

Reclaiming The Joy Of Christmas

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[0:00] We all want peace, and we all want joy. In 1914, during World War I, it was the outset of the war, on the Western Front somewhere in France, the Allies, France, Great Britain, United States, were in trench warfare with the central powers, the German Empire, the Austrian Empire, and they were engaged in a terrible, terrible war.

Military technology had advanced. The machine gun was being employed for the first time in this kind of conflict. It eventually developed into poison, gas, and use, and medical technology had not caught up, and so it would have been awful.

In between the trenches was this no man's land. Christmas time, 1914, a truce is called. And so the soldiers on each side were able to bury their dead. They were able to perform prisoner swaps. They even began to mingle together in no man's land, share rations together. And on the Christmas of 1914, the evening closed out with both sides singing Christmas carols together. It's a picture of peace, isn't it?

[1:34] In the midst of hostility and threat, we all long for something like that. Peace is not just the absence of hostility and threat.

It is the fullness of affection, fullness of love and unity. This kind of hostility and threat, it always results in fear and hiding.

Whereas affection and love give rise to joy and unity. The thing about the Christmas truce of 1914 is that it was gone in a day.

The next day they were back to killing each other. Fleeting peace, shallow joy. The war raged on for years to come.

What we know, what we're born into, is a fleeting peace and a shallow joy. I can imagine some of you who've come into this building this morning and the thought of peace and joy is appealing to you so long as God's not involved.

[2:56] Give me the joy, give me the peace, you keep God. Well, this morning, I'm going to be bold and say, if you're wanting a peace and a joy without God, you're asking for a fleeting peace and a shallow joy because God alone provides an everlasting peace and a fullness of joy.

And the reason why you may not want God is actually because you're running from God. You're hiding from Him. There's things about God you may be disappointed with or fear.

I've got good news of great joy for you today. I can imagine some of you in this room when you hear the word joy and the word Christmastime, you go cynical.

You think something like this, joy, Christmastime, whatever. Because for you, the Christmastime is not a time of joyfulness, it's a time of misery because you're just reminded of your loneliness.

You're just reminded of the unresolved conflicts with those people who are supposed to be nearest to you. You experience absence of people.

[4:12] And so a time where everyone gets together, you're kind of like, let's just get through it. Time of enjoyment turns into a time of endurance for you.

I've got great news of a great joy of an everlasting peace for you. And then there's those of you in this room, you're like, oh man, my joy is in my children opening up some awesome gifts I've got for them.

And that joy is riding high within about three gifts and then your kid says, I didn't want this one. What happens to your joy then?

It's gone. Maybe your joy is in the end of the year bonus check and what to do with it like Clark Griswold did. But what happens if your end of the year bonus comes as a can of popcorn instead of a deposit of cash?

And your boss is given the big bonus. Where's your joy then? Or maybe your joy is at the thought of the gathering of extended friends and family and everyone is together and then it happens.

[5:36] That unresolved old tension flares up and everybody leaves real quick. We all want everlasting peace and fullness of joy.

and we're all looking to stuff that seemingly can never deliver on it. This morning I've got good news of great joy of an everlasting peace.

Peace leads to joy and everlasting peace leads to a fullness of joy and the everlasting peace and fullness of joy that we all long for can only be found in one person the Prince of Peace Jesus Christ. And so this morning I want to help you reclaim the joy of Christmas by looking at the Prince of Peace. And so if you'd open up your Bibles to Luke chapter 2 we're going to work our way through verse 8 all the way through chapter verse 20 but we're going to focus mainly on verses 8 through 14 and we're going to make our way through the text and here's what I'm going to help you see.

There are some fearful shepherds there and they have a fear that we can all identify with and then an evangelizing angel shows up and he is proclaiming good news of great joy for all people and then this multitude of the angelic hosts show up and they start praising and glorifying God and they announce peace on earth to all those with whom God is pleased.

