



## Unwrapping Advent Joy

Luke 1:46-80

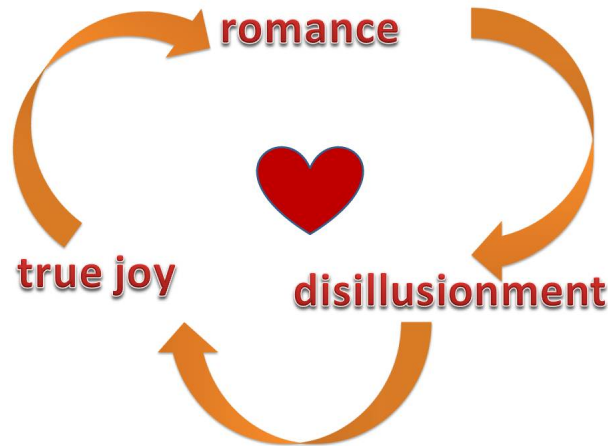
### I. INTRO

- A. What percentage of your life is spent being genuinely joyful? Would you like to increase that percentage?
- B. Please turn to Luke 1. Today we are going to look at a larger portion of Scripture today—34 verses—in our endeavor to unwrap Advent Joy. As you're finding your way there, let me provide some context:
  1. It's important to note that the events that Luke is writing about are coming on the heels of Israel not having heard anything from God in 400 years. God had been absolutely silent! There was **no inspired prophet, priest, or king** who spoke to the people on behalf of God. For perspective, that's 156 years longer than the USA has existed.
  2. In our passage for today, we'll be looking at two "songs" as we search for some Advent Joy—one by Mary and one by Zacharias...
    - a. In **vs. 46-55** are what scholars have termed *The Magnificat*, which is Mary's Joyful Song—and just so you know, it's not like watching *The Music Man*, or *Hairspray*, or *Hamilton* where the characters regularly breakout into song. The descriptor "song" is probably an expression.
      - 1) Additional ways to describe it are a joy-filled psalm, poem, prophesy, or prayer of responsive adoration and worship.
      - 2) ***Magnificat* is the Latin word for *magnifies*, or *exalts* in v. 46 as Mary begins her song with: "My soul magnifies the Lord..."** –...
    - b. In **vs. 56-66** see the joy filled Birth of John the Baptist.
      - 1) John's parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth are a godly and elderly couple, both of priestly lineage. They had been barren, and this barrenness has been a source of deep sadness for them. (Like Abraham/Sarah; Naomi/Ruth)

- 2) Zacharias has been struck mute for all of Elizabeth's pregnancy because he doubted the angel Gabriel's promise to him of a son. (Some legit theologians think that Zacharias was struck **deaf and mute** because of v. 20: "*you shall be silent and unable to speak.*")
- c. And then in **vs. 67-80** we have Zacharias' song, *The Benedictus*, which is derived from the Latin word "Blessed."
  - 1) We'll see in v. 68, the first words out of Zacharias' mouth are, when his tongue is loosened and, possibly, when his hearing is restored, are: "***Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.***"
  - 2) And you may have already thought of this, but "*Benedictus*" is the same word we get our English word "benediction" from.
- C. With that as our introduction, please turn to Luke 1:46...

## II. BODY

- A. I find it interesting that a teenager and an old man sing (or proclaim) these two songs. After 400-years of silence God's people begin to hear sounds of a holy hope—and we hear the JOY and holy expectation in these songs.
- B. Joy can be difficult to pin down and define... (I tend to harp on this...)
  1. One way to narrow it down is to distinguish JOY from happiness.
    - a. Happiness depends on "happenings." It comes from the same root word "happenstance," which is circumstantial.
    - b. So, from that alone, we begin to understand that *happiness* as external while JOY is internal.
  2. Definition: "**Joy is not happiness so much as gladness; it is the ecstasy of eternity in a soul that has made peace with God and is ready to do His will.**" –Unknown
  3. I have found that JOY will **often follow** a pattern and that almost all relationships and life undertakings will follow. This pattern can be identified in three phases:



- a. **Romance** -- Our idealistic perceptions, expectations, and plans.
  - b. **Disillusionment** – We think disillusionment is a bad thing but it's not—it's actually a very good thing. Think about it...to have an illusion is to have a false idea, right?
    - 1) So, to be dis-illusioned is to have our (actual) current reality break in upon us. To move toward JOY, it's essential that we embrace our current reality.
    - 2) Our current culture offers SO many medicating alternatives... from binge-watching a variety of streaming services (including porn), to over-playing video games, to alcohol and narcotics abuse—even “healthy” activities can be sources of medicating our disillusionment that keep us from embracing our current reality.
  - c. We experience **JOY** when we embrace our current reality and begin to proactively work through our disillusionment.
4. **\*\*There is a story about a rabbi who told his student that if they study the Torah, it will put Scripture on their hearts. One of the students asked, "Why on our hearts instead of in our hearts?" The rabbi answered, "Only God can put Scripture inside. But reading sacred text can put it on your heart, and then when your heart breaks, the holy words will fall inside.<sup>1</sup>**
- C. As I read and studied these two songs, I found myself looking for deeper insights from Mary and Zacharias into how to make deposits of JOY into my

