

# Outline

## Impossible Joy – A Failed Attempt

**“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Hebrews 11:6 NIV**

We are attempting to live out the Impossible! As you can see from the verse on the screen, the Bible says that pleasing God is impossible apart from a life lived in “Faith.” However, as we have seen in the last couple of Sundays as we have explored the idea of “Impossible Joy,” living a life that is daily consistent with the idea of joy and contentment characterizing it is an Impossible Dream for us as humans. What we often hope for in some small way is to have little blips of “happiness” that we can look forward to that help us make it through each stretch of life’s seemingly endless stresses and challenges. We grit our teeth as we wait for the weekend, the vacation, the next drink, the next panacea of life be it a raise, a date, a moment alone, a party, new job, new spouse, retirement – you fill in the blank.

However, the Bible tells us that life will be filled with challenges, but in the midst of those challenges, we can hope for the impossible - peace, tranquility, joy! It is not humanly achievable or possible. **Without Faith it is impossible to please God.** To gain that life I must come to believe the invisible, hope for the possible but not yet attained. **I must believe that God exists, even though I have never seen Him, and that He rewards all who earnestly seek Him.** In other words, Impossible Joy can never be attained on my own terms and in my own effort, ability, or talent. I must come to the place in my life where I depend on God alone to bring me joy: a life characterized by contentment and inner peace. God, like the perfect parent is so pleased when we come to the place to trust His Infinite and Eternal wisdom, which is so much more vast than our own few short years of experience, and His ability to guide us to the place of maturity and Impossible Joy. We can only achieve the Impossible by seeking the Divine.

The Bible contains a story that is the exact opposite of this idea of Impossible Joy that can only be achieved in the faith that God is looking out for me and desires the best for me. In the Old Testament biographical account of **Jonah, God gives us a painful example of what it is to live the opposite of our theme verse in Hebrews 11 striving to achieve Impossible Joy on our own effort by staying in our own comfort zone and striving for our own joy.** God will always allow us to strive after joy in our own effort and it will even result in temporary happiness. However, when the thrill wears off, we will be left with a paltry sense of purposelessness and a growing sense of the Impossibility of Joy. That lack of joy and purpose will affect not only us, but everyone around us as well. Take a look how this happened in Jonah’s life, a profit of God in the Old Testament:

God's Word came to Jonah: "Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer." But Jonah got up and went the other direction to Tarshish, running away from God. He went down to the port of Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board, joining those going to Tarshish—as far away from God as he could get. Jonah 1:1,2 TM

I don’t know about you, but I can relate to Jonah here. God talks to all of us all the time. He is constantly seeking to influence us toward maturity and ministry. Whether asking me to do something that I may find lands just outside the comfort zone of my daily routine and safely planned life or urging me to serve someone that will interfere with my pursuit of my own self-centered plans for pampering my cushy existence, His voice invades my fleeting thoughts every day. He invades your thoughts as well. He is able to do that because He is what the Bible calls Him, the Holy Spirit and He is able to speak with our spirits, the part of us that is ever wakeful and ever aware.

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Now, I don't know about you, but when I get that nagging voice in the back of my head that encourages me in a behavior that is uncomfortable, discourages my laziness, convicts me of my poor attitudes toward others, I like to ignore it and rationalize it away – I think things like, "That makes no sense or logic, so it must simply be 'crazy thinking' or me coming down with something and that's why I feel poorly right now." I will rationalize that voice right out of my head, only to have it return. God is nothing if not persistent and He is constantly and patiently encouraging us to act in ways that will encourage others, mature ourselves, and repair relationships. However, He will never force us, just like He did not force Jonah to do what He asked him to do in the "fleeting thoughts" of Jonah's mind.

And like Jonah, I often have the same reaction. I try to get as far away from God as I can. God is just not fair. He asks the Impossible of me. He asks me to get up off my behind and help a neighbor, be late to an appointment to serve someone in need. He will even ask me to admit I am wrong, when I don't want to, for it is embarrassing, seek forgiveness from another when I know I have wronged them. He will expect me to just flat out trust Him with my life and my finances and wait on Him to provide. God expects and asks the Impossible of me and of you and of Jonah.

