

Finding Jesus' Joy
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Hebrews 12:1-3

The Christmas Advent theme today is Joy. The candle for this time is pink. The color hits us as a surprise. Instead of royal purple, it is pink. Like a splash of cold water when you wake up in the morning, it stands out and says, "Wake Up!" Something is about to happen.

We do often think of joy at Christmas. We think of the joy of children and family. We think of the joy of songs and decorations, Christmas lights and Christmas trees. Colorful decorations, food, family all of these bring us a heightened sense of joy at Christmas.

Perhaps the theme begins because of the angelic pronouncement to the shepherds in the night singing "Joy to the world, the Savior's born..." – Actually not! That is a hymn. The Angels proclaimed the birth of the Savior and gave glory to God. The shepherds also went sharing the good news to everyone. Their actions display joy. We see joy as well when Simeon and Anna receive Jesus in the temple.

Joy is an important theme in the Christmas story. It is an important aspect of God's nature. Joy is the motivation of God's heart. It is the motivation of Jesus' heart that enabled him to endure the cross. Joy is the nature of Jesus. Is it our nature? Do we only sense joy when good things happen? If we are to be like Jesus we will need to embrace joy in the things we suffer for God's kingdom.

Hebrews 12:1-3 NIV

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

² 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. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

² 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 does it mean, "Joy set before him?" What was the joy that Jesus had? He had a joy in the outcome of the cross. It was a purpose in his heart that enabled him to endure all of the suffering and pain of the crucifixion. Jesus' love for the **outcome** gave a purpose to his heart that held him in God's will even when he suffered. What was that outcome. It was not just the resurrection. The outcome was bringing many sons and daughters into the kingdom of God. Without his suffering, not one would enter the kingdom of God. Yet, because Jesus suffered the cross, he now has a kingdom of people of every nation, language and tribe. The pain was real. The rejection was real. The shame was real. Yet, in his soul, a joy moved him beyond the immediate, to the eternal victory. Jesus had a joy that was set before him.

We want to be like Jesus. If we would be like Jesus we would find the joy of endurance for the kingdom of God. Yes, even endurance of hardships. That is the meaning of verse 1. The arena of witnesses who urge us on is a reference to those in chapter 11. These people of faith endured hardships, losses and death for the coming kingdom of God. They were like Jesus. Hebrews reminds us to be like Jesus and find our joy not by what makes us happy, but by God's eternal purposes.

Joy in suffering for God is a Christ-like nature.

James tells us to consider it pure joy when we face trials for Christ.

James 1:2-3 NIV

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Why joy in the face of trials. He answers it. It has an outcome. The outcome of trials is perseverance. You don't know how much you can endure until you endure it. When I first started riding a road bike, I could only do a few miles. In time, I found joy in riding 70 to 80 miles. Endurance requires steadfast effort over a long period of suffering. It builds faith and character. Yet, how many of us really rejoice at suffering? NO. we usually look for the way out of it.

Peter says we can endure suffering because we have in inner joy for our coming salvation.

1 Peter 1:6-9 NIVO

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

It is the knowledge of salvation – of eternal life with God forever – that enables us to rejoice in suffering trials. As we endure with joy, our faith grows. That faith is of greater value than gold, Peter says. In heaven gold is shiny yet it is thrown on the streets and trampled. God's glory is what fills every heart with joy. It is this salvation that drives us forward with an inexpressible and glorious joy!

Get your Joy on! – It's in the Bible.

It was there at Christmas morning when Jesus was born. Heaven celebrated the good news of his birth. They celebrated because this was God's purpose and plan from the beginning of time.

The word, joy, is not mentioned in the creation account. Yet, God must have taken delight in his creation. It was good. God only does good.

The first mention of joy actually comes as a complaint by Laban, when Jacob snatched his family away. Tricky Laban was out-tricked by the trickster Jacob, and he pulled his family out of Haran and headed for land of his fathers. Laban said he had robbed him of the joy of blessing his departure (Gen. 31:27). Ha! He would never let him leave.

The next mention of joy is found in Leviticus – that book no one likes to read. But it describes an incredible event in Leviticus chapter 9, Aaron is installed as the first High Priest. They make the very first offerings before

God exactly as God prescribed them through Moses. When they finished doing everything God commanded, it says:

Leviticus 9:24 NIVO

²⁴ Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.

