

Waiting with Joy

SCOTT HOEZEE

Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Few Christmas carols are as well known as this one, and it is rooted in the angel's message to those shepherds the night Jesus was born, when the angels delivered to those unsuspecting shepherds a message that they said would be of great joy to all people; but although Christ's birth brought joy, we still wait for the fullness of that joy in a world that is filled with much sorrow. In Advent, we remember what Jesus' first coming brought, even as we wait for and anticipate all that His second coming will bring. One of the things we wait with, but also wait for is joy; and today on Groundwork, we will dig into scripture to see what that means. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and Dave, this is part three of a four-part Advent, and finally also Christmas series, where we have been talking about what it is. Advent is a season of waiting, and what does it mean to wait? So, we have been talking about hope, peace, today joy, and the final program will be on love.

DAVE BAST

Really, if we chose sort of a theme verse for the whole series it would be a verse from Psalm 130, where the psalmist says: I wait for the Lord, and in His word I hope. O, Israel, hope in the Lord.

Hope is sort of faith projected toward the future. It is forward-looking faith; it is believing that the promises of God will come true, and putting our hope in them; and we wait, as we said, for peace to come on earth – the promise of the angels: Peace on earth, good will toward those with whom God is pleased; and today we wait with joy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As we start, Dave, it would probably be good to distinguish joy from, I don't know if you would call it a near rival term, but certainly a lot of people confuse or conflate joy and happiness. One of the things we are going to want to say in this program is that happiness and joy are actually quite different. Joy for Christian believers is the much more significant of the two terms.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely, and if you just stop and think about that, what is the difference between feeling happy and being joy-filled or joyful? I suppose to start with, happiness is more dependent on our circumstances – on our situation in life. It is hard to be happy if you are not feeling well. It is hard to be happy if you have got chronic pain. It is hard to be happy if things have sort of gone against you lately; if you have had a string of reverses, a financial setback or your family has caused problems or you are having difficulty in a relationship. All of those things can make us deeply unhappy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; as the old vacation bible school song used to have it: If you are happy and you know it, clap your hands. If you are happy and you know it, then your face will surely show it. Happy people smile, right? Their

ship has come in, as you just said. In good times, we are happy; and we might be happy and joyful at the same time, but one of the things we want to say is that you can be joyful when you are also very, very unhappy. In fact, you can be joyful as a Christian even when outwardly you are in a time of sorrow. You can be joyful even when your cheeks are stained with tears because you are standing at a loved one's grave at a funeral and you are committing their body to the ground. You are unhappy – you are sad over the death of someone you loved, and yet the joy of the Lord persists even then.

DAVE BAST

Well, it sounds like a paradox, doesn't it? You can be joyful even when you are sad; but Christians believe it is true, and we believe it is true on good authority, the authority of God's word.

We want to look today in this program... first of all, we are going to look at a number of passages of scripture that relate to the idea of joy, but the first one we want to talk about is in John Chapter 16. Now, this is a passage in the middle of what is called Jesus' farewell discourse. It is the five chapters – John 13-17 – that Jesus shared with His disciples in the upper room on the night before He died. So, it was not exactly happy times. If I can be a little flippant, it was not a happy meal that they had there in the last supper in the upper room; but Jesus had much that He wanted to talk to them about, and one of those great subjects was joy, as we pick it up in John 16.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹⁹Jesus saw that they wanted to ask Him about this, and so He said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see Me no more, and then after a little while you will see Me,' ²⁰Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come, but when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world; ²²and so with you; now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. ²³In that day, you will no longer ask Me anything. Very truly I tell you, My Father will give you whatever you ask in My name. ²⁴Until now, you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

DAVE BAST

So there Jesus uses the analogy of childbirth. It is painful. A woman might even call it grief; but when the child is born, all that pain is forgotten, all that grief is turned into joy; and so Jesus says to His disciples: The point is this. You are going to be plunged into grief. You are going to have bad times, and the worst time you are ever going to experience is right ahead of you, although they did not know it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the next 24 hours.

DAVE BAST

It is going to happen tomorrow when you watch Me taken from you and then publicly crucified; but I will come to you again, and then your grief will turn to joy.