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Lamott, *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*: 73.

heart and soul. I'd like to spend the rest of my time making **two additional points...**

1. We sense Mary's JOY right out of the gate when she begins her song with the words: *"My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior"* (vs. 46-47). As her song continues, I found two words that motivated me to consider more deeply the source of Mary's JOY: **humility** and **fear**. Let's take a look...
  - a. Humility – V. 48 *"For He has had regard for the humble state of His servant."* [this is the difference between Mary and Zacharias]
    - 1) We are just coming off a study of the Beatitudes, which are contained in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5-7). And we identified them, at some point, as **the unlikely route to JOY**.
      - a) What we found in the Beatitudes was that as we were willing to own our *spiritual poverty*, that God would take us on a journey through *mourning*, then *meekness* (or, humble learner), then a *hunger for more of God*, then He fills us with *mercy*, and then begins to *purify of heart*, which empowers us toward becoming *peacemakers* (instead of peacekeepers). It can seem so counterintuitive...
      - b) We also found out that when we live this way that *persecution* becomes normative. (We also discovered from the life of Jesus that most difficult *persecution* comes from religious people.)
    - 2) Joy grows and deepens in our lives as we walk this road less travelled that begins with humility, which includes owning our own issues.
  - b. The second word **is a** phrase found in v. 50: *"And [God's] mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him."*
    - 1) A healthy and holy fear of God will **feed** our JOY. What the Bible means by *fear* and what we tend to think *fear* means can be two very different ideas. (Oprah...)
    - 2) There are many passages that speak to a healthy and holy fear:
      - a) Ps 19:9 - *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever...*
      - b) Ps 111:10 - *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*

- c) Pro 8:13 begins to define the fear of the Lord saying, *The fear of the LORD is to hate evil, pride, and arrogance...*
- 3) These vs. throw a wrench into the idea that the fear of God is disturbing, bad, or negative.
  - a) The biblical word *fear* contains the idea of **humility, awe, amazement**—even **worship**.
  - b) Healthy and holy biblical fear of God requires us to live in the tension of boldness in (i) **knowing that God loves us** AND at the same time seeing and acknowledging our own selfish condition – (ii) **knowing that I am a sinner saved by grace**.
  - c) These two perspectives are to **grow together** in the Christian life. Theologians call this **living in the gospel tension** – and the tension produces a holy vitality and joy.
  - d) **\*\*Here’s how this gospel tension works: I am sinful enough that God had to die for me – and at the same time I am so loved that Jesus was willing to die for me.**
  - e) When we consider the word FEAR, I would suggest that we view the fear of God as wonder-filled and bold humility that will open the door to joy.
2. In Zacharias’ Song I will just mention one important take-away: **Zacharias had forward-looking faith that led to expanding his capacity for joy**.
  - a. **\*\*I would like for us to consider that Zacharias being struck mute (and maybe deaf) by the angel Gabriel was more of a gift than a punishment.**
    - 1) During those 9-months he was forced to be quiet, to think deeply, and ponder God and the Scriptures.
    - 2) To communicate with his wife and others he needed to listen deeply and learn how to communicate his love and affection without words. (And if he was deaf too, he would need to look into the eyes and pay close attention to his loved ones.)
  - b. As a result of this forced “quiet time” Zacharias emerged with a **new perspective and attitude**. This teaches us how important silence and reflection are. (Here’s where I struggle...maybe you can relate...)
  - c. Notice how his song contains a **past tense** perspective...

- 1) V. 68 – *He has visited us...*
  - 2) V. 69 – *He has raised up [protection]..*
  - 3) V. 74 – *To grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve him without [the abusive kind of] fear...*
  - 4) It's as if these promises have already happened...
- d. And then Zacharias' prophesy turns toward how his son, John the Baptist, will fit into God's plan of redemption. Surely that brought him great joy.

### III. CONCLUSION

- A. As we close, I want to leave you with three simple (but I think profound) ways to grow deeper and more fulfilling JOY in our lives:
1. FOCUS ON Giving RATHER THAN Getting. (love and lust??)
  2. FOCUS ON Healing RATHER THAN Hurting. (cured vs. healing??)
  3. FOCUS ON GOD'S Power RATHER THAN ON YOUR Problems.
- B. **Big Idea:** Happiness is dependent on favorable circumstances (e.g., happenstance) and will come and go, but gospel joy is a deep-seated and enduring affection that can grow (even) in difficult circumstances.
- C. Pray with me...