

**The Star – A Journey to Joy**  
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We are in a sermon series entitled The Star: A Journey to Christmas. So far, we've looked at the Journey to Hope, Peace and Love.

Today I am speaking on A Journey to Joy. It's my goal that after this short sermon - you will leave here understanding and experiencing the joy of the Lord!

In the Bible story of the birth of Christ – many people made long journeys. Mary and Joseph journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The wise men made a long journey from the East. But the longest journey of all was made by Jesus! He made the journey all the way from heaven to earth!

He left a throne where He was surrounded by angels to come to a manger where He was surrounded by animals. He left heaven with its streets of gold to come to earth with its dusty streets. He left heaven where there is no pain and no tears to become a man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

Why did the King of Kings and Lord of Lords have to become a baby? Jesus did it to fulfill the will of His Father. He did it to purchase our salvation. But did you know that He did it for joy? Hebrews 12:2-3 says:

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

What was the joy set before Him? Isaiah 53:10-11 tells us:

*It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed (spiritual offspring), He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.*

As we learned last week, Jesus came to earth to save us from our sins and to be God with us. And one day, Jude 24-25 tells us that Jesus will have the great joy of presenting us to our heavenly Father:

*To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*

The birth of Christ is about joy! The death and resurrection of Christ are about joy! And that joy will be complete for Him and for us when we are all together in heaven forever!

Christmas is all about joy! We find that in Luke 2:10-12 where an angel told some shepherds:

*"Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."*

The angel told the shepherds about good news of great joy. And they said that this good news of great joy is for all people!

It doesn't matter who you are, where you're from, where you've been or what you've done – Christmas is good news of great joy for you!  
Whoever you are, the good news is that God loves you.  
Wherever you are, God sent His only Son for you.  
Whatever you're going through, Jesus can get you through.  
However you're feeling, Christmas is a time to rejoice in the Lord.

Matthew 2:10 says that when the wise men saw the star:

*When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.*

The Greek word translated "great joy" is "mega" which means "big, huge, exceedingly great." Jesus came to earth to give us mega joy!

I would venture to say that most people would not say their lives are characterized by mega joy. They are living way below the joy that Jesus came to earth to give us. Why is that? Because they look for joy everywhere except for where it's really found.

They look for it in power and don't find it.

They look for it in drugs and alcohol and don't find it.

They look for it in money and don't find it.

Americans will spend over a trillion dollars on the holidays this year.

Yet that cannot buy joy!

People with no joy will try to find a substitute. That's why we have so many people addicted to drugs and alcohol. But where is real joy found? The answer is simple: in Christ alone. Joy comes from faith in God. Joy is a result of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Isaiah 12:2-3 says:

*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

In other words, salvation leads to joy. Christians should be the most joyful people on earth. Yet, many people think of Christians as miserable people who never have any fun. Why do they think that? Because many Christians *ARE* miserable.

Unfortunately, many Christians have given others a wrong view of Jesus. Now I know Jesus wept and He was a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief – but that’s not the only emotions He expressed. Jesus laughed and had fun! In fact, the Bible says that Jesus was the most joyful person ever. Listen to what Hebrews 1:9 says about Jesus:

*God has anointed You, pouring out the oil of joy on You more than on anyone else.*

Jesus had more joy and gladness than anyone who ever lived. Too many people have a wrong view of Jesus and the misconception that being a Christian condemns you to a life full of rules and regulations whose number one priority is to make you miserable. What a lie! Jesus preached the kingdom of God and Romans 14:17 says:

*The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

When you read the story of Christ you find Him bringing joy to people.  
 He brought joy when He healed people.  
 He brought joy when He set people free.  
 He brought joy when He taught people the truth.  
 And guess what? Jesus is still bringing joy into the lives of people today.  
 Wherever the kingdom of God is manifest – there is joy!

Jesus came to bring joy to your world! That’s not to say you will never have any problems or pain. We tend to believe that joy comes when problems and pain are removed. But the amazing thing about joy is that we can experience the joy of the Lord in the midst of problems and pain.

The fact that we don’t shows that we are living way below the joy that Jesus came to earth to give us. Why is that? I think it’s because most of us confuse joy and happiness.

How do you define happiness? Research shows that most people believe happiness comes from finding a mate, having children, raising a family, having a good job, paying the bills, financial security, and good health.

What about you? What was the happiest day of your life?

I can think of many happy days – birthdays, Christmas, getting saved, meeting Deb, getting married, having our children, our children moving out, having our grandchildren, starting Grace Fellowship Church.

