

Crossings Community Church  
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Series: John: The Way to Joy  
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John 12:12-26

A few years ago, I came to a place where I stopped using the word *Christian*. Many of you, maybe you've felt that as well, and you journeyed to a place where you no longer felt comfortable using it. I want to tell you a little bit about why I don't like to use that word. If you've been here a long time, maybe you never noticed, but it doesn't come out in my preaching either. I really do try to avoid it.

There are a couple of different reasons for this. The first is, even around the church, being in the church, the way it's been used and the way it's been talked about, I feel like it's been watered down incredibly. Amidst our culture, the way it's used, the way it's talked about and understood, it's been watered down significantly.

I found this study from 2014, so this is pretty recent stuff. In 2014, of the Americans polled, 70 percent said they believed they were Christians. I think that is an incredible indictment on the way the word is understood, because as heartbreaking as it is to say, I wish that were a reality. I wish 70-plus percent of Americans were gospel-transformed, Jesus-loving people, but it's not the case.

What is the case is we have a word or an idea that's been thrown around. The meaning of it has been so destroyed over time that it doesn't mean anything close to what it meant in the Bible or even within our own country many years ago. When you look back into the eighteenth century, still the definition and the meaning of the word carried such great weight. It's so different than it is today.

What was once such a high calling has become something so watered down and, unfortunately, insignificant. Not only has the definition of what it means to follow Jesus or be a Christian been diluted, but the joy of what it means to follow Jesus has been diluted. You see, the reality is, as followers of Jesus, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

I've been married (as I shared with you, we just celebrated an anniversary) for now a little over 18 years. I remember back to the conversations I had with people leading into marriage. The phrase I heard the most from people as I was approaching that wedding day is, "Enjoy the honeymoon, because when the honeymoon is over, the honeymoon is over."

That's what I heard. I'm not exaggerating. That is the most repeated phrase I heard from individuals outside of, of course, my close family and all. As outsiders heard and found out I was approaching the wedding day, that's what I heard. I heard this idea that, "Okay, you'd better enjoy life now, because what you're about to walk into is so confining, and it's restricting. All of the happiness you may experience for a moment is all going to fade." That was the message I was hearing.

The truth is what happened was, as expected, the honeymoon was wonderful, but so was everything else that came after. The journey after was wonderful and joyous. The first year was awesome. It was incredible. Year two, year five, all the way through to year 10, all the way through to year 18 have been incredible.

Now when I say that to you, what I'm not saying is it's been easy or without difficulty. My bride and I have journeyed through incredible financial difficulty and loss. We've journeyed through health and medical difficulty and struggle. We've journeyed through all of the normal parenting things of being parents now for over 14 years. We've journeyed through just the realities of, "Hey, we're married, and we're both sinners, and we're trying to do life together."

That's difficult. We've journeyed through that roller coaster of life that sometimes is everything is going great, and other times we're at the bottom of that roller coaster, and everything seems to be going wrong. I can honestly say it's all been wonderful and joyful. You know, if I had the opportunity today in some really weird sort of movie sci-fi sort of reality to go back and talk to the Matt of 18-1/2 years ago and I were to try to explain that to him, I couldn't do it.

I couldn't do it because, you see, what I've experienced and what I've walked through in this great journey of marriage, that joy is really beyond the words I can give it. I couldn't communicate. I remember Matt back then. I could not have communicated something that he would've understood to see what he was walking into.

I think the invitation to follow Jesus is very similar. It's the closest thing I can think of that may be an ounce of what I've experienced in my life. The idea that an invitation to follow Jesus is all about restriction and all about rules and how difficult it's going to be and how the fun maybe is going to be taken away out of life and all of these things... The truth is, I look back at my journey with Jesus, and I know joy that supersedes every single circumstance of my life because of that relationship with Jesus.

