The Colors of Joy (Green)

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Preacher: Jayson Turner

[0:00] Amen. Well, good morning, church. Good morning, church. And I want to just say an early Merry! Merry Christmas in case some of you can't get back for this Wednesday evening. We have a Christmas Eve! service at 4 p.m. So on behalf of Scott, myself, and the staff, we would love to worship with you this Christmas Eve. And it's a family service, so everybody's welcome, and we will keep it to under an hour. Okay? So hope to see all of you here. And we will complete our series on the colors of joy, and the color will be gold. So if you have anything in your closet that matches that, I don't, but have at it. So let me pray for us, ask God's blessing and help in our study, and just commit the time to Him. So join me now. Lord, it is good to be here this morning. And I know that with the season, there can be a bit of melancholy, even as we anticipate time with family, friends, others, and festivities. But Lord, I want to pray that you would work today, and you would help each of us.

We think of the psalmist who's asking the question, why are you cast down on my soul? And why are you in turmoil? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him. Lord, we want to hope in you this morning.
We want to hear from you. We want to experience something of your presence and your help. So we ask for you to be at work through the power of your Word and your Spirit, and the Word proclaimed.
Lord, I pray that we would take time to see one another this morning, have time to listen, encourage, offer a blessing, an encouragement, a prayer. And we will give you thanks for what you accomplished this morning in Jesus' name and all God's people said. Amen. So we are continuing our series on the colors of joy this morning. And I've associated a color with a promise from God's Word with each of these colors, promises for us to carry with us, really for the rest of our lives.
This is not just a holiday sermon series. These promises are for our lives. The promises of God are a central way, friends, that we fight against fear, anxiety, unbelief.
[2:48] They're for our joy. We preach God's promises to ourselves daily for our joy. We need to grip and hold to them, hold to what's true, what the Lord has said about Himself and what He said about us.

Because the enemy would love to pry these out of our hands. He's described in John 10 as a thief who's come to steal. And He would love for you not to believe the things that we have been considering this month. Here's a lie that He'll bring. Hey, God is not concerned about you. He's in fact forgotten you.
And we looked at Christmas red, this promise, right? God saying, my love for you is vast and I will return. I care about you more than you realize. You ask for a loaf of bread, I'm not going to give you a rock.
You ask for a fish, I'm not going to give you a serpent. I'm even better than your earthly fathers. My love for you is vast. And then to believe that. And then in fact, He'll return. He's preparing a place for us. He's very concerned about us, church. Or how about this lie? You blew it again.
You wandered back into that sin. You will never be forgiven without some sort of earthly penance.
[4:24] And we considered Christmas white. The fact that if we're in Christ, we are new creations. And the promise being that you are clean. You are forgiven of sins. Past, present, and future.

And you have this image of snow covering a once dingy street that the Lord says you are clean as though your sins are like scarlet. They shall be whiter than snow. That's a promise that we have to carry as we hear condemning lies from the enemy. Wait a second. There's no condemnation for those in Christ. Our sins have been forgiven. We're clean for real. And as we claim these promises, we are filled with joy. Amen? Well, today we will consider a promise associated with Christmas

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green. Thank you to all of you who were prepared. Thank you. I see you out there. This is my one green shirt. So I think this is the only Sunday I'm actually aligned with the color. But I'm feeling pretty good about that. As we come to this color, this one may be a little problematic initially. Especially for those of you that have cut down a tree and it's now in your home. Or maybe you have a fake tree. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands. But I would like to read a passage from the prophet Jeremiah. And he says this in Jeremiah 10, verse 1 to 4. He says, hear the word that the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the
Lord, learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them. For the custom of the people are vanity. A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. They decorate it with silver and gold. They fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. Some of you didn't even know this was in your Bible because you never read the prophets.
And maybe on like first blush, you're hearing this and you're like, man, have we learned the way of our culture and somehow we're in disobedience to the Lord if we happen to have a Christmas tree in the house? Or maybe you're like, well, if it's okay, we can't have a tree, can we have a bush? [7:15] Or how about can I grow herbs in the house or a house plant? And it gets very awkward initially as you read these verses. But fortunately, Scripture tells us why the nations are bringing trees into their home. And again, as we consider God's Word, we have to ask, what is the heart motive? What is the context of this passage? And Jeremiah actually goes on and gives us the context in the next verse, Jeremiah 10 verse 9, where he says, their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak. They have to be carried for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good. And you've got to love the prophet. Essentially, he's saying to the nations, like your idols are dumb. They're as lifeless as a scarecrow in a melon patch. And he's basically saying, you're fools if you're worshiping trees. So back to the context, these godless nations are bringing trees into their homes in order to worship them. In fact,

