



Light of the World

Part 3 – Joy

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Today, we're continuing in our Advent series and we're talking about the topic of *Joy*. Joy as we celebrate each week leading up to the celebration of Christmas, a different topic. With these topics that we've covered in Advent, you may have noticed that there are these dichotomies that exist. The difference between the topic that we are talking about and the opposite.

For instance, the first week, we talked about *Hope*, the opposite of which, of course, is uncertainty. The picture we got that week from Ted was the contrast of light and darkness. Then the second week, last week, we talked about *Peace*, where he separated out the peace with God and the peace of God. Peace with God, the opposite of which is enmity with God, or being at odds with God, and then peace of God, the opposite of which is stress, anxiety.

So, today, as we talk about joy, we know the opposite of joy is sorrow. To get an understanding of the difference there and to see the contrast, we turn to the writing of King David in Psalm 13 where he says, ***1 How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? And you can hear it. This is the sorrow; this is the lamenting of David. How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? 3 Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, 4 and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.***

And then he turns the page towards joy here. ***5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6 I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.*** This word *rejoice* is very important for the rest of the morning as we talk about it. The word *rejoice*, at its root, has the word *joy* and it's a verb. The verb *rejoice* means to take hold of joy. How do we take hold of joy? In the Lord's salvation.

David didn't say, "I muster up joy, I produce joy, I manufacture joy in myself." No, he said, "I rejoice in your salvation."

So, as we consider joy and sorrow, the world kind of considers joy and sorrow on the spectrum of emotions that we see. And this is kind of how it is depicted to us and how we understand it sometimes that sorrow is at one end of the spectrum, joy is at the other end of the spectrum and in the middle, we have happiness and sadness. And in order to have joy, we have to have extreme happiness and in order to have sorrow, that is extreme sadness.

I just want you to know this is not the biblical understanding of joy and sorrow. This is the way the world tends to think about joy and sorrow. As a matter of fact, we say that joy and sorrow are travel companions. As Christians, we understand and experience that. We know happiness and sadness and this, like I said, is kind of how the world understands how this works. There are things that make us happy and things that make us sad and it's what we tend to think about.

Some things make me happy and sad. One, would be my St. Louis Cardinals. If you have a sports team, maybe you've experienced both happiness and sadness when following your team.

Something else that makes me really happy is the Hot and Now light at Krispy Kreme. Does anyone else... When you've decided to have a treat and you're driving out 76 and you've got Walmart and the coaster across the road and you're peaking around the corner to see if it's lit and it is lit? Yes, that makes me happy. I'm not sad if it's not lit because I'm still getting a donut. But what can make me sad is when we see this sign on the door when we go to get our donut (the store is now closed). We've seen a lot of those this year, haven't we? And that's brought some sadness with some closing of some businesses and some restaurants and things like that.

Something else that makes me happy is getting an uplifting text message. "I hope you have a great day." Wow! "Thanks." Something that makes me sad is reading this: "Your Welcome." Take a moment. If you don't know why that makes me sad, ask someone that does so that we can fix it. Only half of you are laughing, so we have some work to do. I'm hearing whispers too, educating. That's good.

So, we know the difference between happiness and sadness, and we've got things that kind of take us back and forth. Again, as the world sees joy and sorrow, we understand that's not how it works. As a matter of fact, in your translation of scripture, you may see joy interchanged with happiness, gladness, or other words that describe this joy that we have, and it's in contrast to sorrow and sadness and the negative that contrasts against joy.

As followers of Jesus, we understand that as joy and sorrow are travel companions, there are things that can bring us joy, but in the midst of sorrow as well. There are a few different things I think about. Parenting – I can experience joy and happiness in parenting. As my kids are obeying, that feels good doesn't it? When your kids are getting along with one another. And then how about when they take it a step further and they express unprompted kindness to people? That's joy. At the same time, some of us can experience sorrow with our parenting from disappointment or a wayward child or ways that we can experience sorrow in our parenting. So, we are in the midst of joy and sorrow.

How about in marriage? Are there extremes of joy and sorrow in marriage? Yes. At work? We can experience joy because of productivity and recognition and a raise or a bonus or a promotion. Then sorrow with loss of work. We're in the midst of joy and sorrow at the same time in so many ways. With babies. You have this feeling of holding a baby that's pretty neat. But then this joy of holding your own child... It's just different isn't it, grandparents. There's joy in that. But then potentially in the loss of a child there can be extreme sorrow in that.

