

Advent 2019: Joy - Luke 2:8-14

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to turn with me to Luke chapter 2, we're going to be reading from verses 8-14. Luke chapter 2, verses 8-14.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

[1 : 22] Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for its nourishment, its light, its counsel, its comfort, its power. By your spirit, speak to us today.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. In this second week of the Advent season, we take the opportunity to remind ourselves of the importance of joy in the gospel message and in our daily lives.

One thing that the scripture clearly teaches is that God wants you to experience great joy.

See, God created you and me with the unique capacity to experience the emotion of delight.

He has equipped you with physical senses that enable you to enjoy the world he created. We not only see with our eyes, but we delight in what we see.

[2 : 38] We delight in his creativity and the beauty of a sunset or flowers or puppies or newborn babies. We enjoy the wonderful sounds of a waterfall, jingle bells, bird songs, symphony orchestras, and familiar voices.

We savor the taste of milk and honey and smoked jalapeno peppers. We enjoyably breathe in the sense of peppermint and pine and vanilla and breezes from the sea.

And we find enjoyment in the sensations of fur and cotton and water and sand between our toes at the beach in summer. And in the warm touch of friendship.

We also experience joy in significant events like births and weddings, victories, accomplishments, and unexpected surprises. God designed each one of us with the capacity to enjoy the world around us.

And I believe he expects us to give expression to our delight. It's an act of worship to do that. In spite of the curse that has tainted the world, this fallen world, we still have the capacity to enjoy, to experience much joy in the world.

[4 : 17] But God has also created us to experience another kind of joy. God gives us the capacity to enjoy Him.

The psalmist declared in light of the Lord's guidance, In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:11. And he specifically calls God my exceeding joy. Psalm 43:4. Psalm 43:4.

In spite of the judgment that hovers over a rebellious world, We've been given favor by God to experience this joy in Him even now. This is Advent joy.

God holds out to the world the possibility of experiencing joy in Him through the good news of Advent. Psalm 34:8 says, Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.

[5 : 27] Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. Now, we should expect an increase of joy at a holiday season that celebrates the coming of the Savior into the world.

We should expect it. But we should also understand that much of the joy that we observe at this time has different sources. Some of you are just looking forward to a vacation from school.

Some spend time outside in the snow. Most anticipate visits from good friends and family. We give and we receive gifts.

All these foster happy emotions within us. And the social atmosphere becomes naturally more jubilant. But much of the joy that is observed at this season isn't Advent joy.

Joy that is dependent upon a season is not Advent joy. Joy that has its source in temporal circumstances is not Advent joy.

[6 : 41] The uniqueness of Advent joy can be observed in the story of the incarnation. And in the association of joy with the announcement of Jesus' birth, that association points to joy's important role in the gospel.

The passage we just read from Luke teaches us that God sent the Messiah King, the long-awaited Messiah King, into the world so that you would experience great joy.

I believe this truth is emphasized in the passage through an interesting contrast in the story. The contrast is between the initial response of the shepherds who heard the angel and saw the glory of the Lord and the response that the angel indicated would most likely correspond to the message that he was bringing.

I'd like to focus on that contrast this morning because I believe it highlights two things. Two things that God wants you to understand in order to experience greater Advent joy.

First of all, the better you understand, the more you understand your need for the coming of Jesus, the more you can experience Advent joy.

[8 : 20] The first part of that contrast is found in verses 8 and 9, so let's look at that again. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night.

And the angel of the Lord or an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were filled with great fear.

This isn't the first time we see in the scriptures that angels have suddenly appeared and scared people out of their wits.

The Bible records many angelic visitations, and several included responses similar to the shepherds. The prophet Daniel wrote of being completely drained of his strength, falling into a deep sleep, and when the angel touched him and comforted him and had him stand up, he was trembling, simply at a vision of an angel.

And in the previous chapter of Luke's account, both Zechariah and Mary were told by the angel Gabriel not to fear because they were both troubled.

[9 : 40] at this appearance. But what is unique about this appearance to the shepherds is the addition of the phrase, the glory of the Lord shone around them.

During the Exodus, when the glory of the Lord appeared on Mount Sinai, we're told that it was in a cloud, and it was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain.

Exodus 24, 17. And another time, when Moses asked God to see his glory, he had to put Moses in the cleft of a rock and cover him with his hand in order to shield him from a direct view of God's glory, to protect him from death.

Of the shepherds, it simply says that the glory shone around them. They were right in the midst of it. It wasn't on a mountain far away. They weren't shielded from anything.

It was just all around them. Their fear was understandable, not only because they encountered a supernatural being, frightening enough, but also because such an encounter with the glory of God likely highlighted their own sense of sinfulness and pending judgment before a holy and righteous God.