And when He does that, we like Jonah, so often run as hard as we can in the opposite direction. We try to outrun Him, thinking He will not follow. But, think about that. God calls Himself "All Powerful." How does a puny little finite human like me think I can outwit, outplay, outlast the infinite God, the Creator of the World? How can I think that I can hide from a God who calls Himself Omnipresent, "Ever-Present?" As Jonah found out, I too find out – I can't:

[But God sent a huge storm at sea, the waves towering. Jonah 1:4 TM](#)

Here's the thing about God. **He loves you too much to get away with living a life that He knows will only lead to hurt for you and for others.** He will never give up on you or me. Oh, I am a master at trying to control my own destiny and creating my own ideas of happiness. So often in my life I have thought I knew so much about living life. I have desired ultimate control, relying on my talent, my smarts, my work ethic, even my religious zeal to manipulate life and make it work for me. I have been guilty of using life and others in it to gain my purpose, my goals, my happiness only to find myself in the midst of a terrible storm with waves of stress and confusion and troubles engulfing me. So often those waves were caused by my panicked flailing about trying to survive on my own strength. God lets the storm unfold and like a good lifeguard will allow me to thrash about until I have exhausted myself enough to accept help. That is where Jonah finds himself:

[The ship was about to break into pieces. The sailors were terrified. They called out in desperation to their gods. They threw everything they were carrying overboard to lighten the ship... Then the sailors said to one another, "Let's get to the bottom of this. Let's draw straws to identify the culprit on this ship who's responsible for this disaster." So they drew straws. Jonah got the short straw. Then they grilled him: "Confess. Why this disaster?" Jonah 4:1-8 TM](#)

I have found that God will allow me to take control of my life. Like a good parent, He does not try to keep me from getting hurt by my mistakes. You have seen those Helicopter Parents haven't you – the soccer mom who runs onto the field when Johnny and another player collide. Johnny isn't really going to cry or even give in to the pain until he sees mom's panicked face, then he launches in wails of pain that would make the worst war zone pale by comparison. Then there is the parent that debates every A-Suzy gets instead of the A+ that everyone should know that Suzy always deserves.

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Nope, Not God – **He will allow us to feel the sting of our failures, for He knows that our mistakes and our failures are the stepping stones back to Him and toward success and Impossible Joy in our lives.** It is in the midst of the pain of our failed attempts to control our pursuit of happiness that we are faced with the original decision to trust that God exists in our life and that He will reward us if we earnestly seek Him. **He won't take away the consequences of our joyless pursuits of our own will, our own happiness.** The hurt relationships will never be unhurt, the addictions to substances will remain a part of our physicality forever, the firing will not be unfired, the physical and emotional damage caused by poor life choices cannot be “undamaged” all of a sudden - the life pathway once walked cannot be “un-walked.” **However, God is there to speak to us and take us back to the place where He spoke to us in our fleeting thoughts and urged us toward a decision of Impossible Joy.** That takes a huge step of faith into the unknown known. We simply have to give up striving to make our own moonshine joy and by faith go back to the place where God has shown us in our fleeting thoughts that Impossible Joy can be found. It may be a shift of attitude. It may be a shift of location. It may be a shift of relationship. It may be a shift of career. However, as we seek to obey God's voice in our fleeting thoughts and repent of our self-centered dependence on our own human wisdom and selfish control of our lives God will bless our lives with Impossible Joy. And that is where Jonah finds himself at this point:

Jonah told them, "I'm a Hebrew. I worship God, the God of heaven who made sea and land." At that, the men were frightened, really frightened, and said, "What on earth have you done!" As Jonah talked, the sailors realized that he was running away from God. They said to him, "What are we going to do with you—to get rid of this storm?" By this time the sea was wild, totally out of control. Jonah 1:9-11 TM

