

Series: Humble King	Reference: Philippians 2:1-11	Title: Joy	Date: 12.16.18
Website Writeup:			
The kingdom comes with joy, laughter & singing - let's let ourselves go to receive the gift of Jesus, put away our distrust & skepticism, be filled with the Spirit, and practice joy, even when we don't feel it.			

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In the Christmas account, for Mary, Elizabeth, the Shepherds, the prophets Simeon & Anna, Christmas meant joy! Which is what we want to explore today.

Recalling our anchor passage [Philippians 2:1-11](#), we center ourselves on [v2:8](#) this morning...*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross.* The circumstances surrounding the end of Jesus life certainly don't sound joyous at first glance, unless we're privy to the empty grave which follows. The joy is, Jesus would humble himself in such a way going through the painful cross to get to the empty grave for you & me.

The circumstances revolving around the beginning of his life in [Luke 1:41](#) seem much more joyous...*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.*

Have you ever seen two loving close women greet after a lengthy separation? Joy marks the moment...let alone two pregnant relatives. Notice here, there's an added aspect of the Holy Spirit's involvement & presence, Elizabeth is filled. Something magical happens when presented with Jesus for the first time - something powerful, emotive & moving beyond feeling, it's a divine encounter unlike anything else.

Joy's in short supply. We have bursts of happiness tied to circumstance. But are we a people of lasting deep Joy? According to the Gospel, the greatest joy any one of us will ever experience is the direct result of our experiencing the divine indwelling & ongoing presence of God who is, Himself, Joy.

I remember my first months & years following Jesus. I couldn't contain the joy of salvation. Everyone within earshot heard the Gospel whether they liked it or not. They heard what Jesus did in Jason's life. I'm not saying I was some evangelical saint, on the contrary, I was fairly obnoxious & most likely innocently offensive - but you couldn't mistake my joy for anything else but. I remember asking a friend & his girlfriend over for dinner, along with the girl I was currently dating, also a new believer, and this poor couple was cornered with two very enthusiastic & overjoyed born again Christians! Believe me, I know how bothersome that can be - even as a Christian I've been cornered by Born Again Believers on the street. And even though I fully agree with them, I sometimes want to smack them silly! We must've said 'Jesus' 500 times over the course

of that meal. I can only imagine as they got into their car to leave, he probably turned to her saying, "I am so sorry! I had no idea they were going to be like that!"

The joy of salvation just poured out of me during that time - often in inappropriate ways. Verses like Philippians 2:8 were so incredibly meaningful to me.

Have I lost that joy? I hope not! Should I get back to that obnoxious blathering state? And...I hope not as well!

I remember when my eldest brother met his now wife. The first night he tried to call her on the phone & ask her out; how awkward & tongue tied he was due to the anticipation & joy of speaking with her. I remember their dating, how lovey-dovey they were. When they got married, seeing them drive off, her sitting under his arm in the car on the bench seat (remember those?).

Now, after years of marriage, they're not so lovey-dovey, she sits squarely in the passengers seat when they drive, but their love is no less real. It's matured. Love isn't only romance, it's commitment, action & choice walking through the ups & downs of life together. Love grows into settled familiarity. Over time, the joy of relationship may not be so outwardly emotive, as much as inwardly solid, stable & quiet - nothing wrong with that.

In the beginning of our journey with Jesus, we may be a little overtaken & endearingly inappropriate at moments - that's okay, it's part of the process. Joy can be uncontrollable. But as we mature in Jesus, over time we find, our joy comes out in other ways, no less joyful, but more like quiet assurance & deep gratitude. Like a river of Living Water meandering quietly through the valleys of life assuring us of hope & future.

But it's true, **the Kingdom comes with Joy** - Joy's the common experience of virtually every person we come upon in the birth narrative of Jesus. Unless you were Herod, Mary's gossiping neighbors, or the angel of death, joy was an overwhelming part of God's entry into the world at Christmas! We can hear the joy evident in Elizabeth, when the baby leapt in her womb upon meeting the pregnant Mary, she says in Luke 1, "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!*"

Mary's joy is evident as well as she breaks out into worshipful song, the Magnificat, beginning with, "*My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name...*"

Did they fully understand everything happening to them? No, definitely not. Were their hearts simply open to receive this Christmas gift of God become Man in this unexpected baby. They were...and perhaps it's that openness which allows for joy to flourish & overtake them. They could've second guessed. Doubted. Held back. Been skeptical. They do show an incredulity in their questions, but nowhere do they seem to play the role of contrarian who would argue against God's message rather than simply receive it.

