

**Finding Joy in Our Pain and Discouragement**  
**Pastor Deborah Oakley - GFC – 12-11-2022**

Christmas is all about joy! We find that in Luke 2:10-11 where an angel told some shepherds:

*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

The angel came to bring good news of great joy 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!

We are in a sermon series called Rediscover Christmas – Good News in Troubling Times. So far we've preached on Finding Hope in our Uncertainties and Finding Peace in our Struggles. Today I'm preaching on Finding Joy in our Pain and Discouragement.

I would venture to say that most people would not say their lives are characterized by mega joy. Why is that? Because they look for joy everywhere except for where it's really found.

People with no joy will try to find a substitute. That's why we have so many people addicted to drugs and alcohol. And Americans will spend over a trillion dollars on the holidays this year. Yet that cannot buy joy!

But where is real joy found? The answer is simple: in Christ alone. 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 God 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. 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 is there is joy! Jesus came to bring joy to your world!

However, this does not mean that we won't have some pain and discouragement in life. 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. We see that in the Christmas story in two mothers who found joy in painful times. Luke 1:5-7 says:

*In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.*

This short paragraph would have spoken volumes of information to Luke's original audience. First, we see that Israel was under the control of a harsh Roman king. That created circumstances that were painful and discouraging to all the Jewish people.

Then we see that Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous, blameless, and faithful. But they were old and had never been able to have children. That was very painful and discouraging to them because having children was a big deal in that culture. Not having children was a source of pain and shame. It aroused suspicion in people who believed barrenness was caused by sin in your life. But the Bible says they were righteous and blameless. That means that not all bad things that happen are a result of sin!

In the midst of this pain, the angel Gabriel suddenly shows up and tells Zechariah that his wife is going to have a son who will prepare the way for the coming Messiah. Zechariah did not believe it and the angel told him that consequently, he would be unable to speak until the baby was born.

It seems Elizabeth was quicker to believe the news, and when she became pregnant, she said in Luke 1:25

*The Lord has done this for me.... In these days He has shown His favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.*

Notice she mentions that she was a disgrace in the eyes of people. But she found grace in God!

Meanwhile, in Galilee, when Elizabeth was six months pregnant, Gabriel makes another earthly appearance, this time to Mary. And he's delivering the most miraculous pregnancy announcement of all. A virgin will conceive and give birth to the Messiah!

Mary received the news gracefully and willingly, but at some point, early on, Mary must have known that her challenges and disgrace were just about to begin. The scorn and shame she would face—and her family and her fiancé as well—would be tremendous when it became obvious she was pregnant and unmarried. How do you make people believe the baby in your womb is God's Son? Even Joseph couldn't believe this news at first and he planned to break off their engagement.

Mary's journey would not be an easy one. It would be very painful. Maybe that's why Luke 1:39 tells us,

*Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea.*

The angel told Mary about her relative Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy. I'm sure she thought, "If anyone will understand, it has to be Elizabeth." If so, she was right - Because this is where the joy erupts!! Against the backdrop of discouragement, disgrace, grief, and shame, the joy comes bursting through for these two mothers-to-be. Luke 1:41-45 tells us,

*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!*

What a relief this must have been to Mary. She didn't have to explain herself. She didn't have to worry anymore about being understood. All she had to do was say hello, and Elizabeth knew. Even her developing baby knew and leaped within her. This was the affirmation and encouragement Mary needed.

Her joy came bursting through as well, and she sang and praised and thanked God. Listen to what is called Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1:46-50

*My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.*  
This is a beautiful passage of Scripture.

On one level it's a celebration during miraculous events. But on another level, it's two expectant mothers sharing a deep understanding and deep joy - no matter what had happened before - no matter what will come in the future.

There is much we can take away from this story, but I'd like to focus on three points that we can apply to our own experience with joy.

### **1- Joy does not depend on circumstances like happiness does**

Mary and Elizabeth found great joy in circumstances that were not happy. But most of us are living way below the joy that Jesus came to earth to give us 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 Joe, getting married, having our children, our children moving out, having our grandchildren, starting GFC.

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. In fact, the Bible gives a much greater emphasis to joy. Why? Because happiness depends upon what happens to you. Joy does not. Happiness is based on what happens outside of us. But joy comes from inside. Joy is much more than happiness, which is based on circumstances. Joy is something we can have regardless of circumstances.

In fact:

## **2- Joy is our strength!**

Mary rejoiced because the mighty One had done great things for her. Notice that joy and strength go together.

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 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 tread on the high places.*

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 means no strength. We all go through times in our lives when we are facing some very difficult situations. It could be a financial crisis, the loss of a loved one, a loss of a job, a failed marriage; but we can still have joy. James 1:2-4 tells us:

*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! This is about having the joy of knowing I'm going to come through this better and stronger than I was before! For that reason:

### **3- We can Choose Joy!**

Both Mary and Elizabeth chose to rejoice in the Lord. In the Bible - rejoice is the verb form of joy. It's the action of expressing joy and delight.

And if you look a little more closely at the word, you'll notice that it begins with the prefix re-. This prefix means once more, or again, or a return to. So, to rejoice is to return to joy. It is a choice to return to our source of joy; it's a return to Jesus.

You see – joy is a choice. Just like being miserable is a choice. So, we must choose joy and – as James said - *Count it all joy!* All! Everything no matter what!

I looked up the meaning of the original Greek word translated “count” and it means “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!

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?

Jesus is greatest example of joy in the midst of pain.

Why did the King of Kings and Lord of Lords become a baby?

Why did he leave heaven where there is no pain and no tears to become a man of sorrows acquainted with grief?

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 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 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).*

Jesus endured the pain of the cross for the joy of seeing His spiritual offspring. That's us! For the joy of bringing many people to heaven to spend eternity with Him.

Since Jesus came to earth to bring us great joy, let's rediscover Christmas by being like Mary and Elizabeth who embraced joy, no matter what they went through.

Let's remember each day that the Lord is the source of our joy.

Let's choose to continue rejoicing, despite the pain and challenges we are facing.

Let's heed the good news of the angels that brings great joy to all of us: A Savior has been born, our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will carry us through and complete His work in us no matter what.