Christians can experience joy in any circumstance.

You see we are in the midst of joy and sorrow and we don't just swing up and down this spectrum of emotions to extreme happiness, which is joy, and extreme sadness, which is sorrow. The important thing to understand, regardless of the circumstances because those are all circumstances around us that we experience, is that regardless of our circumstances, Christians can experience joy in any circumstance.

The example we are going to look at is Paul. The Apostle Paul was previously a persecutor of Christians. He devoted his life to stamping out the faith. He was feared as a result of it. The Lord changed his heart. He followed Christ and became one of the most important evangelists of all time – past, present, future.

Then, toward the end of his life, Paul was in prison. He was being persecuted himself for his faith and he is in the worst of circumstances. He's in prison and it's probably cold, dark, wet and he's probably hungry, thirsty, lonely. Just the worst circumstances you can think of. I can imagine the stench. All of your senses can take you there to the circumstances that he must be in all on the account of his faith. And yet he has joy, and we know that because as he is writing a letter to the Philippians, he tells them, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice." Did he say, "Hey, church in Philippi, I need you to try to produce joy in yourself. I need you to try and muster up some joy."? No. Rejoice in the Lord. Take hold of the joy that you have in the Lord.

Christians can experience joy in any circumstance. Why is that? What it is that Christians have that they can take hold of, that we possess to have joy in the Lord, joy in our salvation? **Joy is implanted into the soul of the follower of Jesus.** Did you know that? When we choose to follow Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit. When we receive the Holy Spirit, as Galatians 5: 22 says, we receive the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. It's there. Joy is implanted into the soul of the follower of Jesus. That which you can take hold of. You can experience joy in any circumstance.

By the way, I want to point out with the fruit of the spirit... All of those are implanted. If there is anything you are struggling with that you don't know how to approach it, know that you can take hold of the things that are implanted into your soul through the Holy Spirit – peace, patience. We talked about peace last week. It's there; we have to take hold of it. It's in the soul of the follower of Jesus.

This is why Christians can experience joy under any circumstance. One good example I can think of where there is joy and sorrow, where have these two opposing conditions – joy and sorrow – at the same time is at a funeral. The funeral of a follower of Jesus where you're celebrating the life of someone who followed Christ, who was saved from the consequences of sin, yet they are gone from us. The reason we can have joy, we take hold of joy, we rejoice in their salvation because we know that they are now with the Lord. They are with their Savior, away from sin and brokenness, in the presence of the Lord and the presence of joy, absolute joy.

As we acknowledge that and we see that in the funeral of a loved one who had received Christ, we have hope in that for ourselves, and that brings us joy. Yet, at the same time, sorrow for the loss of that loved one here on earth and with us for a time. You see, we experience joy and sorrow at the same time and that's something that's very hard for the unbeliever to understand, isn't it? For a non-Christian to understand how someone can have joy, regardless of their circumstances no matter what's going on around them. That's because the joy is implanted in us.

And it can be very hard for us to describe as well. We read in 1 Peter 1, ***8 Though you have not seen him, you love him...*** This is Peter to Christians. By the way, he's writing to those that didn't witness the life of Christ on earth and he's speaking to them. If you think about it, that's us now as well. ***...and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy...*** Inexpressible. Not only is it hard for non-Christians to understand, but it's also hard for Christians to express. So, it's incomprehensible to those that don't believe and it's inexpressible to those that do. It's one of those things that is hard to communicate.

We're just coming off of potty training our youngest, Mason. He's our fourth. I see some young parents smiling and nodding their head. It's always an adventure isn't it? It's life full of emergencies and different dances and however else to communicate, "I've gotta go." Sometimes it's urgent. So, off we go. One of us takes him to the bathroom and then comes back. Upon the return, there are questions: Did he make it? Number one, number two? Of course, Mason is communicating in the conversation out loud. It doesn't matter where you are, public or not, for all to hear. That would otherwise be awkward for anyone else to have that discussion out loud. But then it occurred to me why toddlers and their grandparents get along so well. It's because they are both so comfortable talking openly about their bowel and bladder habits. There's easy conversation that's built in there.

