

The Gifts of Christmas Part 2

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[0 : 00] Well, joy to the world, the Lord has come. I know we didn't sing that song this morning, but as we are in the season of Advent, we are looking toward and looking forward to the day, the time that we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And all throughout this Christmas season, we hear about joy and what a joyful season it is. And so what many people are trying to do, or what many people try to do, is shove all those other feelings aside and try to feel joy.

And if we don't feel joyful, we try to create joy by tossing our troubles aside, ignoring our deepest griefs, our struggles, and just living for the moment.

There are a lot of people that are going through life even today that don't sense joy, that don't have that inner sense of peace and hope and love and joy in their hearts.

But you see, that's not all what the joy of Christmas is about, of cramming or stuffing all of those other feelings down or pushing them aside and trying to feel joy.

[1 : 23] Now, it may be nice for a moment going through the Christmas season and maybe trying to whip up joy in our life, but it's shallow and it's very short-lived.

You see, the gift of joy is offered to us in Jesus Christ. And that's the only place where we can find true joy, true lasting joy, true joy that we know in our hearts that we belong to Him.

And it's not about what's going on around us. It's deep and abiding joy. It's a joy that's so powerful. It can hold its own in the darkest moments of our hurting world and in the midst of all of our griefs, all of our struggles, and all of our pains.

It's a deep and abiding joy that only Jesus Christ can bring about in our lives. Now, we'll talk a little bit later this morning about how to experience joy through this season.

But for the moment, I want us to come together in a spirit of honesty. You see, you don't have to forget or you don't have to ignore your worries this morning as we unwrap this gift of joy, as we've been going through this series about the gifts of Christmas.

[2 : 48] Last week, we talked about the hope that Jesus Christ offers this world. So you don't have to forget or ignore our troubles in life as we unwrap this gift of joy, just like Peter talked about, about this joy being inexpressible and full of glory that we see in 1 Peter 1 and verse number 8.

It says, Whom having not seen you love, now you do not see him. Yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

Now, we hear a lot about joy this season, but I wonder how many people really, really experience joy deep down in their hearts, this joy about which Peter spoke. Now, I believe many people experience surface joy during the Christmas season, but not the deep-seated joy that Peter is talking about.

There are many people who go through life looking for happiness, looking for joy in the experiences that we have, in our circumstances.

But it only comes through knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord and as our Savior. As we talked about last week, we do not have a hope-so hope.

[4 : 14] The same way we talk about, I hope the sun comes out today, or I hope this happens, I hope they get better. I hope they want... That's not the hope that the Bible talks about.

When the Bible talks about the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, It's a sure thing, it is a sure hope that in Christ we can know that our sins are forgiven, we can know that we are right with God, and we can know that the Holy Spirit can bring to us that deep-seated joy.

You know, the holidays are a time when many, many people don't have joy. As a matter of fact, it's a time where there's a lot of people that go through periods of depression.

And we know that the holidays are a time when the suicide rates go up, when people lose their hope, and because of the depression, and because of the things that they see, and everything in life is weighing down so heavily upon them, that they choose to take that way out in ending their own lives.

They lack this joy that Peter is talking about. And as we said last week, we talked about hope, and today we're going to be opening up that gift of joy.

[5 : 42] And joy is more than a feeling. The joy that the Bible talks about, that Peter talked about, is not just happiness. It's not just, things are going well in my life, and I feel so good.

No, it's a joy that we can have, even in the midst of everything that is so bleak and terrible in our life. And you may be here this morning thinking, well, Pastor, how in the world can I experience joy when it seems like my life has fallen apart? I can't explain it, other than that God accomplishes it through Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit through a relationship that we can have with Him.

It's a joy that we are celebrating this Christmas season as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ that causes all creation to celebrate.

It's deep, it's powerful. That kind of rejoicing, you see where that word comes from? Talked about in the Psalms. As a matter of fact, let's look at Psalm 96 this morning together.

[6 : 53] Psalm 96 and verses 11 through 13. Psalm 96, 11, 12, and 13. Psalm 96, 11 says, Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad, let the sea roar, and all its fullness.

Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it, then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord. There's a song that we sing sometime on Sunday evenings.

It comes as a request. Let the trees of the field will rejoice before the Lord. In verse 13, for why? Why is creation rejoicing?

