

Joy - Wonderful Counselor

Series: *The Lights of Christmas: Finding Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Christ*

Isaiah 9:2-7; Philippians 4:4; Luke 1:26-38

December 16, 2017

In this season of Advent, we are studying the words that the Advent candles represent. And we are doing so through the wonderful Christmas passage found in Isaiah 9. I invite you to turn in your bulletin to page 5. Let me read Isaiah 9:2,6-7 for you:

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine... For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

Two weeks ago, we said that Jesus is our Hope because He is a Mighty God. Last week, we said that Jesus is our Peace because He is the Prince of Peace. Today, I want you to write this down:

He is our Joy because He is our Wonderful Counselor.

We think of this season as the season of Joy. It is a time where it is said, "Joy has come." It is a time when we sing "Joy to the World." And today, we lit the candle of joy.

But let me ask you, "What is joy?" This could really be a hard question to answer. I mean, there can be so many different things that bring us joy. Joy for me is probably not the same thing as joy for you; example: flying. The TV has been offering hundreds of different shopping ideas, each one guaranteed to bring joy. Get a new car wrapped in a big red bow, get that diamond necklace and earring set, or get that shiny new game system! But then there is the joy of family or the joy of a job well done. And I could go on and on.

But is that really joy? And is this the season of joy? Not always. This becomes so glaringly apparent when the occurrences of the rest of the year invade this season of joy, when something from everyday life rears its ugly head into the Christmas season, a season supposedly dominated by joy.

- A mother and a young child just finish picking out the perfect present for dad, and as they are leaving the store, the excitement of the moment and the season is too much, and the child darts into the parking lot and is struck by a car.
- The family has all come together, but before the night is over, two brothers nearly come to blows over their political views, and the whole party was ruined.
- Did you see the article about the mother in Middletown who died from a heroin overdose in front of her nine children, ages 1 to 14?
- There's a present left under the tree for grandma who died suddenly the day before Christmas.

This so-called season of joy doesn't seem very joyful at all. Maybe it's because we've got the wrong definition and idea of joy. If we are going to light a candle called joy, I think we'd better be sure what we are talking about.

Paul writes this wonderful little verse in Philippians 4:4 that has encouraged and sustained Christians for 2 millennium:

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*¹

In spite of the fact that Paul is in prison while writing this letter to the Philippians, he emphasizes joy. Seventeen times the words “rejoice,” “rejoiced,” “rejoicing” or “joy” are found in the epistle. That’s the real kind of joy, even when things are bad. So what does this verse say about joy? Three things:

First, the source of our joy.

A small boy in church in front of you suddenly turns around and smiles a huge grin. He looks from person to person, smile stretching all the way back to those in the back seats. He isn’t gurgling, spitting, humming, tearing apart the hymnals, or rummaging through his mother’s purse. He is just smiling. Suddenly, his mother jerks him around, and with a stage whisper that everyone can hear, she says, “Stop grinning. You’re in church.” With that she gives him a slap on his backside, and as the tears roll down his cheeks, she adds, “That’s better.”

While humorous, I fear the honesty behind this story. Church is not always thought of as a place where we can smile. This is often where people come when the going gets the toughest. And this is doubly true during times of deep trouble! This is where you will find doors open and candles being lit in the wake of national crisis. This is where people often bring their biggest and heaviest burdens to lay down at the foot of the cross. And you can practically see the weight on their shoulders. How could we even possibly think of grinning when the person next to us is in the verge of tears?

But Paul says from prison:

*Rejoice in the Lord.*²

The source of his, and our joy, is “in the Lord.” This qualifies the rejoicing. It is not rejoicing in one’s circumstances, which are frequently a cause of anything but joy. It is not a rejoicing in a sport’s victory or a politician’s election victory. It is rejoicing “in the Lord.” He is the source of true joy.

Paul himself was lying in prison; the Philippians were setting out on the Christian way, and dark days, dangers and persecutions inevitably lay ahead. So Paul says, “I know what I’m saying. I’ve thought of everything that can possibly happen. And still I say it—Rejoice!” Christian joy is independent of all things on earth because it has its source in the continual presence of Christ. The Christian can never lose his or her joy because they can never lose Christ.³

The Gospel of Matthew records:

*When the wise men saw the star, they were filled with joy.*⁴

The only source of true joy is Christ. Not in a car or a diamond or a game system or in anything else you can put under the tree. Our source of joy is Christ.

Second, the season of our joy.

Paul writes, “Rejoice in the Lord...” when? Always.

¹ Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

² Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

³ Barclay’s Daily Study Bible, Philippians 4:4

⁴ Matthew 2:10 (NCV)

He means to always be rejoicing “in the Lord.” We cannot rejoice in other things always, but we can rejoice in the Lord always. There is never a time when you cannot rejoice in the Lord.

