

The Unexpected Joy (Luke 2:8-14)

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. I'm grateful that you have come to worship the Lord this morning, and may I agree with you with a Merry Christmas. And I don't know what your plans are this Christmas, but I pray if I do not have a chance to see you again, I pray that your Christmas may be Christ-filled, and it would be a great time with friends and family.

We're going to be responding to a question today that is, why is the word joy so closely associated with Christmas?

We sing songs like Joy to the World. Christmas decorations often have the word joy. In fact, if you go out to our foyer in the coffee corner, there's a fireplace, and on that fireplace there's the word joy. Why is joy so closely associated with Christmas? There is someone on staff that I don't know how she manages to work out the incongruity of this, but she was not born in December, yet her middle name is Joy.

And so, Melissa, I don't know how you do that, but she manages to not have a Christmas birthday and still yet manage to have that middle name. But joy is often a word that is associated with Christmas.

[1 : 21] And why is that? And you say, well, Scott, sometimes my circumstances are not that joyful around Christmas. Family circumstances are such. I may have suffered loss.

This is not a joyful time for me. And so can circumstances that are difficult coincide with the joy of Christmas? And I would argue yes, and we're going to share why that is in today's message. And we're going to see that there's a great height to joy. We're going to see that there is a great length of joy, a great depth of joy, and then we will conclude with perhaps our response to this great joy.

The word joy is found over 200 times throughout the Bible. It's a common word. There are times in Israel where they have victory over their enemies, and there is joy.

David, when he returns after killing Goliath, he returns, and there is great feasting, joy, and dancing. And it mentions, and there was joy. Joy is often found in the Psalms and songs of praise.

[2 : 31] There is joy being spoken of as being taken away from Israel as they go into captivity. And then joy returns to Israel when they return to the promised land, when they return to the land.

Joy in the New Testament is also spoken of in a victorious manner. And when the 72 disciples are sent out to evangelize, they return with joy, it says, since even the evil spirits obeyed them. And so they return after having went out and shared about Christ. So what does this have to do with Christmas? Well, while the joy, the word joy is found in the English translation over 200 times, great joy is only found nine times.

Single digits, nine times in the totality of God's word is great joy found. Two of those times surrounds the time of Christ's birth. We see, and we will see this here in a moment, around the time of the shepherds, the angel pronounces great joy to the shepherds, and we'll see that here in a moment, and also with the magi.

And so I welcome you to come back to our Christmas Eve service on the 24th at 4 o'clock, because Pastor Jay will be sharing about the magi, and they too will hear great joy and have great joy.

[3 : 54] And so I want to look at these rare and climactic occurrences where great joy is found in the Bible.

We're only going to look at four of them today, but I want to just kind of warm our appetite before we look at the nativity scene of what other times great joy is found in God's word. First, we're going to look at an occasion where Saul is the first king of Israel.

Then we have David. David is now about to die, and his son Solomon is about to take the reins and be anointed king, and David is going to have the opportunity to see the occasion when his son

Solomon is going to be anointed king, and there's going to be great joy in that moment. And think of the reason why there may be great joy in that moment. David asked the Lord, Lord, can I build you a temple? And the Lord said, no, you're a man of war, but your son Solomon will. And so David then, in his totality of his life, he has accumulated these massive amount of resources so that he may allow his son to have all these resources to one day build a temple unto the Lord. [5 : 11] And it will be the place where God's presence will dwell there in Jerusalem. And that is going to be a high, holy moment and occasion for the nation of Israel. And so we read in 1 Kings 1. You don't have to turn there. I think the words are going to be on the screen here. It says this in 1 Kings 1, 39 through 40. There, Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon.

That's David's son Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet and all the people said, long live King Solomon. And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy. There's the word. So that the earth was split by their noise. There's the metaphor of the earth was just split by their noise. Can you imagine the rejoicing that occurred that now this son is now anointed king?

And there was great joy in Israel upon this occasion because now a temple can be built and have the presence of God among them in that way.