For He is coming. Lord Jesus Christ, when this Psalm was written, it was still future. The psalmist was looking forward to that day when the Messiah would come, the Messiah that we just sang about a few moments ago.

For He is coming. For He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness. We are preparing, and we are expecting.

[8 : 05] Jesus is coming. He's come already when He was born in that stable in Bethlehem, but He's coming again one day to take those of us who have trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior, who have received that free gift of salvation, forgiveness of sin, and being made a part of His family.

He is coming back for us. Let us rejoice. And this is the gift that we unwrap today. But the question that nags so many today is often, what if I just don't feel joy this season?

What if I don't feel joyful? You know, how can we receive this gift of joy in the midst of suffering, loneliness, pain, grief, busyness, stress, or even boredom?

How can we receive and unwrap this gift of joy? Well, together this morning, let's look at how we can anticipate, recognize, and choose joy.

Anticipate joy. Have you ever been waiting for something for so long that it doesn't seem like it's going to happen and you just simply give up hope or even forgotten that it's on its way or maybe even not known that it's coming?

[9 : 34] You know, you've probably heard stories about the Postal Service losing letters for many, many years. There was a story of a letter that was delivered 138 years later.

A woman in her 80s in France received a letter in the mail that had been sent to her great-grandfather in 1877 and 138 years later it was delivered and it was an order for yarn for her great-grandfather's spinning mill.

I mean, imagine that. But in the Washington Post in 2015, there was a story in the Washington Post about another letter that was intended for the recipient 14 years earlier.

The letter was written by a father in India to his son who at that time was living after 9-11 was living in New York City.

It was handwritten a few weeks after 9-11 but it was a bit confusing when it showed up in 2014. This is what the story said.

[10 : 48] It said, the man's father had died years earlier as he described in the newspaper essay. The man was flooded with a deep reminder and sense of connection to his late father.

Tears flooded his eyes as he held a physical object created by his father expressing concerns about his son's and grandchildren's safety and about the events of the world in that tragic time.

In the article, the son wrote, 14 years is a long time to wait for a letter but rarely has one been more welcome. The expression of concern in the letter is sadly still relevant today but the physical letter itself was a real joy.

You know, certainly an unexpected joy but it was one that was on its way the entire time. And we've been talking the last week or so about the nation of Israel.

They were expecting their Messiah for years and years and years. It was a gift to mankind that was coming but it was a gift that was long in coming and I'm sure there are many who had lost hope in Israel about their Messiah.

[12:02] There were some that maybe still waited but maybe they moved on with life not even thinking about their Messiah. But I know there were others in the Old Testament who held out hope, who were actively waiting for the coming of their Messiah.

and when we engage in actively waiting, anticipating what is to come and watching for it, the waiting has purpose. And even today as our poor bodies groan in pain and we're living on this earth with all the problems around us, if we know we're right with God, if we know Jesus Christ as our Savior, we can actively anticipate our Lord Jesus Christ's return.

And Paul said that all the suffering that we experience today, he said, it's nothing when you compare it to the weight of glory that we will experience when we come face to face with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But the thing is today there are many who aren't anticipating that, who aren't looking forward to coming face to face with Jesus Christ.

Because maybe they're concerned about what will happen to me when I come face to face with God. Am I going to be rejected? Am I going to be ushered in to his presence?

[13:34] Well, the Bible says there's one way to know. The Bible has good news and bad news. The bad news is about us. The Bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We hear in Romans chapter 3 verse 23. The Old Testament even says that all of our righteousnesses, even the best things, the best good works that we could muster up, the Bible says, is nothing but just like filthy rags.

It's awful. It's terrible. No one is good enough. As a matter of fact, the Bible goes on to say that there's no way that we can be good enough to get to heaven on our own.

All have sinned, the Bible says, and come short of the glory of God. No matter how good we are, we will always fall short of God's standard of perfection.

See, that's bad news. Mankind, on our own, no matter how often we go to church, no matter how many times I've heard people get baptized multiple times, walk down the aisle and pray prayers.

[14:43] No matter what we do on our own, there's no way that we can be right with God. And you may say, well, pastor, what's the point? Well, the Bible says, but God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

You see, even when we had no hope, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, came to earth, born as a baby in that manger in Bethlehem and grew up and one day walked to Calvary, bore His cross and was crucified, died, was buried and rose again.