That's a joy that goes beyond words. It goes beyond being able to paint a picture or describe, no matter how eloquent we might be. Jesus is at a place where he is communicating that kind of gospel, that kind of succinct, in-your-face, no-blanks-left sort of gospel to those surrounding him. I'd like for us to read this morning in John, chapter 12, verses 12 through 26. I want you to hear this unfiltered (especially as we get to the end) call to life Jesus extends. This is John, chapter 12, beginning in verse 12. It says...

***"The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'"***

***And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!' His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him."***

I think this is another one of those moments. We passed one earlier in John. It's like all of this is going on, and what our author John is telling us is all of this is fulfillment of the prophecies, and the disciples right now are missing it. But there's a moment in Jesus' glorification and his ascension where the light bulb comes on, and it all clicks. I would've loved to have been there and just seen that look on their faces when it all clicks. Verse 17:

***"The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, 'You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.'***

***Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'***

***Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.'"***

See, our focus today is going to be on that final paragraph (Jesus' words there), but I want to show you a couple of things really quickly about that first section that we read. See, he gets in there around these people who have gathered together to celebrate the feast, but they're also people who have gathered, and they're looking for him because of the miraculous work he did with Lazarus, raising a dead man to life.

They're there, and Jesus begins to approach. They proclaim, "Hosanna!" That's a Greek word *hosanna* transliterated from the Hebrew word *hosanna*, which basically means *salvation*. That's why it wasn't translated again into the Greek and again into our English language because it's such a unique word. Salvation. Savior. Rescue. That's what they're yelling as Jesus comes in.

You see, they're beginning to realize (or *have realized*) who Jesus is. ***"Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"*** So he is not only here being affirmed as Savior and Rescuer but King, King of Israel, and not just that. Notice the Pharisees' words. ***"You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."***

See, he is not only just King of the Jews here, but whether they understand what they're seeing, what they're thinking, or what they're saying, he is King of the world. His authority and his rule and his sovereignty are complete. Nothing stands outside of that. It's difficult to say when we read Scripture that any one part is more important than the next. Right? It's all important. It's all vital. It's all life giving to us.

But you see, as we've journeyed through the gospel of John, as we noticed last week, all of these times we've said, "The time has not come. It's not right yet. There are other things that have to happen," the time has now come. Right? Jesus says it in his own words. ***"The hour has come for***

***the Son of Man to be glorified.***" All of the filters and all of the speed bumps and all of the pauses we've seen in the ministry and the words of Jesus are all gone.

Now is the time for Jesus to communicate in as much clarity as possible, as succinctly as possible, what it means to come and follow Jesus. All of the times when it wasn't right are over. Now it's time. See, we don't know in this moment as we get to that bottom paragraph and the people are coming... Philip goes, and he gets Jesus. We don't get to see, "Did they ask him a question, or did Jesus already know what they wanted?"

I don't know either, but just to go back and to look at what would've been in their minds, what were they expecting? You see, the Jews were expecting a king who would be not only *like* David but *greater* than David. They were expecting a political ruler. They were expecting someone to come and overthrow the oppressive government (the Roman rule) of their day and then reign and bring them into a day of great prosperity. That's what they were expecting.

As they approached Jesus, as they found him, as they had proclaimed, "Hosanna! Savior!" I think what they were expecting was, "Let's help him become the political ruler we're expecting him to be." I think their question was... Jesus knew it. That's what he answers. We don't know if they verbalized it or not. What they were wondering is, "What can we do? How do we become a part of what you're doing? What can we do?"

I think what they would've expected to hear would be... I mean, he needs to put together an army, right? He needs some military rule if he is going to overthrow the government. He probably needs money, right? If he is going to put together a political reign that's going to overthrow the current leadership, he probably needs financial backing.

I think the last thing they were expecting is what came out of Jesus' mouth. "You have to die." That's what he said. He didn't say, "Guys, we need to start training. We need to get all of our weapons together. I need you to give me half of everything you own so we can have the financial backing in order to make this happen." He says, "You need to come, and you need to die." Let's look at these words again. I'm going to begin reading in verse 23. It says...