Think back to the story of the angel’s announcement to Mary. Follow along in your bulletin:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!” Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she’s now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.” Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.⁵

Normally, the news of a pregnancy is joyous. It’s a wonderful time. A man and a woman are going to be parents, and their parents will become grandparents, and I hear there’s nothing better than being a grandparent.

But the circumstances of Mary’s pregnancy are anything but joyous. A strange story from a supposed angel, a mystery conception, her not married. I’m sure that joy was not the dominant emotion during that pregnancy, am I right? What emotions do you think Mary was going through? Confusion, fear, anxiety for her first pregnancy, the eyes of judgment upon her.

Yet this pregnancy and birth brought God’s true joy into the world. A Savior, a Wonderful Counselor, a child who would set us free.

Christmas is not the season of joy. Every season is a season of joy, whether you are in the prison or the palace, eating bread and water or yummy Christmas candy, celebrating with lots of family or just along. Christ is born, and as the angel said to the shepherds:

I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.⁶

God’s solution for the mess we’ve made of life, of civilization, of history, of relationships, of societal sins and personal sins, is born. So every season is a season of joy. Rejoice in the Lord... always.

Finally, the stress on our joy.

Paul writes:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!⁷

⁵ Luke 1:26-38 (NLT)

⁶ Luke 2:10 (NLT)

⁷ Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

This repeating of the exhortation shows the stress on rejoicing and the importance of rejoicing “in the Lord.” This will cure depression and stop doubts and discouragements. It is very important that the saints, “Rejoice in the Lord.”

On any given Sunday, we could have a “Chippie” visiting us in the greatest distress, needing comfort and guidance, wracking their brains in prayer. Oh, what is a “Chippie?” Let me introduce you to a small parakeet by the name of Chippie. It all began when Chippie’s owner decided to clean out his cage with a vacuum. She stuck the nozzle into the cage to clean up the bottom. Suddenly the phone rang. She reached for the phone with her free hand and not realizing it, her hand holding the nozzle rose slowly upward and sucked Chippie into the vacuum cleaner. Realizing what she had done, she dropped the phone and turned off the vacuum.

With her heart in her mouth, she opened the vacuum bag to rescue poor Chippie. Chippie was stunned and covered head to foot with gray dust... but thankfully he was still alive. She grabbed him and rushed him to the bathtub, turned on the cold water full blast and held him under the water giving him a power washing. Then it dawned on her that Chippie was soaking wet and shivering, so she did what any compassionate pet-owner would do. She snatched up the blow dryer and blasted him with hot air.

You may be wondering if Chippie survived all this. Yes... yes he did, but he didn’t sing for a long time after that. Even now, he mostly just sits there in his cage eyeing the closest where the vacuum cleaner is kept. Being sucked up, washed out, and blown over had stolen the joy from his heart. Can you blame him? One could easily understand why Chippie doesn’t have much joy.

And this is where several people are. They are lost, troubled, sad, fearful, devastated... anything but joyful.

Paul was a “chippie.” When he wrote Philippians 4:4, he had been stripped of everything, locked in a cold, dark, and wet prison cell. And he sits down to write his friends in Philippi. “Yep... I’m in prison... again... and this time, I may die... and oh... by the way... rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again rejoice!” Paul is definitely having a chippie moment. And he responds by writing this letter. A letter that... while it is only four chapters long... manages to mention joy ten times! TEN TIMES! Paul is having the epitome of a Chippie moment and he mentions joy TEN TIMES.

How can he say that? Has Paul lost it a bit here. I mean... wouldn’t it be just plain dumb to go up to somebody who is having a Chippie moment and say “Rejoice in the Lord always.”

How on earth can he write about joy? He doesn’t have anything to be joyful about. His life is on the line, he is cold, wet, and tired, he has no freedom, has no shiny car with a bright red ribbon waiting for him in the driveway, no limited time diamond earring and necklace sale to take advantage of, no Nintendo Switch to occupy his time. He is parted from family and friends, and cannot take a single bit of joy from a job well done because well-being in prison had put a small damper on his traveling ministry.

Yet over and over again, he brings up joy. Somehow he got it into his head, that you don’t need all that stuff to have joy. Even his earthly life being in jeopardy could not part him from joy. For Paul, joy does not come from the world; it comes from God. Our God is the giver of true joy. Our God is the great comforter. Our God is the giver of a peace that transcends all understanding. And it doesn’t come from something you can buy; it comes from something freely given.

You see, Paul's greatest joy was his assurance from God. He knew that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is through Christ Jesus our Lord. We too have this great joy.

As we journey closer and closer to Bethlehem, we are reminded of what awaits us when we get there. A Savior, who brings us something that no one else can give: true joy. That is why Paul can write "Rejoice in the Lord always."

Yes, brothers and sisters, the church can be a place of smiling, because of what the Christmas season is REALLY about. True joy cannot be packaged and wrapped and put under a tree. It can only be found in a manger. And it awaits there for you.