Infallible Joy Tonight’s reading is from John 16. Jesus went on to say, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.” At this, some of His disciples said to one another, “What does He mean by saying, ‘in a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father’?” They kept asking, “What does He mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what He is saying.” Jesus saw that they wanted to ask Him about this, so He said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’? Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. “Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my father. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father Himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. This is God’s word. There’s a whole field now called happiness studies. You know, there’s departmentsin academia, in fields of study, there’s journals, all dedicated to happiness studies. Here, Jesus Christ says, ‘I give to my disciples, one of the main resources you need to go out there in life, and that is joy.’ And of all the things I’ve read, and I’ve tried to keep up with the happiness studies, none of them are as nuanced as this is. Let’s take a look and see what Jesus says in this passage about the joy He gives, you know, in John 15:11, we’ve been going through these parts of the book of John 15:11, He says, ‘I give you my joy that your joy may be complete’, but He doesn’t elaborate on it. Here He gives you more information. So we’re looking at what does the Bible tell us about the joy that Jesus gives? There’s five things we learn here … that this joy is inevitable not circumstantial, thoughtful, prayerful and wonderful, or, based on wonder. First of all, when I say the joy Jesus gives, it is inevitable … I’m thinking about verse 23, it’s a very categorical statement. He says, ‘I will see you again. And you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.’ Now He’s talking to His disciples about them seeing Him after His resurrection, you know, when He’s raised from the dead and they’re going to see Him. He says, ‘When that happens, you’re going to get a joy, and no one will take it away from you.’ Notice how categorical it is. He doesn’t say ‘some of you will get joy.’ He doesn’t say some of you, He says you will have joy. He doesn’t say some of you may have joy, He says you will have joy and then He says ‘nothing can take it away from you’, which is a fascinating thought. Because if you’ve been coming, you know that Jesus also says you will have persecution. In this world, you will have tribulation. If the world hates me, they will hate you. And over and over, Jesus tells them, ‘boy, it’s not gonna be easy, life in this world is tough’. And He’s talking about suffering all the time. And then I hear, He says, ‘When I give you your joy, nothing will take that joy away’ and you say, ‘Really?’ Here’s what I think He’s got to be saying, that the joy that Christ gives you can be subdued, it can even get swamped by sorrow, but it’s never extinguished and it’s never banished and it comes back it reasserts itself. It resurfaces. Now, don’t forget you have to realize we’re not talking about the kind of joy you have at a party. You might say party giddiness, that comes with great food and great drink, we’re talking about something else. I mean, there’s a kind of joy, it’s like a babbling brook … lots of noise but pretty shallow. There’s the kind of joy it’s like a river which is infinitely deeper than the brook but makes almost no noise at all. And maybe you could think of it like this. You do know people, do you not, who on the surface are very, they joke a lot, they’re always cracking jokes, they’re life of the party, they yuk it up, you know, people who are always seeming to yuk it up and yet underneath you can tell that they’re really pretty unhappy people? Do you know anybody like that? Sure, superficially they’re upbeat and maybe even joking a lot … underneath they’re sad. Christians are the opposite. According to this, Christians can actually have a lot of sorrow, in fact, I would go so far … this would be a different topic, I won’t go there now. In some ways, Christians, if we really are following our Lord and we’re really willing to serve people the way He did, He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief … if you’re willing not to be too self-protective or get involved with people, and the pains and suffering of people … well, in some ways, superficially, Christians may be sadder people, but underneath, whereas there’s people who are happy on the surface but sad underneath, as Christians, it is the opposite. There’s a joy that’s deep. It’s sort of like a Christian joy goes down into the