

Good morning! Men if you are still out there looking for that perfect Christmas gift – let me suggest one that will be romantic and have eternal significance - our Marriage Retreat. Feb 24-25, Wildwood Hotel, 4 churches, Marc Sikma – are gathering to ask Jesus to increase, stoke, rekindle our love in each other and our joy in him. Sign up at thesummitstl.com today.

Jesus is joy / Does god still Come to Us Now II - Presence

What is joy? *We sing about it – joyful all ye nations rise / rejoice, rejoice – Immanuel / joy to the world / What is joy?*

- **Is JOY a feeling or an emotion when** – we win, we achieve the greatest thing, we get to celebrate with others our team, our town, our country. **Is joy a feeling of the highest high imaginable?** (Hazelwood Central)
- **Is JOY that unexplainable sense we have that all is right and good that comes with family, friends, and love.**

What is joy?

- **We all want it.** We work jobs hoping it will provide it thru: what we do, who we do it with, and even how much we make so we can pay for things that we think will give us – joy.
- **We all want it.** We envy others who seem to find it often & fail to realize others envy us for the joy they think we have.
- **We all want it.** We anxiously strive to hold onto to it when we have it & then we desperately work like crazy to find it again when it – joy - is gone. **We all want it yes, but I would even say we need it because ...**

You & I were created for joy. But not just the hope of it, a shadow of it, or even a taste of it. You were created for the real thing – joy. *And this joy is in the very person & presence of God. **There is a problem:** some of us don't believe this is true. So, we long for, work for, and desperately hope to find & get joy in anything & everything but God.*

Others of us: we believe God holds our joy but we believe it is something He gives to us in a moment when He provides for a great need we have or He protects us from a great tragedy. We believe joy is a product of what God can do for us to make our life better. There is a life altering truth we all need to see and believe today.

Ps 16:11 (ESV) in Your presence there is fullness of joy

Truth: God IS Joy. Joy is not a product of what he does for

us. God / Jesus is Joy.

Our prayer today: God - allow us to see/believe that He is joy & begin to live in joy!

When God opens our eyes to see (believe) He IS Joy – we will begin to live in Joy.

01. Why Do We Struggle Believing God is Joy?

02. How Do We Begin to Live in the Joy of God?

01. Why Do We Struggle Believing God is Joy?

Luke 2:8-14 (ESV) 8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. *gospel: good news, incredibly great good news: your \$500,000 debt paid, cancer was there – is gone, child was missing – is found / incredibly great good news – JOY for all – today!*

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

- The message of God through His angel – **the JOY you were created to know and live in – is here!**

What is Joy? Joy is God's presence - *in us. It is internal, eternal, not removed by circumstances, and louder than all emotions.*

*In other words – Joy is not an emotion. You can be happy and know joy, but happiness is not joy because it comes and goes based on circumstances. You can know joy in grief and happiness, celebrations and tears, boredom and excitement, hopeful moments and moments of great tragedy – because **JOY is that powerful and beautiful!***

God's joyous presence – gives us a firm confident: identity, worth, value, and hope.

*The gospel or the good news is Jesus came not to give us a joy through gifts or miracles or a job or anything else he could do to make our life better. **He does do these things at times – for sure. But if this is our joy – then what happens when he withholds these things? What happens? We start believing lies.***

Lies we believe about joy: **We struggle believing God is joy – because we believe lies**

1) We believe joy is a product of God – *not Jesus. His person and presence!*

2) We believe God doesn't give us joy because we are not worthy of it. *So we work to be worthy.*

"Don't I deserve a little bit of happiness or peace." These are things we say when we are working to earn or be worthy of God's joy.

3) We believe God doesn't really know joy. *To follow him is to be joyless.*

"Many think God is the great kill joy." D A Carson Have you been there or are you there? Do you believe following Christ is just a bunch of do's and don'ts with an extra helping of don'ts.

4) We functionally stop believing in God. *We don't think he is worthy.*

We believe these lies – *not because of who God is – but because of who we are.*

- **We lost the joy of God in our sin, our rebellion.** *We have been searching for this in anything and everything but God ever since. Where do you search for joy? What gives you a sense of value, identity, worth, and hope? It is usually the same thing that gives you the most anxiousness, shame, pride, and hopelessness.*

When one thing gives you a taste of joy and large drink of anxiousness and despair - it is not joy.

These tastes of joy - when pursued to give you joy - will only give you worry, shame, pride and hopelessness.

God is not a kill joy – he is just opposed to what kills our joy! – John Piper

God knows what kills our joy – our eyes that get blinded to truth – and begin believing lies are truth. He is not a kill-joy. God longs to give us Joy – for this is joy is life and is Him. So ...

02. How Do We Begin to Live in the Joy of God?

What was the shepherd's response to the words of God?

Luke 2:15-20 (ESV) 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

- **Let's go see.**

16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

- **These shepherds, the lowest on the education, economic, social pole** - believed that this was God, the King of All, and the Savior of the world – in a manger. And because of this they were filled with great joy – and left glorifying God – *saying God you are the greatest – the only One who is Joy* - just like the angels did. **Why?**

Did a peasant baby wrapped in cloths, lying in an animal feed box, in the middle of a smelly animals make these lowly shepherds believe – this is God – the Savior of the World! Really – this was the evidence to say – "Savior!"

"Faith appears where it is least expected and falters where it should be thriving." Phillip Yancey
Something made them believe and be filled with the joy of God. What was it? (Reaching for the Invisible God)

Last week, we saw the disciples in an upper room – filled with fear and doubt – and Jesus comes – "peace".

