



*Guest Speaker – Meghan Henderson
New Day Church
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JOY

Life can be hard; following Jesus is hard; and sometimes, to quote Princess Bride, ‘life is pain’. BUT LIFE IS SO MUCH MORE THAN THAT. Listen to what the angel said who came to announce Jesus’ birth to the shepherds –

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Like I said, following Jesus is hard. But if the gospel was only about taking up our cross, suffering, and martyrdom. . . that angel would have been a liar. Good news, maybe, but great joy?? But fortunately for us, the angel wasn’t lying. We truly have reason for GREAT JOY.

Let me make two things very clear.

First, clinical depression is a very real thing. I am not in any way suggesting that if you just love Jesus you can’t struggle with depression, any more than I would suggest that if you’re a Christian you can’t get cancer. Both are simply untrue. Depression can be a medical issue that may even need medical treatment. That’s not what we’re talking about this morning.

Second, I am NOT saying we don’t have reason to mourn, nor am I saying we shouldn’t. The book of Ecclesiastes says there is a time for everything – including a time to weep and a time to mourn. If you’re going through something right now that makes it time to mourn, please know that that I’m not belittling or invalidating that. Nor am I telling you to “put on a happy face” or “turn that frown upside down” or any other platitude. One of our core values at ND is authenticity, and if it’s time to weep or mourn I wouldn’t have us do anything different.

That said, there is also time for REJOICING! So often we get stuck in the “hard stuff” of life, and forget that there is reason to CELEBRATE. So that’s what this morning is about – remembering. Remembering why we celebrate, remembering why we have joy. Remembering how good our God is.

So let’s jump back to the verse in Luke:

I bring you good news of great joy

Why did the angel say his news was the source of great joy? Well, obviously, Jesus had just been born. But why was that the source of GREAT JOY?? As I see it, there are 3 main reasons.

First, God was answering prayer.

Since the beginning of time, people have cried out to God for help. They begged God to deliver them. They cried out for healing. They asked God for forgiveness. They looked for direction. Jesus was God's answer to each of these prayers.

Ephesians 1:3 says "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Basically, God has in a very real way already met all of our spiritual needs through his son. Our needs for healing, forgiveness, all of those things. Jesus is God's answer to prayer.

Philippians 4:19 says 'my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

So, while God has already met our spiritual needs through his son, we also see that God continues to meet our daily needs as well.

This is so important: we have a God who hears us, and cares enough to respond. That is reason to REJOICE! We can find joy in the fact that we serve the almighty God of all creation, and he still takes time to hear our requests. The one who keeps the universe in motion has time to listen to my bedtime prayers. That's pretty incredible.

I know so many times I've asked God for something and he's done it, andforget rejoicing. . . I don't even NOTICE. It's so easy to forget what I've prayed about - what I've asked God for. Over the years, I've kept a prayer journal. It's really helped in this area for me. I glance back through from time to time and see the various things I've prayed about, and I see so many answered prayers. Being reminded allows me, then, to rejoice in that answered prayer instead of forgetting it.

Let me give you one example. Most of you know that Derek has a new job. Now, I was really thankful when he got it. But a few days later, I was glancing back through my prayer journal and I read this from Dec. 1 - more than 3 months before Derek got the job.

I know you're not a vending machine, where I just insert a little faith & get everything I want. But since I just read Matthew 6 about **asking** you, I'm going to ask: God, can you give Derek a job that he enjoys? One that works better hours, gets home earlier, doesn't work weekends, and makes enough in money and benefits that I can stay home with the baby?

Now I was already thankful for Derek's new job before I read that. But when I was reminded that God had **answered prayer**, I rejoiced. GOD HEARS US. He doesn't give us everything we ask for (thank goodness! What good father would?) but he listens to us and he does answer prayer. That's one source of our joy.

A second reason that the angel's news was a source of such great joy was this: truth.

By sending Jesus, God was reminding the world of so many truths. For example: God hadn't forgotten his people. He keeps his promises. He loves his children. God is merciful and forgiving. The list goes on.

Happiness comes and goes, because it is based in feelings and circumstances. If you think about it, feelings change all the time. Circumstances are different day by day. But joy – the joy that we have through Christ is based in something constant. It's based in TRUTH.

In John 8, Jesus says “if you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Through the truth that is found in Jesus, we experience freedom.

One of the ways truth sets us free is that it releases us from being controlled by our emotions. While we may FEEL worried that God has forgotten us, or afraid that God can't forgive us for the same sin yet again, we can find joy in TRUTH. Truth that, instead of forgetting us, God will never leave us or forsake us. Truth that, no matter what, time and again, if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. The truth can overcome our emotions and anchor us in joy.

