

## Message Notes December 13th<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### Advent Week 3: Rejoice

(Isaiah 6:1-4, 8-11, Psalm 126:5-6, Luke 1:46b-55, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)

- **That Your Joy May Be Complete**

- What brings you *joy*?
  - Drinking a hot cup of coffee in the quiet of the morning... Walking through the woods in the fall... Making something with your own two hands... Reading a great book... Listening to beautiful music... Celebrating with your friends... Seeing lights on a Christmas tree... Holding your child or your grandchild... Helping someone who can't help themselves...?
  - Sometimes, it's just the way one of my kids saunters up and talks to me. Gideon barged into the room while I was working on this sermon at home on Friday and, with this twinkle in his eyes, he asked, "Dad, can I have a bwo-nie from the ga-wadge?" (We have a little pantry down in the garage.) And my heart just filled with joy and laughter as I looked at his childish earnestness. (Right after that another kid walked into the room screaming, so it was short-lived, but you get the point.)
- Children, if you watch them, will teach you how to find joy in the simple things: like running, and eating, and elevators, and hugs, and mud-puddles.
- When is the last time you experienced *joy*? Do you live your life expecting to find joy, or does joy seem like a luxury you've had to learn to live without?
  - Depending on the season we're in, joy can be something we just take for granted, or joy can be something that feels painfully out of reach.
- Jesus said to his disciples in the Upper Room, "I have told you these things so that *my joy* may be *in you* and that *your joy* may be *complete*," (John 15:11).
  - I love this. What are "these things" he's talking about? Right before this word about joy, he was teaching them about the vine and the branches, and he said, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." So, he told them this truth about the magnitude of God's love for us and the invitation to *abide* in his love, *that our joy may be complete*. And when he says, "that your joy may be complete," that word "complete" means, *to the full extent, to the maximum capacity*.
  - The truth Jesus reveals is meant to fill us to the *maximum capacity in which we are able to experience joy*. Whatever your individual capacity for joy, Christ intends to *fill you with joy* to the fullness of that capacity as you *abide in his love*.
    - Has anyone ever experienced the fullness of their capacity for joy? Maybe for a moment, a few moments in a lifetime? That's what Jesus intends to give us. *Wow!*
  - Paul said to the early Christians, multiple times in multiple ways, including our 1 Thessalonians reading from today, "*Rejoice always*." And he said that "joy" is a fruit of the Spirit—joy is one of the byproducts of living by the Spirit of God and walking in step with the Spirit of God.
  - Whatever your current feelings, whatever your current circumstances, whatever your current condition, the message of Scripture for followers of Christ is clear: in Christ, the *fullness* of joy and an ongoing *life of joy* are available.
- Do you believe that message, or does it seem too good to be true? Does it seem like something that's only true for *some people*, but not meant for you?
- In this third week of Advent, our word is "Rejoice." Today, I want to simply do this: I want to share with you a biblical definition of *joy* and the way to *live in joy* through all seasons.
  - Wouldn't you love to know the secret to living a life of joy in all seasons—a secret that wasn't a gimmick or a false advertisement? The beautiful thing is, once you grasp the Biblical definition of joy, you discover the secret of living a life of joy.

- **Sadness vs. Despair**

- Now, I don't want to give you the impression that this is an easy, "wave-a-magic-wand" kind of solution to our troubles. But I do believe that a life of joy is *very available* to us through the Gospel and there is a path for us to follow that will lead to this kind of life.
- You know, the opposite of joy is not sadness; the opposite of joy is *despair*.
  - If you're on the brink of despair, you need to recover your reason for hope before you can find joy. But if you're in a time of sadness, joy isn't necessarily that far away.
  - Sadness and joy are not mutually exclusive; they can actually coexist at times. If you've ever been to a funeral that somehow made you grieve and celebrate at the same time, that made you cry and yet, left you feeling lightened, you've experienced how joy and sadness can coexist.
  - This is so encouraging, because it reminds us that, even in "2020," it's possible through Christ to experience *joy*. The message and story of Advent make it possible for us to experience joy, even in times like these.
- It's also important to remember that these words of Scripture came *from* people and *to* people *who were deeply acquainted with sadness and despair*. Isaiah 53's prophecy about Jesus said, "He was a man of sorrows." Remember Jesus' prayer from the Garden and his cry from the Cross. This message is not coming from people of "privilege" who never knew struggles. You can't just write it off like, "*that's easy for you to say!*" And that makes it all the more powerful.