Jeremiah calls them idols. They think they're actually gods. So the question we have to ask is, are we bringing trees into our home to worship them? If you do, then indeed you're practicing idolatry. But I would venture to guess that you are not. And what is so beautiful about our God is that he's in the business of redeeming things misused and allowing them to become triggers for worship.
And I stress this in our first sermon in the series that really the content is everything related to our celebration of Christmas. And I actually believe that Christmas green holds an extravagant promise that we should carry with us the rest of our lives, regardless of how in ages past this color or aspects of God's creation has led some towards idolatry. So yes, it is true that green trees and green garland in homes have been associated with idolatry in ages past. That's a fact. Early Romans celebrated during the same month of December. We talked about this holiday Saturnalia honoring of Saturn, the god of agriculture. And the Romans, they anticipated longer days ahead with winter solstice and the fields and orchards that soon would be green and fruitful. And to mark the occasion, they would decorate their homes with evergreen branches. And it was idolatry. In northern Europe, the druids decorated their temples with evergreen limbs as a symbol of everlasting life. And even the
Vikings, not to be left out in Scandinavia, thought that evergreens were the special plant of the sun god balder. But it was in Germany where it's credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we know it today. In the 16th century, committed Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. [10:47] Some built Christmas pyramids of wood, decorated them with evergreens and candles. And it is widely held that Martin Luther, the great 16th century reformer, Protestant reformer, was the most likely the first to add lit candles to a Christmas tree. And he was inspired while walking home one winter evening, composing a sermon, and was awed by the brilliance of God's creation, the stars twinkling amidst the evergreens. And to recreate that scene for his family, he placed a tree in the main room of his home, wired its branches with lit candles, and he did that to remind them of Jesus, the one who left the stars of heaven to come to earth. So our Christmas celebration is all about the content. What do we make of it? And what do these things, what do they stir in our hearts?

Where do they direct our minds and our affections? And I love that we have this example. Just some fun facts related to North America. It was in 1846, Queen Victoria and her German Prince Albert were sketched in the illustrated London News, standing with their children around a

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Christmas tree.
And I think as a result, the Christmas trees became popular, not only in Britain, but on the east coast of America as well. Additionally, the first Christmas tree in Rockefeller Center in New York occurred in 1931. There were some construction workers. They placed an undecorated tree at the center of a construction site. Two years later, another tree was placed there, this time with lights, and the rest is history. The tallest living Christmas tree in the world, and there's like, there's a little arguing online, but there's about three that are kind of in the mix, but the one that I want to highlight for us supposedly this morning is 161 foot tall Christmas tree, and it's located in Coeur d'Alene. Go Idaho, right? It's planted on a floating platform in the lake, and it's decorated every year.
The green of the evergreen speaks, friends. There is something about God's creation that teaches. Often in very subtle ways, in a whisper, maybe in a serene moment of silence. The psalmist wrote in Psalm 19, right, the heavens declare the glory of God.
[13:37] To declare is speech. This is a term of describing language. The heavens declare communications happening.

