

Jesus turns sorrows into Joy

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[0:00] It's hot when I push the button. Alrighty. I'll try to stay close to my notes because otherwise I'll take too long. Over the course of my life I've learned that God can use every circumstance to help us get to know Him better.

If I choose to learn, which I have many times not often chosen to learn. But I also say this with a caveat, because there is no cookie-cutter approach.

To how God chooses to reveal Himself to us. And He chooses to reveal Himself to us in different ways. Sorry, at different ways. I thought you were just saying, yay, that's right.

Can you hear me now? There is no cookie-cutter approach to how God wants to reveal Himself to us. And He reveals Himself in different ways and at different times in our lives.

And whether we see Him or not in each period of our lives, just like we know that there is a sun in Syracuse. We don't often see it, but it is always there.

[1:15] But don't be discouraged if you don't see God clearly in your life all the time. Our job is to remember that He is there. That He is good, even when you don't see Him.

The last few months have been an example of God shining very brightly and very clearly. And revealing Himself in incredible ways. It is not my faithfulness.

It is God's faithfulness. Through that period of time, God showed Himself to be a faithful, loving Father who prepared me for what lay ahead.

In October, God gave me a soul-restoring trip through the Rockies, where I was so overwhelmed by the beauty of the Rockies that I felt like I had been in Destiny Mall for three days.

It was so overstimulating in its beauty. The day after that trip, I was in Colorado with my friend at her church, and God shared two messages with me.

[2:27] The first one came when there was a series of slides being shown during the worship time. The first slide was of mountains, and it was beautiful.

And the verse was, where does my help come from? I looked at the mountains, and I could totally relate to that. The second slide was of darkness. And it was a black picture with just a little bit of the sun peeking out.

And it was depicting a wildfire and the smoke that was in Colorado the year before. When I saw that picture, I heard God say, Prepare for darkness.

I returned to Syracuse, pondering what that meant. My youngest was diagnosed with COVID.

Or not diagnosed. He tested positive for COVID basically as I was returning. So I went to go to the Adirondacks to pick him up from the camp he was at.

[3:29] We went through that quarantine. Three weeks later, my second born tested positive for COVID. We went through that quarantine. Two weeks later, Randy and I got sick. But all of that really didn't feel like darkness.

As Randy got to a point of becoming sicker and having more difficulty breathing, God revealed himself as a miraculous, trustworthy provider.

I called one of my friends at midnight and met her halfway at a gas station as she rushed to get me a nebulizer and treatment for Randy.

The next day, someone I knew from someone I knew from someone I knew met me at the door, at my door, with an oxygen machine. She was a respiratory therapist and she showed me how to use it and Randy.

And Randy received oxygen for several days during that period of time. And since God had showed himself to be such a trustworthy provider, when he shut every single door that I was desperately knocking on for the next thing that I thought Randy needed, he also revealed himself as a faithful guide.

[4:48] His lack of provision, I could trust, was an answer that Randy needed to go to the hospital. Although navigating trying to communicate with Randy while he was in isolation and not being able to hear him through two oxygen masks was hard and not getting much communication from the medical community was hard and trying to advocate for his care from afar was hard, I still did not sense that this was the darkness.

The darkness came when Randy, on the last night that I spoke to him, with a nurse translating for him sometimes, entrusted his care for me and trusted his care to me, knowing that he would no longer be conscious to make any decisions once he was put on a ventilator.

The nurse called me about 3 o'clock in the morning and told me that he'd been put on the ventilator. And I awoke the next morning in dread, feeling a heavy weight of responsibility.

And God said, this is the darkness. I did not want to get out of bed. And while I was still in bed, because I could not pray, I asked others to.

And God showed up. He showed up as a personal, loving father who threaded every text message and interchange that I had that day with a theme of light and darkness.

[6:31] Only God knew what he had told me the month before. And only God knew what I needed to hear in order to know that he cared for me. In the days that followed, God revealed that he was present and in control.

