

2- The Joy of Anticipation
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC - 12/3/23

We are continuing our Christmas series called Behold A Savior Is Born. Last week I spoke on The Promised Hope. Through the story of Simeon and Anna meeting Jesus, the savior they had hoped for all their lives, we saw that they clung to the promise of God with hope, even though it took such a long time to arrive.

That's because their hope was based on the character and promises of God.

Before we hope FOR something, we need to hope IN Someone! Jesus!

Before we believe FOR something, we need to believe IN Someone. Jesus!

Before we seek FOR something, we need to seek for Someone! Jesus!

Jesus said in John 14:1

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me.

Psalm 42:4-6 says:

My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be: I walked among the crowds of worshipers, leading a great procession to the house of God, singing for joy and giving thanks amid the sound of a great celebration!

Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise Him again—my Savior and my God!

This person had lost their anticipation of being in God's presence and the joy of praise! The remedy was to hope in God and praise Him again.

I'm preaching today on the Joy of Anticipation. Christmas time should fill us with joy as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I remember vividly the anticipation of opening Christmas presents. There was a lot of waiting involved and we constantly begged our parents to let us open just one. But they never let us. We had to wait on their timing. Even so, there was joy in the anticipation – knowing that the waiting would eventually pay off.

And while we are waiting on God, we must wait in hope, wait trusting in His goodness, sovereignty and promises, and wait in joy.

Most of the people who were waiting for Jesus to be born were marked by joy. You would think it would be despair after hundreds of years of anticipation. However, just knowing what the arrival of Jesus would mean for them and others filled them with excitement. That's because:

1 – JOY CAN BE FOUND IN WHAT WILL BE AND NOT IN JUST WHAT IS

The Christmas story tells us about a woman named Elizabeth who was pregnant under miraculous circumstances. Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary went to visit Elizabeth while they were both pregnant. It is during their interaction that we see joy in a unique way. Luke 1:39-45 says:

Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 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. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what He said."

When Mary arrived in Elizabeth's home, the baby inside of Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. The text seems to tell us that the reason for Elizabeth and her baby's (John The Baptist) joyful response was that Mary was carrying the Lord Jesus inside of her womb. Just the presence of Jesus being close had a powerful effect on everyone who was present in the home.

That's why we put so much emphasis on the manifest presence of God in our church services and in our lives. When Jesus shows up things happen!

People are saved and filled with the Spirit!

People are healed and set free!

People are filled with joy and anticipation!

Elizabeth praised Mary for her belief in God and her willingness to submit to the plan of God that would be birthed through her. I want you to think about this: at this time, Jesus was an unborn baby in the womb! They had obviously not seen Him do anything yet. What were they so excited about?

Perhaps we can learn something here. What if we can experience joy in our lives today, not because of how things are now, but because of what can be in the future by the intervention of God? Elizabeth and her unborn child were rejoicing in what was going to result from the long-anticipated birth of Christ.

Notice what Elizabeth says to Mary in verse 45, *You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what He said.*

Mary was blessed because she trusted and believed in something that had not yet happened. And you will be blessed if you believe the word of God! You will be blessed if you trust God with your future. Sometimes just anticipating God showing up can be enough to lift our spirits.

In the classic TV show, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown was having trouble getting into the Christmas spirit because of his sad little Christmas tree and the commercialization of the season. So, his friend, Linus said, "Charlie Brown, you're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem."

Unfortunately, some Christians seem to have the same problem as Charlie Brown. We should be celebrating what Jesus' life, death, and resurrection could mean in our lives, rather than anticipating all the things that could possibly go wrong. **We can always find a reason to be down or gloomy if we look for it, but we can also find the joy of God's presence if we look for that!**

Maybe you are still waiting on God to do something in your life. Maybe you are still anticipating an answer to a prayer. Here is the truth - God is not done yet. He is always on the move. Where there is faith, anything is possible with God! And just like Jesus' presence in Mary when she was near Elizabeth brought forth joy, His presence in our life can do the same for us.

2 - GOOD NEWS BRINGS GREAT JOY!

Another set of characters in the story of Christmas is the shepherds. Shepherds were a class of people that were not well thought of in first century Jewish culture. They lived out in the fields day after day watching sheep. They were smelly, dirty, and known to be untrustworthy. Because of that, it is fascinating to me that the message of Jesus' birth came to them first, but it did. Luke 2:8-16 says:

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.

The angel told the shepherds that he brought good news of great joy. In our lives, we can get news that brings us sadness or joy.

Think of the joy you have when you receive the news that you got that job or that promotion you've been waiting for.

Think of the joy you have when you get the news from your doctor that the test shows you have no cancer.

Or the joy you have when you get the news that a baby is on the way.

All of that pales in comparison to the joy the angel of the Lord brought. That great joy was a result of good news. What made the message of the angel such good news?

The Greek word for good news is the word we pronounce evangelize. It means to announce good news – specifically the good news of salvation through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Verse 11 says:

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

The name Christ means anointed One – the Messiah who is the Lord. So, in this one-sentence announcement the angel says that Jesus is the Savior, the Messiah, and the Lord of all.

He is the One they had been waiting on for centuries. The one who would save them from their sins and deliver them from their bondages. What they didn't understand was that this baby was born to die for them.

