

December 22, 2019

“Rejoice! The Lord Is Coming”
Isaiah 35

FCF: Heavy hearts during the holidays

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Lord is coming.
(magnet) His people should rejoice.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

You’ve heard the lyrics “It’s the most wonderful time of the year. It’s the happiest season of all.” The tune is catchy, sung with zeal. But is it true? Is it wonderful and happy for all?

Do a search on the internet for “sad Christmas songs.” “Blue Christmas,” “Christmas (Baby, Please Come Home),” “I’ll Be Home for Christmas,” or “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.” Why are there so many versions of these? And why do new takes of such songs come out each year? Or look at my news feed from the last few weeks - “Nine Apps to Help You Deal with Holiday Stress,” “Five Ways to Defeat Loneliness at Christmas,” and “What Grieving People Wish You Knew at Christmas.” It’s possible to have a heavy heart during the holidays.

And that’s okay. It’s okay. Christmas does not bring the certainty of happiness. It brings the possibility of joy. That’s what Isaiah shows us in our text. And that is a whole lot richer.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Isaiah 35](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Here’s something often missed in the Gospel accounts of the first Christmas. But worth noting. See if you can pick up a theme. The angel to old Zechariah ([READ Luke 1:14-15a](#)). Elizabeth to Mary ([READ Luke 1:41b-45](#)). Mary’s response ([READ Luke 1:46-47](#)). The angel to the shepherds ([READ Luke 2:10-11](#)). And the reaction of the magi ([READ Matthew 2:9-10](#)).

Did you catch it? It’s joy, joy for what was happening and who was coming - the Savior, Christ the Lord. He would be the long awaited Messiah of the Jewish people and a royal figure to whom the nations would be drawn by movements in the heavens. Which was cause for joy.

This is the very One of whom Isaiah spoke 700 years before His arrival. The Lord is coming. His people should rejoice. And this was true not just in anticipation of His first coming but His second. Which has great bearing on us. The Lord is coming. His people should rejoice.

But this raises some questions. On this matter of joy, what does that mean? What is joy? Second, why joy? What makes it possible? And, third, what does it bring? What does joy do?

I. WHAT THIS MEANS

First, what does this mean? We need an explanation of what the Bible means by “joy.”

A) Not Within Our Circumstances

Such joy is not just an emotion felt but a quality even amidst suffering, a thrill of hope in the face of weariness, a well of gladness despite our circumstances - the good, bad, and ugly.

1. The ugly

Even in the ugly. Joy is possible despite conflict, adversity, and deprivation. Even in the ugly.

2. The bad

Even in the bad. True joy is not supplied by the pleasures of sin or the lusts of our flesh.

3. The good

Nor is this joy dependent on the good - our accomplishments and success, the shiny gifts we are able to give or receive, the perfect Pinterest-worthy Hallmark-moment holiday experience.

B) But Outside Our Circumstances

Joy is outside our circumstances. Paul wrote this from prison ([READ Philippians 3:1a](#)).

1. Rooted in Christ

Joy is rooted in Christ. And Christ does not change. He does not change. Which is why Paul could write this to the suffering churches in Thessalonica ([READ 1 Thessalonians 5:16](#)).

2. Supplied by Christ

Joy is rooted in Christ. And supplied by Christ, through His Spirit. Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit, part of our becoming more like Jesus - the most joyful person this world has ever seen.

That's joy - rooted and supplied by Jesus. And it is so much more than merely happiness.

Illustration:

Look back to the first Christmas and consider that cast of characters. Zechariah struck dumb for unbelief. Aged Elizabeth had to wonder who would raise her boy. Mary was an unwed mother in a culture that would have shamed her. What would people say? What would Joseph say? The shepherds were still outcasts. And the magi were in the blast radius of Herod's fury.

None of these had it easy. What then did they have? Joy in the gospel of the kingdom.

Application:

Listen. We really can say, "The Lord desires for us to be joyful." He really does. But we need to know what that means. It's vital we understand what joy actually is. And what it isn't.

All of which is a challenge to us all. Where is your joy? Where it it rooted? On what is it based? Joy in this world is flimsy and fleeting. It has to be in something, someone, outside.

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II. WHY IT IS

Which brings us to our second point. Not just what it is but why it is, moving now from explanation to exploration and finally to Isaiah ([READ Isaiah 35:4b, 10a](#)). God's people rejoice, they come to Zion with joy overflowing, because God has come to us. There's two parts to this.

A) What Is Coming

First, let's take a closer look at what is coming, the great changes that are described.

1. A return from exile

([READ Isaiah 35:1-2](#)) A return from exile. Isaiah is projecting forward to a day when the people will be released from captivity and bondage. It will be another exodus. But the poetic imagery here far exceeds the historical reality. It's hinting and pointing to something greater yet to come.