Through his word and through messages and word pictures of who he was, he showed me that he was doing this to glorify himself through this trial. And it was very evident.

He told me, seek my face alone, not the outcome. And in that message, my prayers began to be filled with peace that he knew what was best.

He told me, I am the Lord who holds your hand. Don't be afraid. I am with you and I will help you.

God gave me the gift of all of you and many other fellow comrades who prayed along with me and encouraged me.

He provided a way for our whole family to be together the weekend that Randy went into the hospital. And as I sat and watched all of our sons praying sincerely, not foxhole prayers, but prayers because they knew God as their father and Jesus as their Lord and Savior, I was struck by the miraculousness that all of our sons know Jesus despite the dysfunction of our family.

[8:03] Through all of this time, I was buoyed in my spirit with such joy in the knowledge that God was indeed with me and in control and that he was good and is good.

Since we were burdened to use this trial for his glory, we had many opportunities to share God's goodness to all of the people who were in the hospital, including singing an hour in the hallway.

On the day that Randy was to be taken off the ventilator, as I was driving to the hospital, I wasn't driving, my son was driving to the hospital on the 81 overpass, I noticed that the time and temperature building was reflecting sunshine when the sun seemed nowhere to be found.

Everywhere around me was dark and gloomy, but behind me was a small patch of sunshine seeping through the clouds, and I would not have known to look for it if it weren't for the building's shimmering brightness.

darkness. All that building had to do was stand firm where it was positioned and reflect the light.

And this was how God showed me what my place was in this trial.

[9:23] It was my job to seek his face alone. Psalm 34 says that those who look to him are radiant. Their faces are never covered in shame.

It was my job to stand firm where God had positioned me and simply reflect God's goodness and his light through this trial.

Which brings me to the second message that I received that Sunday in Colorado. The sermon was about when Jesus was talking to Peter about how he was praying for him when Peter was boasting about how much he would stay strong.

And Jesus was telling him, no, you're going to deny me. But when you have turned, encourage your brothers. And God said, in the darkness and after Roshan, this is what I want you to do.

Encourage your brothers and sisters. And throughout all of this, God has given me the desire and the opportunity to encourage all of you and my brothers and sisters in Christ and other churches.

[10:32] And I would like to encourage you that, yes, you may not always see God, but he is there. And that God is faithful and you don't need to be afraid of the future because he promises to be with you.

He will provide and prepare for you to be with whatever you have to deal with. And he will give you what you need when you need it. He will shine through the darkness and all you need to do is stand where he has positioned you and reflect his light.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Rishan, you don't even know what that means to us to hear that testimony.

Thank you. Would you pass out some sheets on this side? Roy, would you pass out sheets on this side? And I would ask Deb to say a prayer before we begin.

Amen.

[12:10] Have you ever had to follow a giant? I suspect that what I say I suspect it will be what God the Holy Spirit wants me to say but it won't have the depths of what Rishan has told us tonight.

But it is good to be back. We left 85 degrees. Sun tan. Got here it was 21 degrees. Had to go through a terrible snowstorm on I-81 in Pennsylvania.

Just missed an accident. But we got back. And it is so good to see you all. I was able however to listen to the talks because they were put on the website.

so I listened to every Wednesday night talk. What a wonderful series this has been. All of us seeking God in the hard times.

And each speaker had a little different facet of what it means to seek God in the hard times. So what I've been given is a chance to wrap it up.

[13:28] I'm sort of the, what do they call that? The last batter? Clean up. Clean up. I'm the, thank you. It's good to have an athlete here in the crowd.

That's right. And so the title, which is a wonderful title I was given, Finding God Through Irrepressible Hope, colon, How Jesus Turns Our Sorrows to Joy.

Now I'm going to give you a a big news headline. Every one of us is carrying a burden. Isn't that a surprise?

Sometimes I think I'm the only one carrying all the other stuff. Every one of us, doesn't matter what our attitude, every one of us has a burden we're carrying.

