

Sunday, December 10, 2023

Good News, Great Joy

Week 2: Favor & Blessing

- Last week we started our series entitled, Good News, Great Joy that we will be going through throughout this Christmas season.
 - And my hope and my prayer for this series is that the truth of the Gospel would spark that extra joyousness in us as we celebrate the beauty of Christmas this month
 - Because, you know, I hate to admit it, but whenever I was a kid, and I think most kids are typically this way, we just wanted to get all of the church stuff out of the way as quick as possible to we could get to the good stuff... right?
 - My parents were so good at setting our family Christmas traditions:
 - Us kids would wake up, and have to stay quiet until Dad got up and had at least one cup of coffee....which was torture.
- But then we would all gather around the tree and dad would read to us the Christmas story from Luke chapter 2, he would then share the biblical meaning for the Christmas tree and all of the elements on it, and then we would pray, then we'd get to stockings, breakfast, and then the presents
 - And the older I got the more I definitely appreciated my parents being intentional about making sure we knew the full context of what we were celebrating, why we were celebrating, and Who we were celebrating
 - But as a kid, I'm thinking, let's get this over with because I see a present bigger than my body with my name on it!
 - Now as an adult I am so thankful that my parents instilled these values in me because the reality is, if you remove Jesus, if you remove the Gospel from the season of Christmas, all it becomes is a superficial holiday, that just stresses everyone out, stretches our bank accounts, and makes so

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many just beg for December 26th to come as quick a possible so we don't have to worry about all of this chaos for another year.

- But if every single gift that is given, if every gift that is received, if every meal that is shared, and every family gathering is rooted in the gratitude of what God did for us on that first Christmas day, well then it becomes a celebration and joy that never has to end.
- Why? Because of the Truth that God became a baby, that means that Joy, Peace, Favor and Blessing are endlessly available to us
- If you were here last week, we talked about the Birth of John the Baptist
 - The Angel Gabriel visited John's Father Zechariah while he was serving in the temple to tell him that even though he and his wife are well past the age of physically being able to have children, God has heard their prayers and they will have a son.

- And it was going to be the overly miraculous birth because God would have him do an overly great work
- John's purpose was going to be to have a thriving public ministry where he would baptize thousands and thousands of people, preparing their hearts to be more readily available to follow Jesus, whenever Jesus' public ministry would begin.
- We pointed out that the Name John means- "Jehovah is a gracious giver"
 - So it's no coincidence that the Christmas story, begins with the birth story of the one who tell the whole world that God is a Gracious Giver!
 - It only makes sense that the Season of Giving is based around the God that Graciously Gives!
- He graciously gave Zechariah and Elizabeth a baby boy in their old age

- But then He would Graciously Give His one and only Son to us.
- And a few months after appearing to Zechariah, the Angel Gabriel now appears to a young girl from a small town very few have even heard of. If you look with me in Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 26, ***“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you! But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will***

give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”-Luke 1:26-33 (ESV)

- PRAY
- You know, when Rachel and I were going on our first couple of dates, there were a bunch of careful decisions that went into the process.
 - Why? I wanted to impress her. I was trying to think about every detail
 - I wanted to pick just the right restaurant that wasn't too cheap but not too fancy either (had to keep it in my price range)
 - I had to pick out my outfit very carefully. I had a group chat with a group of guys I was sending different outfits too to get their approval.
 - And I don't remember exactly what that first outfit was on the first date, but it worked, and I wanted to switch it up a bit on the 2nd date.