The heavens communicate to us. They don't communicate audibly because then in Psalm 19, 3, it says, there's no speech, nor are there words. It's a visual language.
Now, I don't want you to go too far with this church. Primarily, God is not telling you as you look to the heavens and you see the stars to go take a particular job or marry a particular girl, but what he is saying is, I exist. All of this is mine, and you see the design, and you're like, yes, there is a God. There is a maker because we have this design intuition inside of us, and that's primarily what he is saying, but I think we have to take time to pause to notice all that is around us, and I think as we do, it often should move us to worship of the creator and also be reminded of something true of him, right? The ways in which he cares for creation for the world around in the same way he cares for us, and there are lessons to learn. Luke 12, verse 24, what does Jesus say?
Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouses or barn, yet God feeds them. Oh, how much more value are you than the birds? Look at my marvelous creation, and just one specific aspect of it, the ravens. Look how I care for them. It should remind us that the same sovereign, caretaking hands that care for the ravens, the same hands taking care of us. How much more valuable are we than them? See, that's Christmas red. My love for you is vast. I'm so involved. Well, I love as we come to Christmas green. I love that we bring coniferous trees. It's kind of a fun word, Scott. Let's put that in our vocabulary for the future. Coniferous. I love that we bring these pine cone producing trees into our homes during this time of year as part of our celebration during Christmas time. I love also that scripture tells us that God is actually like an evergreen. Listen to what the prophet Hosea says in Hosea 14.8. He says, Oh, Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress. You could also use the word fur there. From me comes your fruit. You're like, man, how did
[16:57] Jay find these green verses in the Bible? Because you got to go read the prophets. I'm like an evergreen. All life emanates from God. His life is a life that never fades. He's eternal.

So what do evergreen trees stir, say, without speech, without words? So just as God says, look at the ravens. We're going to look at the evergreen here briefly.
Evergreen trees in particular. They retain their needles year round, replacing them slowly throughout the year. The needles have a variety of benefits. They're smaller, more watertight, more windproof.
They're able to endure harsh elements thrown at them during the winter months. And I just love this image. I'm so sad, like the rest of you, that we look out and there's no snow.
But I love the image of green fir trees just covered with thick white snow in the season, right? Life is still present even amidst the harshest elements. Branches that continue to flourish.
[18:16] Unlike other trees, deciduous trees that drop their leaves when the first cold hits. Green fir trees are trees that endure regardless of the harsh conditions, regardless of how they are beaten by the seasons. And so we come to our promise of Christmas green. And it is this.

If you are in Christ, you will endure. You will endure. Centrally, because the God of endurance, the God described as an evergreen, is near. That's the promise of Christmas green. It's so practical. We carry this, friends. We need endurance. We need faith initially and then endurance as trials come and come and come again. The prophet Isaiah even used imagery of nature's elements, harsh elements related to this promise. It says this in Isaiah 43, kind of our key text this morning, verses 1 through 3.

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He says this, But now, thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, How did God create? He created from nothing.
He who formed you, O Israel, formed, the word here is an artistic, He fashioned you as an artist. He says, Fear not, for I have redeemed you.
[19:58] And in the context, as Isaiah is talking to God's ancient people, he actually redeemed you. Remember Egypt? Part of the exodus? And then Isaiah writes, I have called you by name.

You are mine. I just want us to understand the context here, friends. This is a word spoken to God's ancient people, actually preparing them for some difficult seasons ahead.
The prophet is actually preparing, specifically the southern kingdom, for the Babylonian exile that still lied ahead, due to their disobedience.
And so Isaiah wants Judah to know, your captivity as you experience that doesn't mean that God has abandoned you. And I want us to notice the language Isaiah uses.
It sounds very Pauline. This could be New Testament writing, because it's salvation language, that God has also directed to us, to His people today, to the church.
[21:06] Because Isaiah writes it this way, Fear not, I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. If we're in Christ, friends, we have a new name. We are Christ's ones. We're sons, we're daughters, we're beloved.

We're His workmanship. We've been called by a new name. You are mine. So as we hear this promise that Isaiah writes to the southern kingdom, to Judah, 700 years prior to Christ, this can be attributed to us.
Because we've been called by name. And we belong to the Lord. So let's look at it. Verse 2 and 3. Isaiah writes, When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.
And through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I, the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior, I give Egypt as their ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.
This last bit at the end, just so we're aware of what's going on here, I give Egypt. We know that ultimately God delivers Judah.
[22:30] They're in exile in Babylon for 70 years. And then he raises up this leader, this Persian king by the name of Cyrus. And you can read about him in Isaiah 44, and Isaiah 45, and 2 Chronicles 36.

