Joy

Second in the series, “Christmas Gifts that Won’t Break”

# Scripture: Luke 2:10

# Key Thought: God wants to give us great joy through His Son.

# Intro:

## Today there is a great need for Christian joy

Paul instructed us, “Be joyful always!” (1 Thess. 5:16) But how? We live in a busy anxious age and “joyful” is definitely not one of the adjectives that describes our times.

Tired spirits and bodies, wearied by the bustle of our lives, need to hear again the good news from God, “The joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10).”

Those weary of sin and moral compromise might pray with David,

“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul (Psalm 86:3,4).”

Those weighted down with anxiety and the press of circumstances yearn for the time they can testify as another Scripture writer did,

“When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul (Psalm 94:19).”

## We try to manufacture joy

We organize parties, bring in food, and music. But satisfaction eludes us. We strive for productivity; we immerse ourselves in crowds; we buy more stuff, but we can’t hide the inner lack of joy.

Joy is a pleasure of the soul not of the body, and when we have humored the body we find we are just as far if not farther from joy than we were in the beginning.

Joy may make laughter come easier, but it is not the same as laughter, as the OT wise man said, “Even in laughter the heart may ache (Prov. 14:13).”

Joy often accompanies celebrations, even causes them but it is not the same as celebration either.

## Joy is an inner satisfaction

Joy is an inner satisfaction of the soul that makes us feel blessed and glad in heart. Joy is often a byproduct of something else and it surprises us by its happy presence.

# God intends us to have joy

It’s important to remember that God wants us to have joy.

## Joy surrounds the Christmas story

Think about how joy surrounds the events of the Christmas story. The sense of joy pervades the events of Luke 1 and 2. The feeling of those two chapters is the feeling expressed by the Psalmist;

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.
 Ps 126:3 NIV

Mary uses nearly the same words in her song and you can sense the joy as she sings,

“The Mighty One has done great things for me” (Luke 1:49).

The message of Zechariah is one of joyful expectation of the coming salvation which his son, John would announce.

When the angel messenger appears above the Judean countryside, to announce the birth of Jesus, it is with a message of great joy (Luke 2:10). All this is a hint ahead of time of one of the chief virtues that is to characterize the followers of Jesus, joy.

## Over 400 references to joy/rejoicing in the Bible

Once when I was working on this topic, I asked my computer to print out Bible verses with joy words - joy, joyous, joyful. It found 239 such verses. Then I checked an old-fashioned concordance, the book we used before computers, to find all the references for the word rejoice. There were 191 occurrences. Together that makes over 400 references to joy and rejoicing in God’s Word! There’s a message there for us. I think God is trying to make a point. Joy and rejoicing are critical to what God wants to be happening in the hearts and lives of God’s people.

Here are just three of those “joy” verses. The Psalm writer taught us;

Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart. Ps 97:11 NIV

Jesus encouraged us with his own strong promises about joy.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.
John 15:9-11 NIV

That tells us that Jesus wants to put his own joy in our hearts, and he wants our joy to be complete. Another way to translate that word “complete” would be to say that Jesus wants us to be fully supplied with joy! What an amazing concept.

Sometimes in Paul’s writings we find a pithy statement that gets right at the heart of the matter. In this next short verse. Paul points out how central joy is to the proper practice of Christian faith.

The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Rom 14:17 NIV

So, if our Christianity is missing joy, it is missing one of the three key ingredients that Paul mentions, and something that Jesus intended your life to have and not just a little bit, but in abundance.

## Joy the promise of Luke 2:10

Let’s look directly at the angel announcement when Jesus was born.

### Isaiah linked joy to the Messiah’s coming

The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, had foretold that the Messiah’s coming would be a cause for joy.

In Isaiah 9:3, just before the famous verse about the Wonderful child who would be born, the verse we just sang about, the prophet predicts that God has

 “increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest.” Isa 9:3

Another Isaiah prophecy that we associate with God’s Christmas miracle is in Isaiah 35. No doubt Handel’s Messiah has helped us remember this Messianic prophecy.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Isa 35:5-6 NIV

Not only do these verses mention joy, but earlier in the passage the prophet pictures nature itself as rejoicing because of God’s work in sending his Son to earth.

The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. Isa 35:1-2 NIV

### The angel’s pronouncement

The reason why we often preach this message about joy at Christmas is simple. God made a major announcement promising joy through the work of Jesus when he sent the angels to the fields of Judea to announce the birth of Jesus. Luke records the message to the stunned shepherds.

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Luke 2:10 NIV

##  **So, Christmas time is a natural and important time for us to remember God’s gift of joy.**

## Joy is the 2nd fruit of the Spirit's presence

We can remember also that joy is the fruit of God’s Spirit being present in our lives.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Gal 5:22-23 NIV

# Three reasons people do not have the joy Jesus came to bring

So, if God want us to be joyful and Jesus came to bring us joy, why isn’t everyone joyful? Allow me to venture three reasons for the dread lack of joy, both theological and practical reasons.

## People are not in a right relationship with God and therefore with God’s Spirit.

Isaac Watts stated the Christmas truth well in the carol; “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!”

