

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
Advent	Luke 2:10	The Power of Joy	12.17.17
Website Writeup:			
The Angel declared a great joy had come in the birth of Christ, but what is Joy? That is the question we wrestle with today. Enjoy!			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

-SLIDE PERSON: PLEASE RECORD THE SERMON-

We began this series talking of Hope, then Peace, now we look at the power of Joy. But what's joy? It's a concept which eludes definition, but you know when you have it. Is it a feeling? A state of being? Does it come & go? Is it constant? Can I choose it, or does it come upon me uncontrollably?

Luke 2:10 announces it's coming in the Christmas story firstly to the Shepherds in the fields, "But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

Understand the scene, in vv8-9 it says, *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.*

Regular guys probably asleep in a field watching over flocks, or sitting around a campfire. Imagine the fear you'd have if an Angel suddenly appears waking you from sleep, or interrupting your conversation with friends. They didn't feel hope, or peace, or joy at that moment - they were simply terrified. Fear isn't joy, rather the opposite.

Isn't fear, in its varying degrees, what we feel when faced with almost anything new or unfamiliar? Being terrified is the extreme level, but we can fear things by simply being quietly disdainful, to laughingly cautious, onto the extreme of being terrified.

This state of fear, or some form of it, be it just simple distrust or full blown anxiety, seems to be the natural condition or state of humankind. Fear causes fights. Wars. Conflicts. All that we talked about last week in reference to peace. Fear governs our political discourse leading to anger, since anger's typically a byproduct of fear. The fear of not getting what you want, leads to fighting for what you want.

As it says in James 4:1-3, "What causes fights & quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel & fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

We react in fear to something, often times driven by self-interest, self-preservation, or by desire & pleasure. Fear comes manifests itself in so many ways. It turns us inward,

retreating into ourselves & away from others in depression. It turns outward in anger & violence. And all its varying degrees in between.

Fear's the knee-jerk reaction. The illogical response. The uneducated quick decision. The unintelligent reaction. A characteristic of the heart which has just let life *happen* to them. The heart which hasn't ordered itself under, and allowed itself to be governed by Truth. Fear's not how God would have us respond.

Like joy, living in fear is a condition, more than just a feeling. The feeling of fear merely identifies the condition we live under; that of little hope, peace, joy or love, for that matter. A condition not conducive to faith & love, leading to deep joy. The fearful don't walk closely with Jesus who is perfect love, since perfect love drives out all fear. But as these Shepherds turn away from fear, what would they hope for when the Angel spoke of great joy? What's joy?

Joy's the natural outcome of experiencing the love of Christ. Joy's more than emotion, it's a pervasive sense, not just a thought, but a condition of overall ultimate well-being as a result of Jesus & his work in the world. These Shepherds didn't have that until this moment - they had to be told, it had to be proclaimed to them. They had to see for themselves - and in seeing Jesus fear is dispelled! Fear gives way to Joy in the expectation of Jesus, just like our opening a door on a dark room from a lit hallway - light breaks through.

Joy's primarily marked by a feeling of *delight*; a delight in an all encompassing good which is well secured in Jesus bringing hope, peace, joy, and as we will see next week, *love*. Dallas Willard says, "*Joy is not the same as pleasure, although it is pleasant. Pleasure & pain are always specific to some particular object or condition, such as eating something you really like (pleasure) or recalling some really foolish thing you did (pain).*" We can delight in Jesus despite going through painful ordeals.

Like we said of peace last week, joy brings a sense all is well whether your situation is good or bad, painful or pleasant. It's intimately & inextricably linked with hope & peace. We have hope even when things don't seem hopeful due to the nature of the Kingdom of God. In Christ we have peace even in the midst of chaos. God's plan moves forward; His kingdom hope & peace slowly enveloping the world no matter what we see out there - in that fact we find joy - an all encompassing sense of good; a state of being. The three so closely married, they may be indistinguishable.

Joy relishes in Romans 8:28, *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* The joyous person sits in this assurance of faith. It's cemented in God's purposes for & work in us. Joy reflects a confidence in being a child of God & his plans for us as his children.

At the end of his ministry, Jesus speaks of leaving his disciples, and therefore us, with complete joy. The night before his crucifixion he says in John 14:27, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

There it is again, the intimate tie joy shares with peace, and the eradication of fear - it's almost as if he's preparing them for some horrific event (which he was!). Almost as if to say, "No matter what you see happen tomorrow (crucifixion), don't be afraid, have peace!" The world promises peace & security through the sword, through outward dominance. But Jesus doesn't give as the world does, he imparts peace, hope & joy to us as if we are an inner tube he fills with the breath of his Spirit. It originates from within us, the Living Water welling up to the hope of eternal life.