[7:32] And then those fearful shepherds make a beeline to Bethlehem where their fear is radically transformed to joy and in verse 20 they go back to the outskirts praising God.

Does anybody want to know why fearful shepherds turn into worshipping shepherds? They encountered the prince of peace.

So let's look at these fearful shepherds in verse 8 a little background verses 1 through 7 we learn that this baby has been born to Mary and Joseph and they lie him in a manger and on that same day Luke brings us to the outskirts of Bethlehem in the region the hill country surrounding it where there is a bunch of shepherds.

Look at verse 8 and in the same region of the city of Bethlehem there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night. Now what you got to understand about these shepherds is these were everyday guys and you got to ask the question what do you think they were talking about?

I'm thinking they're talking about politics Roman occupation maybe they're talking about economics how much are these sheep going to get on the market? How do the sheep help? Maybe they're talking about family stuff I'm not sure what to do with my daughter maybe maybe they're going a little deeper and one of the shepherds is saying something like this how did I end up here?

[9:06] Is this going to be what I'm doing for the rest of my life? I feel stuck. Here's something you need to know about shepherds. In Israel at this time shepherds were considered lowlives.

In an ancient Jewish document there was this understanding that shepherds were under a perpetual ban. They were thought of as disgusting. The only people in Israel at the time lower than the shepherds were lepers.

It gives you a sense of scale and where they're at in terms of the low life to high life spectrum.

Here's what I want you to notice in verse 8. These shepherds these lowlives of that time they were on the outskirts of Bethlehem in the same region they were out in the field.

So you got lowlives who were on the outskirts and did you notice they're in darkness? They're watching over their flock by night. Lowlives on the outskirts living in darkness they're lost.

lost. You might not be a lowlife but apart from Jesus you have no life and if you're apart from Jesus you're definitely not on the inside you're on the outside and if you don't know Jesus you may think you're living in the light but reality is you too are living in darkness.

[10:44] There's a reason why in verse 9 an angel shows up to these lowlives living on the outskirts in darkness. God has come to declare to them good news and if you realize that you are a lowlife on the outskirts in darkness it's good news for you too.

So in verse 9 out of nowhere an angel of the Lord appears to them. It would have been sudden it would have been unanticipated 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.

The glory of the Lord shone around. What is this glory? Well it would have been really bright and in the darkness it would have been really really bright. It would have been an all encompassing glory. Here's the way to think about it. You know how the mist rolls in off the lake from time to time and not only do you see it you feel it. This glory would have been a penetrating glory glory.

Because this is not the glory of the angel this is the glory of the Lord. Do you see that? The glory of the Lord shone around them.

[11:58] This is the Shekinah glory of God. It's his holiness gone public and if you experienced it it would affect you down to the core.

So these lowlifes on the outskirts in darkness are suddenly immersed in the brightness of the Shekinah glory of God and there before him is standing an angel of the Lord.

And if you know Luke at all Luke chapter one there's this angel of the Lord that keeps on showing up and it's Gabriel and my suspicion is it's Gabriel again. So let's just bear with me and just think it's Gabriel.

Gabriel appears to them and the reaction of these shepherds is something you've got to see.

And they were filled with great fear. I want to take an aside here and help you to understand something. For us to reclaim the fullness of joy that comes with Christmas we've got to reclaim the tragedy of the fall.

[13:05] Out of the tragedy of the fall is born a great joy. Why were these shepherds filled with great fear?

Was it the suddenness of the appearing of the angel? This past week I'm at a basketball game for my son I walk out of the men's room my little daughter Mary surprises me boo and I'm like blah! I was afraid but just for a little bit it wasn't a great fear it was a little fear. So I don't think that these shepherds their great fear was they got surprised nor do I think it's just because it was an angel. The angel of the Lord showed up to Zachariah and Mary and though they were troubled and maybe a little afraid they didn't have this great fear. Why this great fear?

I think it has to do with the Shekinah glory. This palpable holiness that was surrounding them. You see what happens is that when God's glory shows up this holiness penetrates and exposes a person's utter sinfulness.