I saw the most amazing picture of this last week. I went to a memorial service – a friend's husband had died completely unexpectedly. He was, in her words, the love of her life. You can just imagine all the emotions she was, and is, dealing with. But at his memorial service, I saw the most wonderful thing. I saw her smiling. Not just a forced “I can deal with this” smile, but a real smile that you could see in her eyes. And this is why: in the midst of the emotions of her situation, she was able to find joy in the TRUTH – the truth that her husband really is with Jesus. Of COURSE she's going to deal with all of the emotions tied to what she's going through – knowing the truth doesn't mean we don't go through hard times emotionally. What it does mean is that we have a stronghold to cling to in the midst of our emotions.

I don't know how many of you have read *Experiencing God* – it's, in my opinion, a great study. And it makes an excellent point about being anchored in truth.

When Israel crossed the Jordan River into the promised land, this is what God told Joshua (who was leading the Israelites at that time):

“Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood, and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.” So Joshua called together the 12 men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you ‘what do these stones mean?’, tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

God had the Israelites do this because he knows people, and he knows our habit of forgetting. The authors of *Experiencing God* encourage us to follow the Israelites

example and set up “stones” – or spiritual markers- in our own lives – ways of reminding ourselves of the truth – of who God is or what he’s done in our lives. So while there is this top layer of everything that we’re experiencing in day to day life, - whether a tragedy, a worry, or just everyday “busyness”, creating these spiritual markers can allow us to be anchored to truth beneath it all, which helps create this undercurrent of joy in our lives.

There are a variety of ways to construct spiritual markers in your life. You can keep a journal. You can have a tangible reminder – a hospital bracelet from an illness God healed you from. A rock from a beach on a camping trip where you had a good long talk with God, or a photograph of the good friend God brought along at just the right time in your life. Or anything that works for you. The point is to have something you can look at when you’re feeling down or doubting God that reminds you “our God is GOOD. He is faithful. He is active in MY LIFE. I have reason to rejoice.”

There’s a third reason the news the angel brought that day was a source of joy. Are you ready for this? SALVATION. It’s so simple, but so easy to take for granted. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life!”

We get so used to hearing it that we forget how incredible that is.

God created us so that we could be in a relationship with him, but we rejected him. He loved us, and we spit in his face. That “crime” had to be punished, and the bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. We deserved to die. So many people think, “well, I’m a pretty good person! I deserve to go to heaven.” That may well be the case, and if Hitler was the measuring rod most of us would be in the clear. But GOD is the standard- perfection is the bar. And against that standard, “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” And sin carries the death penalty. God could have given us what we deserved, washed his hands of us, and started over. Instead he sent his only son to die FOR us. To take the punishment that we deserved, and instead of death we get eternal life. All we have to do is believe, and we get to exchange punishment for abundant life! What kind of God does that? That is so awesome. If that doesn’t give us reason to rejoice, I don’t know what does.

Let me show you a video. This man, Mark Zook, was a missionary to the Moke tribe in Papua New Guinea with New Tribes mission. Where we’re going to pick up this video, mark has been living with this tribe for 3 years, learning their language and their culture. He then finally started to tell them the gospel – but he started at the very beginning. He spent multiple hours a day, five days a week, for 2 months telling them the history of creation and God’s relationship with his people.

{movie}

These people GET IT. Joy has taken root in their lives. Let’s let that same joy characterize our lives. Somehow I don’t think that’s going to look like us jumping up and down yelling “ee tow!” all day every day. It won’t even mean a smile on our faces all the time. But my hope for today is that we’ll walk away reminded of the reason for

our joy – a God who hears us and answers prayer, an anchor in truth, and a God who loves us so much he sent his son to die for us.

So here's what we're going to do. I'm going to give you guys a question to think about, then we're going to break into small groups and tell each other what we've come up with. I know this makes some people really nervous. And if you absolutely can't do it, that's fine. I don't want you to be so worried you can't think about the question. But if it just makes you nervous, I'd challenge you to go ahead and do it – speak up. This is a great way for us as a church to choose to rejoice in the Lord. To worship, really. And it can be so encouraging to be reminded that God is working. And not just in my little life, but in Tara's and Pat's and each of our lives. It's a great way to cultivate joy. So here's the question

Think of a specific reason that you personally can have joy. It can be

An answered prayer

A truth God has revealed to you about himself

A story of salvation- yours or someone dear to you

I'm going to make one rule though. It's really easy to pick the "answered prayer" one and say something like "God healed my great aunt's colon cancer." Which is awesome, but rather impersonal. If you choose that one, try to think of something a little more specific to you and your life. So try to include what that answered prayer was specifically important to you or what it showed you about who God is- why it gives you personally reason to rejoice.

Then in a few minutes the band is going to come up and shift our worship from talking about what God's done to singing about who he is.