We were at a basketball game a couple of weeks ago. Mason, of course, is in and out. It's a basketball game of our son, Jameson. He's 17. Mason is with us. There are so many emergencies, going in and out of the gym. And upon his return, the conversations and the questions declaring for all to hear what had just taken place... or not taken place. Towards the end of the game, some of our family had to leave early. They got up to walked out.

Our friend, Cole, 17 years old, is there watching the game with us. Cole walks with them out of the gym to the door and then walks back in. As he comes back in, Mason sees that Cole has left and come back in. It's a quiet time-out moment in a full gym. Cole gets halfway back up to us and Mason yells out, "Cole! Did you go poop?" Cole says, "No, Mason, I didn't." At this point, Mason is getting confused because there is only one other option, right? "Well, did you go pee?" "Nope." Mason couldn't understand it. It was incomprehensible to him. Cole left the gym and came back, and, as far as Mason knows, that's the only reason you go out of the gym and back in.

To the non-believer, the only reason that you have joy in your heart is because you have extreme happiness. And you can't experience that alongside sadness. But we as Christians know that joy and sorrow are travel companions and we can have joy regardless of the circumstances around us, at a funeral or otherwise. So, joy and sorrow together is incomprehensible to the non-believer and yet inexpressible to the believer.

Then we talk a little bit about sorrow. Now, as we talked about joy, the things that bring us joy, we also know that there is sorrow. For our example of sorrow, we look to King Solomon. King Solomon was the king over Israel, and he was the son of David, and he had experienced great wealth and great wisdom and this was his life. He was thought to be one of the wealthiest men that ever lived, one of the wisest men that ever lived. Solomon sought out joy through pleasures around him that he could create, that he could generate, that he could manufacture joy through his circumstances and the pleasures around him.

In Ecclesiastes 3, the first part of that passage in the first eight Verses of Ecclesiastes 2, we read about Solomon and his listing all of the pleasures that he took, all of the things he tried to do to build up his happiness, his joy.

Then he turns the page when he goes in to Verse 9 where we pick up the story. He says, ***9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.*** That's important. It's not like he got a lot of money and lost his mind. He still had his wisdom about him. So, we understand that no matter how smart, bright, intelligent you are, you can have your wisdom about you and still chase the wrong things.

He said, ***10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil.*** Translation – "I deserve this." "I deserve joy, I deserve happiness." Do we ever hear that? Do we ever say that? That's what he's saying. "I've worked hard for this; this is what I deserve."

11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless (pointless, worthless), ***a chasing after the wind*** (chasing something I can never catch); ***nothing was gained under the sun.*** So, we see this deep sorrow that Solomon expresses, and we know that he did take hold of the joy of the Lord in his salvation, but we get his example of chasing after things to try to bring ourselves joy. We do that too sometimes, don't we? We have a tendency for that. Sometimes we fall to the lies that more money, more possessions, more power, more influence can bring us joy. If we could just control those circumstances, we would be full of joy.

There are other things besides those common things that we think about. They are kind of these smaller things I think of where we try to manage ourselves in order to achieve joy. As a matter of fact, Time Magazine has a special edition out right now called *The Power of Joy*. It says, "Elevate your Life," "Finding Joy in Trying Times," A Spiritual Peek." They are so close in here. Some of these articles are interesting articles. You read about getting a religion, expressing gratitude. The questions are: What do you mean by get a religion?" "And when you say express gratitude, express gratitude to whom." So, we get very specific when we talk about taking hold of the joy that it in us.

There are measures that we can take, especially in the health and wellness space, things that we are encouraged to do. If you know me at all, you know that I'm very much a fan of wellness and caring for our physical and our mental and our relational and emotional condition. Because when we are unwell, our focus becomes inward.

When we are well, we can better turn our focus outward. As you are seeking wellness, the question becomes: "What is your goal? Is it happiness and joy? Or better, is it to love and serve God and other people?" We see many things like, *You need to change your diet. You need to get a pet. Get outside more. Improve your sleep. Start exercising.* We need to do all these things, but really what we're trying to do, if our goal is to seek joy only, is we're trying to bio hack our neuro chemistry. We're trying to increase the good chemicals in our body so that we can feel better. The problem with that is that we can do all the right things to boost our mood and still have sorrow in our heart. We can kind of trick our chemistry to feel better but still have sorrow in our heart and it can be a chasing after the wind, something that we are not going to catch. It can all be vanity.