I don't know how God gets fire to come down or fall from the sky. In this case, the fire comes directly from the ark of the covenant. It flies out of the holy of holies, out of the tabernacle and lands on the altar outside, and it consumes the offerings. All of them. And the people are said to be filled with joy! Wow! What a service! The Pentecostals are rejoicing and the Baptists are murmuring! Bam! God shows up! Joy! Can you imagine God doing that today?

Joy is a frequent theme in the Psalms of David. He instructed the worship leaders to sing:

1 Chronicles 16:31-33 NIVO

³¹ Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!"

³² Let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them!

³³ Then the trees of the forest will sing, they will sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.

In the Psalms, joy occurs in 53 verses.

- The heart finds joy in God's presence
- It finds joy in God's salvation
- It finds joy in repentance
- It finds joy in God's Word
- God has joy in his works
- We are instructed to sing for joy

Esther chapters 8-9 describe the joy of the Jews with king Xerxes edict. They can arm and protect themselves from anyone who seeks to harm them. Haman had tried to get all of the Jews killed. He set up a pole to impale Mordecai. But Esther informed Xerxes of the false plot and Xerxes had

Haman impaled on his own pole. His wealth was given to Esther's family, and the Jews were allowed protection. What is fun at the end of the story, people of other nations suddenly wanted to become Jews. They wanted protection too!

Find Joy in **salvation in Jesus.**

This joy is a joy of salvation. Salvation as a term initially referred to being saved from something bad, like enemies, death or disease. So, the Jews in Esther's story celebrate being saved from their enemies. We often think of salvation as going to heaven when we die. What it really is – is being saved from the perdition of destruction brought on by sin. Salvation is being snatched from the pit of hell's flames by a merciful God! Jesus made that possible. It was the outcome of the cross!

Isaiah reminds us of the joy of salvation.

Isaiah 12:3-4 NIVO

³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

⁴ In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.

Drawing water from the well of salvation reminds me of Jesus' words to the woman at the well (John 4) when he spoke of the life of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believer.

John 4:14 NIVO

The water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

God is present! And there should be joy! With joy we draw from the water of life of the Spirit of Life that has come to us in salvation!

The Spirit of Life has come because He is the Spirit of the Son who sent him. That son when he arrived caused joy to spring up. When Mary having conceived went to visit her aunt Elizabeth, who was now 6 month carrying John the Baptist, as she came near to Elizabeth, John leaped for joy at the coming of Jesus!

Isn't that what joy looks like? Jumping up and down at good news? Pentecostals get that better than Baptists and Presbyterians, and Lutherans and Episcopalians.

After Lori and I had tried for years to have children, going to specialists, and getting nowhere, and then it ended in surgery that said no more! Then one day, I received a phone call. We had a baby to adopt. I literally jumped up and down with the good news. God had heard our cry.

And Elizabeth responded to Mary that her baby, John, was jumping up and down because Jesus, the Messiah, had come. And when Jesus was born, the angels came out to celebrate. They went to shepherds in the fields in Bethlehem and told them of good news of great joy!

Luke 2:10-11 NIVO

¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Yes! Christmas is supposed to be about Joy! We are celebrating the birth of the Savior. It's okay to have a party! God's salvation has come. Jesus has brought us salvation from sin's destruction. He sent His Holy Spirit to us so he may claim us for all eternity. So rejoice!

Can you find **Christ's Joy**?

Yet, remember, this joy abides even in the suffering. Remember, we started with the joy set before Jesus who endured the cross to bring us this salvation. In John 16:19-23, Jesus prepares the disciples for his death on the cross. He speaks of the joy a mother has that enables her to endure the pain of childbirth. The joy of bringing a child into the world enables her to endure.

John 16:21 NIVO

When her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.

The pain of the cross for Jesus and the disciples would be hard. Yet, they would forget the pain when they see the new life that has come into the kingdom of God. So, Jesus with the joy set before him, endured the cross, despised its shame, and rejoiced to bring many sons and daughters into the glorious kingdom of God. That glory that will last forever and ever outshines the pain of the cross.

So, if you must suffer for the kingdom of God. Rejoice! The outcome is better than the loss. If you can, you have found Christ's joy.

Jude 1:24-25 NIVO

²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--

**²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!
Amen.**