

Good News of GREAT Joy!

- Luke 2:8-14
- “FB Meyer was a Baptist preacher from England who was also well known in America in the late 1800’s. Once on a train he was approached by a woman who recognized him. Despair and misery had carved her features and with great sorrow she told the preacher her story. For years she had cared for a crippled daughter, the joy of her life. She made tea for her each morning, then left for work, knowing that in the evening the daughter would be there when she arrived home. But the daughter had died, and the grieving mother was alone and miserable. Home was not “home” anymore. Meyer gave her wise counsel. “When you get home and put the key in the door, say aloud, ‘Jesus, I know You are here!’ and greet Him directly when you open the door. And as you light the fire tell Him what has happened during the day; if anybody has been kind, tell Him; if anybody has been unkind, tell Him, just as you would have told your daughter. At night stretch out your hand in the darkness and say, “Jesus, I know you are here!” Some months later, Meyer saw the woman again but did not recognize her because her face radiated joy instead of announcing misery. “I did as you told me,” she said, “and it has made all the difference in my life. Now, I feel I know him.”
- That woman willfully entered into what was announced to the shepherds on that Bethlehem hillside so long ago: good news of great joy. We can, as well. Today let’s talk about that great joy the angel talked about and I am going to use David Mathis’ outline from his book on Advent entitled, “The Christmas We Didn’t Expect,” as we look at the Great Heights, Great Lengths, and Great Depths of that great joy. But first, let’s acknowledge that this was not just ordinary joy, which is wonderful, this was GREAT joy. The Bible talks about joy more than 200 times, and we know that joy is a fruit of the spirit. We know that everyday joy comes to us when we taste his goodness. In laughter around the dinner table. In a smile. In completing a task or in using God-given abilities to bless others. There is joy in giving and there is joy in receiving, which we experience at Christmas. But because we were made as infinite creations, we long for joy that will last, that is not connected only to that which is finite. David Mathis wrote, “God made our human souls in such a way that we will not be eternally content with that which is only human. Finitude cannot slake our thirst for the infinite.” That is where “good news of great joy” comes in to satisfy us.
- A reference to great joy is rare in Scripture, showing up only a handful of times. The people of Israel rejoiced with great joy when their beloved King David’s son, Solomon, was anointed as his successor. (1 Kings 1:40). They rejoiced in Hezekiah’s day and there was “great joy in Jerusalem” when the Passover was celebrated for the first time like this since Solomon was king. (2 Chronicles 30:26). And finally, when the wall was rebuilt by Nehemiah, the people rejoiced with great joy, so great that Nehemiah said, “the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.” (Nehemiah 12:43) It is interesting to me that great joy in the old covenant arrived because of a king. And because of a sacrifice. And because of a city. All finite, but each one pointed to the infinite. **Each of these point to the King who came to sacrifice his life so that the city of the living God could be prepared for us, his people!**