[14:19] We see it in Isaiah chapter 6. The prophet Isaiah has this vision of God in the temple. The seraphim sang holy holy is the Lord God almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory.

His glory is his holiness gone public. And what does Isaiah do? Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips. He's ready to die. He feels exposed because he's in the presence of the glory of God. Exodus 19. God is speaking on Mount Sinai to Moses and all of his people. They hear his voice. And you know the people think we're gonna die because we hear his voice.

And they start saying Moses in verses 18 and 19. Moses stop him from speaking to us. You speak to us. We can't handle it anymore. They were exposed by God's manifest holiness.

In Genesis chapter 3 Adam and Eve they blow it. They disobey God. They eat of the fruit. And then in verse 8 God comes looking for him in the garden.

[15:28] It's what he did every day it seems. He would come and spend the afternoon with Adam and Eve and walk with him in the cool of the day. And so after the fall something horrific tragic happens.

Do you remember God comes calling for Adam? Remember where Adam was? He was hiding from God. God's presence he's hiding from it.

He saw God as some kind of threat and so he hides from it and he's covered himself up with fig leaves because he's ashamed of himself. And not only is he ashamed of himself when God asks him what happened he starts blaming his wife.

She made me do it. And then when God says to Eve what happened she's like I blame the serpent. He made me do it. So you have blame. And then the curse comes down and now all creation is cursed.

We're to toil and what we read from Romans is all creation has been subjected to futility. It's groaning being under the weight of sin. That's what we're born into.

[16:38] And what we see here is God's holiness as a threat. Let me just press this home a little bit more. Now imagine we've got this screen behind me right? Let's just say we played a video of all your thoughts for the last week on this video screen for everybody to see.

Would you come back next week? No. Why not? Because you'd be ashamed. Just like I would be ashamed if I had all my thoughts put up on screen.

Not only would I be ashamed you'd lock me out. When we become aware of our sinfulness we want to hide.

And what we see happening with these shepherds this fear is at the Shekinah glory of God. It's they want to hide.

They're being exposed. And there's nowhere to hide. They're out in the open. There's nowhere to go. Adam and Eve played hide and seek in the garden.

[17:49] It's like we play hide and seek with God today. If you play hide and seek with a three year old it's a really interesting game. You count to ten the three year old goes hides.

You go looking for the three year old. It's not tough. You're like oh red lightning McQueen sneakers underneath the floor length curtain of the window. There's a bulge there. I wonder who that is.

You know where this child is hiding. This child thinks that they're hiding from you. We tend to think that we're able to hide from God.

Adam and Eve weren't able to hide from God. Isaiah wasn't able to hide from God. These shepherds weren't able to hide from God. There is no hiding from God.

When you come into the presence of God you will feel exposed. There will be great fear in you. You will start to fear your death.

[18:47] death. These shepherds are thinking the worst.

I don't know what was going on in their minds but I can only imagine they're thinking okay is this one of the angels that kind of dropped the bomb on Sodom and Gomorrah? Is this the angel of death that swept through Egypt?

I'm guessing these shepherds at this point have this pit in their stomach thinking this is bad news this is bad news we can all identify with that right?

You think about your life you think about what you've done the shame but this angel didn't come with bad news.

Let's look at verse 10. This angel shows up and the first thing he says to them is fear not don't fear don't be afraid I'm not here to destroy you I'm here to evangelize you we read I bring you fear not for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people good news not bad news good news these shepherds are exposed they're afraid and this angel is saying I bring you good news great joy that word bring good news is a verb that you can literally translate gospelize to announce good news to to make known the good news of a particular event back in 1945 at the closing out of World