Some of us approach the story of God as contrarians with a 'yeah but...' attitude. We read & say, "Yeah, but..." or "But, so & so says..." We've listened to those who've made it their career to inject doubt into the Scriptures, and therefore, into the hearts of Christians. Those voices are resounding gongs & clanging symbols, their arguments amount to smoke on a windy day. Do we think the arguments have never been made before, of course they have. Are they so intelligent they've found something new, of course not! And the Word of God stands despite all the assaults upon it. Instead of just receiving the gift of the Word, some question incessantly. What would my marriage be if every time my wife said 'I love you', I replied with, "Yeah, but do you really? What about that time you..." then listed off every little mistake I've ever perceived her to make? I'm not receiving her love in that way, I'm spitting on it. Denying it. Questioning it. Arguing against it. And many do this in reference to God's efforts & expression of love towards us in the Gospel - we choose not to receive it with joy. We can be like the bride who refuses to consummate the marriage.

Chuck shared the other day how he & Christy have been reading through the whole Bible. The value of reading the Scriptures, receiving it, letting it wash over you. Not that you have to understand every little detail, and not that trudging through Numbers isn't difficult, but that you simply receive the proclamation of God's Message to you. Giving God the chance to speak. God doesn't incrementally give us truth, or only half truth - he proclaims full blown loving truth in the Scriptures. The Contrarian will never receive it with joy, as they pick it apart, deciding for themselves if this part is true as compared with that - it's only the child-like heart of faith which receives & rejoices in it! Are you Contrarian, or Child-like in faith?

If child-like, **the kingdom comes with joy & laughter as well...** Have you ever seen a mother when her baby abruptly moves within her womb? Often one of the mother's first expressions (after initial shock) is a *smile*. Then a burst of laughter.

I remember the first time feeling Aidan move in Kim's stomach. I'd come home from work & had tackled Kim on the bed (get your minds outta the gutter!) and as I lay on top of her I felt a small flutter - it was the first time either one of us felt him move. We went nuts! It was such a weirdly joyous moment with a lot of laughter.

Joy can't be bottled up for long. If you've not met Katie Boghal yet, you should...if you want to know the joy of salvation, get around Katie for 5 minutes. She oozes joy, basking

in Jesus' love for her. She's such a blessing & encouragement since she lives in this state of gratitude & joy of what's been done for her.

Life & joy growing, bouncing & moving underneath the surface of our lives, like a baby in a pregnant belly, is the primary indicator God's Kingdom activity is stirring within.

Many people, if not all, who come to faith in Jesus have a story which includes joy. Joy is a sustained sense of well-being, dictated not by circumstance, but rather by relationship. Joy weathers all the ups & downs since it is fueled by our Humble King who has birthed hope & peace into our lives. Joy's the well-being of knowing God's with you, under the surface at all times & within you by way of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We're in a sense all pregnant with Jesus & the joy of that relationship.

Joy has enabled people to smile before their enemies, and to laugh when the world as they know it was falling to pieces around them (the Apostle Paul expresses this more than once). AW Tozer is quoted as saying the Christian owes it to the world to be supernaturally joyful. Haydn, the great musician, was once asked why his church music was so cheerful, he replied: "When I think upon God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance & leap, as it were, from my pen, and since God has given me a cheerful heart it will be pardoned me that I serve Him with a cheerful spirit."

The smile that has donned the face of countless millions who have had an experience with the Spirit of Jesus must be not unlike the smile that we can guess Elizabeth wore when she and her unborn son met face to face (and womb to womb) with Mary & Jesus!

Joy's a positive human condition which can be either feeling or action. The Bible uses joy in both senses. A feeling called forth by well-being, success, or good fortune. A person automatically experiences it because of favorable circumstances. In this sense it can't be commanded. The shepherd experienced joy when he found his lost sheep (Mt 18:13). The multitude felt it when Jesus healed a Jewish woman whom Satan had bound for 18 years (Lk 13:17). The disciples returned to Jerusalem rejoicing after Jesus' ascension (Lk 24:52). Joy was also the feeling of the church at Antioch when its members heard the Jerusalem Council's decision that they did not have to be circumcised & keep the Law (Acts 15:31). Paul mentioned his joy in hearing about the obedience of the Roman Christians (Rom 16:19). He wrote to the Corinthians that love does not rejoice in wrong but rejoices in the right (1 Cor 13:6; see also 1 Sm 2:1; 11:9; 18:6; 2 Sm 6:12; 1 Kgs 1:40; Est 9:17, 18, 22).

