

20th December 2020

Bible reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

Theme: Joy

This 3rd Sunday of Advent, we Celebrate Joy...the Joy that comes from knowing the Saviour... Jesus...our Christmas gift. We are referring to the Joy that knowing Jesus produces in our hearts?

Listen to the words that Charles Wesley wrote in the 1700's about his Saviour....

Come, thou long expected Jesus..... Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art; dear
desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign
in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone; By thine all
sufficient merit raise us to Thy glorious throne.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Luke 2:8-10

When you think about this idea of Joy, what do you think of?

I see joy on the face of students when they get that test back and they accomplished what they were hoping for....you can see the joy on their faces.

I see joy on the faces of children when they receive a special gift. Our neighbours have just welcomed their first baby and they are bursting with joy as they show off little Harrison.

We could say that these expressions of Joy are based in our emotions....

However, this Joy that the angel is telling the Shepherds about seems a little more than a passing emotion, it's based on a fact that will change people lives forever..... *"I bring you good news that will cause great Joy for all the people."*

How many of you realize that Jesus' birth, God's plan for Jesus to come and live with us, to die for us, and to be raised back to life....God's salvation plan was for us...it was for our Joy...for our eternal Joy?

So where does this Great Joy come from....and how do we keep it apart of our life?

Salvation gives birth to Joy -

- a) **Reconciliation-** When we are away from God, when we are lost in our sin... Joy is absent. We were created to have relationship with God, a personal embrace...a close intimate relationship.

So when we come to that place of repentance and ask Jesus to be the Lord of our Life...something amazing happens..... Salvation... We are born again... our Spirit is made alive and with that Spiritual life comes Joy....Eternal Joy. So our Joy comes when we reconcile ourselves with our God. Are you reconciled with Him today? Do you know this Joy that comes from being in a healthy relationship with God? To be reconciled is to

be brought back into proper relationship with God...this is done by God's Grace when we ask for this great gift.

- b) **The joy of possession.** Our granddaughter Rachel, taught us about how Joy comes through possession. When she was little, she had her mother's nightie that was her security blanket, she slept with it, she would carry it around the house...she had to have it with her before she would take her nap or go to sleep at night. When she had her blanket, she had Joy. (I was going to say as a toddler, but it went far longer than that)

Despite looking well past its use by date, she refused any alternative. No "Blanket, no joy".

This great Joy comes from knowing we are in possession of our Saviour Jesus, and He has us. No imposters accepted, nothing else will do.....our Joy only comes when we have Him.

The Christmas season can be a difficult time for a lot of people. Often it is depressing because of the reminder of loved ones who have passed away. Sometimes it is hard because it reinforces feelings of loneliness, or the sense that few people care about you. Yet the coming of Christ is a message of both comfort and joy.

Charles Jennens, who selected the words used in Handel's *Messiah*, must have thought that Isaiah 40 figured prominently in the prophecies about the Messiah coming.

Part 1, Scene 1 of Handel's *Messiah* is Isaiah 40:1-5, and verse 9 is found in the scene in the middle of Part 1, and verse 11 near the end of the last scene of Part 1.

In fact, Jennens is simply following the lead of the New Testament. All four of the Gospels in the New Testament quotes Isaiah 40:3 within the first few chapters. John the Baptist was the voice crying in the wilderness for the people to prepare the way of the Lord. For the message of the arrival of the Messiah is tidings of comfort and joy for sinners.

Isaiah 40:1-11

1. The good news of the coming of the Messiah may seem like old news to you, but just because it is familiar don't miss the good news of comfort and joy.