[20:45] War II you would have these newspaper headings that said VJ day exclamation point victory over Japan day or VE day exclamation point victory over Europe day you have you have headlines that say Japan surrenders war ends victory exclamation point peace exclamation point the paper headlines were declaring good news they were publishing good news for all to read and rejoice in and so this angel comes to these low lives on the outskirts in darkness who's had their fears exposed and he's like I bring you good news of a particular event that particular event happened earlier that day but what I want you to see right now is that this good news would bring great joy for all people whatever this good news is it turns great fear into great joy you see the verse the great fear in verse 9 and if you look down to verse 20 those same shepherds are rejoicing and glorifying

God as they go back to the outskirts there's great joy this great news of great joy is for all people it's not just for the low lives on the outskirts who are living in darkness it's for the high lives who are on the inside but still living in darkness and for everybody in between whether you're a low life or whether you're a high life or you're in between life you have no life apart from Jesus darkness one

of the things about living in darkness and why this is good news for all peoples is it's all peoples apart from God are hiding from God they're trying to deal with their threats they're trying to deal with fear this good news that generates great joy is for all those who are hiding and willing to admit it so whether you're a man or you're a woman or you're confused if you're a man or a woman this is great news good news of great joy for you you just need to admit you're hiding it doesn't matter if you got more money than you know what to do with or you've got so little money you don't know what bill to pay it doesn't matter this is good news of great joy for all people you just need to admit that you need peace it doesn't matter the color of your skin it doesn't matter the address on your place the issue is we all want peace and we're all hiding from the prince of peace are you willing to admit that you're hiding from the holiness of god this good news of great joy for all people is for you what the angel announcing here is a plan god's plan for the fullness of time for all people everywhere the good news is for every tribe tongue and nation again this angel

Gabriel isn't bringing bad news of hostility and threat he's bringing good news that makes the nations glad so the question is what is this good news that makes the nations glad look at verse 11 for unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior the good news of great joy for all people that this angel of the lord is declaring to these sin exposed shepherds it's not a government program it's not educational degrees he's not making job offers he's not proclaiming a scientific discovery he's proclaiming the birth announcement of a person the good news of great joy for all people is a person for unto you is born this day in the city of

David a savior when you hear those words in verse 11 for unto you is born this day does that ring a bit of a bell does that sound familiar to you if you go back to Isaiah 9 6 you read Isaiah prophesying of one who is to be born for unto us a child is born Gabriel is doing a little bit of a riff on the words of Isaiah 9 6 it's a prophetic fulfillment riff he's saying the baby's been born this baby boy born to us is David's son baby boy is David's son baby boy is David's son baby boy is the offspring of Abraham and whom all the nations will be blessed as far as the curse is found the nations will be glad in this baby boy this baby boy who is born to us is

David's greater son this baby boy according to Isaiah the government will be upon his shoulders and his name will be wonderful counselor mighty God everlasting father prince of peace of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end the good news that this angel was announcing that would bring great joy to the nations is the birth of the peacemaker you will bring great priests to all who humble themselves and are willing to admit they need it a peace with God no more hiding a peace with yourself no more shame no more self hatred peace with others the blame game gets done and eventually peace with creation a time coming when there's no more toil a peacemaker can go by another title savior unto you this day is born in the city of

[28:08] David a savior a savior rescues from threat and fear and so this angel is announcing the birth of the great savior who is the peacemaker and not only is this savior the great peacemaker he's the christ do you see that who is christ the lord christ is a title it's a reference of the long awaited king from david's line who would establish a forever kingdom with a never ending peace and so what we read is that savior is the great peacemaker and he's the christ the great king and he's not only the great peacemaker and the great king he is the lord and what luke and this angel are helping us to see is he's god the lord the great god this baby this birth announcement which is good news for all nations born this day in the city of david is the great peacemaker the great king the great god who's taken on flesh emmanuel and it happened this day says the angel it took place he was born he really was born he really lived and in verse 12 the angel tells these shepherds hey let me give you a sign you can just make a beeline to bethlehem right now and what you will find you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes which would not have been unusual lying in a manger now that's unusual especially given who this baby is the great peacemaker the great king the great god is lying in a manger it's a feeding trough what does that tell you about our god he became nobody he came to the outskirts he came into the darkness to save those who were low lives on the outskirts living in darkness so that we could have life so that we could be brought in so that we could be lit up what a god before the shepherds can make a beeline to the city of