So one of the fundamental things I think we could say based on this is that for the Christian – for the Christian believer – joy is a function of the presence of Christ. No matter what... no matter what your external circumstances; and remember, we said your happiness depends completely on those circumstances being positive; nevertheless, for a Christian, because Christ is with us, we can have that deeper joy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is, indeed, what the angels in Luke 2 in the classic telling of Jesus' birth – the Christmas story, as we call it; when they said that they had tidings of great joy to share with the shepherds, they did not just mean that Jesus had been born, right? Everybody likes it when a baby is born. The angels meant something deeper. They meant the depth of the Gospel, the ultimate joy that Jesus brings, will come through His death, which does not sound like a joyful thing, but also His resurrection; and when Jesus returns to the disciples through the resurrection, when He sends them His Spirit after the ascension, then Jesus said: No matter what

happens in the world, you are going to have a joy nobody can take away from you. I like that line: No one will be able to take it from you, not once I have conquered death.

So, you have to go to the cross, you have to go through the hard times to get the true depth of the joy Jesus brought to the world when He was born into this sinful world.

DAVE BAST

So we already have joy, and we have joy as a function of Christ coming, His dying, His rising again, His ongoing presence with us through the person of the Holy Spirit – another theme in these chapters from John, including John 16, the Helper that Jesus promised, who would be His Spirit living within us; but we still look for joy as well, and we anticipate it; we watch for it, as the psalmist says, like watchmen watch for the coming morning; and we want to look ahead in just a moment at what that is going to look like when the day dawns and full joy comes to us.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and let's get right to the kind of joy we are still waiting for as people of Advent, by listening to one of the most lyric passages in the Bible. It comes from Isaiah 35:

¹The desert and the parched land will be glad. The wilderness will rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it will burst into bloom. ²It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it. The splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. ⁵Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁹No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast. They will not be found there, but only the redeemed will walk there; ¹⁰and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

So here, Dave, is one of the...

DAVE BAST

That is just beautiful, isn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is beautiful poetry, beautiful sentiment, and one of the classic promises. We find this kind of thing all through the prophets, and very often in Isaiah, but also elsewhere in the prophets, very often the location where we are going to start to see the great reversal of God is the wilderness, or the desert; which in the Bible, is more than just a physically dangerous place. If you have ever been to Arizona, like my wife and I were some years ago, we decided to take a walk around Saguaro National Park around like 1:00 p.m., and the water went kind of fast and the car seemed farther and farther away. You know the desert is a dangerous place physically, but in the Bible, it is also a spiritual danger.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and if you are familiar with the story of the Bible, your mind immediately can probably go to several familiar examples of how the wilderness figured in a spiritual sense in the history of the people of God. So, most notably in the Old Testament, the Exodus story; and then later in Isaiah, the return through that same desert from exile in Babylon; or in the Gospels, Jesus is driven out after His baptism in the wilderness it says, really, the desert. That is the place of temptation, where Satan attacks Him; and finally there is this marvelous symbolic telling of the story of the whole people of God in Revelation, in Chapter 12, where the dragon pursues the woman, who stands for God's people, into the wilderness – into the desert. So,