[11 : 16] To most of us here, our need for Jesus is pretty obvious. But many people still don't understand that need. They argue it away.

Even for many Christians, we might not completely understand or we misrepresent our real need. Jesus is often presented as someone who can help us in our loneliness, give us a reason to live, meet some need for significance or boost our self-esteem.

You can see this in a lot of the more popular Christian songs. But the gospel message starts with the truth that we need to be delivered from God's righteous judgment and an eternal death sentence.

I believe understanding this is the first step to appreciating the good news of Jesus' coming. The other part of the contrast is observed in verse 10.

[12 : 31] Look there again. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

The great fear, verse 9, stands in stark contrast contrast with the great joy of verse 10. Now, I admit that the author of the gospel doesn't say anything about the contrast, but the connection does appear to be obvious.

And in light of that contrast, I'm going to suggest that the Holy Spirit intended it to be read by us to communicate something important to us about the experience of the gospel.

I believe that in order to fully experience the great joy of Advent, you and I not only need to better understand our need of His coming, but we need to better understand the joy associated with the good news.

So, first of all, what do we mean by joy? An older Webster's definition, 1828 version. I like that version.

[13 : 57] It's not politically correct. Says this about joy. It's the passion or emotion excited by the acquisition or expectation of good.

That excitement of pleasurable feelings which is caused by success, good fortune and gratification of desire or some good possessed or by a rational prospect of possessing what we love or desire. Gladness. Exaltation. Now, that definition coincides very well with the definitions that the biblical words give us or are translated by our English word joy or rejoice or gladness.

There's been a lot of discussion over the years about the difference between joy and happiness in the Christian life. Some make a strong distinction like this popular 19th century evangelical who wrote, joy is a distinctly Christian word and a Christian thing.

It is the reverse of happiness. Happiness is the result of what happens of an agreeable sort. Joy has its springs deep inside and that spring never runs dry no matter what happens.

[15 : 25] Only Jesus gives joy. He had joy singing its music within even under the shadow of the cross. joy Now you're like I might read that and go, wow, that sounds great.

But as wonderful as it sounds, it doesn't agree with either the English definition of joy or the biblical definition. Joy in the Bible is used of emotions and celebrations of the ungodly as well as the godly. It's used of a donkey. The main distinctions that we do find in the scripture are in the objects of the joy. God and his care being prominent and its duration.

Job 20 verse 5 declares the joy of the godless is for a moment. Whereas Isaiah says the godly are promised everlasting joy.

Isaiah 51 11 I draw your attention to this because over the years many have tried to present joy as something altogether different from the happy emotions that we share with every human being.

[16 : 52] They promote an emotionless joy because it's deep and spiritual has nothing to do with our feelings.

This just isn't so. The various biblical synonyms that depict joy like simcha and sason gil ra'anani! These are all distinguished primarily by the way the emotion is expressed.

There's joyful shouting, there's joyful singing, there's intense joy, joy, there's quiet joy. But in all cases, joy is clearly something observed.

As a matter of fact, Nehemiah records a time in Israel's history when the people's joy was actually heard. That's what it says. It was heard.

Verse 43 of chapter 12 of Nehemiah says, And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced for God had made them rejoice with great joy. The women and the children also rejoiced and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

[18 : 13] The angel's announcement, good news to the shepherds, was described as one that brings great joy.

First of all, it's joyous news because it's the fulfillment of a long awaited promise to mankind.

A long awaited answer to the human predicament. It's news of a savior. It's news of the anticipated messianic king's arrival.

It's news of God's gracious plan to save his people from his own wrath. It's news of the impartation of righteousness to those who are unrighteous.

It's good news of the dawning of eternal life in a renewed universe. others. It's the news of an effectual sacrifice on our behalf.

[19 : 24] I can't help but believe that the contrast in these verses are intended to emphasize the wonder of the message.

It's benefits to Israel, it's grandeur, it's mystery, and it's amazing initiation in these humble circumstances among sheep and shepherds.

we're right to focus on that aspect that God in all his stated glory would appear as a child in a cave among animals.

But you have to remember that the announcement came in one of the greatest displays of trembling fear to the shepherds.

But I also believe that there's something more being communicated here by this phrase, great joy. The prophets of Israel wrote a great deal about joy, and they predicted a time when joy would be prominent.

[20 : 49] joy. I mean, they didn't just indicate that there would be joy at the arrival of a new world, but they prophesied that joy would characterize that world.

If you want to look at Isaiah 65, 17 through 19 for an example, it's amazing. the prophet writes, for behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind, but be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.

For behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy. and her people to be a gladness.