And whether we've accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, whether we're trying to live with Him, whether we don't know who He is, we've all been laid on a burden.

[14:35] Do you ever wonder why? Thank you, I'll tell you. In the, you see, I think it was Jerry Shriver talked about Satan.

But the reason we carry a burden is basically about sin in the world, right? Satan brought in sin and he watered it and blossomed it and it grew.

And it's not just people, it's the whole creation caught up in sin. And we've been reaping that whirlwind ever since.

Every one of us gets caught in this. We're all tangled. The world is, in case you hadn't noticed, the world is in a tangle right now, right? We've got untold stuff going on over there in Ukraine.

And sometimes we feel just helpless. It does, for those of us who think rather than feel, it doesn't make sense what's going on in Ukraine.

[15:45] But we don't have to look all the way to Ukraine. We can look at our southern border in Texas, Arizona, California.

We want to be a nation that welcomes all who are in need. But when you have no control, pretty soon North America is going to drop off because everybody from Central America and all around the world have come in.

There's no control there. That's tough. But we can even get closer. How about politics in Washington? Yay!

You know, Will Rogers used to talk about that. I would sit there at the table with him and talk with him. Anyway, he, you know, politics are usually kind of bad in Washington.

well, they're really bad now. And to throw more on it, cultural and government repression of Christian values.

[16:50] Stuff we all grew up with, understanding, it's up is down and now, down is up, good is evil, evil is good. It's all mixed up.

And little by little, Christians are having a limited amount of influence on American values. Wow!

It's enough to make you say, hopeless, right? And when you throw in our own personal work, family issues, when you throw in our illnesses and the death of loved ones, you would say something like, finding God through irrepressible hope, are you kidding?

Where's there hope? There is none. So how do we, I'm going to point to if you're following the little sheet, how do we as believing active Christians, you might call Jesus Christians, how do we find this hope and joy?

not realizing that the suns come up every morning when I open my bedroom window. That's the actual solution, thank you. But I've got to do theology though, Helen.

[18:15] So, last Sunday you heard a passage from the Old Testament, Isaiah 43.

And one of those verses is one that we basically know, 43 verse 19. It said, Behold, I am doing a new thing.

Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. To get a sense of this, the Israelites, where any of you been in the Holy Land, some of you have, yeah, a lot of us have, is it kind of dry there someplace?

Sometimes. Yeah, it's desert, it's wilderness. And so for the Israelites trudging a cross, what a great gift God was saying, I'll make a way through the wilderness, a road, and I'll put rivers, you'll have water, you'll be able to live.

That's what God, through Isaiah, was letting us know. Isaiah was a great prophet. He didn't know what his prophecies were going to give hundreds, thousands of years later.

[19:35] God did, that's why God put it in his pen, in his mouth. And so, this is a new thing for us, paths in the wilderness, rivers of water, hope.

See, God's new thing is making the impossible possible. Now, some of you remember Robert Shuler, the Crystal Cathedral?

I'm not doing a Robert Shuler thing here. I mean, I liked him, but I think sometimes his theology went hard left. But, he had some good things to say.

One is making the impossible possible. That's what God does. He loves doing that. God is saying to us today, do you all remember when I opened up the Red Sea?

Do you all remember when I saved the Israelites? Do you remember when the sun comes up every morning? He says to us, you ain't seen nothing yet.

[20:46] And he can use that kind of language because he doesn't care about proper construction of sentences. You ain't seen nothing yet. So, we have to ask, what new thing is God doing in our lives?

What new thing is God doing in your life? I'm going to give a little twist here. The twist is that sometimes we see the new things as we're doing the old things.

And that's why in the Anglican church, we have Lent. It's an old thing. Lent's been around for, it's been around longer than Leroy has been around.

I'm much younger than Leroy. Lent is one of the old things we do which issues forth in God's new thing.

Doing the old things opened the way for God to do his new thing in our life. So, this Lent reminds us of one thing in another great scripture to have glued in your head.

