

The Gift of Joy (3 part message)

Trinity CRC, December 25, 2018

The Gifts of Christmas Series: Christmas Day

Isaiah 12:1-6 (v.3)
Rev. Richard deLange

Today we're going to have three short meditations which unpack three different parts of the gift of Christ as he brings joy into our lives.

read **Isaiah 12:1-6**

The Definition of Joy

What does the word *joy* bring to mind for you? Boys and girls, is joy the sound of your screams when you open a Christmas present? Is joy the feeling of happiness when you pass a test you studied really hard for? Or might it be the excitement of parents when they finally see a child who has been away for a long time or when a grown child finally moves out 😊? Is joy the feeling you get when you land a new job or get a promotion you've been working for? Or is it like the excitement you feel when you score a game winning goal?

The biblical definition of joy revolves around a deep and solid confidence that is built on grace. You can be happy today because things are going well and be sad tomorrow because something frustrating happens. We sometimes are happy and sad at different times of the same day.

But joy comes from something more solid and definite. It's a deep-rooted comfort that comes from knowing that God in his grace has sent his Son to be our Saviour. Jesus came with a heart full of love for us, though we fail God often. Now we live in the confidence that, despite our failures, God looks with favour on us. In love, he holds us tight. And that can't be taken away.

The Anticipation of Joy

The prophet Isaiah anticipates the coming of Christ and he and the people of Israel with him are filled with joy. Their situation hasn't changed. They are still in a foreign land and far from their homes. Nothing has changed yet. But they have a promise from God that deliverance is coming. The debt of the sin is removed. And the result is this:

Is 12:1 "I will praise you, O LORD.

*Although you were angry with me,
your anger has turned away
and you have comforted me.*

Isaiah 11 talks about the coming of Jesus as the shoot from the stump of Jesse. Jesus is the one who, after centuries of anticipation, is born from Jesse's and David's line, just as God promised. Heaven sends love to earth in the form of Jesus.

Because God's promise is trustworthy, Israel was filled with joy even in anticipation of that salvation. We read in v.3,

*Is 12:3 With joy you will draw water
from the wells of salvation.*

That's future tense. God's future saving act—when Jesus comes—is the well from which Israel will draw life-giving water. In Isaiah's days of apostasy and the warning of judgment there is joy that comes through the promise that God's grace will break into our darkness and sorrow. God's love and grace will restore the parched souls of his people. They will drink freely from the well of salvation. Because of Jesus, restoration will take place. Jesus is not only the long-promised Saviour of Israel who came to Bethlehem. He lived, took on our sin and died for us. But he also rose from the dead. And because of his resurrection, we are promised new life, recreated life, a new eternal home.

Christmas is confirmation that the joy Israel anticipated has come. He did provide salvation. And we live with joy in anticipation of his return.

read from **Luke 2.**

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy..." said the angel to the shepherds in the field near Bethlehem.

The angel was calling the shepherds to celebrate the joy.

Celebrate the Joy

When Jesus comes, it is time to celebrate the joy.

Jim Kane once said, "Joy is tuning in to what God is doing around you, seeing the world through his eyes, picking up on his delight in us as his children... Joy is when your whole being sings because you have caught a glimpse of God at work." (sermoncentral)

A group of Korean business leaders—all Christians—visited the United States with news about the plight of believers in North Korea. "There has been terrible persecution," they reported. "And thousands have died for their faith; yet many still worship (Jesus) despite danger and death threats. When they gather, it's in complete secrecy; and when they sing, it is done in silence. They open their mouths in unison, but they allow no sound from their voices for fear of being overheard." (*The 12 Ways of Christmas* by David Jeremiah, pg 110)

Can you imagine going through Christmas with no sounds of Christmas carols? Can you imagine not being able to belt out “Joy to the world the Lord is come!” The North Korean Christians I just mentioned can’t sing out loud for fear of persecution. But that doesn’t mean they don’t have joy. They just can’t express it in loud singing like we can. That may not be ideal but it’s okay because, remember, “Joy is when your whole being sings because you have caught a glimpse of God at work.”

The shepherds caught a glimpse of God at work. They heard the good news of great joy, ran with joy in their heart to see Jesus and couldn’t be silenced when they saw and heard what God had done.

When we live our lives focused on Jesus, our whole being sings with joy. Oh, sometimes we might go through hardships and not be real happy. Sometimes we could even be persecuted for following Jesus and we might need to keep our voices low. However, the joy of our salvation can’t be silenced. It shines through, it shapes us, it changes our daily lives. It goes far beyond mere singing.