- **Joy Defined**

- Here are some different definitions of joy I found from Christian perspectives:
  - John Piper says, "Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ..."
  - Rick Warren says, "Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation."
  - C. S. Lewis described joy as, "A longing, an unquenchable desire that itself leaves you full." He also said, "If there exists in myself a desire which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world." He was a deeply intellectual agnostic for a large part of his life, and his conversion came when he discovered that the source of that longing for joy was Jesus Christ of Nazareth.
- It really clicks when you look at the root meaning of "joy" in the New Testament. What does Paul mean when he says, "Rejoice always," and what does Jesus mean when he says, "my joy will be in you,"?
  - As I was looking into this, I discovered that the words for "joy" and "rejoice" in these passages share the same root as the word for "grace"—like, some scholars would say they're all expressions of the same idea. The word for "Joy" is *Chara*. The word for "Rejoice" is *Chairo*. And the word for "Grace" is *Charis*. In Scripture, "Joy" and "grace" are interrelated.
  - When the New Testament talks about "joy" and "rejoicing" it literally means to *experience the grace of God*. Joy is the *awareness and recognition of the Grace of God*.
    - Which naturally leads us to ask, "*What is grace?*" Grace is the unmerited kindness and favor of God—Jesus is the fullest expression of God's grace to humankind. He is God's gift, God's blessing. Undeserved. Free.
  - Now, put it all together. If *joy* is simply experiencing God's grace, and grace is the unmerited kindness of God, then joy means experiencing the lavish, free, unmerited kindness of God, the goodness of God, in Christ.
  - Joy is the *experience of God's grace* and the *expectation of God's goodness*. Experiencing grace, expecting good. That's a good definition of joy, I think.
  - 2020 has been a lot of anticipating the bad: we've said things like, "What is it this time? Things are just going to keep getting worse. Is it over yet?"

- Living with joy in a time like this means that even in the midst of hardship and sadness, we are *experiencing God's grace* and *expecting God's goodness to continue showing up*. We are not hopeless, we are not in despair; we are *deeply aware of God's grace* and therefore we have a profound *anticipation that good things are still to come*.
- **The Beautiful Secret**
  - Advent is a season of Joy because it's a season of remembering Christ's coming and anticipating Christ's return. Advent is a season where we realign with Christ: we reflect, we reorient, we *repent*, in order to reconnect with the joy of our *union* with Christ. A life of joy is the byproduct of living *in union with Christ*.
  - Here's the beautiful secret: if joy is simply the experience of God's grace, is there ever a moment in which we cannot find joy?
    - As a Christian, your life is *in Christ*: there is never a moment in which you do not have access to the grace of God, and therefore there is never a moment in which you do not have access to the source of joy! It's always available.
    - We might have moments of sadness and loss, times of struggle and being overwhelmed, times of anxiety and stress. We might even go through seasons when we are on the brink of despair. But because of Jesus, *joy is never far away*.
  - Like Romans 8 says, "...neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord." In that love of God we find the joy of Christ.
    - But this is not a cheap grace or a shallow joy: the joy of Christ is full and all-consuming; it's a joy you have to abandon yourself to. Just as you cannot experience the joy of marriage unless you abandon the freedom of singleness, just as you cannot experience the joy of parenting unless you abandon the independence of living without kids, just as you cannot experience the joy of an adventure without abandoning the comforts of home, you cannot experience the joy of Christ unless you abandon yourself to Him: die to yourself and completely surrender to Christ, and your joy will be complete.
- **Isaiah 61**
  - Isaiah 61 that we read today—"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me..."—is a Scripture that Jesus quoted at the start of his ministry, and if you look at his life, he fulfilled these words.
    - "Good news to the poor...bind up the brokenhearted...freedom for the captives...release for the prisoners...comfort to those who mourn...a crown of beauty instead of ashes...the oil of gladness instead of mourning...a garment of praise instead of despair..."
  - Do you find yourself poor, in body or in spirit? Do you find yourself brokenhearted? Do you find yourself captive to something? Do you know someone who's mourning, grieving in their soul? Do you know someone who's in a spirit of despair?
  - This Good News, this healing, this freedom, this crown of beauty and oil of gladness and garment of praise come from experiencing the presence of Christ; it comes from experiencing the redeeming work of Christ; it comes from welcoming the Kingdom of Christ. And it's all *grace*. It's all *gift*. It's available to *all* in Christ! "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy!" (Psalm 126:5)
  - *Oh, Church, this is the Gospel of Jesus! Joy to the World, the Lord has come! Will you surrender to Him today, will you welcome in the fullness of His Joy today, the fullness of His Kingdom today?*
  - With Mary we can say, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my savior...for the Mighty One has done great things for me!" (Luke 1:46) Hallelujah and Amen!
- Last week, as we talked about the word "Prepare," the question to reflect on was, "This Advent, how is God calling me to prepare the way for Jesus?" Here's the question for this week: "*This Advent, how can I renew the joy of Christ in my life?*"
  - As we celebrate Communion now, let's contemplate that question: *how can I renew the joy of Christ in my life this Advent?*