

Joy is Born

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[0 : 00] Joy is born in Bethlehem, the angels sang. Such a joyous message couldn't simply be spoken,! It needed to be accompanied in song.
! That is where this unmatched, unbreakable joy for all peoples was to be found on that night in Bethlehem of Judea long ago.
It's a scene of magnitude and a scene of seeming contradictions. But why should we care about these kind of things? Why should joy matter to us at all?
This idea of joy, this question of why it is, why it exists, and where it comes from, it's something that has confounded many deep thinkers for a very long time. C.S. Lewis in his day, in his own story of salvation, it was the linchpin that turned him from staunch atheist to Jesus apologist.
The thought goes, he said, if we're just a compilation of random cells fighting for survival in an inhospitable rock curling through space, then what is joy to you and me? What purpose could it serve?

[1 : 33] It would be, at most, a life luxury, but not a necessity. And yet, that's not how we live. None of us live that way. We are pursuers of joy.
We constantly pursue joy. Because when you taste joy, it feels like, man, this is what we were meant for. Joy meets us in some of the fantastic moments of life.
A desire fulfilled. A baby born. Making a deep relational connection with a friend. Your team finally wins the Super Bowl. Suffering relieved.
Or perhaps it's not desire fulfilled, but it's glory beheld. Maybe it is listening to a piece of music that just moves your soul to something that just makes it go, wow.
Or a piece of art that speaks to you. Or beholding something in nature. Maybe it's a sunset. Maybe it's up in the mountains. But you see something magnificent and glorious and transcendent.

[2 : 38] We feel these moments of joy and ecstasy when justice is realized. Wrongs are made right.
Or when we see the world move a little bit more into this idea of people made in the image of God where more and more people, despite race and creed and color and ethnicity, are treated with a dignity and honor befitting a child of God.
Joy is the product of our souls being satisfied. The deepest needs and longings suddenly being met, that is what causes us joy.
That's what brings joy. And many of those needs and longings we don't fully realize and we can't even quite name. But yet they lurk and they exist in there. And the kind of joy that we need, the kind of joy that we desire and we go about looking for is the kind that is perfect and unbreakable.
What would it take? Think about this. Not just for yourself, but what would it take? What kind of thing must happen for all the souls in this room to suddenly be satisfied all at the same time?

[3 : 54] What type of event could make that happen? Now broaden that out to our city and all the people in our city and then to our state and then to our nation and then the whole earth as the angel saying, this is good news.

This is joy for all peoples. What could bring joy to that degree and to that extent? And if the answer can't be found on this earth, then the answer has to be that it comes from somewhere that we do not yet know and we cannot yet see.

But before we get into that, we must face the question of why we need that kind of joy in the first place. What keeps us from finding a joy that is unchanging and perfect and unbreakable?

What is so elusive about finding this type of joy here on earth? Why can't you and I move from one joyful moment to another and keep this joy high going forever and ever?

The answer to that is the very fact that this world is inhospitable to joy because it has been placed under sin's curse.

[5 : 06] And that sin abides in all of us. See, sin is a joy robber that needs a solution. And this is the hope and promise of Jesus' birth.

Anticipating this centuries before Jesus even arrived, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah. And it says this in Isaiah 9, starting in verse 2.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation.

You have increased its joy. They rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest. As they are glad when they divide the spoil for the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

Who is this you? For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle to molt and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

[6 : 14] So two reflections on this passage and a final thought on what it means for us today. First reflection is that joy is the relief of sin, suffering, and sorrow.

This passage talks about people living in a land of deep darkness. No one wants to live in deep darkness. Yet, so many of us live that way.

Maybe not literal darkness, but we walk around with shame and guilt, living in the shadowlands of our hearts. No one revels in being oppressed under heavy burdens or addictions, nor do we desire to be under the yoke of those who mistreat and curse us.

What hope do we have? What hope of deliverance is there for the downtrodden?

How often do you and I go about life choosing to ignore the plight of our fellow man who suffers under a heavy yoke? How often do we live to this idea of let us eat and drink and fix our eyes on the light of our screens?

[7 : 28] And so we live cheaply satisfied and thoroughly distracted and detached. Yet there's no relief that can come from the glow of that false light. Nor does a full belly satisfy a malnourished soul.

Joy. Joy. That is what we want. And it's not just we want. It is actually what we need.

But here's the thing. Too much stands in the way for us to get it. In the measure that we need and we desire. There's no way to keep it for any significant time.

In every generation, the young and the idealistic say, yes, we can do it. We can get there. Utopia is right there for us to take.

And so we always, every new generation, dreams, grand dreams. We imagine with John Lennon. And yet the dreamers and the dreams, they come and go and they dissipate with age.

[8 : 28] As does the joy attached to them. Here's the thing. The dreams of man can never be promises. But there is a dream that man did not dream.