Bethlehem something else happens in verse 13 it's another unexpected appearance and it's a multitude of the angelic host and that word multitude means literally a number you can't count one pastor thinks that it's all of the heavenly host present to announce the birth of the great peacemaker and I tend to agree with him my son and I were recently at a football game and we were in a stadium that held over a hundred thousand people watching this game and the place was electric it was this mass of humanity praising this football team it was we were surrounded by it hundred thousand people in a stadium it's like the city of Kenosha in a stadium we're not told how many angels were here but if it was a hundred thousand that would have been impressive don't you think it was a multitude too great for anyone to count and it's what these angelic hosts were saying that you need to see in verses 14 they're praising and saying glory to

God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he's pleased this angelic host and by the way the word host literally means army the army of God had gathered to announce the birth of this baby and they're saying glory to God in the highest in excelsis Deo and they say on earth peace among men with whom he's pleased the angelic host this army of God is declaring peace to the earth at the birth of this baby this baby in the manger gives rise to the angelic praise of God and they're declaring peace among men with whom God is pleased peace with God has come peace with yourself has come peace with others has come peace with creation has come no more hiding no more shame no more blaming no more toiling this baby has come to make it all right and for those who are humble those who please

God oh receive the peace in verses 15 through 20 what do these shepherds do well the angels leave and then these shepherds make a beeline to Bethlehem and they find the savior in the manger just like the angel told them and they share with Joseph and Mary what has just happened and all of them wonder and we see Mary treasuring all these things in her heart Mary did you know that your baby boy would be the great peacemaker what I want you to see is in verse 20 I pointed to it a few times now and the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen as it had been told of them they had now personally encountered the prince of peace and their fear was turned to joy their threat becomes peace peace

I want to let you know something this grace peace came at a great price this baby lying in the manger surrounded by his parents and shepherds and eventually magi in 33 years he's going to be surrounded by quite a different crowd and that crowd is not going to be praising him but jeering him mocking him taunting him he saved others let him save himself if he's the Christ of God his chosen one if you're the king of the Jews save yourself the prince of peace who was announced at his birth by singing angels died at the jeering of those he came to save those who are hiding in fear Isaiah 53:5 says but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace his work on the cross is what secured our peace the good news of great joy for all peoples is the birth of this baby and the shepherds when they encountered him were dramatically transformed their fear was turned to joy because threat had turned to peace have you encountered the prince of peace have you come to him you who came in and you want peace and joy without

[36:42] God he came for you and he's no longer in the manger he's raining on high and you can make a beeline to him if you want to experience the everlasting peace and fullness of joy that he alone offers through his blood you go to him and you say something like this oh prince of peace I have been hiding and I've been covering up and you see me as I am I admit my sin and ask for forgiveness and peace through your blood that you alone can supply and at that moment if you meant it if you trusted it if you believe that you're saved peace everlasting joy in the full and your peace becomes a merry salvation for those of you who have come in and Christmas time is a joyless time remember that this baby boy grew up and he secured your everlasting peace and so maybe right now your life the people in it are really hard but remember your greatest problem has been solved you've got peace with the

God of the universe and that's something to rejoice in even when hardness comes joy to the world the Lord has come and for those of us who are setting our hearts on the fleeting peace and temporary joy that will soon dry up there's a greater joy that is grounded on an everlasting peace that secured by the blood of the prince of peace and it never dries up joy to the world our Lord has

come let earth receive her king he comes to make his blessings flow as far as the curse is found as far as the curse is found now let every heart prepare him room do you want everlasting peace and fullness of joy set your heart on

Jesus the prince of peace it's the good news of great joy for all people and that's Christmas cheer let's pray God in heaven would you do a work of bringing peace and joy to the hearts of these people for the glory of your name and for peace on earth it's in your name we pray amen