deepest recesses of the heart. And as we’re going to see it, you can’t extinguish it, it’s there, it’s sort of, you know, there’s a place in which … in a novel I once read where it talked about a character who looked on the surface like he was pretty unhappy, and lots of bad things were happening, and it was a lot of sadness. But then he laughed, in the midst of his sadness, and it says, it became clear that under all of his sadness, there was a fountain of joy, enough to set a kingdom laughing or to burst forth. So that’s why Christians have gotta joy. Jesus says ‘when I give you this joy, this is a joy that can be, you know, it can be submersed, it can be swallowed up for a while by grief, but it never goes away, it’s never extinguished; it’s deep there underneath everything else.’ And therefore, joy is inevitable. You know how often the Bible talks about this? This is pretty strong. I already told you, John 15:11. Jesus says ‘I give you my joy’, but like Rom 14 says, ‘The kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit.’ Doesn’t say brings joy, or might sometimes make you happy … the kingdom of God is joy, In the Holy Spirit! Or Gal 5, it says ‘the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy.’ I mean, if you have the Spirit in your life, joy absolutely comes, it’s inevitable; or 1 Pet 1:8, I’ll get back to this. Here’s Peter, he’s talking to his readers and he says, ‘sometimes, we Christians love Jesus so much that we become overwhelmed with an inexpressible and indescribable joy.’ Actually, the Old King James puts it like this. Peter says to his readers, ‘even though you’ve never seen Him, you love Him; and you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.’ And He wasn’t just saying some of you, you know, spiritual types are like that. Now, he says, ‘you (meaning you Christians), you love Him. And that means sometimes the joy wells up from downward where God put it when you became a Christian.’ So this joy is inevitable, number one, number two, it’s not circumstantial. What I mean by that, it’s not based, like the world’s joy on favorable circumstances. So for example, there’s a metaphor that Jesus puts right in the middle of this whole passage, and we’re going to see this metaphor does a lot of work for Him. But the first thing, let’s read it, it’s verse 21, and here’s the metaphor, the illustration, the analogy, He says, ‘a woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come. But when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.’ A vivid image! Now, I’ve watched all three of my sons born, so I saw my wife go through this, but you also have to keep in mind … everybody, that Jesus Christ is speaking to, be before epidurals, before anesthetics, before hospitals, when actually, labor was, in general, probably considerably even more painful than it is right now, the way it’s done. Here’s what’s so fascinating … He says that ‘she’s in pain, she’s happy, she’s in the pain of labor. But when the child is born …’ notice it doesn’t say her pain and anguish goes away. You know, I mean, even I can see that the minute the child is born doesn’t mean suddenly her body stops hurting, you know, suddenly, everything’s fine. No, but it says ‘the baby makes her forget her pain.’ Which is to say that even though her body’s still got the pain, the joy of seeing the child grabs her mind, it takes all the mind share. It’s like she’s got pain, but she’s not even thinking about the pain, the pain doesn’t control her thinking anymore. It doesn’t … she can hardly think about it because there’s the child! Jesus says Christian joy is like that. And what does that mean? Wow! It means at least this … that Christian joy can coexist with sorrow, and that, in other words, it’s not like when you have Christian joy it banishes all sorrow. No. The child’s being born doesn’t banish all the pain immediately, but what it does is it so fills her with joy, that the joy gets her through the pain, helps her overcome the pain, keeps the pain from controlling her. And Jesus is actually saying that’s how Christian joy works. You have it, you still have your sorrow, but what Christian joy is, it doesn’t banish the sorrow or get you to not care or not feel the pain. Rather, the Christian joy is something that gets you through it. See, the world’s joy is based on circumstances. Where’s your joy if, you know, if you live in this world, and this world is all there is that you can tell, you don’t really believe or you maybe believe something very vague, but by and large, the world’s joy is ‘my joy resides in the fact that I make good money, or I’ve got a great relationship, or I’ve got a good family’, or, you know, your joy is based on