that is the place of attack – the place of temptation – the place of spiritual threat.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. It is interesting in the Bible God created a cosmos, right, in the beginning. We see He made the cosmos, which is a word that can mean world, but it also means order; but before God imposed order on the world, there was *tohu vabohu* in Hebrew, which is the formlessness and the void in Genesis 1; and in the Bible after Genesis 1, when sin came back, this *tohu vabohu*, which could be translated as chaos, that is what started to try to edge out cosmos. So, God made a cosmos of order, sin came, we fell, and now we had chaos; and that chaos is symbolized in the wilderness. This is where the devil roams, where the demons howl; it is a spiritually dangerous place; and that, Isaiah says in Chapter 35, is where you are going to see a complete reversal and a complete renewal; and when that happens, joy. I love it; gladness and joy are going to overtake us as though it is roaring up from behind...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is going to catch up to us and joy and gladness are going to overtake us, and once they do, all the sorrow and sighing will flee away. It is a beautiful promise.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and it is a beautiful picture. Isaiah sees God's people as returning to the land of promise, but sort of marching through the wilderness; and now you think of all those prophetic passages that come a little bit later in the book of Isaiah about making a straight way and leveling out the hills and filling in the valleys, so that you sort of have an interstate, or the ancient equivalent of an interstate highway, going from the place of exile back home to the promised land; and here in Chapter 35, God says in effect, He is going to beautify that highway. It is not only going to be straight and smooth and level so the going is good, but the flowers are going to blossom all over it and water is going to come where there has only been dry sand. The wild beasts will be driven away so they are no threat; and then, as you pointed out, that lovely ending verse: As they are walking along the way through this beautiful, now paradise-like garden, all of a sudden coming up from behind, they are overtaken by joy – everlasting gladness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is almost as though the picture here is as God's people make their way through the desert, every time their feet touch sand, grass starts to grow. It is sort of like, you can imagine the special effects people in Hollywood being able to do a nice image of this, that as they walk through the wilderness, it just becomes more and more beautiful; and interestingly, that is exactly what happens when Jesus comes. You mentioned, Dave, the first thing that happens to Jesus after His baptism is that He gets thrown – literally thrown by the Spirit – into the wilderness. Mark, in Chapter 1, is the briefest of them all, and he says Jesus was hurled by the Spirit into the wilderness, and He was with the wild beasts and angels attended Him. Very, very short, typical of Mark, and what he is saying is, where Jesus went, it was not the wilderness anymore. Now it was an oasis. The wild beasts were there and they did not hurt Him. The angels were there. Where Jesus goes, cosmos follows, and that is the ultimate joy for which we as people of Advent are still waiting. Jesus has brought joy to the world. His death, resurrection, and ascension give us joy now; and as we said in the first segment of this program, for now we keep our joy even in the teeth of sorrow. We maintain our joy at the bedside of hospice patients. We maintain our joy despite grim news from the Middle East of Christians being beheaded and churches being burned. We maintain our joy at funerals; we still have the joy, but the joy we are waiting for yet is this: The renewal of all things when there will not be a need to keep joy in the face of sorrow because sorrow will flee away and joy will be our reality.

DAVE BAST

Right; and I think that is one reason why a chapter like Isaiah 35 can move us so greatly. You know, it is all cast in the future. It says this *will* happen. Water *will* gush forth in the wilderness. No lion *will* be there or any

ravenous beast. Then *will* the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then *will* the lame leap like a deer. Yes, that is in the future; but meanwhile, people remain blind, people are confined to wheelchairs and they pray for a miracle and the miracle seems to be waiting. So we are waiting with this tension. Joy is real, but the full expression – the full experience of it – we still look forward to that, and that is why we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus,” with the Church through the ages. We long for His return, because only at His return will all things be made new.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we wait for that second advent, we have the joy already and we have the assurance of the fullness of joy yet to come, but what anchors that hope? What keeps us going through funerals and persecution, and what makes us really believe that this vision of Isaiah 35 will come true? What anchors our hope in the joy yet to come? We will think about that next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to Groundwork, where today we are doing the third of our programs for Advent: Waiting with joy; and we have already looked at a couple of passages, one from the Gospel of John Chapter 16, where Jesus promises joy even though we still experience grief – the joy that comes with His presence; and then we looked in the next segment at the prophetic vision of Isaiah 35: The joy that is coming in the future when God will turn the wilderness of this world into a beautiful garden, and the forces of chaos will be replaced by cosmos – by God’s order and God’s beauty. Now we want to look at a couple of other verses, just short passages from the New Testament, which explain the nature of this joy, how it comes to us and how we can hold onto it, even in the midst of terrible, sometimes life-shattering sorrow.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And these are both very short. We are just going to read one verse each, but it gets at where the joy comes from. The first one is from Acts 16:34. This is right after God, by the Holy Spirit, has broken the apostles out of prison; the jailor thinks he is going to get killed, but instead he finds Jesus and the Gospel and is converted; and so, after this the jailor takes the apostles to his own house, and it says in Acts 16:34: The jailor brought them into his house and set a meal before them. He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God; he and his whole household.