He then says in vv29-31, *I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*

Remember we spoke of how the Accuser (Satan) diminishes hope & peace last week - he also seeks to diminish our joy by attacking belief in Truth - creating lies. BUT...Jesus clearly states, "I'm telling you early, the Accuser has no hold over me!" You can live in the condition of joy, peace & hope without fear, no matter what you face. We simply must choose to believe Him & not the Accuser. And Jesus doesn't make empty promises, he's obedient even to death on a cross - Jesus models for us that even though he faces the most tormenting death he could, he lived in peace, hope & joy as he walked towards it - he knew the overall plan of God & that it would prevail.

Then after explaining to them how they need to draw rich life from him as the Vine & they as the branches, he says, *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete (15:11)*. Full joy, no room for more, downloaded to us from Jesus himself! Something horrific's going to happen, he'll be crucified, but Jesus is okay with it, and seeks to impart his peace & joy to them, and likewise, us.

Things may look dire tomorrow, but even in that chaos you can be full of joy because the Christian life has the ability to pull back looking at the full picture of the kingdom work of God! Jesus knew what was on the other side of suffering & death - and that is the conquering of it! The everlasting Kingdom of God which Rome had promised, but couldn't deliver on - Jesus can & does.

That is why Nehemiah 8:10 states, *the Joy of the Lord is our strength!* Because living under the condition of full joy, means we're unshakeable. Joy's our defense against weakness, failure, disease of mind & body, war, racism, and all other societal & personal ills - even when we face things unpleasant in suffering, joy reigns. *This is why Elizabeth said to Mary, "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy" (Luke 1:44).*

John the Baptist, even before he's out of the womb, knew what was to come - the world will never be the same - joy has come in Jesus. When the Kingdom of God breaks in, there's always this sign of joy. Joy's the free delight, a condition of great pleasure & happiness, which can only roll in when Jesus comes on the scene. Joy's a sign of the kingdom. It's a condition of living in Truth, having hope & peace, and is a result of the

divine movement of the Spirit of God in us. It's un-reliant on feelings, although they may accompany it, rather we can still have joy in the midst of tears & sorrow, even in pain we can delight in Jesus.

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them (Matt. 18:20). In living rooms & churches around the world, in the middle of a small towns & big cities, people continually experience Jesus *with* them in powerful ways. You may've read the story of the woman, Susan, in the In-Breaking booklet. A woman plagued by fear & depression until her small group laid hands on her & prayed.

She began to have a vision of herself as a little girl stuck in a corner waiting for someone to notice her. That then replaced with another of Jesus twirling with her in an open field. This vision a clear contrast of the Accuser's lies with Jesus' Truth. She began to laugh so hard that it became contagious. Christ's joy had released this woman from her fear & depression. All she could do was to laugh out loud & joy spread.

Thursday I met a mother named Tammy. Tammy's daughter had recently passed away after a 4 year struggle with a rare disorder at the age of 20. For a mother to lose her only daughter you'd expect her to be devastated. She wasn't. There were tears during the conversation from all of us present of course. Tammy is sad. However, there was a clear foundation of joy as she explained how her daughters suffering had changed so many lives. Tammy has hope for the future since she trusts in the promises of God. She has peace because she knows He has it all under control. And Joy because she knows within whose hands her daughter rests. Her assurance in Christ brought solid hope even in the loss of her only daughter.

The angels knew Jesus' coming would be *good news*. John the Baptist knew it would be good news. And remember, when they said *good news*, that was in direct contrast with & challenge to the Roman idea of *good news* which came with fear & control we spoke of last week - Jesus was breaking in bringing true freedom, hope, peace & joy.

We're called to be like Christ, who set joy before himself. Without it we fold & crumble under the Accuser's lies. Hebrews 12:2 urges, *"...Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer & perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Joy's a goal which can keep us walking through the most soul-wearing times of our lives. We can't stop hard times from coming, but we can keep our eyes on the prize rather than constantly staring at our debilitating circumstances. Romans 14:17 states, *"...the kingdom of God is...a matter of... righteousness, peace & joy in the Holy Spirit..."*

And as we said last week, just because we're *at* peace with Christ, doesn't always mean we're walking *in* Christ's peace. Peace & Joy are divine impartations of the Spirit in tandem with Christ's work, but it's something with which we must engage. We can't be

passive in our pursuit of a life filled with Joy. It's possible to allow it to dissipate in looking backwards at sin & failure, or forward at what might happen to us (letting fear take over), or inward at our struggles of work, responsibilities, temptations & deficiencies.

When we do any of these, we've taken our eyes off the Pioneer & Perfecter of our faith, Jesus, and placed them back on ourselves. Panic ensues as fear creeps back in. Paul from jail spoke this to the **Philippians when he said in 4:4 of that book, *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!***

Choose Joy! Make it a constant act of the will to choose to believe in the power of Christ & the joy he leaves with you. Henri Nouwen said, "At every moment of our life we have the opportunity to choose joy...we have to choose joy & keep choosing it..." every day.

Paul then told the Philippians *how to do this* starting in v6, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer & petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts & your minds in Christ Jesus.*

One of your greatest weapons against a joyless life is the prayerful life. Take it all to the cross. Drop your worries & cares there, and pick up His promises.