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- Now this was a time where I was still going back and forth with whether or not I was committing to glasses or not.
- I had been a contact guy since high school, but I had been playin around with the glasses look, still wasn't sure if it was working for me or not.
- So on the 2nd date, I decided to go no glasses.
- And this date was an outback and bowling outing with one of Rachel's couple friends. And the dinner part went well, but things started to go off the rails when we got to the bowling.
 - You see, Rachel beat me by about 50 pins the first game we bowled.
 - A little emasculating!
- So I go and pay for another round, and I keep it a little closer this time, but still lose pretty handedly
- Like, there's nothing I can do but feel like a total loser in that moment. But its at that time she decided to mention to me that her dad and grandad were semi-pro bowlers back in the day
- WOULD HAVE BEEN SOME NICE INFORMATION TO HAVE!
- But all in all the 2nd date still went well, and later that night she texted me, and said, "Hey I got something to tell you."
- I was like "Oh yea? What's that?" Just waiting for the gloating of kicking my butt on the bowling lanes
- But she just said..."I like glasses."
- I Said, "Noted." And I have been committed to glasses ever since.
- But we all know what its like to try and impress someone, to go above and beyond to get them to like us, to give a good first impression, whether its in relationships, or in business, in athletics, school, there's always someone we

want to think well of us and we feel as if its up to us to work hard to gain their favor.

- And so many times, that's the mind set we take into thinking about God's favor toward us.
- It's a term that if you have been around church for a while you have probably heard many times people talking about you having God's favor but we could be thinking, ok but what does it take to GET God's favor.
 - What am I going to have to do, to obtain God's favor in my life?
- Well to answer that question, let's think. What did Mary do to obtain the favor of God?
 - We do not see a resume of her good deeds and acts of service.
 - She a 14 or 15 year old girl from a town that was so insignificant that it wasn't even referenced in the Old Testament
 - We don't see this angel listing off all of the reason why she has been favored by God, she just is!

• ***And [The Angel] came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you! -Luke 1:28 (ESV)***

- Because the reality, the Favor of God and favor of man work in vastly different ways.
 - This term "Favored one" in the original greek actually has three distinct definitions, that will give us a full view of what the favor of God actually looks like in our lives.
 - The first definition of "FAVORED ONE" - or as older translations says, "Highly Favored" is
- TO PURSUE WITH GRACE**
- This is such Good News and Great joy, because God's favor over your life is not dependent upon your pursuit of Him....it is first and foremost dependent upon His Pursuit of You!
 - You know why Mary was favored? Because God chose to pursue her with grace

- Yes it was going to be inconvenient, her engagement was probably going to be over, but it was still every little girls dream in the Jewish society to be the woman that would be chosen to be the mother of the Messiah.
 - And no she wasn't ready for it. No she wasn't equipped for it, No, she didn't have any idea what she was in for, for the next 33 years
 - But for reasons unbeknownst to her, God pursued her with grace
- The second time the word Favour is used in verse 30 when it says, ***“And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” -Luke 1:30 (ESV)***
- The word Favour there is the greek word CHARIS- which is only translated as “favor” 6 times in the N.T.130 times, it's translated simply as “Grace”
 - You can be confident that you have the Favor of God available to you, because we know
- without a shadow of a doubt that He has pursued all of us with Grace
- How do we know that? Because the grace he bestowed on Mary, was for us too, He brought the Messiah into the world for all of us.
 - That why John tells us in his gospel, ***“For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” -John 1:16 (ESV)***
- The grace that God showed Mary, wasn't just for Mary, she was just the starting point, and conduit of which the promise of Abraham would be fulfilled, and “All of the families of earth would be blessed.”
- But sometimes, blessing doesn't always feel like a blessing in the moment.
- If I'm Mary, I'm terrified in this moment, I need some encouragement. Mary is a smart girl, logical girl, she has some practical questions.

- She's not arguing back with doubt like Zechariah did, she's genuinely concerned how with is going to take place.
- And the angel answered her, ***“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” -Luke 1:35-37 (ESV)***
 - You know how relieving that had to be for Mary, to hear that she's not the only one experiencing something like she's experiencing at that moment?
 - That had to at least be somewhat reassuring to her, because after she hears that she, says, ***“And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.” -Luke 1:38 (ESV)***
 - The Second Definition for “Favored One, or Highly Favored” is
 - **TO ENCOMPASS WITH FAVOUR**
 - When God shows you His favor, when He pursue's you with grace, He does not just give you a glimpse of it, He completely surrounds you with His favor.
 - God didn't just have the angel drop the bombshell on Mary that she's going to conceive the God-Man and leave her to her own devices.
 - God was making sure she knew she wasn't alone in this. She's not the only one. Which can be such a relieving feeling to have.
 - You know over the years, I have this reoccurring nightmare, that I'm back in college, the semester is coming to a close and right before graduation I realize that there is a class I completely forgot to go to

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all semester long. And the rest of the dream is one big panic trying to figure out how I'm going to still graduate even though I had completely ditched math class!