circumstance. So what happens when the world takes that away? What happens when the circumstance changes? The answer is, you go from joy to sorrow. And they’re actually so, they’re mutually exclusive. You either have joy, or you have sorrow, but worldly joy cannot co-exist with sorrow. Sorrow just eats it up, just takes it away, and that’s all there is. But Christian joy is different. Christian joy is something that takes you through it or put it another way … If your joy is your relationship with God, if your joy is God’s love for you and Jesus Christ, if your joy is Jesus’ love for you, okay, that’s your joy … then when sorrow comes, it’s real sorrow, but it actually drives you even more into your joy. It pushes you, you know, you have joy in your job, you lose your job, it pushes you more into Jesus. So in some ways, in the Christian faith, your sorrow pushes you more into joy. Another way to put it is this … you know, how you put salted meat to keep it from going bad? You know, put salt in the meat, that way doesn’t go bad? There’s another sense in which Christian joy goes into the sorrow to keep it from going bad. That is the circumstances, not get rid of the sorrow, as part of the circumstance, it doesn’t get rid of the joy, you still have your joy in Jesus. That’s an unconditional thing, circumstance can’t change that. And so the joy that you hold on to during the sorrow keeps the sorrow from making you bitter, keeps the sorrow from dragging you under, keeps the sorrow from putting you into despondency. So in some ways, here’s how it works. Being a Christian, the sorrow pushes you more into your joy. The joy actually goes into your sorrow and keeps it from going bad. And therefore, Christianity is marked by this joy and sorrow overlap, because your joy is not based on circumstances. It’s something that helps you get through the circumstances. Out in the world, it’s one or the other, and your sorrow eats up your joy and it’s gone … So you see how different that is. It’s really important to see not only is Christian joy inevitable, but it’s also not circumstantial. It’s not based on circumstances that overlaps. But here’s the third thing, this is kind of an implication. We’ve already said, Christian joy is thoughtful. So some of you are trying to say, ‘Okay, well, how does this work?’ Well, I’m getting more and more practical, it’s thoughtful. Why would I put it like that? Well, now I’m noticing with you how often Jesus uses the word ‘see’! In verse 16, He’s talking about encountering the resurrected Jesus, you know, they’re going to ‘see’ Him raised. He says in verse 16, you will ‘see me’, in verse 17 ‘you will see me’ … down in verse 19 it says ‘you will see me’. Then, of course, actually in verse 22, it says, ‘I will see you’. And in every one of these cases, He’s saying ‘something’s going to happen where you’re going to see them risen from the dead’. And that’s what’s going to bring the joy. Okay, well think about this. Well, actually, that’s what I’m trying to talk to you about. When they saw Jesus raise from the dead, they didn’t just see He was raising from the dead, they started to say ‘there is a God, He is the Son of God, all that stuff He was talking about. Wait a minute! The Cross, maybe it wasn’t a defeat! It was a victory! He died on the Cross for our sins!’ In other words, to see the risen Christ, and suddenly all the truths of the Gospel become alive to you. And Jesus says therefore, ‘that is what brings you joy.’ Because you think … How do they go into a Barnes and Noble sometimes, how do they get out a book on how to deal with grief and sorrow and trouble? Now, there’s actually three ways that you can do it. The first way is, you try to forget the pain. Now the books don’t tell you to do this, but this is what most people do. Forget the pain. What? Drink, party, overwork, have an affair … Lots of people do it that way. In other words, how do you deal with the pain? You try to forget the pain by by losing yourself in some other kind of pleasure! The books don’t tell you to do that, but that’s what most people do. The second way that people deal with the pain is they try to avoid it. Which means, put it this way, if your joy is based on a circumstance and it looks like the circumstance is about to change, what some people do is anything to get the circumstance back. So if you’re losing someone and that relationships important to you, and then It looks like that person is leaving you or something like that, you do anything, you manipulate, you blackmail, you meltdown, you do anything you possibly can to keep up that, which of course, by the way, makes everything worse, makes the relationship worse. But that’s what we