

Sunday, December 3, 2023

Good News, Great Joy

Week 1: Don't Miss the Joy

- How many of y'all have already done all of your Christmas decorating? Do y'all have a tradition for your Christmas decorating? Rachel and I do.
- Normally every year, shortly after thanksgiving, Rachel and I go out to Hobby Lobby, pick out some Christmas mugs. Then we'll go home, I'll pull all of the Christmas decorations out of the attic, and then that's the extent of my decorating. Rachel won't let me touch the tree or anything else as she puts everything in place just so.
- But we normally will have Christmas music going, make some hot cocoa and eat Christmas cookies after the decorating is done.
- It's normally a really fun day filled with laughs and good memories.
- However this year, it wasn't all that fun.

- It was last Saturday, we had just gotten back from our thanksgiving travels, we were both playing catch up from work stuff, and we were cramming to get everything done so we could go to hobby lobby and do all of the things.
- And on a day that's normally fun and carefree, Rachel and I were just snapping at each other all day.
 - Yes, even the Pastor's family has bad days like that
 - It was over the littlest things, we were just acting so annoyed with each other, Fletcher was being difficult to add to it all, and we were jumping down each others throats for no reason.
- However, on the way to hobby lobby, we realized that neither of us had eaten anything all day, and it was about 3pm!
- So of course we were both irritable, we hadn't eaten anything all day!

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- *So we were missing out on the Christmas joy and the Christmas spirit because we were hangry.*
- We talked about this idea of being Hangry a few weeks ago. We talked about whenever Jesus quoted the book of Deuteronomy when He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”
- And we pointed out that there are so many Hangry Christians out there because we are not making the Bible a priority in our lives.
 - I’m telling you, every single Christian that I have encountered that just has an attitude in church, nit picks every little thing, doesn’t develop relationship with others within the church, and there’s nothing you can do to make them happy
 - Every single Christian that I have encountered and counseled through that all have a common denominator. They do not

have a healthy and consistent relationship with the Word of God in their personal lives.

- And as a result, they are missing out on the Good News and Great Joy that the Christian life offers!
- And the same is true for the Christmas season. You will completely miss out on the fullness of joy that this season brings if The Person of Jesus and the Word of God is not the central theme of your Christmas Experience.
- We need a working knowledge and appreciation for the Word of God that brings us the story of Jesus’ birth which is the whole reason why the Christmas Holiday exists in the first place!
- And that is why we are doing the series that we are doing. So we can get a deeper appreciation and understanding of the Good News and Great Joy that the Birth of Jesus has given to us.
- And you may not realize this, but the Christmas story actually doesn’t begin with the Birth of

Jesus. It actually begin with the birth of His cousin, John.

- If you look with me in Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 5, Luke writes, ***“In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.” -Luke 1:5-7 (ESV)***
- So Zechariah and Elizabeth were in the ministry. Zechariah was a sort of Pastor to the people of Israel and they were both really good people doing things the right way.
- They lived such good lives that there was nothing but good things to say about them.

- But they had no children. And in that time and that culture normally if a couple would go childless it was thought to be because God was punishing them for something.
- So it didn't make any sense that a couple who was seen as nothing but righteous and blameless wouldn't be able to have their own baby.
- And for years and years, ever since they had gotten married they had prayed countless prayers for God to bless them with a child, and that prayer doesn't seem to have been answered, because now they are wayyyy past the age of physically being able to have children.
- So even though they are living good lives, and doing great things, there is still this sadness that overhangs their house, because one of their deepest desired has gone unfulfilled.
- That is until one day, Zechariah goes to work and verse 8 says, ***“Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was***

on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 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. And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been 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," -Luke 1:8-14 (ESV)

- You know, sometimes **God has a way of answering our prayers outside of our expectation.**
- Whenever Zechariah and Elizabeth would have prayed for a baby, they had in their minds what that new growing family would look like!

- They would still be young, they would take the baby on trips, they would have had all of these new young parent plans!
- But now Zechariah is being told that his prayer has been answered! He could have been thinking, "Really? Now? I'm an old man now! Why couldn't have you answered this prayer when I was still young enough to be around to see grandkids at least!"
- But God has a plan.
- He specifically chose Zechariah and Elizabeth to be the parents of the greatest prophet who would ever live.
- He trusted their character enough to raise this son who would be the forerunner of Jesus and prepare the people's hearts for when their Messiah would arrive on the scene
- This birth needed to be overly miraculous because God was wanting to do overly great works through this boy!

- There is so much within this encounter for Zechariah to be thankful for, but he's still got questions.
 - And it could be that his expectations are gettin in the way of experiencing the joy of this moment.
- In the next few verses, the Angel explains all of the great things that God has planned for his soon-to-be son, but Zechariah's response is, ***"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. I stand 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 take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." -Luke 1:18-20 (ESV)***
- How many times do we fail to be thankful for what God is doing or has done, because

we're too caught up questioning His methods.

- And it's not just the half-saved Christians that fall into this. Even Zechariah, a righteous and blameless man fell into this as well!
 - And the lesson that the Angel teaches Zechariah here, we would be wise to learn from.
- **Sometimes we just need to Be Quiet and Receive**
- It may not be what we expected, it may not be happening the way we expected it to, but either way when God blesses us we should be thankful and receive it
 - *It reminds of back whenever I was in college, I drove a beater.*
 - *It was a 2003 Ford Focus, 5 speed. And it had been the victim of some unfortunate events, and it had a hood on it, that was shifted up and to the side, but it still latched. It had a large dent caved into the from*

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passenger side, and the door made a very loud screech when opened. The two back windows would stay up without some help so I had one window with a map book of Georgia folded up and shoved into it to keep it in place and the other window had two different colors of duct tape holding it up.