The Bible says that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. God demonstrated His love. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, and died on the cross in our place.

The Bible says that even though the bad news about us is we're all sinners, none of us are going to get to heaven by church attendance, by any good works or anything that we do. But God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were helpless and hopeless, Jesus Christ came and He died for us.

Then in Ephesians, Paul tells us the gift of God is what? Is eternal life. The gift of God is eternal life and no matter what we do, it is not of works, the Bible says, lest anyone should boast.

[16:22] But receiving eternal life, receiving the forgiveness of our sin is simply comes by placing our faith and our trust in what Jesus did on the cross.

And because of His resurrection, it proved that God was satisfied with that payment. There's nothing that we can add to that. Jesus, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God, died for the sins of the whole world and all who call upon Him, all who trust Him completely for their salvation, the Bible says, shall be saved.

And so it's that active anticipation of that joy that will come that allows us to have joy even today.

You see, joy is similar. Even when we don't feel joy right now, we can anticipate the coming of joy to our world. We can prepare to move from that state of discouragement and oblivion to an experience of life-giving joy.

And the shepherds in the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament is a story of that example. When the angels showed up and delivered the message to the shepherds on that hillside outside Bethlehem, the shepherds immediately didn't feel joy.

[17 : 42] As a matter of fact, they were afraid in Luke 2, verses 10 and 11. Then the angels said to them, Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.

Verse 11, For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. The angels address their fear first and then help them move beyond their fear to receive the message of joy that a Savior was born this day.

The Messiah, the one that Israel had been waiting and expecting for so, so long had been born and by the end of the night these shepherds got it.

In Luke, Luke said, verse 20, Then the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had seen, that they had heard and seen, and as it was told them.

As we walk through this Christmas season, we know what's coming. We know that Christ, the Messiah, has come and we can celebrate this over and over and over again.

[18 : 59] We know there's more to come when He comes again. So we spend this time, spend this time season growing closer and closer to Him.

in our quiet times, appreciate, glorify, and enjoy, and rejoice in Him. See, let's deepen our love for Him.

You know, it's been a sad time for our family this week, but it's a time when the more that you spend time together, even though you're sad, even though your heart's broken, just simply being close to those you love can bring peace, can bring hope to us.

Just as in this world when we don't sense joy, just get closer to Jesus. Just spend time with Him.

And if you are a child of His, if you trust Him, just like we talked a moment ago, if you've placed your faith completely on Jesus Christ apart from anything else, that He died in your place, forgive your sin, and make you part of His family, the closer you get to Him, the more you can sense that joy that only He can provide.

So anticipate joy when you're struggling. Secondly, recognize. recognize joy. Recognize joy. Do you ever wonder, in all the world, the wise men were the only ones who recognized and followed the star of Bethlehem?

[20 : 46] I mean, think about it. It was a star. It was there in the sky all the time for the whole world to see. But most people, Jews and Gentiles alike, didn't recognize the meaning of that star.

For these men who did, it caused great joy. Matthew 2, 10 and 11 says this. Matthew 2, verse 10 says, When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary as mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

These wise men, these magi, had traveled a long way to meet this child whose birth had been announced by the star.

And they encountered hardships along the way. They had to deal with the deceptive tyrant King Herod all along the way. And they even came back. They didn't even do what he had wanted them to do.

[21 : 51] They even lost sight of the star for a time. But they knew what they were looking for. They recognized joy when they saw it.

Sometimes it can be hard to recognize joy in our lives. You can be going through financial trouble. You can be going through the loss of a loved one.

We can be going through lost relationship. We can be going through health issues. Sometimes it's hard to recognize joy when it's right there. God wants to.

God is able to. Through Jesus Christ to give us just as Peter talks about this inexpressible joy if we will just anticipate it and recognize it when God provides it and God makes it available for us.

You see very often that joy doesn't look like we expect it to. God can provide that joy in sometimes unexpected ways and sometimes with unexpected people.

[22 : 57] He's able to provide that joy. You know we expect joy to be free of hardship. We expect joy to be free of sorrow. So sometimes people will say well how can you rejoice when you're in the midst of sorrow?

Well because joy is something that has nothing to do with our circumstances. Joy as Peter talked about as we hear about the Magi and we hear about the shepherds joy was centered in Jesus Christ.