God's Spirit is a fountain of joy. But if we are not in a good relationship with God, then joy will not flow into our lives. If a person has never opened their heart to God's Spirit, if they have never invited the presence of the Savior into their hearts and lives, then it is no wonder they are missing out on the joy that the angels announced. The joy-giving Spirit of God enters our lives when we give hospitality to Jesus in our hearts, when we believe in what he has done for us and acknowledge our need of Jesus as our own Savior. Then the joy can begin.

But even some Christians seem to be missing out on joy.

 “Joy is one of the central characteristics of the Christian. And yet a lot of Christians know little or nothing of Christian joy-they are under the lash of duty, not under unabashed delight. They are artificial not artesian. They creak in soul . . . . Some not only don’t expect joy; they don’t want it. One grim New Englander had put on his tombstone; ‘He was a Christian without emotion,’ as if one could be a real Christian without emotion! The total person is redeemed and is lighted up in the process of redemption, and because he is lighted up, he sings.”
E. S. Jones in Growing Spiritually p. 135

Perhaps people are missing out on joy because, having begun in faith, they are now quenching the Spirit by disobedience and rebellion. Nothing kills joy in our lives quite like acts contrary to conscience. Such actions are like putting sand in the gears of our lives. They create emotional friction and interfere with our fellowship with God and steal our joy. David experienced this and recorded his experience in Psalm 32. Our sins need not be as egregious as David’s for our joy to ebb away. But can get our joy back in the same way that David did. At first, David says, he tried to ignore his sin, to hide it. But his conscience was heavy, and his joy was gone.

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.
 Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.”
And you forgave the guilt of my sin. Ps 32:3-5 NIV

When he confessed his sin to God, he was forgiven. His burden of guilt was lifted. Then his joy returned, and he could exclaim;

Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart! Ps 32:11NIV

For us also, we cannot expect to have great joy unless we have believed in Jesus as our Savior and are seeking to walk with God with a good conscience.

## We are self-centered and self-focused, expecting the world to cater to us.

One of the great disfavors that we are doing our children and ourselves today is to constantly cater to our desires for something exciting, something fun, something new. It’s like trying to get enough candy. You only want more. You are never satisfied. We end up constantly in search of the next experience, another place to see, a new adventure. It eats up resources and results in people who are bored with everyday life. Video games feed into the same type of psychology. A more subtle danger to mental and spiritual health is this; people come to think that life revolves around them having fun. It is the modern version of self-centeredness, a preoccupation with new and fun experiences. The deception is that people think they will find joy through new adventures. But joy is not the same thing as fun. New sights are not necessarily new joys. Joy is more lasting and deeper than a just the next adventure.

For example, one of the best sources of true joy is helping someone else. As Paul said,

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Gal 5:6

Helping may involve work, even difficult work. It might not be a purely pleasant and fun task, but the sense of knowing that you are helping someone in need brings an inner satisfaction and fulfillment, a joy that makes you glad you did that task.

Example. On Dec. 24, JoAnne and I plan to do a nursing home service at 11 AM at Cherrybrook nursing home. I lead this type of service every other month and JoAnne goes with me whenever she is available. It would be easier to skip on the 24th of December, but I know that if I skip, there will be no Protestant minister there to bring Christmas service for these who are sick, often alone, and away from home. No one appreciates such help more that nursing home residents. Even though it will squeeze our schedule, it’s a joy-filled thing to do. You leave feeling blessed.

Friends, if you are short on joy, one of the best ways to find joy is to help someone else. Put love into practice. And the more face-to-face the helping is, the better it works. Just contributing money to a cause may not add as much joy, even though it is a good thing to do. I felt so spoiled when Carl and Ryan came over yesterday and shoveled some snow for me and helped me get my manger set out. I really appreciated their help. It was work and on a damp day too, but I hope they felt some joy for helping me so much.

## We are not doing life in community.

The third reason we may be short on joy is that we are trying to do life alone. God did not create human beings to do life alone. The more isolated with are, the harder it is to stay joyful. Those of you who have suffered from depression know that nothing is easier to do when you are depressed than to avoid people. But it is not the path of joy. God made us to help each other.

### Nuclear family

In the garden of Eden, God created the family. That is our primary social unit, our family. If we are married, our spouse and children are our first circle of joy. But they are not the only one. Most of us also have a family of origin that we can relate to.

### Extended families

We need to keep in contact with extended families. Often they are great sources of support, encouragement and love. It may take some effort on our part to maintain those connections, but it will usually pay off in increased joyful relationships.

### Church families

Some people don’t have extended families they can relate to for one reason or another. Many Christians find they have closer ties of friendship with people in the family of God where they worship, especially if there are active subgroups of which they are a part. Jesus started his church with a group. God does not intend us to be lone-ranger disciples but to enjoy the encouragement of each other.

### Circles of friendships

Close friends can also be a source of great joy. Blessed is the person who has a good friend, someone to talk to regularly, to confide in, to share activities with. Such relationships take time, but they pay us back with joy.

# Conclusion

*The Christian Man* p 22 “The Man in Room 3330”