[6 : 18] Well, after Solomon, that great rejoicing did not last very long. After Solomon, the nation of Israel split. There were 10 tribes in the north and two tribes in the south. So you have the nation of Israel, the 10, and Benjamin and Judah, the two tribes in the south called Judah.

And so the nations now split, 10 tribes and two tribes in the north or south and north. Hezekiah is going to be, is a king. And there have been very many successive kings since Solomon, both in the north and in the south.

In the north, 10 tribes, there was never a righteous king. They were all wicked. And in the southern kingdom of Judah, there was a few godly kings, but most were wicked.

And you come to a man, several kings later, after Solomon, whose name is Hezekiah. He reigns for 29 years. He happens to be among the godlier kings.

He's a reformer. You see, he had a father whose name is Ahaz, who was the king of Israel. And Ahaz was a wicked king. He put up high places all over Israel, places of idolatry for the nation of Israel to worship false gods.

[7 : 27] The temple, by the time Hezekiah came into power there in Jerusalem, the temple had fallen into disrepair. It had been years since they worshiped the Lord there. In fact, there wasn't even a priest that was consecrated unto the Lord then.

And so there was no one to even make service in the temple, the Levites. There was no one to accept sacrifices. The temple had fallen into disrepair. It is now unclean.

So there's no worship going on there. And Hezekiah is this reformer. He can't stand it. And so he removes the high places. He reinstitutes temple worship.

So he cleanses the temple. And then he also reinstitutes the festival and the feast of Passover. So can you imagine being in Israel and you haven't even in your generation ever celebrated Passover? You don't even know what that's like. It's been years since this. You've only heard and maybe read of it. But you don't know what Passover is. It's this time, it's this festival where Israel celebrated God liberating them out of the land of Egypt.

[8 : 36] And after putting blood on the lintel, their horizontal cross member of their door, and on the vertical doorpost, if they put, the death angel would pass over them.

And their firstborn would be spared from death, both of animals and of livestock and people. And all of Israel was spared for they obeyed the Lord and put blood.

And this death angel passed over Israel and liberated them out of Egypt, out of slavery, and into the promised land that God had for them. And so this festival was a big deal.

This feast was a big deal. It was also a pilgrimage feast. Everyone from Dan to Beersheba, from the farthest north city, Dan, down to the southern city of Beersheba, everyone was to make pilgrimage. But now since the kingdom of Israel was split in two, it was harder. Not as many people in the north, they didn't really want to make pilgrimage. And so Hezekiah is bothered by this.

[9 : 33] But the law of Moses is given to all of us. It doesn't matter if you're in the northern kingdom or the southern kingdom. And so the temple is not yet ready. And so He postpones the Passover feast one month.

The first month of the year in the Jewish calendar was supposed to be the month that the people of Israel were to celebrate Passover. But that month had passed. And so He sends messengers out and says, It is so important for us to celebrate Passover.

We must celebrate. But because He changed the date and nobody knew about it, He sends out messengers from Dan to Beersheba to say, Come, make pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The temple is now in service.

Let's celebrate Passover. Okay, that's the context for which we find ourselves to read our passage. It's important to understand. 2 Chronicles chapter 30. Let's read in verse 23 through 27.

Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it another seven days with gladness. By the way, the feast of Passover is a seven-day celebration.

[10:37] And they were having so much fun. They just said, Let's keep going for another seven days. So I'm going to prolong the service for another like five hours. And you too are going to do that with gladness.

Okay, 23. 24. 24. 24. 24. For Hezekiah, the king of Judah, gave the assembly 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep for offering. And the princes gave assembly of 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep.

And the priests consecrated themselves in great numbers. Let me pause. They had to. They were unclean, the priests. You have this many sacrifices being offered.

The temple is now ready, but the priests were not. They were still yet unclean. So they had to quickly, in order to handle all of these sacrifices, consecrate themselves. So that they could be ready for service unto the Lord again.

Verse 25. And the whole assembly of Judah and the priests and the Levites and the whole assembly that came out of Israel and the sojourners came out of the land of Israel. That is to the north.