***"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."***

This group of people has come, and Jesus says, "It's time to come and die. It's time to come and have a distaste...no, not a *distaste*, but a *hatred*...for everything that's marked by this world and live a life serving and sacrificing. Oh, and by the way, it will be greater than you can ever imagine." I mean, can you imagine just the shock that would've been in their minds and their hearts as they approached Jesus and as they were there looking for answers and direction?

Inasmuch as they were expecting to hear, "Okay, this is how we're going to become a prosperous people. This how we're going to come and find the rule and find what you're looking for," it's

like he delivered that message, and yet he didn't deliver it in any way similar to what they were expecting. His message was one of prosperity, not financial prosperity. It was the kind of prosperity where you find the joy that's bigger than yourself and bigger than life and bigger than circumstances. You find that through coming and dying. That was the message he extended.

We're a pet-friendly home in the Powell house. Those of you who know us know that's an incredible understatement. We have a fish in every room, we have a bearded dragon, we have two guinea pigs, and we have two dogs. It's a zoo. With a pet-friendly home like that, obviously we have children who love animals. They've grown up around animals. We haven't always had this many, but they've grown up around dogs for sure and other animals.

Being young (and maybe some of you have walked through this with your own children), as youngsters, there was this talk sometimes of wanting to be a vet. "I want to be a vet." In their minds, a vet as they had experienced was somebody who sits down, and all the people from all around bring all their cute, little puppies to the vet.

The vet sits down and then plays with the puppies, makes sure the puppies are eating and drinking everything they should. Even some of the big dogs come in, and they get to pet them, and they get to love on them. That's what a vet does. When you begin to communicate to your children at the right age-appropriate moment what a vet really does, you see the conversation begin to change, right? The conversation begins to change when you describe to them all of the work and the sickness and the surgeries and all of that kind of stuff that comes along with it.

I think, unfortunately, we're in a day today where we're surrounded by people who think they are Christians but have no idea the truth of the gospel. Unfortunately, I think we have a great number of churches...our community, our city, greater Houston, Texas, America, around the world...where people are gathered and come often together, and they have no idea what the gospel of Jesus Christ is.

When Jesus says what he says in these words... Just verses 24 to 26. They're such few words, but the words he says are so incredibly clear. What he describes is what it means to live a life that follows him. We are called to die. We are called to die! What does that mean? That's at the beginning of those words he shares with those people who are gathered. "You have to come and die." What does that look like for us?

Let me read to you from Paul. Romans, chapter 8, verse 13. I think Paul helps us understand what Jesus is saying here. He says, "**For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**" If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live! You see, we're called to die.

That means that a call to follow Jesus (what he is extending to these individuals who were listening to him, what he extends to us here today) is we're called to a battle mentality. We are called to wage war against the desires of our flesh every single day. We're called to a battle mentality. We're called to wake up every day and say, "Today, I'm going to fight the desires and the temptations of my flesh. I am going to put them to death so that in Jesus, I might find life."

It's a warrior mentality. It's a battle we're called to fight. I think every one of us as Christ followers, as we gather together, whether it's in a small group context or just gathering together here on a Sunday morning, I think all of us should be able to answer the question, "What are you putting to death in your life?"

It's not a "one moment in time" kind of thing. I can tell you I'm a follower of Jesus. I placed my faith in Jesus a long time ago, and I'm doing the best I can to love him and follow him, and there is sin all over my life. It's not something we closed a chapter the first time we said, "I believe in Jesus," and then we never have to engage in the battle again. It's a continuous battle until Jesus returns.

All of us...every one of us in here...should be able to answer the question, "What am I putting to death in my life?" Maybe for some of you, it's, "Well, Matt, I'm putting to death the lust of the flesh. I'm putting to death the lust of the flesh, the things I'm viewing on the computer on the Internet. I'm putting that to death because it's a sinful desire in my heart. Here's how I'm doing it. Here's how I'm waging that war."

