capability the Iranian had no idea the F22 was there. At that point the US plane just popped out from under the F4 right on his left wing. The American pilot radioed the Iranian and said, "You really ought to go home now." The Irani pilot immediately left and returned to base.

We are kind of like that drone, flying around in this world, often unaware of what's really going on around us. We are so vulnerable to attack. But here's the great news. Jesus is like that F22. He is stealthy because we don't see him, but he is there. He said he is with us always, he loves us and is working to protect us and bring about good in every single thing that happens in our lives. We are never alone. We have a friend who cares about everything in our lives. And that is cause for great joy.

Yeah, consider that picture of Snoopy, dancing his heart out with that ridiculous grin on his face because he doesn't have a care in the world. That my friends, is to be us. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." He's your friend. Cast your care on him, which makes you carefree and full of joy. Is there something stressing you, sapping your joy? If Jesus were right here with you would it be different. Well he is here. His right with you, loving you, being your friend in all that happens.