



## Joy Comes In The Mourning

Gregg Caruso // Luke 1:5-25

### I. INTRO

- A. Psalm 30:5b: "*Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.*" This is not our text for today, but it frames the scope of what we want to consider on this third Sunday of Advent as we lit the JOY candle.
- B. With that said, let's read our text for today in our search for joy in a dark moment in history. [It was then, and it is today!]
  - 1. To set the larger context, when the book of Malachi comes to an end, the curtain draws to a close on the OT and God goes silent for 400 years.
  - 2. There's no word from God, no prophets from God, there are no scriptures inspired by God—and then we step into Luke's gospel.
  - 3. I will make some comments along the way to help us further frame the context. I hope my comments enhance your understanding instead of confusing you...

### C. Luke 1:5-25 (NASB)

*In the days of Herod, king of Judea, [Herod was a wicked local puppet king appointed by Rome] there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. [This doesn't mean they were sinless; this means they were sincere and devout in the faith.]*

*But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.*

*Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, [The division of Abijah was of 24 priestly divisions (1Ch 24:10); each ministered for a week twice a year. During major festivals (Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacles) all the divisions served.]*

*according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. [Burning incense happened twice a day and was a symbol of the prayers and praises of God's people. Being chosen to burn incense in the temple was an esteemed honor; some priests never got the chance to enter the temple to burn incense before the Lord. This may have been the highlight of his priestly career.]*

*And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [In the Orthodox branch of the Christian faith, the right side (or, right hand) symbolizes blessing and mercy while the left hand represents justice.]*

*And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." [The last chapter of the OT only has 5 verses and says that before the Messiah comes the Lord will send an Elijah-type prophet to prepare the way. What this verse does is connect the OT, after 400 years of silence to the present moment.]*

*And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." [Last week we spoke about the difference between reacting and responding. This is certainly a reaction on Zacharias' part. Both Mary and Zechariah questioned the angel on receiving their news, but Mary's question was more like, 'Help me understand?' While Zacharias was more like, 'Prove it...']*

*And the people were waiting for Zacharias, and they wondered at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak to them, and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; and he made signs to them and remained dumb. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.*

*After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying, "Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men. [pray]*

## II. BODY

- A. The narrative we just read addresses some **strategic heart issues**. It is a depiction of human suffering and sadness, coming from decades of the brokenness of infertility.
  - 1. While infertility is awful, it's just one condition of many that steals our **capacity for joy** to break through in our lives. I don't think it's unrealistic to say that we've all encountered, or are currently encountering, roadblocks to a durable and residential joy.
  - 2. The portrayal of this couple's suffering turning to joy hopefully reminds us that in the pain of our own trials we have a limited perspective that is not always able to grasp the good plans that our kind Father is moving us toward (Rom. 8:18–28; 1 Cor. 2:9).
  - 3. We are invited by this Advent narrative to renew our active trust in God's will, even through a current veil of sorrow and tears if necessary.
- B. This may give new meaning to the verse we first looked at: Psalm 30:5b: "*Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.*" Nighttime lasts about 12-

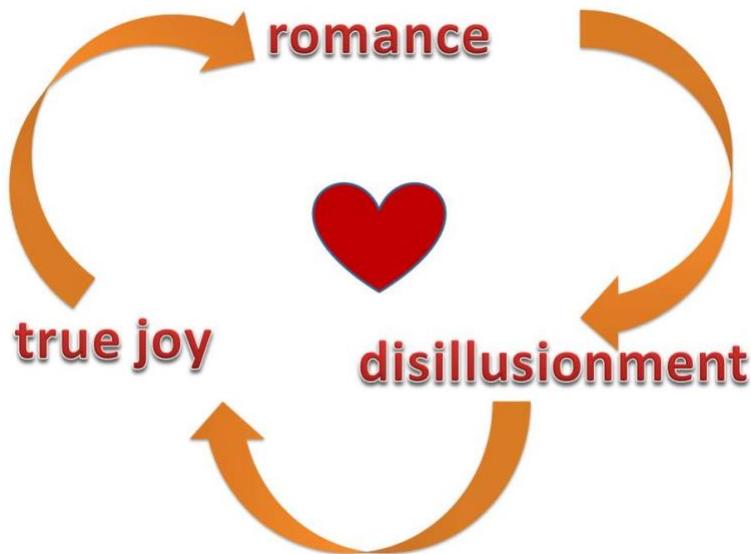
hours. It's important that we see "nighttime" as a metaphor. One of my mentors used to say this about a "season:" "A season lasts as long as it takes God to do a work." We could say the same about a night of weeping.

- C. I'd like to spend the next few minutes reminding us of how the Bible instructs us in how we can receive God's joy – and then I'd like to close by providing an overview of the journey of joy...
  - 1. Receiving Joy
  - 2. The Journey of Joy
- D. Receiving Joy
  - 1. Joy comes to us from the Holy Spirit, not our own efforts or imagination or family upbringing.
    - a. Joy is received: "*You received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit*" (1 Thessalonians 1:6). [reservoir of joy?]
    - b. Joy is the fruit, not the goal: "*The fruit of the Spirit is ... joy*" (Galatians 5:22).
  - 2. Joy comes to us as citizens of the KOG: "*The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but [free gift of] righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 14:17, emphasis added).
  - 3. Joy comes to us through faith, that is, from believing God:
    - a. "*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing*" (Romans 15:13).
    - b. "*I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith*" (Philippians 1:25).
  - 4. Joy comes to us through heartfelt worship:
    - a. "*Rejoice in the Lord always*" (Philippians 4:4). [get more physically involved??]
    - b. "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." (Hebrews 13:15)
  - 5. Joy comes from fellow believers who work hard to help us focus on these sources of joy: "*We are workers with you for your joy*" (2 Corinthians 1:24).
  - 6. Joy comes from the sanctifying effects of tribulations:
    - a. "*We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope*" (Romans 5:3-4).
    - b. "*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*" (James 1:2-4).