Joy was centered in their Messiah not about what was going on around them. But the Bible tells us that even in the midst of our problems even in the midst of all of these things James chapter 1 verses 2 and 3 says this and we looked at this when we were looking at the trials and tribulations and being in the fiery trials of life James says my brethren count it all what?

What's that word there? Joy count it all joy when you fall into various trials and you say pastor I'll come on it doesn't feel joyful remember joy is not a feeling it's that deep seated peace that comes from knowing there's more to life than what we see there's more to life than what we experience see there's an eternity all about us and there's meaning in this world beyond us as individuals and beyond the problems and the difficulties and the trials that you and I go to go through but my brethren count it all joy when you fall into various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces what?

Patience perseverance you know there's most definitely nothing hakuna matata about this joy you know no worries kind you know the real deep seated bible joy you know is not the you know the hakuna matata no worries be happy that's not the joy the bible talks about it's that joy even in the middle of all of the things that are going on in our life and that only comes through a right relationship with Jesus Christ so anticipate joy and recognize joy when it comes but how much richer and deeper the experience of joy think about it how much richer and deeper the experience of joy when it sustains us in the midst of all the darkness that you and I have to go through just as a diamond when that jeweler is showing you a sparkling brilliant diamond upon what background does he place it he places it on the darkest background possible on a black background that will not reflect light so that the beauty and the sparkling brilliance of that diamond can shine forth and in our life when you and I are going through the darkest most difficult times in our life

[26 : 21] Jesus and Jesus alone can work in our life as Paul says he can work all things for good he can work all things out for our good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose you see when we recognize that joy comes from trials because they produce perseverance within us and it makes us into the people of God the people that God wants us to be then we can experience joy even in the midst of the hard time so anticipate joy recognize joy the joy that we have available in Jesus Christ and lastly it's a choice choose joy see the idea that we can choose joy is a little bit deceiving and don't don't get me wrong when I when I say that that we choose joy we can't just close our eyes and focus and manufacture joy in our lives you know it's not something that we just think about and focus on like these self help recordings

I was going to say tape but we don't have tapes anymore these self help recordings and if you just think about it long enough it's going to happen that's not joy that's not the way joy works but yet we can choose joy as a matter of fact working to get joy joy can actually lead us away from joy see joy is a gift joy is a fruit of the spirit love joy peace those are things the Holy Spirit brings about in our lives we don't manufacture it we don't make it we don't wake up one day and say you know what I'm going to have joy I'm just going to choose joy and I'll be joyful there are a lot of happy people that go around life and I just guess that's their personality and they're just bubbly all the time that's not necessarily joy joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit that God provides to us so we can't just create it by trying harder but we can choose to live in ways that God says brings joy in our life see the concept is similar to physical health you know we can't get stronger just about thinking mentally about getting stronger you know what

I'm going to build my muscles and I'm going to imagine being in the gym and I'm going to get stronger it doesn't work that way does it no what do we have to do we have to exercise and build the muscles that make us stronger well didn't we hear a little while ago consider it all joy when we go through trials why because the trials the troubles and the difficulties in our life work just like the weights in the gym do it makes it can make us stronger as we rely on Jesus Christ and as he produces that joy and that perseverance in our lives now while we cannot concentrate hard and choose joy we can choose to give thanks we can choose to obey and we can choose to abide see when we do at least these things we open ourselves up to the gift of joy let's look a little closer at

these practices as we wind this down to a close you know when we choose gratitude that's the first avenue to joy choose gratitude