[22:03] Psalm 30. verse 5 says, this is my translation, weeping may want to stay with you all night, but joy will arrive come morning.

We don't need, weeping is good, we need to weep sometimes, all of us need to weep sometimes, but it doesn't need to go on forever.

Because the joy, weeping for people if they don't. Okay, so you have some weeping to share with others. Okay, see Stephanie, she'll help you with the weeping.

Yeah, weeping stays the night, but joy comes in the morning. That's a great truth, that's an eternal principle, and it's a new thing.

So, our old thing is to continue to practice traditional Lenten disciplines year after year. Wednesday night at Holy Trinity is one of those disciplines.

[23:10] It is a great opportunity for us to focus on God in a special way as a family. Other things we've done in Lent have been ways of taking old things and offering them to God, and God does a new thing through it.

There's been a three-fold way of keeping Lent. I'm going back to some Catholic teaching, not capital C as in Roman Catholic, although they teach it, but universal teachings of Lent.

You do three things in Lent. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. That's been a practice of Lent for a couple thousand years.

Lent's been around a long time. It was regularly used in all churches by the 8th century, and it was used in pieces like by the 3rd century.

It's old. But actually, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving is just part of Lent. there's so much more to Lent.

[24 : 23] Basically, Lent is a time for an attitude adjustment. Now, back when I was in the Marine Corps, Friday afternoon at 5 o'clock was called attitude adjustment hour.

It took place at the bar. That's not what I'm talking about. attitude adjustment is the way we just get honest with the Lord.

In effect, we're all Adam and Eve. We're all stuck in pride, and the pride raises its head. Even the most devout Christian has to deal with that.

In our age, the person who just died, Billy Graham, there's no one that ever thought Billy Graham was bad. If they did, they were totally out to lunch.

Billy Graham took a salary. He didn't do a take. He tried to give godly answers to all kinds of questions.

[25 : 30] Extremely faithful to his wife. I mentioned before about what was his wife's name? Ruth. It just stays in my head. You know, he was gone most of their marriage.

And at one point a reporter said, have you ever thought about divorcing Mr. Graham? And she said, murder, yes, divorce, no. He had a sense of God's calling.

And he fulfilled that call. But he had an attitude of humbleness, didn't he? That's what Lent can do for us, to bring back humility.

With all that, though, we still get robbed of joy. We get robbed of joy by circumstances, by our own feelings of being gypped.

Most of us feel gypped, to tell you the truth. I wish I were seven foot six. I got gypped. Just not fair.

[26 : 39] I could be tall like e-faith, if God knew what he was doing. So we feel like we've been gypped, we've been robbed, and the old phrase, I can do the best pity party of anybody in this room.

It's a self-pity party. So these adverse circumstances. This person has gone through some adverse circumstances.

She's watched and listened for God to bring healing. The healing is going to take a while, isn't it? But there's a joy.

That's what we're getting at. Finding God in adverse circumstances. and the joy that produces. God is doing a new thing in your life.

This new thing is centered in Jesus. Another thing about Lent, we're building up to what's called Good Friday, which is really a bad Friday. Our Savior is, we're going to relive him getting murdered next Friday, a week from this Friday.

[27 : 59] this God who loves us so much, demonstrates his love by becoming a human being, Jesus the Christ, living with us, teaching us, dying for us.

But that's not the end. We haven't gotten to Easter yet. If you look at the, remember the two witnesses that were going on the road to Emmaus, remember that?

we have no idea who they were. You know, it's possible that they were husband and wife. Could be they were two friends.

They had been in Jerusalem. They knew that Jesus had been murdered. Well, they would call it executed. They were hopeless.

The cross without the resurrection doesn't do much for us because what we've got is a dead Christ. The resurrection makes sense of it all.

[29 : 04] We have funny words like atonement, propitiation. We've got a million words which mean Jesus took our place on the cross.

He took what we deserved and then he defeated it. The cross and the resurrection help us to focus on what we are and who we are.