What are you putting to death? There are others in here. Maybe, "I'm putting to death this pursuit of professional success that I've elevated over the responsibility of my bride (or my husband) and my children. I want to be excellent in my work, in my job, but I've elevated as an idol in my life professional success. I'm no longer discipling, loving, training, shepherding my home the way I've been called to. I'm putting that idolatry to death."

*We are called to die, and in our dying, we find life.* Again, Jesus says, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."** Notice in the death, the bearing of fruit. Life! New life! Transformation. **"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."**

In dying, we find life. I think this is a great picture of what we saw a few chapters ago in John, chapter 10, verse 10. Remember those words of Jesus? **"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."** We often ask the question as we're reading that or we know that, "Okay, what does that look like? How do I walk in that?" I love to read and to meditate on Jesus saying he came, he lived, he died the worst death imaginable, he rose again, and he ascended into heaven so we might have abundant life.

Okay, how do we walk in it? By dying. By waging war against the desires of our flesh. I think you could read this, and you could see in it what some people might call a *poverty righteousness*. Right? *Hates* this life. You might think for a moment, "Well, if I give away everything I have, well, then I'll be where Jesus wants me to be." I don't think that's what's going on here. I think this language is meant to have us so focused on eternal things that the things of this world fade away.

When we read, "Hate this life," really I think what's going on here is we're so focused, we have such a laser beam determination, the soldier's motivation and focus... "I'm living my life for Jesus Christ. I'm living for eternal things. I'm following him with every single ounce in me, so much so that the things of this world just begin to fade. It's not that my focus is on the things of

this world and how much I can hate them, but rather on how big and how determined I am to glorify the one who came and lived and died so I might have life."

That means, "I'm so passionate about spiritually mentoring my children. I'm so passionate. I feel so compelled because of not only my love of Jesus, my love of his Word, my understanding of that call on my life, that I'm pursuing that, that the fact that I might not ascend the promotion ladder as fast as others I work with is meaningless to me because I'm so passionate about pouring into my family."

Do you see? One fades as the other grows. It means, "I'm so passionate about giving of myself financially to eternal things, whether that's the pregnancy help center, whether it's the local church, whatever it is, to giving to the kingdom of God, that the desire to get a new car in three years just because I had the last one for three years, to have the new model, fades. It gets destroyed in my mind because I'm so focused on eternal things and God's call on my life."

It means, "I'm so passionate about developing and growing in this relationship with Jesus. Because I know who he is and what he has done for me, spending 30 minutes, spending an hour with him every day is a joy when that alarm goes off." You see the ways of the world, the ways of the flesh piling in comparison to the growing, all-encompassing, enormous passion for pursuing eternal things. We're called to die, and in our dying, we find life.

The last verse there. ***"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."*** You see, there is no relationship with Jesus, there is no Christianity, there is no Christ follower, without this lifestyle. This is the invitation. He is saying... These people have gathered. "What can we do? We've seen you're Savior, Rescuer. Hosanna! How do we live our lives to follow you?"

Although it was completely different than what they expected to hear, Jesus shares with them, "Here is what it looks like to live a life that follows me. It means dying to the flesh and finding the joy of eternal life." It's a lifestyle that has the aroma of death and yet the taste of joy. Can you picture that? It's a lifestyle that has the aroma of death, but it has the taste of joy. It's the constant putting to death of the things of the flesh while walking in joys inexpressible.

Most simply, this is the gospel. This is the invitation of life. I want to take this idea that we're called to die, and in our dying, we find life. I want to get so incredibly practical with it this morning. I know sometimes we talk about these big ideas. I've heard people say, "You know, I leave here, and I really just don't know what to do with it." Today you're not going to be able to say that, okay? Here is the practical about, "What do I do? I hear the invitation. I'm called to die, put the desires of the flesh to death, and in that, find life. What do I do?"