do. Because if you’re basing your joy on your circumstance, you’ve got to keep it so you know you can either try to forget the pain, or you can try to avoid the pain by doing all sorts of evasive action, very often makes it worse. Or, and here’s what most of the books try to tell you, is you essentially turn your mind away from the pain, you think other things, you think more positive thoughts, or you don’t let it get to you, or you do something, you get a hobby or you sit and say that shouldn’t have been so important to me, but here’s the point. In every case, what they’re really saying is, turn your brain off. Don’t think about it. Leo Tolstoy wrote a book, a little booklet called Confessions telling about how around the age of fifty he had an existential crisis, he didn’t have much of a faith in anything. He was part of, actually, the Russian intelligentsia, he was already a pretty well-known writer. And he asked His friends, ‘what happens when you die?’ And most of his friends would say, ‘well, when you die, you just don’t exist anymore.’ And he was part of a group that said, ‘well, there is no God, and when you die, you just stop existing. And eventually, the sun will burn out and everything will go away.’ And Tolstoy started saying, ‘Wait a minute. If that’s the case, why go on? Why should I keep writing books? Everything’s meaningless. I mean … it means, that in the end, it doesn’t matter what I do in the end. Nobody’s gonna be around it to know what happened. It doesn’t matter whether I’m cruel or whether I’m good. In the end, nothing I do makes sense or difference; everything’s meaningless. Why even go on?’ His friend said, ‘hey, go to the beach. Go shopping. You know, you’re a Russian artist, okay? You’re morbid, you know, Russian artists are like that. And so you’re thinking too much, you know, just enjoy life.’ And here’s what he said, and he actually explained, this is why he started going back to Christianity. He says, ‘what kind of view of the world is only livable if you don’t think about what you believe? What kind of view of the world is only livable if I just don’t think too much about the implications, what I believe about the world? In other words, the world’s peace and joy comes from not thinking too much about what we actually believe about the world!’ But you see what the opposite is. And you see what Jesus is saying when He says ‘the joy will come from seeing me’. If you’re a Christian in this room, and you don’t have a lot of joy, you know why? You’re not thinking out the implications of what you believe. Christians believe that God made the world in joy. Says so in Prov 8; says, ‘when God created the world, He was delighting in us, He made the world to enjoy, He made it to be a world of joy, but we turned away from Him. And yet He didn’t leave us just to rot and go away. He, at infinite cost to Himself, He came into this world. And He, Jesus Christ, died for us, we believe in Him … think of the value that you are, you have, to Him … for Him to do that. And He’s going to make the world perfect in the end, and we’re going to have that; I mean, think about what the Bible actually says, think about what you believe. And the more you think about it, the more you’re going to say, ‘wow! why am I so upset? Why am I sweating the small stuff? The world’s peace … Let me say it in a way, that’s a little bit unfair, but it’s … you know, preaching is oversimplification. The world peace is a stupid peace, you only get your get peace and joy as long as you don’t think too much about what you actually believe. But Christian peace and joy is intelligent. It comes from actually thinking more and more and more about what you really are and who you are in Christ, and what God is doing and what God will do. You see that, stupid pieces … ‘Ho, ho, ho … to the bottle I go.’ And intelligent pieces … Do you believe that Jesus Christ came to earth and passed through the heavens and now sits at the right hand of God, and He intercedes for you, and He’s going to come back for you, and He’s going to make the world a perfect place? Do you believe that? How could that not make you feel good? And if you don’t have the peace and joy, you’re not thinking. So interestingly enough, Christianity is an intelligent peace; the joy and the peace, it’s thoughtful, it’s profoundly thoughtful. Look at Him, He says, and look at what this means that ‘I’m raising the dead.’ And that will give you a joy that nothing can take away. Now there’s another interesting, actually, there’s one more thing I got to mention, even though it’s brief, before I get to our conclusion, you know, He also brings up prayer. And He says in verse 23, ‘very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.’ Now, it’s kind of a drive-by, it’s interesting. Yeah, there’s other places where He’s talking more about prayer in these passages. In fact, we’ve spent some time on them. If you’ve been coming, you’ll know that we’ve actually spent some time on prayer. Because there’s other places in these chapters, 13–17, that we’re looking at that; Jesus talks more about prayer. But it’s interesting that right here, in all this talk about joy, He suddenly hits that. And so even though it creates a bit of a problem for me as a teacher, because I can’t go take up of what it means to pray, and that would be a whole sermon in itself. Nevertheless, we have to keep something in mind when He says, ‘If part of your joy is knowing that anything you asked in my name my Father will hear you and give you what you need is gotta be part of your joy.’ And what does that mean? To ask ‘in’? To ask the Father for things, like to pray ‘in Jesus’ name’ means two things. At least, it means to pray with deep humility and with infinite confidence. Now, the deep humility goes like this. Some of you may have heard this story before because I often use it, is a true story, was a pastor got a letter from a guy who was very upset because God wasn’t answering his prayers. And the letter said something like this, I mean, along these lines, the letter said, ‘Well, you know, I’ve been an elder for 10 years. I’ve been a Sunday school teacher for 15 years. I’ve taught Sunday school for 20 years, I’ve been a good person, I’ve been a good father.’ And then he says, ‘and yet, God’s not answering any of my prayers. I’m very upset! What have you got to say?’ And the main thing that the minister said is ‘well, to start with, you’re not going in Jesus’ name, you’re going in your own name. You’re not praying in Jesus’ name, you’re praying in your own name; you’re saying look at all the reasons why You should be hearing me, to pray in Jesus’ name.’ At least means this ‘You don’t owe me anything Father … if I go in my own name, You don’t owe me anything … that’s why I’m coming in Jesus’ name, I’m asking that you for Jesus’ sacred name, hear me not for my sake.’ So the first thing is praying in Jesus’ name means not getting angry because God’s not doing what you’re asking Him to do. Because the anger almost always comes from the fact that, you know, I deserve this! So first of all, it gets rid of that, but once you start to understand you’re going in Jesus’ name, and we’ve talked a little bit about this, when God looks at a Christian, there is a sense in which He doesn’t see your flaws or your record. In a certain sense, He doesn’t see you, or He sees you in Jesus, and He regards you as He regards His son. And there’s a place we’ll get to in John 17, where Jesus says, and it’s astounding … ‘Father wont you to love them, even as you love me?’ … not half as well as you love me, ‘Even as you love me’. Now, if you go in Jesus’ name, you know, therefore, that God is going to hear whatever you ask for, and He will be as attentive and as desirous to fulfill your desire as if it was Jesus Himself asking; and that should give you incredible confidence, but it also would explain something. We’re a child and He’s the Father … Jesus never talks about prayer without calling God Father. Of course, God’s a king, and God’s everything, there’s a lot of things God is, but Jesus always emphasizes ‘When you come in prayer to God, always realize He’s your Father!’ And what do fathers do? Very often, a little child especially, is going after a toy, or a little child’s going someplace to play. And you see, oh, that the child’s is going to fall or they’re going to get pinched or something like that. So you pick the child up and for a moment the child goes ‘aaaa’ and then you put the child down some other place, and say ‘no, over here honey! this is the place to go.’ And suddenly the child says, ‘Oh, okay!’ And basically, the desire is filled in a way that won’t harm the child. You must have this confidence every time you pray, that God will give you whatever you would have asked for if you knew everything He knows. And if you believe that, realizing that God sees you in Christ, and therefore, if He’s delaying what you’re asking for, or if He’s not giving you what you asked for, then it’s never because He’s not attentive, He doesn’t love you … He loves you as if you were Jesus Christ! Well then why would He not be giving you exactly what you asked for? Only if you’re that little child who doesn’t know that really wouldn’t be the best thing. God always gives you what you would have asked for if you knew everything He knows. And therefore, if you know that, that’s part of the joy. Part of the joy of a Christian, is it comes prayerfully, is it’s having that infinite confidence. So you see, this is inevitable because it’s not circumstantial. It’s thoughtful, it’s powerful, but last thing and it is last. When I say it’s also wonderful, I mean, if you’re saying ‘how do I enhance my prayer, my joy?’ You don’t just sit there and ask God for joy, you should wonder what Jesus Christ has done. Let’s go back to that metaphor. ‘A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her hour has come. But when a baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.’ Now you were looking at that and saying, ‘Wait a minute, it’s a says on my bullet and says ‘her time has come.’ Yeah, but what’s interesting about the way Jesus phrases this is He says, ‘The woman in labor and in pain is crying out because her time has come.’ But the actual word He uses, the Greek word there in the text is the word ‘hour’. It’s kind of odd for someone to say about a woman who’s in labor, ‘her hour has come’ … that’s not generally how you would speak about it. But do you remember this? You might remember this from other times, we’ve talked about it this year. In the book of John, whenever the word ‘hour’ has come up, it refers to the hour of Jesus’ death. So you know, places where Jesus says, ‘My hour has not yet come.’ … it means that ‘it’s not time for me to die.’ You know, the places where He says, ‘Now the hour’s come’, that means ‘it’s time for me to die’. Why would He be using that term here? Think about what the metaphor is. Back in those days, no human being was born unless a woman put her life on the line and experienced tremendous pain. And which is fascinating, is it not? It means that only through risking a woman’s life and tremendous pain was anyone ever given new life, a new life come into the world. But guess what? Maybe a woman cries out in her hour, but Jesus Christ cried out in His hour, ‘oh, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ And Jesus knew that unless He also experienced anguish, but not the anguish of just risking His life, the anguish of giving His life, we could not be newborn, we couldn’t be brought into the world. But He did it! See he’s identifying with this woman, and what Jesus is saying is ‘do you see that I gave up all the joy of heaven and I came to earth and experienced infinite anguish? But I was glad to do it.’ When I see you being born, I know it was worth it, just like the woman seeing a child born feels like it was all worth it. It says in Heb 12, ‘why did Jesus Christ go to the Cross? For the joy that was set before Him!’ Wait a minute. He had it. He had every joy in the world, up in heaven. Why did He come to Earth? He didn’t have all the joys; No, there was one joy He didn’t have before He came to earth. What was it? Us! He didn’t have the joy of having us. And that must mean that Jesus Christ made us His joy and was willing to give up all joy and go into anguish so that we could, ever since forgiven and we could have infinite joy. Here’s how you get more joy. Don’t just say, ‘Oh Lord, give me joy.’ Wonder at what Jesus has done, be amazed, Amazing love. ‘How can it be that thou, my God, should die for me?’ And look at Jesus and say, ‘Lord Jesus, if you made me your joy, that makes you my joy? Did you really do that for me?’ See, that will give you a joy that nothing can take away from you. Let’s pray: Give us Father, some better idea of how much joy is available to us. Lord, we have encountered the resurrected Jesus Christ by faith, but because we’re maybe not thinking, because we’re not wondering, because we’re not praying for all sorts of reasons, we are not experiencing the joy that You have for us. Now, Lord, you want our joy to be full. You want our joy to be complete. Help us just to simply see how your Son Jesus Christ gave up all joy so that we could have infinite joy. And that makes HimHim our joy and that will inflict the joy in us. The wonder of it will break over. It’s like a wave, the glory of it. Lord, we want to rejoice with joy, unspeakable and full of glory, and what your son Jesus Christ did for us and it’s in His name we pray. Amen. Overcoming the World Tonight Scripture reading is taking from the Gospel of John 16:28–33. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father. Then Jesus’ disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.” “Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. “A time is coming and in fact has

Timothy J. Keller, [“Infallible Joy,”](https://ref.ly/res/LLS:TMKLLRR2016_2017/2023-02-22T22:06:32Z/1343604?len=29277) in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2016–2017* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2017).