- But the car drove fine, so I was happy with it.
- But one summer I was doing an internship at a church in Columbus, GA and one day I went into the office and the Pastor said, "Give me your keys." So I did. And then it was explained to me that someone within the church had anonymously offered to have the car all fixed up.
- And this bothered me. No one asked me if I wanted my car fixed. I didn't think my car was worth being fixed. This person was going to spend more money on putting that car in the shop than the car was even worth!
- And I was talking to my dad about it, thinking I was being all humble and spiritual saying

things like, "They could send 10 kids to camp with what they're going to spend on my car, that money could be used for so many better things."

- And my Dad finally interrupted me and said, "Kenny, Be Quiet."
 - (He didn't say, "Be Quiet", but for the sake of the kids in the room)
- He said, "Be quiet, don't rob those people of a blessing."
- "Those people out of the goodness of their hearts have chosen to bless you in this way, and God is going to bless them for it. So don't take that blessing away from them."
- And that is probably one of the Top 3 lessons I have ever been taught in my life and it will stick with me forever.
- I need to get over myself, not get caught up in my expectations and in whatever way God chooses to bless me, either directly or through

another person, I just need to be quiet, be thankful and receive it.

- This is the lesson that Zechariah is being taught as well, and my dad can be an intimidating dude, but I think the Angel Gabriel had him beat in that department.
- And now Zechariah literally had no choice but to be quiet.
- The Angel literally takes his voice away, and that's when he comes out and is playing charades with the people trying to tell them everything that just happened.
- What would be even more challenging is that now he has to go home and tell his "Well advanced in years" wife that she is about to get pregnant.
 - Scholars believe she would have been anywhere between the ages of 60 and 88. That's a pretty big age range, but I don't know of any SANE woman over the age of 60 that would enjoy being pregnant and giving an all natural birth at that age!

- But Elizabeth's response is the response that the angel would have liked to have seen from Zechariah.
- A few days later, In verse 25, after she had gotten pregnant the New Living Translation quotes her this way, **"How kind the Lord is!" she exclaimed. "He has taken away my disgrace of having no children."-Luke 1:25 (NLT)**
- It didn't matter that the timing wasn't what she expected, in fact, it could be said that the waiting made her even more appreciative of the blessing.
- In either case, this baby is coming no matter if they like it or not!
- And in verse 57 we read, **"Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the**

child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered." -Luke 1:58-63 (ESV)

- This would have been very strange in this day and age. Because it was customary for the first born son to take the name of their father, or at least be given a family name.
- I shared this last year, but it reminds me of my Father in Law's family who's great, great, great, great, great, (I don't know how many greats) grandfather was Robert Frederick, King of Norway. They say King...but ehhhh...some sort of royalty I'll give them that.
 - But either way, it was tradition in that family for each son to be named the reverse of their

father. So you have Robert Frederick, then Frederick Robert, Robert Frederick, Frederick Robert, so on and so forth...passed all the way down to Rachel's grandfather, Robert Frederick, and then her Dad who's name is Brian....

- Completely broke thousands of years of tradition
- And that's what this feels like, John? Where does John come from?
 - God is always very intentional whenever He gives someone a name
 - **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!

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- 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, so that through Him, He would Graciously Give us:
 - Good New and Great Joy
 - He Graciously gives us Hope
 - He Graciously gives us Purpose
 - He Graciously gives us Understanding
 - He Graciously Gives us Peace
 - He Graciously Gives us Mercy
 - He Graciously Gives us an Opportunity to be a part of His Family
- ALL Because of the Baby that was Born in Bethlehem
 - Because He was Born, friendship with God is possible
 - Because He was Born, eternal life is attainable
 - Because He was Born, Joy is sustainable
- All due to the Good news that the Child in the Cradle because the King on the Cross
- Born to die, so that we could live.
 - So that He could give us the greatest gift of all. The Gift of Salvation
 - John in his Gospel tells us that all who receive Him, all who believe in the Name of Jesus, are given the right to become Children of God
 - He doesn't say, all those who earned it, he doesn't say all those who were born in the right family, he doesn't say all those who do more good things than bad things
 - No, all those who Receive Him. Salvation is a free Gift from the God that Graciously Gives.
- After Zechariah was adamant in writing that his son's name would be John. verse 64 says, ***"And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all***

their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him." -Luke 1:64-66 (ESV)

- And Zechariah tells us exactly who this child would be. In verse 76 he speaks over his son, and says: ***"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God." -Luke 1:76-78 (ESV)***
- And you know the ministry that John the Baptist had, has been passed down to us
 - His job, was to tell people the Good News about who Jesus is, so that when He arrived on the scene they could be more readily prepared to believe in Him and follow Him

- That's what our ministry today is. We cannot convict anyone, we cannot change anyone, we cannot save anyone
 - And if we try to take that responsibility upon ourselves we will just make people resent us
- Our job is to simply tell the Good New and Great Joy of Jesus Christ to all those around us, so that when Jesus encounters them through His Holy Spirit, they will hopefully be more readily prepared to Believe in Him and Follow Him with us.
- And that's the opportunity we have to do this Christmas season. The season of Giving. To find every opportunity we can, to share about the God who Graciously Gives. Let's not keep that gift to ourselves.