[11:40] Those 10 tribes did make pilgrimage. And the sojourners who lived in Judah rejoiced. So there was, here it is, great joy in Jerusalem. For since the time of Solomon, the son of King David, David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.

Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people and their voice was heard and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven. Since Solomon, there had never been a time like this in Jerusalem.

It was a long time ago. And the Levites, they're praying and it says their voice was heard in his holy habitation.

Once again, the Lord heard the priest's prayer who interceded on behalf of the people to the Lord. Can you imagine what a rejoicing day of worship this would be unto the Lord?

And it says there was great joy on this day in Jerusalem. So now, remember, I said there's only nine times that great joy is ever mentioned. We've just read two. But I wanted to give you the high watermarks and kind of give you a flavor of when this term is used in the Bible.

[13:04] When these words are used in the Bible. So now we come to our text for today. And you say, what does this have to do with Christmas? I did not think you guys would ask. And so I'm so thankful. Let's turn to Luke chapter 2.

We're going to find ourselves in verse 8. These rare and climactic moments when great joy is mentioned. We'll find another one in our text today.

Taking off where Jay, or proceeding where Jay, and reviewing a little bit where Jay was last week. Verse 8. Luke chapter 2, verse 8.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over the 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. And unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the child, or Christ the Lord.

[14:09] And this will be a sign for you. And you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

And so, I want us to see verse 10, this great joy.

And the angel said to them, These shepherds, they see this angel appear, full of glory, and they are filled with fear.

And so this angel says to them in verse 10, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy. That will be for all people. Here is that climactic moment, these rare and climactic moments where great joy is used.

And notice here that this great news, who it is pointing to. Let's look at the content of their great news, or the one to whom it is pointing to.

[15 : 25] Look with me in verse 11. What is this good news of great joy that is for all people about? For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Why is this such great news? This great joy, this good news of great joy?

That since Adam, all mankind had been in sin. Can you imagine being dead in sin? Nothing one can do can make oneself pleasing to the Lord.

You are separated from God. You are what the Bible says is enemies of God and those who are without hope of knowing the Lord and spending eternity with them.

And that's how the Bible portrays those apart from Christ because of sin. And so now, the one everyone has been waiting for, the one who will then ultimately, Jesus now condescends, second person of the Godhead, he condescends to earth, born of a virgin, laid in the manger, lives a sinless life.

[16 : 46] It's this child who will grow, die on the cross in our place. And anyone who believes in his person, fully God, fully man, and his work, what I just communicated, who he is and what he has done to die on the cross for sin, can be saved.

And this angel is telling them, this good news of great joy is about a person, not an emotion. It's about Christ, for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a savior to save you from sin.

And in case you don't know who this is, it says, who is Christ the Lord? This is not some ordinary baby. This is the savior, Christ the Lord.

There can be no greater news of great joy mentioned in the Bible. Finally, the one who would come and make payment for sin.

So, let's look and discover. We mentioned that we are going to notice the great height of this joy.

[18 : 13] Look with me in verse 13. Luke chapter 2, verse 13. And suddenly there was an angel, a multitude of heavenly hosts, praising the Lord and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased.

Do you see the great height of this joy? The great height of this joy is that from the surface of the earth all the way up to the highest heights of heaven, the good news of the Son, the second person of the Godhead, Christ the Lord, has now taken on human flesh.

There is praise of such news that reaches the highest heights of heaven, sung by the angelic hosts on earth. And this accompanying great joy, then, is worship and praise.

So, why is this such great joy? Because the height of such great joy. We looked at the height of great joy.

Now, let's look at the length of great joy. The greatness of this joy. Look with me back in verse 10.

And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy.

[19 : 33] But the verse doesn't stop there. That will be for all the people. This good news of great joy that Christ, the Savior, is born is not just for Jews.

It's for Gentiles as well. It's not just for the elite. It's for the lowly. It's not for one people on one nation in one tribe with one language.

It's for all people, all nations, all tribes, and all languages. It's for everyone. This good news of great joy will be for all the people that this Christ child and the work he did on the cross is for everyone.