The question then becomes: "Great, you tell me to take hold of the joy that I have as a Christian and that's implanted in my heart, but how do I do that? Travis, I can't just flip a switch and experience joy. What are some practical things to take hold of the joy of my salvation?" I'm going to give you five things, we call them spiritual disciplines, that you can do to draw near to the Lord.

1. Scripture – Reading God's word, breathing in the breath of God that has been breathed out for us that is profitable for so many things.

2. Prayer – I don't just mean a mealtime prayer. Even in your quiet time prayer, I want to challenge you. May your prayer not be rich in petition but lacking in gratitude. I'm talking about meditative prayer that is drenched in gratitude. Nothing pours into a heart of joy quite like a condition of gratitude.

3. Solitude – Some of you need to get away from people. I know we're in a time right now where we're trying to isolate and get away physically, but I mean get away electronically, digitally, however else you are connecting to people. And for part of your time of the day, isolating yourself from everyone, from people. Because these first two happen better when you are in isolation from people. Solitude is important and scripture and prayer are far more effective when you are in solitude. Some of you need to get away from people.

4. Fellowship – Some of you need to get around people. Again, we've been isolating. We've been away from people. This has been hard. It's been a trying time for our church, for The Church, for our country, for the world. Followers of Jesus, you were not made to do life alone. As we've been isolating, we're taking measures to be safe and we will continue to do that as a church, but we want to encourage you... And we still respect all decisions. We want to encourage you to get around other believers in Christ, whether it's at church or other places. Some of you really need to get around people. I say that specifically – others who are equally yoked in Christ, others who take hold of the joy of the Lord's Salvation.

5. Service – Service is one of our purposes that we talk about as a church and it applies to us individually as well. It's ministry. How are you serving the body of Christ? How are you being the hands and the feet of Christ through service?

And how do these things help us to draw near to God? How do they help us to take hold of the joy that we have in the Lord? They do so because it draws us near to the Lord.

We read in Psalms 16, ***11 You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*** As we draw near to the Lord, we can better take hold of the joy that we have in him.

We're celebrating Advent, doing this Advent series in the Sundays leading up to Christmas. Advent literally means coming into place. The way I like to think about Advent is that it's God plan coming together because it's still happening. It was happening when Christ was born and it's happening now. What is God's plan? Well, since the time of creation and the fall, God put a plan in place of redemption and restoration. First redemption – when he sent his son, Christ, which is what we celebrate around Christmas. That's the redemption. For the sin of all man who will follow him.

We read about that in Luke 2: 8-11. We heard part of it earlier with the lighting of the Advent candle. ***8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.***

The Savior was born that had been prophesied about hundreds of years before and talked specifically about how it would happen and here he is. Because in God's plan coming together, he sent his Son, Christ, to live a perfect life, sinless, to die a sinner's death, to raise again from the grave to prove that he is God, and that his sacrifice is sufficient for atonement of our sins. He established his church, went to be with the Lord, and now we wait for his return because his plan is still coming together. That's what Advent is.

Around this time, we sing the hymn. We sang it this morning. "Joy to the World." A lot of you may be thinking in 2020, *I ain't feeling it.* Right? It's been a rough year. Boy, have joy and sorrow been travel companions this year? We've been in the midst of so much and we're just on a roller coaster of joy and sorrow and experiencing them together at the same time, which, again, is incomprehensible to those that don't believe and inexpressible to those of us that do.

I want to quote my wife. She said, "Jesus brought joy to the world, but he did not promise joy in it." Now, again, we understand that Christians are promised joy in the world because of our salvation and so we understand also that he brought joy to the world through Christ, which is why we can have joy in the world. As a matter of fact, we are promised sorrow and if anything, that this life will be full of struggles and trials and darkness. But He did bring joy to the world of which we can take hold. He brought joy to the world, but we will have struggles.

Do you ponder heaven and hell much? At all? You should. We should all ponder it. One or the other is the eternal destiny of every man, woman, and child. So, we should think about it. We shouldn't ignore it. When you ponder heaven and hell, what do you think about? When you think about heaven, do you think streets of gold, gates made of pearl? Do you think about being with loved ones who have gone to be with the Lord before you? That's a joyful thought, isn't it?