And God raises up this Persian leader to deliver Israel back to the promised land. And God gave Persia Egypt in that episode.
God was willing to move empires to rescue his people. But the main thrust, the main theme of this text to Israel is, hey, you're still going to have difficulty ahead, but don't be afraid.
Like, what can man do to you? What can nature do to you? What can Satan do to you? And the promise is, hey, I'm near. You will endure.
I'm near. So when the floods come, don't be overwhelmed. When the fire arrives, don't be shaken. And the flood and the fire, they will come.
[23:44] Because the context is related to the fact that there is a future exile ahead for God's ancient people.

But I love this promise, friends. This is the promise of Christmas green. That even in the worst winters ahead of you, you will endure.
And Isaiah here chooses really bold images of trial, right? There's difficulty ahead. But friends, if God is only good in the easy, he's no good.
If he's only there, and he's our help in the springs and the summers of life, he's not really a help. Amen? Amen? Shadows will be cast over our lives in differing degrees in this life.
Jesus promised it. In John 16, 33, in the world you're going to have, not ease, you're going to have tribulation. Especially as you live life seeking to make much of me.
[24:53] You're going to have difficulty. And yet, there's hope. You're not alone. You're never alone.

In fact, you belong to the only one who can create a future out of the ruins of the present and the past. Because our God is likened to an evergreen.
We serve the God of endurance. I would be remiss if I didn't share a word from Joni Erickson-Totta. We're reading her biography right now. And she knows suffering. She says this. Throughout many decades of quadriplegia, I have never wanted my endurance to wane.

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Through quadriplegia, chronic pain and weakening lungs, not to mention run-of-the-mill problems of advancing age. I think she's now 75. I have sought to turn the hard things in my life into something beautiful, transformative, glorifying to God.
[26:07] I can't do it by myself. The race I want to finish with endurance can only happen through the Holy Spirit's empowerment. My hope is not anchored in my fortitude.

No. It rests in God's unshakable, enduring commitment to complete His work of His grace in my life. I can rest in the assurance that Jesus will give me what I need to endure.
After all, He's the God of endurance. So friends, I don't know what you're experiencing today.
And maybe you're in a summer. Maybe it's a spring. But maybe it's not. And I just want to say to those of you that feel like, man, it's pressing in.
And I'm just trying to survive through this holiday season because of all that it's stirring. Don't give up. Don't give in to fear.
[27:11] Even in the flood and the fire, your God has already redeemed you and He's near. Do you realize it says in Psalm 56 that every tear He's written in His journal, He knows them all.

Yes, trials are difficult, but hopelessness is devastating. Do you suppose Satan would like both believer and unbeliever to get to this place of hopelessness?
Yes. No doubt. He loves this. I still have the image in my mind. It's just burned into my mind the first time I prayed with somebody as an Uber pastor.
and it was a gal and I think I've shared the story who she was in Seattle and she'd been out and was pretty compromised by the time she got to my car and was just broken.
And she was just in the throes of addiction. She could not get out. And I remember before I dropped her off praying with her and she just wept because she's like I'm out of college.
[28:32] I've been doing the career thing for four years and I'm still just addicted to my thing and she could not get out and she was broken. Satan loves that.

He wants to move people to a place of hopelessness. You know this series and this particular sermon on green is weighty for myself because when I wrote this it's been changed.
These are not old notes. It's been updated. I wrote this and I was just crushed.
the Christmas of 2014 I was crushed in spirit and I just was in the space of believing my days were few and it was like man I needed this.
I need Christmas green. I need to know that God's near. I need to know that I can endure that he's with me that he hasn't forsaken me. and in a sense back a decade ago I almost had to sort of get and I know this is theologically not correct but daily saved deciding what I was going to believe about God and what he said of me every morning I had to roll out of bed choosing what I would believe about my life and my God today today I wasn't getting saved but it was like I got to remember who I am and what God has said to me.
[30:12] The promise of Christmas green friends it's huge it's huge that God is near that he's not going to let go that we can endure Isaiah 41 13 same promise for I the Lord your God hold your right hand it's I who say to you fear not I'm the one who helps you he gave the same promise to Joshua Deuteronomy 31 6 be strong and courageous do not fear or be in dread of them for the Lord your God who gives who goes with you he will not leave you or forsake you friends this is the same promise God has made to all who have trusted in him in this life it's the same promise Matthew 28 10 or 20 behold I'm with you sometimes part of the time always