They expected Him to deliver them from the captivity of the Romans rather than the slavery of their sin. They expected Him to set up a kingdom on earth rather than bring the kingdom of heaven to earth.

They did not understand that the good news meant that Jesus would die on a cross to save us from our sins and to defeat and disarm Satan. But that's the good news that brings great joy!

And the Bible says that this good news is for all people. It was good news to the lowly shepherds and it was good news to the lofty wise men. The fact that this is good news for all people shows that there are not many ways to salvation. There is one way – and it's a narrow way. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14 (NLT)

You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

What's the narrow gate? Jesus said in John 10:9

I am the gate; whoever enters through Me will be saved.

Jesus said in John 14:6

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Do you see a pattern here? **Jesus is the only way of salvation. I know it's popular today to believe there are many ways of salvation, but Jesus said there is only one – and He is the way of salvation.**

There's not a way for Christians and another way for Jews and another way for Muslims and another way for Hindus or Buddhists or any other religion. **You can't get to God by going around Jesus.**

It's always amazing to me that people have a problem with this. Some people seem to think that this is bad news. They think there ought to be many ways to God and they ought to be able to choose their own way or even make their own way. They think it's narrow-minded to believe Jesus is the only way. I don't. Let me illustrate it this way.

Suppose I discovered the cure for cancer. I didn't say *A* cure; I said *THE* cure. It is the only cure and everyone who takes this cure is healed. Would people say I was narrow-minded because there was only one cure? I don't think so.

Now suppose this cure involved getting a shot of medicine. And suppose someone came to me and said, "I want to be cured" and I said, "Sure, let me give you a shot and you'll be healed." And suppose the patient said to me, "Oh, a shot? No way. I hate shots. I'd rather take a pill."

But I respond, "Sorry, this cure does not come in pill form, only a shot." And so they ask for liquid medicine. And then they ask for cream to rub on their skin. My answer remains, "There is one cure and only one cure. If you want to be healed, you must get this shot. Take it or leave it. I urge you to take it."

Do you really believe people would turn this cure down? NO! Do you really believe they would be upset that I discovered THE cure for cancer because they had to take a shot? No!

The whole world would be rejoicing over that cure.

They would not be upset that there was only 1 cure.

They would not care that they would have to take a shot.

They would all get in line to get that shot.

But God has done something infinitely greater than curing cancer.

God has given us the cure for our sin problem.

God has given us the way to escape hell.

God has given us the way to eternal life.

And people have the nerve to say, "I don't like that cure. I want another way. A different way. My own way." And God says, "Jesus is the only way. Take it or leave it. But I urge you to take it."

And when you do believe the good news of salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ, you will find great joy. Literally it means mega joy! 1 Peter 1:8-9 says:

You love Him, though you have not seen Him. And though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Receiving and believing the good news results in salvation and salvation results in joy!

3 – THERE IS JOY ON THE OTHER SIDE

The birth of Jesus was only the beginning of what the Savior came to do. Our celebration at Christmas time only makes sense considering the season of Easter that is to come.

It becomes clear later in the Gospels that Jesus was born into the world so that one day He might die on a cross for our sins. The arrest, trial, and crucifixion would have been horrific. The pain he went through would have been terrible. However, the Bible says that even in the middle of it, Jesus still had joy. Why? Because He knew what was on the other side.

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.

Jesus suffered the pain and humiliation of the cross for the joy that was ahead of Him. What was the joy on the other side of suffering and pain? Part of that was sitting down at the right hand of God in heaven.

But a big cause for His joy was the fact that He made the way for many people to be saved, to become part of His family and to live in heaven with Him forever. 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 will justify many for He will bear their iniquities.

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.

Think about this. Elizabeth and the baby inside her womb celebrated with joy because of the good news that Jesus would save the world. The shepherds were given good news that would cause great joy for all people. Jesus endured the cross and knew that joy was on the other side. One of the reasons we enter the Christmas season with joy is because we know that no matter what we are experiencing now, because of the good news of Jesus, we can look forward to joy in the future.

Sometimes we feel like we must feel joyful to be joyful. The truth is though, that when Jesus was facing the cross, I am sure He did not feel joy. He felt pain and He chose to persevere through difficulty, nonetheless. He endured the pain to enter the promise.

Remember that joy is different than happiness.

Happiness is based on what happens to us.

Joy is based on receiving salvation through Jesus and then knowing that whatever we go through on earth – we will still be with Him in eternity.

This Christmas I want to challenge you to make a conscious effort to celebrate with joy because of what Jesus has done for you. No matter what is going on in your life today, choose joy!

You do that by having faith in the fact that whatever you need, the good news that the answer to that need is Jesus!

God meets all needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus!

Whatever the question – the good news is that Jesus is the answer!

Whatever the problem – the good news is that Jesus has a solution!

That's good news!

To the lost, the good news is that Jesus will save you!

To the sick, the good news is that Jesus will heal you!

To the addicted, the good news is that Jesus will set you free!

To the depressed, the good news is that Jesus will give you joy!

To the anxious, the good news is that Jesus will give you peace!

To the confused, the good news is that Jesus is wisdom!

To the hopeless – the good news is that Jesus will give you hope!

To the grieving – the good news is that Jesus comforts all who mourn!

He gives beauty for ashes and the oil of joy for mourning!

The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

He rebuilds old ruins and the desolation of generations!

That's good news!

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.