Then Paul goes even further in his instructions in vv8-9 directing their minds to think on **healthy things, *Finally, brothers & sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.***

This is Paul speaking to them from Jail who just afterwards in v11 says he's found contentment in whatever circumstances he finds himself. The enemies of joy are the thoughts & images we entertain in our minds. Think on how many joyless images & thoughts congregate in your mind, constantly fed by all the avenues the world has opened up for us. You are not unintelligent if you turn off the voices. You are not a legalist if you say, "I don't need to see that." You're not missing anything if you choose to occupy your thoughts with holy & pure things. If we can be in the habit of taking all our thoughts captive to Christ, we will find joy is waiting at our doorstep if we choose it. It's a good habit to turn it all off, and think on healthy things, not filling our head & heart with image & thought which eat away at joy like a fat caterpillar on a tomato plant.

Invite the Holy Spirit to bring Christ's joy. Like Susan, say you're ready to trade in your old way of talking about your life for a new script – a new image of how God sees your situation.



We began today by asking what is joy? Is it a feeling? A state of being? Does it come & go, or is it constant? Can I choose it, or does it come upon me uncontrollably?

It's a condition we can choose to live under constantly by keeping our eyes focused on Jesus in both good & bad times, in sickness & health, plenty & want. It's sometimes accompanied by feelings of happiness which come upon us uncontrollably, but always produces an undercurrent of delight in Christ even in painful situations. We can choose to rejoice by believing in the greater picture of God's work in the world & our lives.

Get in the habit of such things, begin your day with Jesus, end your day with Jesus. Crack open your Bible & begin to memorize & study some of this good Truth - memorize Philippians 4:6&7. Remember, we all know, we are what we eat, and so often our spiritual diet is filled with the sugar & fats this world offers - we become spiritual diabetics bordering on spiritual heart disease. We can live differently, we can choose joy.

PRESENTATION of Ethan House:

One of our greatest joys in life is to see our children grow up under this Joy of Christ. Today we celebrate Jesus in the House Family who bring Ethan to be dedicated before the Lord this morning. Dedication doesn't impart salvation, however the act of dedication is in keeping with the Scriptures, Jesus himself was dedicated by his parents.

God rejoices over children, we share in that. We want to give thanks for Ethan today, making a promise, relying on the grace of God, to provide guidance, instruction, discipline & to lead him to know Jesus. Jesus blessed the children he came in contact with. Today we do the same for Ethan entrusting him to the care of a loving, faithful, gracious God.

We acknowledge Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Elysia House who present their son, Ethan Daniel House, before God & this body of believers today. Mark & Elysia will now read a passage of Scripture which they've chosen for this occasion.

Reading for Ethan - 1 Chronicles 16:8-11

THE COMMITMENT:

Mark & Elysia, in presenting your child to the Lord, do you promise in dependence upon God's grace, and in reliance on your community of faith, to teach him the truths of the Christian faith, to set an example before him, to bring him up in the instruction & discipline of the Lord - to encourage him to accept Jesus as his savior under the leadership & guidance of the Holy Spirit?



Parents: “We do.”

As members of Christ’s family and/or this local church, do all here promise to join these parents in teaching & training Ethan that he may be led to trust Jesus as savior & confess him in baptism & church membership? If you accept this responsibility, will you indicate that by saying, “We do”?

Congregation: “We do.”

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

Please stand with me as I pray.

‘Father, we come before you today, in the name of your son Jesus, under the umbrella of your grace, and the leading of your Spirit, to officially celebrate & welcome Ethan into your care, and our faith community.

You knew him before we ever did. He’s your treasure & joy. You’re Lord over his life. We entrust him to the guidance of your Spirit & willingly give him into your hands.

We acknowledge our responsibility over Ethan. You’ve called us to love & care for him, protect & lead him, as we too are led by your Word & Spirit. Your will is expressed through your Word, through your Spirit, and flows out of the loving actions, words & thoughts of your people.

We endeavor to raise this child well, becoming a buffer, pointing him to yourself. We ask for blessing on his life & future. Empower us for this ministry which you’ve entrusted to us. Quicken our thoughts for words of encouragement. Speak clearly to us concerning his life. Convict us where we’re not being a strong witness for him. Keep us from exasperating him. Let us be a grace & encouragement to his young life. Let us help him to walk spiritually, until he might reach for you himself.

Bless his parents. That all negative patterns would be broken. Newness would flow. Peace, hope, joy & love would be evident in their home & lives. That they’ll have learned the mistakes of life, having wisdom not to mete out the same on Ethan. Solidify their resolve to follow you. Prepare them for all the stages of life they’ll experience with him. Let them never give up, and always embrace Ethan if he should turn away. Let them be parents of strong grace, fortitude & love. Parents of credibility & integrity, shining examples in their child’s life, so that Ethan can always look back pointing to them as an example of God’s character & grace. Let these things be true in their lives starting today...and all the people said, AMEN!

