

“Sing with Joy, Jesus Reigns”

12-15-13

Christmas is almost here! Only 1½ more weeks and the whole ordeal will be over for another year! For many people this is exactly how they view it! They don't see Christmas as a time of happiness, but a time of frustration. For them it's not a time for joy. I realize that Christmas can be hard if you've lost a loved one, or you're alone, or if you've fallen on hard times.

Many people today feel empty. They feel as though everything has gone against them and all they have is nothing. Many people today feel unfulfilled. They worked hard to have the best job they could, but now they're not sure if they've reached the success for which they hoped.

Many people today feel unsatisfied. They feel that everything they've done and everything they're doing just isn't fun anymore. This happens because we confuse fun with joy. To have fun isn't the same thing as being joyful. Fun only becomes crucial if you're using it as a substitute for real joy.

The remarkable thing is that all these feelings come from people who have so much. Our lives aren't empty of blessings. Because of God's love and grace for us, the blessings He gives overflow. As God's children, we have an answer, especially during Advent and Christmas. Today, we see the reason for our joy and happiness. Jesus Christ, the babe in the manger, is come to earth to take our place and save us.

Open to Isaiah 35. If people today feel empty inside, they're not the first ones. A world of inner emptiness is exactly what Isaiah's describing here. Verses 3-4, *“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”*

This was a world that had no confidence anymore. It was a place of *“anxious hearts.”* The people of Judah were extremely fearful. They were soon to be invaded, captured, and sent into exile in Babylon. They lost their homes, their livelihoods, and their families.

Our fears are the same. Fear of today. Fear of the future. Fear of death. Isaiah says all this suddenly changes. Fear and anxious hearts flee away. Fear's replaced with joy. Verses 1-2, *“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.”*

When Jesus comes, He changes everything. Sometimes we don't have joy because we want to control everything around us, but when we let Jesus lead and take control, our focus is outside ourselves and we can rely on Him alone in trust.

When Jesus comes, He brings salvation. Listen to what Jesus said to Zacchaeus in Luke 19:10, *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* Jesus knows our struggles. Jesus knows we can't save ourselves. That's why He came to earth to take our place and suffer our punishment so we might be saved and live for Him.

When Jesus comes, He provides a way out of confusion. When we rely on Him, we're not so easily distracted by the things around us and our own thoughts. We're not caught in the confusion that comes from not knowing which way to go.

Jesus makes a highway in the desert. Verses 8-9, *“And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.”*

Even when we think there's no solution to what is causing confusion in our lives, Jesus gives us a clear path to follow. The people on this highway know where they're going. This highway is only for those who *"walk on the Way."* Did you know that before Christians were called Christians, they were simply called people of *"the Way"*? Jesus is the Way.

He is the way for the ransomed. He is the way for the redeemed. These are the people who have been "bought back," and every one of Isaiah's original readers knew exactly what he meant by that. The words "ransomed" and "redeemed" have in mind a person who's fallen on hard times. When that happened to someone, it was the duty of one of his relatives to step in and buy him back.

That's a perfect picture of what Jesus has done for us. Through our sins we have run up a debt we could never begin to pay. We're people who are in bondage by our fear of death. But Jesus came as our brother. He took on human flesh. He bought us back. He gave Himself in death, so we could be released. When He rose from the dead, death was destroyed forever.

As a child of God, whom Christ redeemed, you can be filled with joy! There was a conference at a church in Omaha. People were given helium-filled balloons and told to release them at some point in the service when they felt like expressing the joy in their hearts. Since some were Lutherans, they didn't free to say "Hallelujah, Praise the Lord." All through the service, balloons ascended, but when it was over 1/3 of the balloons were unreleased. Let your balloon go!

The joy of the King is here! Jesus' coming brings joy to the world! Celebrate His coming! Celebrate His life! Celebrate His joy! Be filled with His joy, smile and enjoy Him, this Christmas and always!