Charles Spurgeon once put it like this: “The greatest joy is to those who know Christ as a Saviour.... The further you submit yourself to Christ the Lord, the more completely you know him, the fuller your joy becomes.” Spurgeon goes on, “the great deeps, the great fathomless deeps of solemn joy, which glisten and sparkle with delight, are for such as know the Saviour, obey the anointed one, and have communion with the Lord himself.” He adds, “you will never know the fullness of the joy which Jesus brings to the soul, unless under the power of the Holy Spirit you take the Lord as your Master to be your All in all, and make him the fountain of your intensest delight.”

We can sing as loud as we want today and any other day. But having Jesus in our lives doesn’t just change our song. He changes our life. We can sing and live differently because we know that Jesus has brought to us the embrace of God’s love for today and every day—regardless of how we feel about ourselves, what we’ve done wrong, or what we are struggling with. The joy of our salvation starts in knowing Jesus as our Saviour and deepens when your whole being sings because you know his love and live out of it—just like the shepherd who returned to their fields, back to their usual lives changed—glorifying and praising God. They teach us that “joy is when your whole being sings because you have caught a glimpse of God at work.”

Now we come to our final meditation from **Isaiah 40:9-11**.

We Proclaim the Joy

Isaiah says, we ought to “lift up your voice with a shout and say, ‘Here is your God!’” Isaiah 40 is all about reminding people who have been carrying a heavy burden that God brings relief and comfort. He fills their hearts with joy and our lives proclaim, “Here is my God.” Here is our God. Yes, Here is your God!

In the first 39 chapters of the book, Isaiah is proclaiming judgement on Israel. She has strayed from God repeatedly and was now in Babylonian captivity. But here in chapter 40, Isaiah has joy-filled news for the captives and an important commission from God.

The Messiah brings comfort to our broken lives. He comes to broken and hurting people to restore and bless them. And if it weren't for his loving grace to us, we'd simply have to be resigned to the fate of the flowers and grass of the field that Isaiah talks about in vv.6-8, "People are like grass and flowers that wither and die." That doesn't mean we don't bring some beauty to the world for a time. That we don't have reasons to smile. But God is saying through Isaiah that he has a lot more in store for us.

The coming of Jesus turns our lives to a new channel. We enjoy and proclaim the good news that Isaiah foretold. The good tidings he mentions in v.9 are repeated by an angel at Christmas, "I bring good tidings of great joy that will be for all people." Jesus is born in Bethlehem. And through him, the old is gone and the new is come. The life of withering and dying like flowers is past. Now the face of God is shining on us in Christ. Now he will eternally tend his flock—that's people like you and me. He cares for us, gathers us, carries us when life is hard and gently leads us. What a blessing to have such a Messiah.

And how do we respond to this gift that is ours in Jesus? Friends, the joy of Jesus changes our lives. We proclaim to the world in our words and deeds that Christ is the one who brings lasting joy. In our world where sorrow is a constant reality and where we see people withering and dying like the grass of the field that Isaiah mentions, we declare, we shout in word and deed that Jesus is God and he has changed us by his grace. His joy which fills us moves us to show and tell the world about him. To shout to the world, "How great is our joy in Jesus!"

Most of you know what my family has gone through this past year. Back in March, I never would have imagined how in the lowest point of our life, the joy of the Lord would fill our hearts, even when our life seemed very frightening. Yet that's what happened over and over again. It was joy that came out most often in tears. Tears of joy. Yes, we had tears of fear, especially in the first weeks. But so often the love of God's people brought tears of joy to us—through emails, cards, calls, so many gifts that showed love and support. This is how the Lord Jesus gently led and cared for us.

And, honestly, as our life has returned more and more to normal, I first didn't want to lose that deep joy of the Lord that sustained us. But more and more I realize that it's not mine to hoard for myself. As I have been loved and blessed with the joy of the Lord, it's mine to share Christ's love with others in both deed and word.

When I see all that Christ has provided for us—especially the peace and love and abiding joy—then I feel moved to love others more deeply. To step out of my comfort zone and love as we've been loved. But also to share the good news... the good tidings of great joy. I don't get tired of telling others what the Lord has done for us. Maybe they get tired of me. I don't know!

Remember that one old song where the lyrics go, "I've got joy like a fountain."? But it strikes me that joy is like bubbling fountain and we need to share it. We need to join Isaiah in proclaiming good tidings to Zion, telling one another what the Lord Jesus has done for us. And join the angels in declaring the good news to all peoples. Christmas has an evangelical thrust to it. We can't keep this joy of Jesus to ourselves. Let our lives and words proclaim how great is our joy through Jesus our Lord!