I'm with you always to the end of the age God is with us friends if you're in Christ God is with you his spirit indwells us friends the promise of the promises of God they're everything they're everything they're that which sustains us daily as we seek to walk in hope as we seek to disciple others as we seek to make much of Jesus in this life see distractions aren't enough like if you've got real grief you've got real worry you've got real fear like an adult coloring book is not going to do the job this Christmas there's not enough substances you can put in your body enough drink that you can pour in or drugs that you can do that are going to provide sustained shalom now the enemy wants to promise that you receive it it's a lie the only way we are able to fight anxiety born of unbelief is through the rich weighty truthful promises that our father has made to us amen a father that never breaks his promises and so as we have been in first Peter a little sneak peek that you guys all probably are aware of this existing but he says this in first
Peter 5 6 humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you casting 80% 90% all casting all your anxieties on him why because he cares for you

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he's near you know there's a massive assumption in this text that perhaps you've never seen because Peter doesn't actually say if you have anxieties he actually says you do you have worries that you actually live with every day and every day you can choose to wage war on the unbelief that fuels them so don't miss this to cast is a call to prayer to talking to the
Lord Lord remind me of the things that you said are true why am I downcast oh I'm in a hope in God he hasn't forsaken me his love for me is vast I'm clean forgiven my past has been dealt with he's preparing a home for me there is good days best days eternal days ahead heaven's real thank you Lord just continue to pour those promises over my heart and my life today and just very practically let me end with this because I think some days we stop believing as the storms the winters of life beat on us I think Christmas green is lost I think it's in those moments that God loves delights to actually use his people to speak the promises of Christmas green over us and he actually may want to use you today in the life of another in this regard that God hasn't forsaken you that he's actually near if you're in Christ his spirit indwells you he's not going anywhere and he'll give you what you need today and sometimes
I need to hear that and you need to hear that from a brother or sister to be reminded oh this is true these promises are from a God that never breaks his word never breaks his promise he always tells the truth and when he says fear not because I'm near I'm going to walk in that I'm going to hold on to that I'm going to claim that but I need to maybe hear that from another back in 2014 at Christmas time I was pretty hopeless I was a very different J and I think you know that I tend to bring some levity often to wherever I am it's a gift from the Lord I want to use it to bring people together and I lost all that there was no levity in my life I was just very dark and it was an evening
[36:24] I still remember and I was just so hopeless and I was like I think God has just abandoned me and I still remember my two oldest girls they came and they saw a dad just kind of a wreck and they just laid their hands on me and they just prayed over me and I just was like God hasn't abandoned me he's near and I needed that in that moment to be reminded of that and we do that for one another so just stop assuming because you feel wonderful today that everybody else around you is feeling the same God may ask you to deliver that gift to somebody this year to bring a promise from him to them to remind them that it's the water the river the fire the flame none of that's going to destroy you because God's near he's a God of endurance he's an evergreen and you're right there next to him maybe look to the hills and just see right those trees standing with all of that weight and snow and they're enduring and God says you're going to do that too you'll endure because he's with us he's the evergreen but so are we because he stands beside us amen father thank you that you are a God who is forbearing and patient present that you're an ever present help in times of distress thank you that you tell us and remind us not to fear because you're with us lord I want to pray against the spirit of discouragement this morning if anybody's here and they're just under it lord would you minister to their heart through your spirit would you lift their countenance father might we be a people ready prepared looking for ways to encourage with that which is true because we know the enemy he's a thief and he lies and he lies and he lies but lord we need to walk in that which you have said is true holding up the shield of faith that this is the promise that god has made to me that he's made to his people and i'm going to live into that lord i pray that we would never look at a forest of evergreens ever the same but it would remind us of something precious a word that you gave to israel even before their own winter of life we love you jesus and we thank you for this time in your name we pray amen

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