All of our lives are filled with days of happiness, days of sadness and days that are just plain average. But amid all the circumstances, all the ups and downs, God wants to give us joy that goes beyond the ups and downs.

Sure, we'll have hard times in our lives, but that doesn't mean that we can't have joy anyway. We can – but having joy requires having faith in God. Romans 15:13 says:

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Joy comes AS we trust in God.  
 Joy is a product of faith, not circumstances.  
 Joy is more about what you believe than what you achieve.

We've got to understand the difference between happiness and joy. The word happy has the same root word – hap – as the word happen. So – get this - this means happiness is based on what happens to you.

If something good happens, you're happy.  
 If something bad happens, you're unhappy.  
 If you get a job, you're happy. If you lose a job, you're unhappy.  
 If you get a raise, you're happy. If you don't get a raise, you're unhappy.  
 If things happen the way we want them to happen, then we are happy.  
 But if they do not happen the way we want, we are unhappy.

Happiness is based on what happens. BUT - let me clue you in on a secret:  
 happiness is not enough to get through life.  
 You need something greater than happiness.  
 You need something not based on what does or doesn't happen.  
 That something more is joy.

So, don't mistake happiness for joy. It's easy to do that. But they are different. The Bible speaks much more about joy than happiness. In fact, the Bible mentions "joy" or "rejoicing" over 400 times. But it only mentions "happiness" 30 times.

The Bible gives a much greater emphasis to joy. Why?  
 Because happiness depends upon what happens to you. Joy does not.  
 Happiness depends upon circumstances. Joy does not.  
 Happiness comes and goes. Joy does not.  
 Happiness is based on what happens outside of us.  
 But joy comes from inside.

Joy is much more than happiness, which based on circumstances. Joy is something we can have regardless of circumstances.

There are two main biblical meanings of joy. One is “rejoicing with a shout of gladness.” The other is “calm delight.” So, in the Bible you will find joyful people laughing, leaping, shouting, singing, dancing and celebrating. You will also find them full of a calm delight, even in tough times. Habakkuk 3:17-19 says:

*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights.*

You see – joy is a choice. Just like being miserable is a choice. Have you noticed how different people go through the same circumstances, yet respond very differently?

Some people are overcome by circumstances.

Others choose to overcome their circumstances.

Some let happenings determine their happiness or lack thereof.

Others choose to rejoice in the Lord. They choose joy.

And when you choose joy – when you choose to rejoice in the Lord - He enables you to walk over those high places – the tough terrain.

Sometimes God moves mountains; sometimes He gives you the ability to walk over your mountains – to walk through your fire.

And that ability comes from joy! I get that from Nehemiah 8:10 –

*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*

If you’ve got joy, you’ve got strength. No joy, no strength. Jesus came to earth to give us mega joy – which gives us mega strength. That strength will enable you to walk right over your tough times. But we must choose joy in the midst of our circumstances.

We all go through times in our lives when we are facing some very difficult situations. It could be a financial crisis, a loss of a loved one, a loss of a job, a failed marriage; but we can still have joy. James 1:2-4 says:

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

Really? Facing trouble is an opportunity for great joy? YES!

This is not about slapping on a fake smile and acting like you’re happy.

This is about taking the broader view that God works all things out for our good and having the joy of knowing I’m going to come through this better and stronger than I was before!

I looked up the meaning of the original Greek word translated “count” and it is a leadership word meaning “to command with authority.” The word “trials” means adversity. So, the Bible says to command with authority – joy – when we face adversity. Now there is a place for resisting the enemy, but the Bible tells us to command ourselves to be joyful even in the midst of trials.

You will start having joy when you quit being a victim of circumstances and you start commanding joy in your life!

When you are in a tough time – command joy!

When you are in a good time – command joy!

When your circumstances do not result in happiness – command joy!

We must get back to the place where we celebrate Jesus regardless of our circumstances or problems. If you are on a journey to joy in your life, you will find it in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

As the words to Joy to the World say: “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare Him room.”

Jesus came to bring joy to your world! You will find it when you make room for Him in your life. The more room you make for God in your life – the more joy you will have!

Make room for Jesus in your world and Jesus will bring joy to your world!  
The joy of the Lord is not something we DO, it’s something we receive.  
Jesus said in John 16:24 –

*Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

You will find joy when you ask Jesus for joy.

You will find joy when you trust in God.

The journey to joy is found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

A personal relationship with God begins by receiving the best gift of Christmas - Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Have you ever done that? If not, do it now!