Knowing what it is we're battling against demands we feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Feeling the conviction of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives, is directly proportional to our time in God's Word. As we wrestle with this and we get so incredibly practical... You're like, "Matt, I knew you were going to say this. I knew you were going to go there." Here it is.

If we're going to put the flesh to death, *we must be saturated in his Word*. We must be saturated in his Word! That's where, as we spend time with him in this Book, the Holy Spirit comes alive and begins to do a work in us. He does miraculous work in us, gives us gifts that blow our minds, brings conviction, brings transformation.

If you're just sitting around waiting for that to happen like some genie in a bottle and you're not opening this Book, you're going to get exhausted waiting rather than walking in the life-giving joy of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. That's how we fuel the work of the Holy Spirit in us (time in his Word).

The second thing is if we're going to put to the death flesh in our life, then *we must be fully engaged in his church*. We must be fully engaged in his church. I want to show you. We could go to all kinds of different black and white Scriptures and talk about this, but I want to just show you a historical narrative.

Jesus comes, and we're in his moment right here where Jesus is sharing the unfiltered message of the gospel. "Come. Die. Find life. Follow me." But notice what happens. He comes, and he shares this message. He dies on the cross. Three days later, he is up from the grave. Ascension. Acts, chapter 1, and then into Acts, chapter 2.

Immediately, historically after, "This is what you do to follow me," it's, "Here is the church," because you can't do it without the church. We need the church. We need the people around us. We need those walking next to us who are also people who are people of the Word, and they're journeying through it.

We've given them permission in our lives to say, "Hey, right here, this decision you're making, I don't think you need to buy that new car right now." We've given people permission to say those things to us because they're journeying with us to put our flesh to death and find life together. They're also the people as we journey through life who are there with us, and they say, "I am celebrating with you in this area, the victory you've shared with us." Or, "Here where you're struggling, you're in the depth of circumstances that feel so heavy and defeating..."

Jesus came, and he offered life. He is bigger than this. He is sovereign. He is ruler. His authority has no end. We need the church in order to come and die and find life, because we need the people around us who we have given permission to speak that kind of truth, to speak that kind of encouragement in us, because following Jesus is not a solo mission.

Many of you in here are part of small groups. This is why. This reason! What I've just shared with you is why our small group ministry is so foundationally important to us as a church. Many of you in here are a part of a small group. Some of you aren't. If you aren't and you're here and you're visiting, you came on the greatest day you could come.

We're going to have all of our small groups at these different tables, and you can come, and you can meet somebody. You can put together the plan of which one you want to try first and which one you want to go to second. Don't tell them that, but you can put together that plan. Those of you in here who are fully engaged in small groups, there are some of you who attend every

single small group meeting, but you still haven't given people permission to speak that kind of truth into your life.

Go in, and go deeper. Be vulnerable enough to give those people you're doing life with amidst those Community Groups the permission to speak that kind of truth into your life. In dying, as those who are walking with you, you will find life. See, as we close this morning, the invitation is to come and die.

I know that may not be the greatest thing you've ever heard ("Come and die"), but it's the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In your coming and in your dying, you will experience a joy that supersedes every single difficulty and circumstance you will ever face in your life. Come and die and find life.

I want to invite you to bow your head and close your eyes. As we respond in prayer, we're going to have some prayer volunteers, including myself, who will be in the back this morning. If you want to grab somebody and there's an element of your flesh that you feel that conviction through the Word of God to put to death, you need to grab somebody, and you need to just pray with them over that.

Then this is the time for you to be courageous enough, faithful enough, bold enough, to do that. As we worship this morning, we respond to a Savior whose invitation to us is, "Come and die" just as he came and died. Might we worship him this morning in the life he gives us. I want to invite you in the spirit of prayer to stand up if you're physically able. Stand up on your feet.