2. A renewal of all things

A return from exile and a renewal of all things. The natural order - the wilderness transformed into a garden. Societal order - a deliverance of the oppressed and the establishment of justice. Our physical bodies (READ Isaiah 35:5-6a). Our spiritual state (READ Isaiah 35:8-10) - a protected path, assured arrival, safe homecoming, unbroken joy. All cause for joy to the world.

B) *Who Is Coming*

This is what happens when God comes. That's what is coming because of who is coming.

1. Jesus' ministry

Fast forward a few centuries. This is why there was such amazement at Jesus' ministry (READ Matthew 11:1-6). Yes, they were amazed by the power of His miracles. But also the message.

2. Jesus' identity

His ministry said something about His identity. Think of it this way. If Jesus was doing the things Isaiah said would happen when God comes, then who is Jesus? Who is He? Do you see?

This is where joy is found - in the return and renewal, in both what is coming and who.

Application:

That's what Christmas is about. You can even say, "Jesus is the reason for the season" so long as you understand that that is shorthand for something really big. Yes, Christmas can bring gatherings of family and friends, food and festivities, galas and gifts. It can be the occasion for all such things. But those are the outer edges, the parts that are fueled by this joy at its deep core.

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III. WHAT IT BRINGS

So that's what joy is and how it's possible. What does it bring? This moves us from the explanation and exploration to expectation. What are the effects of joy? What are its fruits?

A) *In Us*

Isaiah shows us that there are fruits of joy in our own lives (READ Isaiah 35:3-4a).

1. Connection to the news

Note how this is directly connected to the news of the coming reversal of the curse in vv.1-2.

2. Consequence to our lives

There is a connection to the news and a consequence to our lives. "If this is the case, then that has to follow." (READ Isaiah 35:2b) This is who is coming. Of what then should we be afraid?

B) *Though Us*

So there are these profound effects in us. And then, beyond that, to others through us.

1. Implied here

This is implied here in Isaiah 35. For this is hardly something that can be kept under wraps.

2. Other texts

Other texts make this explicit (READ Isaiah 52:8; 49:13; 25:6-9). This joy flows through us.

Again, all because of what is coming and who. And it becomes beautifully contagious.

Illustration:

My favorite Christmas special is from “The Andy Griffith Show.” It’s Christmas Eve. Andy and Barney are making plans. Aunt Bee will cook. Barney will play Santa. The prisoners will go home. But then old Ben Weaver enters, dragging Sam Muggins. Ben runs a department store, Sam is moonshining, and that’s cutting into business. “*Lock him up, Sheriff,*” Ben demands. Andy is stuck. What will come of Sam’s wife and children? Especially at Christmas?

So Andy has a plan. He “arrests” Sam’s family as accessories to the crime and locks them up together. Old Ben protests but Andy won’t have it. And then a strange thing happens. Ben commits crimes for no apparent reason. He steals a public bench. He tears up a parking ticket. Finally, Andy catches him “disturbing the peace” and notes, “*If I didn’t know better, I’d think you were trying to get yourself thrown in jail.*” “*Why would I do that?*” Ben argues. And then it hits Andy. “*Yeah, Ben. Why would you do that?*” The old man has softened. So Andy “arrests” him but allows him to pack a few things – things that prove to be gifts from his store that are given to everyone back at the courthouse. Christmas had come to old Ben Beaver.

Application:

That can happen with anyone. All we have to do is speak of who Jesus is and what He is doing in our lives. To say what we can to where folks are. And leave the rest up to the Lord.

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CONCLUSION:

Advent is about anticipation. It’s about waiting and longing. Some of us have been using various devotional books over the last few weeks to guide us in our time of reading and prayer. They are usually numbered 1 through 25, giving a sense of getting closer with each passing day.

Or think of Advent calendars. Advent lasts for four Sundays leading up to Christmas, though most Advent calendars start on December 1 and simply mark the next 24 days before Christmas. The tradition is believed to have started in the mid-19th century, when German Protestants made chalk marks on doors or lit candles to count the days leading up to Christmas. The first printed Advent calendar was produced in the early 1900s by a German named Gerald Lang. When Lang was a child, his mother sewed 24 cookies onto the lid of a box and allowed him to eat one of them every day during the Advent period. Lang used this as the model for his own Advent calendar in 1908. Most of these you buy today have lost this. But that’s the history.

The whole idea creates the feel of a countdown. Anticipation builds as with the clock at Mission Control before a launch into space. So much has gone into this. So much is at stake.

All of these things are pointers to the heart of this season - the wonder and need for a Savior. The Lord is coming. Again, the Lord is coming. Think of it. His people should rejoice.

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