- c. There is a true story of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination and circuit-riding preacher, who was riding along on his horse one day when he realized he had gone two full days without experiencing any noticeable persecution.
  - 1) No one had falsely accused him, slandered him, threatened him, or ridiculed him. This lack of visible and experiential persecution caused great concern for Wesley and he wondered if he had somehow lost favor with God.
  - 2) Desiring to search his heart for what he may have done wrong Wesley got off his horse, knelt down behind a bush and began to repent and pray. Soon afterward another man was riding down the same rode and heard a strange noise and threw a rock into the bush that hit Wesley on the head, who began to rejoice and praise God that the Lord's favor had not departed him!<sup>1</sup>

#### E. The Journey of Joy

1. I'd like to spend the next few minutes describing to you how I have seen the Bible describe the **journey of joy**. Healthy relationships (and other endeavors in life) follow a predictable and biblical cycle: There is initial attraction identified as the **romance** phase [show graphic], which then moves to the **disillusionment** phase. It is essential to understand how to process the disillusionment phase in order to move forward into a deeper and true **joy**.




---

<sup>1</sup> David White. *The Times to Come Have Come: Hope and Help in Troubled Times*, AuthorHouse 2009: 50.

- a. Most of us can relate to the **romance phase**; as I said, it's the initial passionate attraction phase—whether it's another person, a career focus, a business idea, a ministry idea or longing...
- b. And then comes the **disillusionment phase**... To have an illusion is to have a 'false idea' (or, false expectation). So, to be *dis-illusioned* is to begin to see (and engage) reality for what it actually is.
  - 1) It's hard, but it's actually essential that we get there because it unmasks a false idea or faulty belief system.
  - 2) **Disillusionment is actually a fork in the road.** We can turn back, give up, or try to place the blame on someone else, or, we can open ourselves up to God and recommit ourselves to the purposes He has before us.
  - 3) As we embrace our current reality through, first and foremost, owning our own issues, repenting as needed, and recommitting to walk in reality, we make way for a durable joy to take root deep in our soul.
- 2. "And you will **know the truth, and the truth will make you free**" (John 8:32, emphasis added).
  - a. Many people who become Jesus followers have this false idea that Jesus will protect, or shield us, from suffering. There are some parts of the Church that believe that Jesus suffered so we wouldn't have to. But that is not the arc, or storyline, of Scripture, is it?
  - b. We want Jesus to take us around suffering, around grief, to get to joy, yet what we see in Scripture is that God takes us through suffering, through grief, to get to true joy. The benefit is that, as Jesus followers, is that Jesus walks with us through the suffering and grief—and we go in His strength and His power.
- 3. Understanding these dynamics helps us see the bigger picture of what God is doing, what to expect, and how to proceed.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

- A. As we close, I'd like to provide you with **one more important take-away**...
  - 1. In one of his sermons John Piper pointed out that he thought Zacharias being struck dumb by the angel Gabriel was more a **gift** than a **punishment**.
  - 2. During those nine months Zacharias was forced to be quiet, to think deeply, and ponder God, ponder the Scriptures, ponder the scope of his relationships, to ponder his calling—as a priest, and now, as a father.
  - 3. To communicate with his wife and others he needed to look into their eyes and learn how to communicate love and affection without words.
  - 4. As a result of this forced "quiet time" Zacharias emerged with a whole new perspective and attitude. If you read deeper into this chapter, you'll see his

spectacular prophesy beginning in v. 67. He certainly seems refreshed and revitalized.

5. Sometimes we think God is angry with us and punishing us—yet, in reality, God is continually training us and preparing us for our calling.
- B. Like this church, some of my early pastoral days were spent in what I might describe as a hyper-charismatic phase. And during that season there was a prophetic man and his wife who used to come through our town once a year.
  1. He would come, usually to a mid-week gathering, and preach and then prophesy over people. We'd have a typewriter in the room, and someone type as he prophesied over people. (There was no extra-biblical revelation, it was actually speaking God's heart to people—this is how God sees you, kind of thing...) Oh, and he often prophesied in rhyme!
  2. Every time he came, somewhere in there, I would receive a prophesy from him. (Linda and I still have a manila folder full of those early prophesies.) Anyway, one small section of one of his prophesies to me has been stuck in my soul ever since that moment.
  3. He prophesied to me, [The Lord says.] "And I shall K-N-E-A-D thee until the N-E-E-D of my people is met." [This may have been the beginning of one of my disillusionment phases as I thought, "this pastor thing could get hard..."]
- C. But here is the beauty of the gospel—the gospel is not dependent on what you do, or don't do. It's W-H-O-L-L-Y dependent on what God, through Jesus Christ has done for us. That is why it's good news. And let's not forget, we never outgrow our need for the gospel.
- D. Have you trusted in what Jesus Christ has accomplished through His incarnation, His ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension back into heaven—where He seated at the right-hand of the Father—and praying for you—and me?