Jonah had a choice. Continue in self-delusion and blame the consequences of his life on others – the poor seamanship of the sailors, the faulty construction of the ship, an unloving God that would allow for such a storm, or even shaming himself in sulky self-centered depression that he just wasn't good enough for God's love and protection. I know that in my storms of life, I have done all of the above and blamed everyone from God to others to myself for life sucking and then settled into a life of selfish moping and “blame-storming.” It looks a little like this:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZtHzc7VXU&feature=Playlist&p=E4A2551EFF3A6B37&playnext=1&playnext\\_from=PL&index=36](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZtHzc7VXU&feature=Playlist&p=E4A2551EFF3A6B37&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=36)

This was not the choice that Jonah made. He came to the point where **he owned the mistakes that he had made in life. He began to look for God-led solutions:**

He said, "Throw me overboard, into the sea. Then the storm will stop. **It's all my fault. I'm the cause of the storm.** Get rid of me and you'll get rid of the storm." Jonah 1:12 TM

How did he arrive at such an absurd answer? It sounds like a suicidal pity party. It sounds like no solution. Even the sailors did not believe its logic and tried to row even harder to get to shore. But the account says that the storm became more severe. So often when God talks to us (and He does talk only to us about our life – not others), we want to get human “clarify-rationalization.” Actually we want to continue to do what we want to do and we go to the people we know will agree with us so we can rationalize our choice not to obey God's voice in our “Fleeting Thoughts.” Other times, well meaning people listen to what God has told us and think its absurd, because God's thoughts are rarely like human logic. Often it does not make sense to humble yourself before your enemy or be kind to the Ex, or reconcile or not take the promotion or whatever it is that God has told us and they will try to convince us other than what we have heard from God or convince us that there is no way we have heard from God. And our life continues to storm, even get stormier. How did he arrive at such an answer? Just like in the first verse of the

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chapter, God gave Jonah the answer and had prepared the solution well in advance:

They took Jonah and threw him overboard. Immediately the sea was quieted down. The sailors were impressed, no longer terrified by the sea, but in awe of God. They worshiped God, offered a sacrifice, and made vows. Then God assigned a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the fish's belly three days and nights. Then Jonah prayed to his God from the belly of the fish. Jonah 1:15-2:1 TM

Interestingly enough, God arranged transportation right back to the original maturity point – Nineveh. God knows what is best for our lives and from the moment that we stop having faith that He will guide us best, we stop growing in life. He will let us flounder in the ocean of despondency and will even guide us through the storms of our bad decisions to ignore His voice in our fleeting thoughts. He will not abandon us but waits inside the hurricane with us to jump at our cry for help. However, He will not let us skip the lesson. He will take us right back to the point of faith where we jumped ship and tried to make life happen for ourselves and pursued that moonshine joy called the Pursuit of our own Happiness.

What decisions have you made in your life to ignore God's voice? When was that moment in time when you chose to ignore the voice of God in your fleeting thoughts because of fear or selfishness or the unknown destination He had in mind for you? How has life been since that time? God is waiting today to take you back to the place where the Impossible Joy starts. What decision do you need to make to get there? What relationship do you need to mend to take you back to that place? What decision have you made to flee in the opposite direction of His choice for your life? Just like Jonah, it is never too late to turn your life back to Him and obey Him in faith. While the band plays this last song, will you talk to God about that decision? Pray to Him from the safety of the "whale" of this service. He's waiting. Here are the Jonah steps back to the Impossible Joy that your flailing Pursuit of Happiness stole from you:

I would like this on the screen during the last song.

1. Admit the mistake you know He's convicting you of in your Fleeting Thoughts.
2. Accept the fact that God doesn't care about the mistakes or even require penance on your part (and neither does anyone else).
3. List out the Action Steps to return to the point of obedience.
4. Step out of the boat in Faith realizing that God has provided safe transportation back to the source of Impossible Joy in your life.
5. Begin trusting God again – that He exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him.

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