- It's a terrifying dream. Because if there is one thing I never want to do again for the rest of my life, it's school
- But over thanksgiving, we were gathered at my parents house down outside of Savannah, Ga
- And my other brother Dewey was there, who I actually graduated college with
- And I'm not sure how we got on the topic, but he said, "You know, I have this reoccurring dream, that that I'm back in college, the semester is coming to a close and right before graduation I realize that there is a class I completely forgot to go to all semester long. And the dream is one big panic trying to figure out how I'm going to graduate, even though I completely blew

off...then I say it with him at the same time..."MATH CLASS!"

- My mind was blown! NO WAY! I'm not the only one suffering from this tortuous nightmare...someone else actually knows what's its like!
- There is something that can be just so relieving, reassuring, and even exciting to know that someone else is experiencing something that you thought only you were experiencing
- God will intentionally wants you to know that there are people around you that that understand the struggles that you face, even though you thought that they were only unique to you.
 - There are people around you to bear the burden and share in the struggle
 - Now God makes sure that Mary knows that she is going to have a spiritual and physical support system throughout this season

- Who else could relate to a miraculous pregnancy?
 - Her cousin Elizabeth, over in Judah, who had been barren her whole life, and was at this point way past the age of being able to conceive, is miraculously pregnant now too!
- Who else is going to believe that the Angel Gabriel came to visit her?
 - Well, that same exact Angel visited Elizabeth's husband to tell him that THEY TOO were going to have a son.
- Who is going to believe her that the Messiah is actually coming?
 - Elizabeth, who was told that her son was coming to prepare the way for the Messiah
- So what does Mary do? ***"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, (70 mile journey) and she entered the house of***

Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth." -Luke 1:39-40 (ESV)

- This is also important to note, that God didn't send Elizabeth to Mary. He let Mary know that there was someone out there who would understand, and Mary put forth the effort in initiating the connection with her.
- If you sit around and wait for community to come to you, it'll never happen. You have to seek it out, or you never appreciate it when you have it.
- Also, You should NEVER allow the fear of your circumstances to blind you from the favor and blessings that God has surrounded you with. Especially like the people He has surrounded you with
 - I think many people in our day and age, if they were in Mary's shoes, they would just compare how much more drastic their circumstance was, and how Elizabeth just would really understand.

- Because the reality is, God's Favor does come along with responsibility.
- Yes Mary was being blessed by having the honor of being the mother of the Messiah, but she still had the responsibility of Raising the Son of God...
- And that's exactly what the majority of us do not what in this generation. Is the responsibility.
- Because with responsibility there comes expectations, with responsibility there comes an opportunity to fail, with responsibility there comes pressure and too often we would rather victimize ourselves for the pressure that we feel
- Rather than accepting the Favor that God has shown us and making the most of the opportunity He has given us.
- Now during Mary's journey to see Elizabeth, she could have been feeling the weight and the pressure more and more the longer that she journeyed. Especially if she had been traveling

alone, I can imagine how that time could be used just to get in her own head thoughts swirling every which way....but again, God finds a way to wrap her up in His favor and remind her how He is pursuing her with His grace.