Everyone. Everyone. I love that baked into the announcement of his birth.

First, we are informed of his mission. And we are informed of our mission. We're reminded of our mission that Jesus will later state to his disciples to go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.

[20 : 43] Because this good news of great joy is for all the nations, for all peoples. So let us be reminded. So we see the great length or we see the great height of this joy. We see the great length of this joy.

But now how about the great the depth of this joy? Christmas joy goes to great depth. Here joy is deeper than every fear, is deeper than every grief.

It is deeper than every sorrow and every pain. This joy comes into the world of great sin, great fear, great sorrow, great suffering. In fact, the child who is born, who is joy incarnate, will be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Isaiah 53 states the great suffering that Christ will endure to secure for us great joy.

So I want us to be reminded in Isaiah 53, verse 3 through 6, reads this. This is the prophet in the Old Testament foretelling of Christ who would come.

[22 : 01] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. As one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, afflicted. He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, and upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with his wounds we are healed. And all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, each one, to his own way. And the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all.

The great height, the great length, and the great depth to secure joy. From Christ's birth in Bethlehem to his death on the cross, this joy was great enough to endure, being born into obscurity, laid in a manger, having no place to lay his head.

He would go on to be rejected by his own people, delivered over to the authorities, betrayed by his own friends, and the sin of the world be laid upon him, including mine.

[23 : 17] But this great joy could not be extinguished. It cannot. It is too high, too long, too deep, even for the death itself to quench.

And our joyful Savior is now with us, even to the end of the age, to strengthen even us in our fear, to cheer us on in our grief, to hold us in our suffering, and to the day when he will unseat every sorrow.

So we have just looked at the great height of joy, the great length and extent of joy, the great depth of joy.

And now I want us to look, perhaps, at our response to joy, to what Christ has done for us. First of all, I want us to be reminded that in the list of the fruit of the Spirit, which, how can I articulate this? For those of us in Christ and who walk with the Lord, there are certain virtues and attributes that we should just exude as children of God. And in that list is given in Galatians 5, verses 22 through 23.

[24 : 40] It reads this, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Joy is number two in the list. That we, as saints of Christ, have joy because the Holy Spirit lives inside of us. God himself, we are secured with the Holy Spirit of promise.

In Ephesians 1, verse 13, it says. And so, we have joy as a people of God who walk with him. I want us to think about how secure you are in Christ and why no one should be able to take away your joy.

No circumstance can ever take Christ from you for those who are in Christ. No amount of physical health or financial strain can take Christ from you. No person, no elected official, no spouse, no child, not even Satan himself can take Christ from you.

Our joy is found in Christ and Christ alone. So, what is a response to this good news of great joy?

[26 : 02] I want us to see how the first hearers of this good news of great joy responded. In Luke chapter 2, after they went, the shepherds, they went and saw the Christ child laying in the manger.

They went away. And now, we're going to read a verse that articulates how they went back to their sheep and to keep watch of their flock by night. We're going to read in verse 20.

It says this. Can you see these shepherds?

This good news of great joy that Christ the Savior was born. He is Christ the Lord was just told to them.

They went and sure enough, they saw exactly what they were told that they would see. A baby wrapped in clothes laying in a manger. They see that. They know who they've seen.

[26 : 59] This good news of great joy. And what do they do? They return to their shop, blessing the Lord, worshipping the Lord, praising him, and testifying to all that they had seen and heard.

So, what's an appropriate response to this great joy? Worship. I love that we have the opportunity to sing words that are true about the Lord. And we have the opportunity to worship him with our lives, not just in word.

With our heart, soul, mind, strength, motives, we worship him. That's an appropriate response. And then testify. What are these shepherds doing?

They return, glorifying, praising the Lord for all they had heard and seen as it was told to them. And they're sharing with one another as they go.

Can you believe that? Did anyone think tonight we would see this angel, this nameless angel, and he say, behold, fear not? No. And then to go and see exactly what you would see.