- a) Isaiah wrote to believers who longed to hear this news after having heard how their nation would be exiled and her wealth plundered. The natural question for those hearing the bad news of the exile would be, "Does this mean we will be separated from our God forevermore?" Knowing that there was nothing that they could do to reverse this course toward death—for exile from God is the very definition of death—they would be tempted to despair. Therefore, God tells Isaiah to share this good news of comfort and joy. He says, "*Comfort, comfort my people...speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned.*" He says, "*Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news.*" To those believer's dead in their sins and hence helpless to help themselves God promises news of comfort – the forgiveness of sins. To those believers separated from God and wandering like sheep without a shepherd, He sends good news of joy. To the people of Judah who believed in the word of God, these were most welcome words of comfort and joy.

b) Then we also note that this news of comfort and joy that has been proclaimed is not only to the people of Judah but also to us. This good news of comfort and joy is also to the believers among and around us who feel all alone, to those believers who grieve because of sin and death, to believers who are struggling with depression or anxiety, to believers who sometimes wonder if anyone cares. This is news of comfort and joy for all of us who are longing to hear that this age will come to an end with all of its suffering, pain, crying, and death. These words of comfort and joy for all of us who know that we are sinners helpless to save ourselves, and longing for the day when we will sin no more.

2. So, we take comfort and rejoice for the coming of the Messiah is the arrival of God-with-us and for us.

a) Isaiah foresaw the coming of the Messiah Jesus as God-with-us and for us. He saw back in Isaiah 7:14 that the virgin would conceive and bear a son and His name shall be called Immanuel, meaning God-with-us. He then saw in Isaiah 9:6 this Immanuel would be a child born to us and a son given to us and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Then here in Isaiah 40, he continues to unpack this vision of how the Messiah would be God-with-us and for us. So just as we saw last Sunday that each of those four titles in Isaiah 9:6 unpack what it means to say that the Messiah is God-with-us, so too many of these eleven verses unpack what it means to say that the Messiah is God-with-us, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

It was sin that always caused problems for Israel when God was with them, but the good news of the Messiah is a king who is God in the flesh with us forevermore and who pronounces the forgiveness of sins and proclaims peace. Moreover, the Messiah is the glory of the Lord, and speaks the word of the Lord that stands forever. WoW! Isaiah wants to see Zion and all Jerusalem herald to the cities of Judah: *“Behold your God!”* This was how he wanted them to respond to the coming of their Messiah and how they would respond if they were prepared.

Isaiah also sees this Messiah as a champion king who comes with might (v.10) to usher in the kingdom rule of God but also a shepherd king (v.11) who takes care of His people like a shepherd cares for his flock or a father cares for his children. Thus, in these verses Isaiah continues to unpack this vision that he sees of the coming of the Messiah as God-with-us and for us.

b) So today we take comfort and rejoice for the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus. John the Baptist was the voice that cried in the wilderness for the people to prepare the way of the Messiah who is God-with-us. He was preparing the way of the LORD—the name of God—and making straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Unfortunately, the people of Jerusalem were not all that ready for the coming of the Messiah as God-with-us and were less than enthusiastically heralding the good news from the mountain tops. Nevertheless, many believers in Israel did receive it and proclaim it after the resurrection of this Messiah Jesus from the dead and the good news went from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth.

Therefore, today you hear the good news that Jesus is God-with-us and for us, so take comfort and rejoice. Allow me then to encourage you to take this good news to others and so prepare the way of the Lord for Jesus is coming again.

Maybe you could invite friends without family nearby, or those you know do not have plans, to join you for Christmas dinner and you take comfort and rejoice in this good news together.

Or, maybe you simply invite some from your neighbourhood for coffee or a meal. But it is an intentional effort to “shout from the mountain”, the good news of Jesus.

Or, invite a pre believer to read the gospel with you and examine the claims of Jesus.

You might not feel like you are in the mood to share this good news because you are having a hard time rejoicing in all the cultural trappings of Christmas and you are wrestling with loss and loneliness.

But you will find that others don't want you to pretend like you have it all together.

Share how you find comfort and joy in the gospel even while you are feeling pain and suffering in many ways. Such is a witness that will glorify God. Such is the Joy of the good news that is for all people.

Prayer: Father, I pray that You fill us with the joy of the Lord, that overwhelming joy. Your joy is unlike anything this world has to offer. It brings peace, trust and hope because we know You are in control.

Your Word says in Nehemiah 8:10, Don't be dejected and sad, for the *joy* of the Lord is your strength! We will lift our eyes to the hills, Lord, because we know from You comes our joy and peace. Thank You, Father, and we love You. Amen!