DAVE BAST

And then here is a line from Paul in I Thessalonians Chapter 1. This is a letter he wrote to a church that he had planted; early on, in Chapter 1:6, he writes:

You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So it is clear, believing the Gospel – the Gospel of grace – that we are saved by grace – this is what brings us joy, and what anchors our joy, both now and into the future, and until God makes all things new.

It is not too surprising, if there would be a connection between the Gospel of grace and joy because, Dave, I think we have noted this before on the program, people don’t always like to hear Hebrew and Greek words, but here it is kind of important; the Greek word for grace is a word called *charis*, and it turns out that *charis* is at the root of a lot of other important words in the New Testament.

DAVE BAST

Such as thanksgiving. Even the word *eucharist*, which some Christians still use for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper or communion, has at its root the idea of giving thanks, but pare it down even further and the word *grace* is there at the center. So, *charis* – thanks – and they are related verbally to the word for joy, which is *chara*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that verb comes up, particularly in the Gospel of Luke, but also all through the New Testament, whenever the Gospel of grace – *charis* – comes, people respond to it with *chara* – to rejoice and to have joy. There is even, and I learned this not too long ago, that in a well-known story, most people know the story of Zacchaeus... wee little Zacchaeus from Luke Chapter 19... people will remember that Jesus kind of invited Himself over to Zacchaeus' house, and after Jesus is there, Zacchaeus says: Now I declare, I will pay back everybody I robbed. I am going to pay them back fourfold; and sometimes we think: Ah, see, he is doing the right thing, and that is the moment he got saved; but Luke was more clever than that. Zacchaeus was saved earlier. As soon as Jesus says, "Zacchaeus, come down from the tree," the sycamore tree, Luke says that he came down with *chara* – he came down with joy. Translations sometimes miss this. They say he came down gladly or happily, but...

DAVE BAST

It wasn't just that he was glad to be able to climb out of the branches.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; he had joy, which means...

DAVE BAST

Joy filled his heart, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Gospel had already penetrated there. And that is what happens to us as believers. When the Good News of grace gets us, joy fills our hearts, and as Jesus said in John 16 – the passage we looked at in the first segment of this program – once that comes, nobody can take it away.

DAVE BAST

Well, there is an old story about a fellow, a long-time Christian, who was asked once if he thought whether Jesus had ever laughed or not; and he said: I don't know, but He sure fixed me so that I could. There is that interplay: When you have experienced grace, it flows out in joy, and it is not just an emotional response, because as Paul said to the Thessalonians, this is produced by the Holy Spirit; so grace is life-transforming, and the Spirit of Christ accompanies it and begins to fill us and transform us, and one of the outflowings of the Spirit's presence in our hearts and in our lives is genuine, deep-down joy that cannot be rocked by circumstances.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because we know we have a future, and it has been secured for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord; and we get caught up in that by grace.

Interestingly, Dave, we said earlier in the program that joy is not the same thing as happiness because you can be joyful even when you are sad; and that for now, in this world, joy is going to have to coexist side by side with sorrow; but there is another little thing that we can mention just in closing, and that is that when you have that deep-down joy, that knowledge of what is right, and what God is doing and has done and will do, ironically, it might actually make you more sad because you are going to be more sensitive to the bad news of the world than people who have no joy, no hope, no assurance of the promise of the joy to come. The more you know what is right, the more the wrong hurts you.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; and I think there is an even further dimension, Scott, to this, that is captured by the Apostle when he says: We weep with those who weep. Experiencing the grace of Christ makes us more sensitive toward others; so, again, paradoxically, our own sadness might be increased because we come alongside brothers and sisters in the body of Christ; or for that matter, brothers and sisters in the family of humanity; and we feel more deeply their pain. Jesus, after all, was known as a man of sorrows, and I don't think anyone

ever accused Him of lacking joy either. So, the grace that transforms us and the Spirit who fills us can also send us out into the world on a mission to come alongside those who suffer and really share our joy with them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we share our joy. It is a deeper joy. We do not just tell people to cheer up, you know, or paste a smiley face over their hurts, but rather, we say: God in Christ has already had an ultimate solution to all this; and as people of Advent, that is the message we live – that is the message we proclaim – not just during December or Christmastime, but all year long.

DAVE BAST

Joy to the world, the Lord has come, indeed.

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

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Printed on April 1, 2025