

The Gift of Joy - Romans 5:1-11
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."

Blaise Pascal

If there is one word that stands out at Christmas it's the word "Joy". Its everywhere right now. On T-shirts, in lights, throughout our Christmas songs as we "repeat the sounding joy." The Advent and Christmas season seem to come with a sort of promise to fulfill the longings in our hearts to be happy and joyful. Of course many believe that the Grinch and Ebenezer Scrooge had it right. "Bah humbug!" This sort of happiness is an elusive dream promised in some kind of pixy dust but never authentically experienced.

But is happiness even a promise for us in the Bible. Is Pascal correct? And if so, should we try to be happy? If you are religious you might find the answer to this question interesting. Sometimes in church it looks like the people there have determined to be miserable for God. They look like they have been sucking green persimmons and sing quiet for no one to hear (C'mon Elf fans, you know). We even find creative ways to spiritualize it, saying that the word joy is different from happiness. Now, a little clarity here, happiness as it is defined by the world is a bit different from joy. But the truth is that joy is an emotion of jubilation, of wonder, well, of happiness. But true joy is not circumstantial and whimsical, it is deep and lasting happiness and well being rooted in our knowing God and experiencing His grace and presence.

So get this, and this is important. God actually desires that you be happy, be joyful, be experiencing authentic feelings of wonder and delight. Our problem is not in the desire to be happy, it is in the destination we pursue for those desires. God placed the longing for happiness and joy in our souls, but he placed it there so we might realize that the only place these longings find their fulfillment are in Him. The Oprah vision for happiness is that we will be happy when we reject any molds, find our own path, determine what makes me happy and pursue it. Sadly, the Scriptures are a continual reminder that this path to happiness actually ends us in the ditch of despair. The created things we believe will bring us happiness turn to dust in our hands and ash in our mouths. The gifts we will open on Christmas morning, which we believe will make us happy will end up in a corner in a few short weeks, and at some point will end up being thrown in a dumpster. Furthermore, when we seek happiness within the self what we will find there is a sinful person who cannot bear the weight of their own search. The puddle of happiness or joy inside the human soul is shallow and unfulfilling in the end.

So if our problem is not in the desire to be happy, how can we experience authentic joy. This is where the word all around us can be helpful. For the believer in Jesus, authentic joy begins when we see our own sinfulness and brokenness and therefore see the wonder of grace. As a result, our eyes are lifted off ourselves and we see the glory and majesty of our God, drinking deeply from the infinite reservoir of glory. This is the source of true joy. We were created to enjoy God. We are to glorify him, yes! But we glorify Him most when we enjoy God, enjoy His presence, enjoy his glory, enjoy His grace.

The pursuit of happiness, even our first document as Americans makes the promise.

Jesus was born into this dumpster fire of the human pursuit for happiness, and into the night angels announced “Good tidings of great joy for all people.” Yet in an amazing irony, the people in the story found their joy by looking into a manger-cradle and seeing infinite glory within. In the end, it is only joy found in knowing God and experiencing His glory that will give us the hope to rejoice in our suffering, to sing from the pits of darkness, and to joyfully accept the plundering of our goods in wait for a better promise (Hebrews 10:34).

So this week we light the joy candle, because the birth of Jesus offers us the promise of what our hearts deeply seek. True and lasting happiness, joy, found only in Jesus.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Matthew 10	Matthew 11	Matthew 12	Matthew 13	Matthew 14	Matthew 15	Matthew 16

Reading from this past week: Romans 5:1-11

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Romans 5:1-11

Family Worship

Song - *Hallelujah, Christ is Born*

<https://youtu.be/IOQ5n2JQ0pM>

Gospel Project

Unit: In Exile

Story: Daniel was faithful

Big Picture Question: Where is God?

Answer: God is in all places at all times and is always with His people.

Scripture: Daniel 1

New City Catechism

Question #50: What does Christ's resurrection mean for us?

Answer: Christ triumphed over sin and death so that all who trust in him are raised to new life in this world and to everlasting life in the world to come.

Verse: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

Scripture

Romans 5:1-11

- Do you want to be happy? What in life brings you the most joy?
- Read Psalm 16:11 together. Where does the Psalmist claim is the source of true joy?
- What are the reasons or opportunities for our rejoicing according to Romans 5?
- How is Christian joy different from the happiness sought by the world? How can people experience this joy in life?

Prayer

*This is the third week of Advent. If you have a family advent wreath, light the third candle and give thanks for how Jesus gives us joy and happiness in life.

*Pray for our mission partners at the International Mission Board and the missionaries sent around the world taking the Gospel to people who have never heard of Jesus or Christmas.