But like we've said about hope & peace, joy is also an *action*, something to be practiced. There's a joy Scripture commands. An action which can be engaged in regardless of how a person feels. Proverbs 5:18 tells the reader to rejoice in the wife of his youth, without reference to what she may be like - there are times you may not feel great toward your spouse - but you can rejoice in them still. Christ instructed his disciples to rejoice when they were persecuted, reviled & slandered (Mt 5:11, 12). The apostle Paul commanded

continuous rejoicing (Phil 4:4; 1 Thes 5:16). James said Christians are to reckon it all joy when they fall into various testings because such testings produce endurance (Jas 1:2). **1st Peter 4:13** seems to include both action & emotion when it says, “But rejoice [the action] in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice & be glad [the emotion] when his glory is revealed.” Joy in adverse circumstances is possible only as a fruit of the Holy Spirit present in every Christian (Gal 5:22).¹

Sometimes our countenance, the way that we hold ourselves is the only witness we have & you never know who’s watching. Years ago the missionary Adoniram Judson was home on furlough. As he passed through Stonington, Connecticut, a young boy met him on the street & was struck by his joyful countenance. He’d never seen such a light on a human face. He ran up the street to a pastor & asked who the stranger was. The pastor hurried back with him, and became so absorbed in conversation with Judson that he forgot all about the boy.

Years later that boy, greatly influenced by Judson’s face, became a famous preacher by name of Henry Clay Trumbull. In a book of memoirs he penned a chapter titled: “What a Boy Saw in the Face of Adoniram Judson.” That lighted countenance changed his life.

People need to see joy. Like flowers strive & thrive bending to sunshine, so shining, joyful radiant faces come to us who constantly turn toward Christ with open hearts!² Taking the time to drink from the Well of Living Water, to be filled with Jesus, comes out in all ways, even how you look & carry yourself! Others notice, in a world starved for the things of God, we can at the least be a people of hope, peace & joy in how we carry ourselves through life since we are filled with the Spirit of God, and assured in the message of Christ.

The Kingdom Comes With Singing - Angels sang at Christ’s birth; why is singing such a key to a joy-filled Church? Singing, unless you are one of the world’s great vocalists, is often an act of humility. The proud rarely sing in public; they’re too busy caring for their image, courting the crowd, or considering how important it is to hide uncontrolled emotion & portray impervious strength. But the humble? The humble sing. And when they sing, they do it with *gusto*.

Mary sang the Magnificat when Elizabeth came to visit her. Paul & Barnabas sang in prison, despite their obviously problematic state of affairs. Every week, Christians sing in church – not because they have amazing voices, or are eager for those around them to hear their bellows – but because they’re filled with & *practicing joy*.

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Joy,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1224–1225.

² Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 680–681.

And even when Christians aren't feeling filled with joy, singing is a powerful gateway to joy being renewed by the Spirit within us. When we sing Truth, we come to believe it more. And when we sing, the joy of the Kingdom can invade not only our own hearts, but also the hearts of those who are listening. Bill Massey just told the guys at breakfast how his men's group in Florida used to gather at a local restaurant for breakfast for study. They'd often begin with worship & singing - and the other people began to tell them how they grew to look forward to hearing it every week. The proud rarely sing, the humble can't sing enough.

We just got an Echo Dot at our house. A free gift as a promo item. What a brilliant product! I like music, but I am not a music buff. I don't want to work that hard finding music, and don't want to spend the money on it. But this thing is great, all I have to do is say, "Alexa, play Christian Worship Music." And suddenly my kitchen is filled with praise! It helps my mood. It lifts me up. Singing changes me!

Find some worship, or Christmas songs you most love to sing at this time of the year, take an hour to get them on your phone, music device, or playlist. Then, as you listen through the holidays, sing. Find spaces to sing loudly (like in your car or your home if no one is around, or in church), and let your singing renew your Christmas joy once again.

Remember the kingdom comes with joy, laughter & singing - let's let ourselves go in order to receive the gift of Jesus, put away our distrust & skepticism, be filled with the Spirit, and practice joy, even when we don't feel it. *Because the message we bear is good news as Isaiah 52:7 says... "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"*"