And it was dreamed up in the heart of God himself. A dream too wonderful and too magnificent and too mysterious for man to think of and design and pull off. And yet it is more than a dream for endless perfect joy.

It is actually a promise. One that would come through a child being born. The rest of that passage in Isaiah says this. Here's the answer.

Do you see what the prophet is claiming for the answer to the joy need?

It wasn't in the birth of a new technology. It wasn't in a new scientific discovery. It wasn't in a new nation and a better nation being formed. It wasn't in a perfect government system to live in.

[10 : 15] It was in the birth of a child. Actually, it was in the birth of one particular child. As it claims here, joy is the endless reign of a righteous king who was born to save us.

If unbreaking joy hasn't been discovered thus far, perhaps its source is not of this world. And this promised child who was born, he was born to sit on David's throne.

And he would bring that which the world could not feel or fulfill. And he couldn't just be a typical descendant born of man and woman.

And yet he would still be a child born. But unlike any other child that has been born, he would be called Wonderful Counselor. He would be called Mighty God.

He would be called Everlasting Father. And he would be called Prince of Peace. He would be to us all of these things. A child born to us and a child born for us.

[11 : 21] And he would grow up to reign forever. Over a forever kingdom. To redeem and call a people to himself. He would step in as the light of the world to scatter the darkness that we lived in.

As Wonderful Counselor, he would bring truth to make straight what man had made crooked. We have seen a great light. As Mighty God, he would heal diseases and cast out demons.

He has broken the rod of oppression. As Everlasting Father, he would call many sons and daughters to glory. The sheep of his own pasture. And we rejoice in that as those at time of harvest.

As Prince of Peace, he would bring an end to hostility between man and God. And unite mankind together in himself.

The embattled warrior has been conquered. God commanded that this child born to the Virgin Mary must be called Jesus. Because according to Matthew 1.21, he will save his people from their sins.

[12 : 33] This is our hope. For you and me today. That unto us a child was born. And the reign of his kingdom there will be no end.

And one day that kingdom will come in its fullness. And there will only be joy. But we don't have to wait for that future hope.

And that hope isn't relegated to the past of remembering Jesus came one day. Jesus still comes today to the most humble of places. Long ago joy filled a feeding trough for animals.

A place marked by humility and want. It's kind of the place where you ended up when the good places were full. Where the guest room, a.k.a. the inn of the house, had no room.

The place where the animals were kept. That's the place where they made room for the joy of the whole earth. A humble feeding trough for animals made room for the joy of the whole earth.

[13:41] And today joy fills the hearts of the humble. And those who recognize that they are in want and in need. Friends, your heart, my heart.

We are all longing for the same thing. We are longing for immeasurable and unbreakable joy to fill it. But to have that, to experience that, you and I, we have to make room for Jesus.

And we have to receive him as king. Making room means to become humble and lowly. Like that manger. So make room for your king.

As the band comes up and we respond. We're going to prepare ourselves to respond. And we're going to prepare ourselves as we get ready to take communion. And those of you who are here and not yet followers of Jesus, before you come to the communion table, you must come to Jesus.

You have to make room for him by receiving him as your savior, but also as your king. And all of us who have already done this can testify to you that when you do this and you make room for him, what comes, what he brings to you is this peace and this love and this joy that is unlike anything you have experienced before.

[15:08] It's like nothing you can manufacture. Man cannot manufacture such a thing by his will or by his desire. Make room for Jesus in your heart today.

There's going to be a prayer on the screen for you to pray. And if you're already a follower of Jesus, we are coming to the communion table. And Jesus is saying to us in this moment, I have made room for you here at my table.

There is enough here for you. My sacrifice for you. This is a table of joy. This is a table of feasting and thanksgiving in our savior who died for us.

And it is a reminder that this king who died for us is a king right now who is ruling and reigning over us in heaven and will come one day and bring the fullness of his kingdom.

But just as he was born unto us, just as he was called Emmanuel, God with us, when he arrived so long ago, his presence is with us right now.

[16:19] He is the king who abides. He is the king who counsels. He is the king who reigns and rules. He is the king who commands and loves his people. And so we get to enjoy that today.

We get to enjoy our king's presence today in us and among us and respond to him as we anticipate his return, where his joy will be fully realized and everything sinful, everything sad, and everything sorrowful will be no more.

There will only be the fullness of joy. Pray with me. As we respond to you, Jesus, and reflect on the fact that joy is something that we desire, it's something that we experience in part, but the promise is that you are fullness of joy.

Lord, may that be born in us today who have yet to receive you as king.

Lord, today as we come to you as those who believe in you, may we receive that joy once again. I think of David in his psalm where he says, restore to me, not my salvation, restore to me the joy of my salvation.

[17:51] There is joy in knowing you. There is joy in your salvation, unspeakable and full of glory. Let us taste and see and know that joy today.

Come to us, draw near to us today, Lord God. Lord, I ask you to bless this time of communion, this time of coming to you, your body broken for us and your blood shed for us.

Amen.