[28 : 04] The Savior, Christ the Lord. Did you think this would happen to us? Us, shepherds. So, what should we do? We should go to work. We should say, when I was 19, could you believe it?

I'm a sinner apart from God. I can't believe. I'm exaggerating. However you want to tell your, yeah, they think, yeah, don't do it like that. They'll probably think, he is special. You get what I'm saying. But it is totally natural for a person to communicate the good news of great joy that Christ the Savior has been born.

One has now access to the Lord, believing in his person and his work. It is completely natural to testify to that. And you say, Scott, but my circumstances are hard.

I'm going to conclude with this story. This, a few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to share a meal with Rich Paulson.

[29 : 15] He has given me permission to share this. Rich Paulson, in order for you to understand the context or what he said, it's important to kind of understand the context.

Rich Paulson is a beloved person, a man I, in many regards, aspire to be. He has had this amazing ministry that the Lord has given to him to marry three brides who would all die of cancer.

And he has had the privilege to usher into the presence of the Lord three of God's daughters who he had the privilege of marrying at one point in time.

Six months ago, Shelley passed away approximately six months ago. And so I just wanted to meet with Rich. Wanted to hear from him. And I'm grateful to have spent that time.

Rich is one of the most loving, doting husbands that cared for these brides in their health and when their health declined. One time in the conversation I shared with Rich that he was a model to me of someone who is resilient in his faith.

[30 : 43] What's interesting about Rich is he praises the Lord. He walks with the Lord. He's not embittered that the Lord has taken these ladies from his life. He's not holding anything against the Lord.

And he's testifying to his goodness to me. So I mentioned to him that he is an example of one who is resilient. And then I said, Rich, you're of someone who has experienced loss.

And it's in that context of the conversation that this is what he shared with me. And that I want you to hear the joy in these words. He was telling me that in his grief, this is what the Lord had taught him and was teaching him and had revealed to him was this.

He said, yes, Scott. But before there is loss, there is great gain. I hope you heard the joy in those words.

Yes, Scott, there is loss. But before there is loss, there is gain. There's two parts to this that is being communicated.

[32 : 06] One, before I lost my spouse, there were years of getting to enjoy the privilege of being married.

The memories, the trips, and all of that. That also has to be said in order for me to experience loss. I had all this gain. Earthly with these, with my wife.

But he also is communicating. And this is what I want you to hear. Yes, this is sad.

Yes, this is loss. But I want you to know where I could be. Dead in my trespasses and sin. And how good the Lord has been to me.

How great gain I have that I know the Lord. I am forgiven. I will also return to the Lord one day. I am in Christ. And so then he testified.

[33 : 08] He went on to testify the goodness of God and how much he has gained knowing the Lord. And then I think about this text that we're in.

And reflected back on what Rich had shared with me. I want to conclude with Luke 2, verses 10 and 11. I'm going to read it once and then I want you to read it with me.

And the angel of the Lord said to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Would you read this with me? Would you read this with me? And I'll summarize a few final words. And the angel of the Lord 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. Jesus is the good news of great joy.

[34 : 29] There is a great height to joy, a great length to joy, a great depth to joy. And that is why joy is a word that is often and commonly associated with Christmas.

Your circumstances this year may be good, may be well, but others, there may be difficulty. But even in difficulty, one can have great joy because this joy and this text that it's speaking of, the good news of great joy is wrapped up in a person, not necessarily an emotion or one's circumstances. I pray we have a wonderful and great Christmas remembering Christ and his work. Let's testify easily and often to him.

Would you pray with me? Father, thank you for this beautiful day. Thank you for this privilege to read your word, to hear from you.

And I pray that we would be a people who model and testify like these shepherds who returned glorifying and praising God.

[35 : 50] Of all that they had heard and seen as it was told to them, I pray that we would glorify you and praise you. For all that we know and we have read and we have heard and seen.

Thank you, Lord, for being the source of our great joy. Thank you for the height, the length, and the depth you went to to secure for us joy.

We love you. We thank you for this beautiful day. And it's in your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen. Amen.