What did God have in mind? It's mind-boggling, I think. I mean, what do you think of when you think of heaven?

Sitting at the beach a lot? dutifully serving? That's not the picture we get from the prophets, anyway.

[22 : 20] I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. It's an important thing to realize this idea of joy replacing suffering.

I think it impacts us most because we know what suffering is like. We experience it. We spirits it all our lives in one way or another.

This world is characterized by suffering. And yet God promises a time when that suffering will be gone completely. And I think it increases the joy.

At least the very understanding of it. But this passage tells us that the Lord is a God who rejoices and he has destined us to reflect that joy.

Now, though the prophet spoke of a day that is still to come, there's no doubt that God wants you to experience this joy now. Advent joy is a message of present joy.

[23 : 39] Joy was a prominent characteristic of the early church. One theologian in the late 19th century declared, the New Testament is the most buoyant, exhilarating, and joyful book in the world.

And in the pages of the New Testament we see joy in the New Testament also directs us to rejoice in the Lord always.

Philippians 4.4 And it reminds us that our joy in the midst of our troubles is inexpressible and full of glory.

1 Peter 1.8 Advent joy is a joy that transcends all other joys because it is based on the goodness and greatness of God our Father and his Son and his Spirit in their delight for each other and their eternal work on our behalf to share in their joy.

It's a relational joy. It's a joy we share. It's an experiential joy. It's observable and undeniable. It's an effectual joy.

[25 : 39] It affects the way we live and strengthens us to resist the pleasures, the temporary pleasures, the insignificant in comparison pleasures that are all around us.

And it is a lasting joy, a joy that never ends but only increases for ages to come. I believe God wants you to experience more fully his great advent joy.

The more you appreciate why Jesus had to come, why he came, how he came, I believe the more you will experience his everlasting advent joy.

Now many of the history of the church, philosophers who have looked at the Bible and Christian teaching have criticized the Bible's emphasis on the fallenness of humanity.

They suggest that such a negative view of human nature leads to low self-esteem, hinders human potential and progress, happiness.

[27 : 08] Now, I can see what they're saying if there were no God and if there were no solution. But there is a solution.

The baby born in Bethlehem is Christ the Lord and became the atoning sacrifice that satisfies God's justice and provides you with an undeserved righteousness and everlasting ever increasing joy now

and forever.

And I believe this doesn't just apply to salvation. It applies to us in our daily lives. And it's very helpful to us in our daily lives. When you look at the world today, the ideal person is one who's got it all together.

Or at the very least can say, I've got this. that's the theme right? Of the modern individual. And it's contrast for us perhaps are those who believe that the Christian life needs to be so solemn that there's no expression of joy or very little.

And both extremes I think are misguided. because when we truly understand our need for Christ even now it's not meant to cause us to walk around in gloom and doom but it's meant to drive us to the one who can help us.

[28 : 55] And the more we experience that pain or frustration of failure and inadequacy and all those things that we are trying to get rid of the more we experience that the more it should drive us to the one who is our strength.

as Nehemiah said to those people who were rejoicing the joy of the Lord is your strength. How can you have joy in suffering?

How can you have joy and feel miserable about your own self? I don't know but it's possible because we know when we convince ourselves when we tell ourselves it doesn't really depend on me that we can go to God and you know what he's just delighted when we come to him like that and then he answers us and then we receive it and then we're excited that God came through for us and it helps us the next time we are in similar circumstances God wants us to know our need of Christ for salvation and for just getting up in the morning sometimes he wants us to know that so that we can experience and appreciate more deeply what he's done on our behalf the gospel coming of Christ I'd like to close with reading a quote or part of a quote of a pastor who who aware of the possibility that some might think that emphasizing this emotional aspect of joy could result in self absorbed isolation among people among the church and he argued that Advent joy has the opposite effect he wrote it is deep delight and joy in the all satisfying beauty of Christ that stokes the white hot flame of passion for the plight of the nations that energizes the will of man or woman to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to preserve a marriage that is falling apart that empowers the human heart to overcome addictive behavior and sustains the soul in its fight against sin and temptation that enables a weak and broken soul to persevere when a job is lost or a child rebels or a promise is shattered or a dream becomes nothing that encourages the timid and fearful heart to engage and confront the the

Christless culture in which we live with the good news of the gospel of the cross of Christ and the life of forgiveness and hope that can only be found through faith in Jesus and it is the deep it is deep delight and joy in the all satisfying beauty of Christ that will sustain a church through adversity and bind the hearts of its people together in unity and love and mutual affection salvation this is the joy that is ours for the taking now and forever because God has sent to us his son a savior who is Christ Jesus the Lord joy to the world indeed!

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