I mean try it when you don't feel joyful give thanks when you don't feel joy in your life just give thanks now try it out you're saying well you know what you don't know what's going on in my life no I don't well you don't know how difficult what I'm going through is no I don't but I challenge you to think of three things that you can at least be able to give thanks for if you can't be thankful for your children you can be thankful for your job you can be thankful for find something and I guarantee you I guarantee you you choose gratitude and be thankful for one thing you're going to think of another thing and a third thing you might even want to write those down just write them all down you'd be surprised how long of a list you can come up with pretty quickly now it's counterintuitive you know when you don't feel joyful and you'd rather mope around or gripe and complain but giving thanks opens our heart to joy that's that's why paul instructed the thessalonians in first thessalonians 5 16 through 18 rejoice always pray without ceasing in everything give thanks for this is the will of god in christ jesus how can we be filled with joy all the time like paul says he says pray and everything give thanks gratitude goes a long way and it leads toward joy when you don't know what to do you feel overwhelmed this season when you feel anything but joy give thanks choose to obey in john chapter 15 verse 11 jesus said these things have i spoken to you that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full so what did jesus tell his disciples what was the secret to joy obedience in john 15 10 he told his followers to obey his commands you know we often we often want joy to appear from out of nowhere but when we choose to give thanks we choose to obey jesus said joy comes from obedience just like gratitude obedience is a practice it's the process of seeking to follow jesus's commands it's a it's the the practice of getting closer and closer and closer to jesus and becoming who he wants us to be now uh we won't always get it right see that's the thing about being a follower of jesus we're and in this world we're still human beings we still have a nature and a propensity to sin so we won't always get it right that's why god says that we confess our sin he's faithful he's just to forgive us our sin because he knows we'll still mess up and that's the beauty of our relationship with him we don't have to be perfect we don't have to be super christians in order to be right with god and to be and be pleasing in his sight it comes from just simply following him obeying him and when we fall repent and get right back up and just admit god i messed up but thank you for your forgiveness the more we open ourselves up

to joy to gratitude and obedience the more we can prepare ourselves to encounter and to receive his joy and then thirdly choose to abide choose to abide see john 15 also tells us about that third part he brings he brings the the analogy of a vine and the branches you know how how do the how do the branches gain their life how do the branches stay alive how do the branches bear fruit they stay they stay stuck to the vine they stay connected to the vine and so they get their life blood they get their their their life-giving flow from the the vine and so just as jesus said you get your life-giving flow from me they said stay connected to me abide in me he says and just as he remains in his father's love we remain in his love and our joy is complete now this is not an immediate quick satisfaction thing you know it's something that it's a day by day by day relationship with jesus christ as we grow as we grow in our relationship with him as we learn to love him more as we obey him as we abide in him and see the same is true in our relationship with him our joy is made complete by imitating christ's love and his obedience so let this season as we are expecting and as we are celebrating the birth of our lord and savior jesus christ let it be a time of gratitude let it be a time of obedience and let it be a time of abiding in his love as we anticipate the joy that this christmas season brings spower heads every head bowed every eye closed you know this morning as we we mentioned there are many today who may not be experiencing this deep-seated joy that peter talked about that paul talks about there are many things that go on in our life that that may just suck that joy out of us that may suck the the the happiness out of our life but this morning if there's anyone here that is not sure of their relationship with jesus you may be here this morning you may be young or you may be old and you would say pastor i'm just really not sure if i'm right with god i'm not sure if i have a right relationship with god i haven't been experiencing that kind of joy that you spoke about well this morning i invite you to enter into the life-giving relationship with jesus christ that doesn't come through our good works doesn't come through just being here today it doesn't come from being born into a religious family but as god's word says only comes through faith and accepting that free gift that's made available to us by grace through faith this morning would you receive that gift of eternal life the forgiveness of your sin and i know that a prayer doesn't save us but by praying something like this lord jesus i know i'm a sinner the bible said so and i know that i

can't deserve to go to heaven on my own

[38 : 14] lord jesus right here today i'm trusting jesus alone who paid for my sin who made it possible for me to be right with god so lord jesus right now i'm trusting you alone for my salvation thank you for coming into my life thank you for forgiving my sin in just a moment we'll have an opportunity to to make sure our worship team is going to come up prepare to to sing in just a moment i would ask if you've trusted jesus as your savior this morning and you just want to make sure we can have someone take a bible and go to a private place and show you how you can know for sure that your sins are forgiven how you can know for sure that you have a right relationship with jesus christ please don't leave here today without making sure that our father we come to you this morning lord we thank you that we can experience joy inexpressible father we we know that our lord and our savior jesus christ makes it possible for us to have a right relationship with you and this morning we thank you for what you're going to accomplish in our midst today father we thank you for each one that is here we ask that you would help us to anticipate the joy that only comes from knowing you that we can recognize the joy when you provide it in our lives and lord that we might choose joy choose to rejoice no matter what's going on in our life because of our relationship with you and because you are working everything everything out in our life for our ultimate good so father we thank you and we praise you and you alone father we pray this in jesus name amen