In case you hadn't noticed on Sunday morning when we worship, we have a two-part act, right? We have ministry of the word and then we have the ministry of the sacrament.

Word, sacrament. Word, sacrament. We go to church longer than most people because we do both every Sunday. When Mary Ellen and I were in Florida, we were trying to figure out where to go to church.

The closest Anglican church was about an hour and a half. And there was a little old Methodist church down the road. And I'm suspicious of Methodists. I don't know why, but I'm just suspicious. [30 : 17] So I looked on their website and it was not what you might call a woke congregation. It was a good old Methodist congregation. So I said to Mary Ellen, let's give it a shot.

So we went and the service was 37 minutes long. We walked out of the, we did the Apostles Creed, we did the Lord's Prayer, we did pastoral prayer, we did kind of a sermon, and we did three hymns, 37 minutes.

And I said, we're gypped in the Anglican church, we have to stay too long. Well, they didn't have communion. We have a longer service because we highlight what God is doing in our life.

He gives us the word, he gives us the table, the sacrament. He feeds us with the word, he feeds us with the sacrament. That's to build us up as his followers.

It all begins when we seriously accept Jesus Christ to come into our lives. That's where the hope comes. That's where the joy comes. That's the answer of what do we do when circumstances rob us of our joy.

[31 : 38] So, last point, four, antidotes to hopelessness and sadness. I've got four Bible verses. Now, you can Bible verse yourself to death if you want, but God uses Bible verses to touch us in our attitude.

So, I want to look at these four passages. If you are one who can do this sort of thing, this is the old school way of doing it. You get a three by five card, and you write the passage down, you put it somewhere like on the refrigerator or the mirror, so that you're seeing it, and that gives you a chance to meditate on it.

New school is you put it up as wallpaper on your computer. So, every time you turn it on, there it is, staring at you. I'm going to suggest that we do that, meditating on these scripture verses, as an antidote to sadness, disappointment, and hopelessness.

So, the first is Romans 12, 2. What do you have? Romans 12, 12. What does yours say? Rejoice in hope.

Rejoice in hope. There's more to that verse, so you need to look it up. But the big point I want to make is rejoice in hope. By golly, that's something to rejoice about.

[33 : 07] Who doesn't like hope? Okay, second is 1 Peter 1, 3. What does it say on the sheet? He has caused us to be born again to a living hope.

Okay, here's another newsflash. Anglicans can be born again. It's not just Baptists. There's a clause in there.

Anglicans also may apply. Okay, we can be born again, and say that last part again? To a living hope. We're not hoping in some tradition.

We're not part of churchianity. We're part of Christianity. We value the church, but church is not all there is. Jesus is what there is.

We're born again into him. Okay, Jim, would you read the 1 Peter 1, 3, what's on the sheet? 1 Peter John 15, 11, right.

[34 : 10] Jesus said that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. Now, the words of Jesus. Now, all of the scriptures inspired, okay, so we can't really say, well, this is really important because Jesus said it.

God, God, the Holy Spirit, said the whole darn thing. And so it's all equally important. But this is great. Say that one more time, Jim.

Jesus said that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. Jesus wants to be in us. He wants to pump joy into our lives.

That's part of our destiny when we follow Jesus is to have that joy in us because he pumps it into us. And finally, Raymond, would you read the passage on that sheet on Nehemiah 8.10?

The joy of the Lord is your strength. Remember that song we used to sing, that old gospel song? I'll sing it to you. No, all right. So, the joy of the Lord is our strength.

[35 : 21] Okay, those are four verses they're the antidote that I'm prescribing to you to move away from hopelessness, to move back into the road of joy.

Roushan mentioned a difficult time in her life. I have a difficult time in my life. We have a beautiful little five-year-old granddaughter. Some of you have prayed for her. Now, Amelia, five years old, cannot talk, cannot walk.

She's in a wheelchair. Because she has poor muscle tone, she has no control of her toilet.