- “I bring you good news of great joy.” This story reminds us that Christmas invites us into great joy. Not as a place to visit once a year and wistfully long for through 12 long months until it comes around again. No! Great joy is how God works in the world. Everything God has done, from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane, from the creation of the world to its re-creation, is for God’s great glory and for our great joy! And even with all the trials and suffering we experience, God gives us everyday joy “to accentuate and deepen the experience of great joy.” (D. Mathis) The joy I experience when I pick up one of my grandchildren and give them a hug points me to the great joy I have in the Son who loves me and picks ME up every day because I am his. The joy we felt last week when we heard that our dear sister Karlean has been pronounced “in remission,” points us to the great joy we have in Christ who has pronounced us forgiven! Forever healed! This is great joy because it goes to...
- **Great heights (verse 14)**
- The angel was joined by a heavenly host who praised God saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” The glory of God reaches to the highest places, to heaven itself, and to the lowest places, to earth itself, and not only that, to the lowest of men. To shepherds. The shepherds were audience to the greatest choir that has ever performed, and they had front row seats to the greatest praise that has ever been witnessed on earth. They saw and heard GREAT JOY and what happens as a result: praise and worship. The angels from heaven praised God on earth. The shepherds from earth went immediately to see this miracle birth and their Savior come down from heaven. Then they went away, “glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, as it had been told them.” Same with the wise men from the east. “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.” And when they saw the Christ child, “they fell down and worshiped him.” (Matthew 2:10-11)
- Richard Foster in *Celebration of Discipline* writes, “Celebration is at the heart of the way of Christ. He entered the world on a high note of jubilation: ‘I bring you good news of a great joy,’ cried the angel, ‘which shall come to all the people.’ He left the world bequeathing his joy to the disciples: ‘These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.’ He goes on to write, “The carefree spirit of joyous festivity is absent in contemporary society. Apathy, even melancholy, dominates the times. Harvey Cox says that modern man has been pressed ‘so hard toward useful work and rational calculation he has all but forgotten the joy of ecstatic celebration.” Great joy goes to great heights and also to...
- **Great lengths (verse 10)**
- The angel declared, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” This is it! This is the great joy that we were created for, and this is the great joy that is for all the people. There is so much good news and great joy that is NOT for all the people. I would have loved to have been a starter on the UNC basketball team from 1975-1979. Are you kidding me? I would have played with people like Walter Davis and Phil Ford, Al Wood and Mitch Kupchak. But that joy was not for all the people, especially short and slow people who couldn’t shoot. (They all played for NC State).

- But the good news of great joy was and is for all people. Tall and short, rich and poor, black and white, educated and not-educated, kings and beggars. Look, there are times when we need to “petition government for a redress of grievances,” to quote from the First Amendment to our Constitution. We have that right. But the good news of great joy? You don’t need to petition anybody, especially not Congress, for that! It has come to us, it is, and it will never end! You simply need to reach out and take hold of the one who has taken hold of you. Why don’t we see that? Why is joy so elusive for so many?
- Alistair Begg says that we often treat joy like we do love: we see joy and love as victims of our emotions rather than servants of our will. When love is a victim of our emotions, we only love when we feel like it. When joy is a victim of our emotions, we only rejoice when everything in our life is as we think it should be, when we are “happy” about every circumstance in our family, our church, even our nation. **In either case, our emotions lead, our wills follow, and our minds are out to lunch.** But we must lead with our minds. Think this out: why do you rejoice? Because Christ was sent to redeem you from the curse. Because you have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3-5) JOY! Our thinking is to control our wills, and then our emotions follow along behind both. Good news of great joy has gone to great lengths, even to come to the likes of you and me. Finally, this good news of great joy goes to...
 - **Great depths (verses 10-11)**
 - Fear not, the angel says! For today a Savior is born. This great joy is enough to pull us down from the highest reaches of our fears, and enough to pull us up from the lowest depths of our suffering. David Mathis writes, “This great joy comes into a world of great sin, great fear, great sorrow, great suffering. In fact, this child, who is joy incarnate, will be a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and it will be his suffering that secures for us the great joy.”
 - C.S. Lewis called joy, “The serious business of Heaven.” In other words, the serious work of God in the heavens is done in an atmosphere of great joy!
 - What do we do, then, if we are just not feeling it? What if joy seems like an impossible thing to attain to right now? You may be able to come up with a list of 50 reasons why you just cannot be joyful, cannot rejoice, cannot feel joy right now. What to do? The Bible’s solution to a lack of joy is surprisingly vertical. We look up, to the One who gives us a reason for joy and the One who is the source of joy. Jesus told his disciples before he went to the cross, “You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (John 16:22). He understood that there would be great sorrow in his absence and great joy in his presence. The only way that promise can be true is if Jesus is the source of our joy. I have good news of great joy. Jesus is with us. He is here. And no one can take him from us. Ever.
 - We don’t need smaller problems in order to live joyful lives. We need a bigger God. He **is** “good news of great joy!”
 - Prayer
 - Song: Micah and Jesse