When you ponder hell, what do you think about? Do you think hot temperatures, fire, endless reruns of Hallmark Christmas movies? Some of you are like, *no that's more like heaven - hot cocoa and Christmas movies*. But what do you think about? The fact is they exist, and they do have a physical component, but the thing is the physical component of heaven and hell are not the essence of heaven and hell. The essence of heaven and hell boils down to one thing and that is the eternal presence of God in heaven and the eternal absence of God in hell.

Jesus brought joy to the world. Let me show you this graphic to help you understand what I'm talking about. Anywhere there is God, there is joy. Anywhere God is not, there is not joy. In heaven, God is there and there is joy. On earth, God is here, we have his presence and there can be joy. In hell, God is not there and there is no joy.

Anywhere that there is sin and brokenness, there is sorrow. In hell there is sin and brokenness. On earth, there is sin and brokenness. In heaven there is no sin and no brokenness. This is why joy and sorrow are currently travel companions for us. We experience joy and sorry at the same time. That is often incomprehensible by the non-believer. They don't understand because joy is simply excessive happiness and sorrow is just simply excessive sadness. But to the Christian, it can be inexpressible, and for those that have placed faith in Christ, you get it; it's hard to express.

A little bit ago, I mentioned the five spiritual disciplines that I think are some of the most important if you're not participating in it. By the way, if you're doing all of these other things with your wellness and your job and money and physicians and things like that, and you're neglecting the spiritual disciplines, then you're missing it, you're chasing after the wind.

As we talk about that, I said scripture. That was the first one that I listed because we can literally breathe in the breath of God that has been spoken out to us. And if you're wondering where to go in scripture, I want to give you, if nothing else, maybe a little homework assignment. I want to direct you to Romans 8. This is a chapter in the Bible that, to me, helps to take hold of the joy that is implanted in the Christian.

When Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans, he started off with setting the scene. The first half of the Book of Romans is like the situation that we're in. This is where we read that all have sinned and that the wages of sin is death. We read about the condemnation that faces man because of sin and our condition – creation and the fall.

But then he goes on in Chapter 8. He starts to turn the page on it, and he starts to talk about the redemption that we have in Christ. He starts out in the beginning of Chapter 8 - ***1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...*** Remember, there was condemnation. Now there is no condemnation. ***2 ...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh...*** What can the law not do that God can do? He could send joy to the world. He brought joy to the world.

Then in that chapter, he goes on to tell us and remind us of who we are – sons and daughters, heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ, that is who we are. And he says that the suffering in this life is not worth comparing to the glory that will once be revealed to us when one day we are in glory with our Father in heaven and the absence of sin and brokenness and in the presence of a condition of absolute joy.

And he says that in our sorrow and in our sufferings when we're praying to God and don't even know what to pray because we're in such sorrow, he says the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that are too deep for words even. And he reminds us that for those who love God, all things work together for those who are called according to his purpose. And then he says if God is for us, then who can be against us.

I love how this segment of scripture ends in Verses 38-39, ***38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

And that is our salvation of which we can take hold of joy. That is the joy that is implanted in us, followers of Jesus, you get it. It's hard to express. If you haven't place faith in Christ, we'd love to tell you about it, but it's hard to express. May we not be striving, chasing after wind, things that are unattainable that aren't going to bring us joy. May we bring ourselves into the presence of the Lord and draw near to him so that we can have fullness of joy.

Father, we love you. We're grateful for this Advent season, Lord. We know that we are in the midst of joy and sorrow. Father, as we experience both, we understand that as your followers, we can experience joy no matter our circumstances. We know that our eternal destiny, one day, Lord, is in your eternal presence and in the absence of sin and brokenness and to that, we look forward.

We pray for those who have not placed faith in you, Lord, that today may be the day that they make that decision to understand the brokenness in them and that they need a Savior and that your Son is that Savior who is Christ the Lord. I pray that if they have questions or want to receive your salvation, that they would meet with a prayer team member in the prayer room or elsewhere, Father, that they could turn the page over into joy that is incomprehensible.

Father, for those who have placed faith in you, we look forward to the day where we experience a condition of only joy in your presence.

Father, we love you and we thank you for this Christmas season. We pray for safety, for those who are sick and need your healing touch, Lord.

We love you and we give you praise in Christ's name... Amen.