- ***“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” -Luke 1:41-15 (ESV)***
- I love that Elizabeth calls her “Blessed” here twice, because the 3rd definition for “Favored One” is:

- TO HONOR WITH BLESSINGS

- When Mary hears the unsolicited words from Elizabeth, it has to feel like a bolder being taken off of her shoulders.
- Without even saying a word about her predicament, before maybe expressing any doubt of whether or not she may have dreamt up the angel, without having to try to explain something she has no idea how to explain
- She doesn't need to
- Because the Holy Spirit Filled Elizabeth to give her the exact encouragement that she needed and the exact moment that she needed to hear it.
- That is why God does not want this life, especially this Christian life, to be lived alone.
 - This is no doubt why God was intentional about instituting His local church, so a group of believers could consistently gather together, and be there for each other when

the pressure piles on and the doubt mounts up.

- To be there to to encourage each other and remind each other how blessed and favored we are.
- That first word, “Blessed” that Elizabeth used literally means - **“Blessed”- Favoured One of God**
- She is able to greet her in the same way that the Angel greeted her, because the Holy Spirit always knows the right things to say at the right time.
- Man, my hope and prayer is that we have a church full of Elizabeth's.
 - I hope and pray that all of us would come in to church on Sunday mornings, less concerned about what we're going to get out of it, and more concerned with how we're going to encourage each other
 - Knowing full well that all of us in here are going through stuff.

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- Some of us are going through financial struggle
 - Some of us are going through the loss of a loved one that won't be here this holiday season
 - Some of us are going through a season of spiritual doubt and struggle that we don't feel comfortable admitting out loud at church
- But I pray that we would be a group that, on the drive in to church we would be praying for the Holy Spirit to fill us, just like He did Elizabeth, so that we could be encouraging each other with the exact encouragement that we need at the exact moment we need it.
- That's not something we can manufacture on our own power. It's not just saying nice superficial things to each other.
 - No real, soul piercing encouragement, comes only from the Holy Spirit.
 - You see if we have a community here that is intentionally asking with Holy Spirit to fill us

in that way, so we can encourage each other and remind each other how blessed and favored we are....well then this will truly be a place where you come to be built up, not beat up

- And we can leave this place every Sunday with our heads a little bit higher, a little extra pep in our step because this is a place where we come to be reminded how Good our God is, and how much He has pursued us with Grace and Surrounded us with Favor in spite of the rest of the chaos that may be going on in life.
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians about how this is supposed to be a vital part of church DNA when he said, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which***

we ourselves are comforted by God.” -2 Cor. 1:3-4 (ESV)

- We see Elizabeth putting this into practice... and the last word for “Blessed” in verse 45 the Elizabeth uses for her, is the word that simply means. - “Happy”
- Many say, “Oh well God just wants me to be happy.”
- And that is 100% true, He does want you to be happy. This is Good News and Great JOY!
- God is without a doubt in the business of wanting you to be happy. But He’s the one who tells you how to be happy.
- You cannot live in a manner contrary to God’s ways and God’s standards and expect to maintain happiness and joy in this life.
 - Elizabeth didn’t say, Blessed is she who “followed her heart”
 - She didn’t say, Blessed is she who “Took charge of her own life”

- She didn’t say, Blessed is she who “decided what was best for her”
- No she said, ***“Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” -Luke 1:45 (ESV)***
- Do you want to experience true happiness this Christmas season?
 - Believe what the Lord has spoken to you
 - Believe that unto YOU was born that day, A Child who is Christ the Lord
 - Believe that Because He was Born
 - *God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” -Phil 4:19*
 - Believe that Because He was Born
 - *...He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.”-Phil 1:6*
 - Believe that Because He was Born

- *Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.” -2 Cor 4:16*

- Believe that because He was born, He has pursued you with Grace, He was Surrounded you with Favor, and honored you with Blessings
- And we have this holiday to go above and beyond in Honoring Him back
 - And He is honored the most, by the way we love and care for one another
 - Jesus said the gauge in which the world would recognize that we are His disciples would be if we loved one another, the way He loved us.
- So it only makes sense that God would get so much pleasure out of the gift giving. He loves the family gatherings, and beautifully shared meals
- Because all of that is a reflection of His heart.