John 20:20, 22, 24-29 (ESV) 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. But who wasn't here – Thomas. I think his moment with Jesus will help us see how we begin to live in the joy of God.

24 Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Thomas just missed Jesus – do you feel like this? Thomas had no joy – just doubt! He couldn't believe.

His belief was this – There is only one thing that will make me believe – when I see Jesus risen from the dead and touch his wounds myself. **Important question that is so relevant to how we see & believe:**

Is Thomas' doubt a horrible thing to us or our God?

1) Doubt is not a horrible thing? *I think the shepherds doubted: let's go see. (A baby: the good news of great joy?)*

"God's invisibility guarantees I will experience times of doubt." - Phillip Yancey **He is not mad when you doubt.**

The bible is full of **doubters**. **Abraham** and his wife **Sarah** doubted God's voice and word. **Jacob** their son doubted so much – He tried to cheat his way to God's favor. **Job** doubted and it was he who was held up by

God – not his friends who scolded him for his doubts. **Jonah** the prophet doubted and ran and doubted and obeyed. **David** doubted – all through his songs in Psalms. His son **Solomon** – the wisest who has ever lived – doubted and filled two books of God's Word with his doubts – Ecclesiastes and Lamentations.

Doubt comes in a lot of different forms. 1) *It can be doubting that GOD IS?* 2) *It can be doubting that God's ways are best?* 3) *It can be doubting that God is our joy?*

*** David Busby – Pastor with Cystic Fibrosis and Polio. He wrestled with doubt his whole life. 1st - Why did I get these diseases, why was I the runt of all my friends, why couldn't I be like other kids. 2nd – Why won't you heal me – I'm going to die sooner than I want, I'm serving you, I want to my whole life to be for your service. 3rd – Why won't you take me now – I'm tired of this body, this machine, no breath, always in pain. This led to depression, fear, deep anxiety, and "dark nights of the soul." Humanly – this man had the most profound and deep impact on my soul between the ages of 25-35.**

Doubt is not the opposite of faith. In God's eyes – **DOUBT can be** a pathway to belief that gives us joy IN God.

If doubt is abundant and joy is lacking ... - if the cry of your heart is pain, boredom, a longing for another time when you knew joy. If real constant, internal, eternal joy is missing. **What do you do?** Let's read ...

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas said, unless I see and touch ... Jesus came to Thomas and responded to the exact cry of his heart.

1) **Make your doubt and missing joy known to God.** I'm not saying Thomas prayed to Jesus, but Jesus knew the pain and doubt in Thomas. He heard his cry of hopelessness. Jesus heard Thomas – and Jesus came.

When you cannot come to Jesus with your doubts and – please, please ...

2) **Press in – to other Christ followers.** - where there will be believers who are running toward God even in the midst of their own doubts, where there will be believers who will pray for you, walk with you in the midst of doubts and not make you feel like you are hated by God, but they will also challenge you in love to turn to God.

Gospel Centered Counseling Course - great course for deepening your understanding of the gospel and how to walk with others (community group, people at work, kids) in the gospel. Tues, Jan. 10 – 6:30 pm / Sign-up card.

28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus came to Thomas and let Thomas see Him – and Thomas believed and knew JOY! Questions...

When the shepherds heard of the hope of JOY – there response was – let's see.

When Thomas heard of the hope of JOY in Jesus' coming from dead to life - that Jesus could give life in the Spirit.

You know the disciples told him: he breathed on us: life & joy filled us. What was Thomas' response – I want to see.

What made them see – really see and believe Jesus is Joy / God is Joy?

What makes us see - believe? What makes you see Jesus for who He is and believe He alone can give joy?

1) Do something amazing – and I will believe.

2) Take the bad things away – and I will believe.

3) Make the bad thing make sense – and I will believe.

If this is what will make you see – really believe God is joy. Then, the joy you are seeking is not in God and his presence – it is in the amazing thing, the removal of the bad thing, or the understanding of the bad things.

Signs and miracles alone do not make us believe and trust our soul to Jesus.

John 12:37 (ESV) Though he (Jesus) had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,

Miracles and signs are ...

1) salt and light to our unbelieving eyes

2) a tsunami of grace to our believing eyes to see the GREATNESS of God

Between 1 and 2 we must have our eyes opened!

Despite the evidence of God we don't believe – not because of who He is – but because of who we are. We see and don't believe. Our eyes must be opened to believe that He alone is Joy.

John 6:63-65 (ESV) 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." 65 And he said, "This is why I told you that

no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” **Only God can open our eyes!**

- **The shepherds rejoiced in joyFULL praise not because they saw a peasant baby in the manger – but because God opened their eyes to see and believe He was Savior – Joy - and then know His joy.**
- **Thomas’ eyes seeing Jesus did not make Him know joy.** Even some of the disciples in Matthew 28:17 after the resurrection doubted - **And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.** Thomas rejoiced in the JOY of God’s presence because God opened the eyes of his heart to see and believe he alone was JOY!
- ***Dave Busby’s “Dark night of the soul” – what He called the John the Baptist moment – was followed by great moments of faith. Why? I remember him sharing this with me. He said, “I trust the Father’s heart because He opened my eyes to see that He was worthy to be trusted – not because he answered MY prayers, my wants, my way. He opened my eyes to see He was WORTHY!***
- **God wants to open your eyes – so you can see HE is joy and begin to live in joy.**
We only begin to live in joy – when God opens our eyes to see and believe He is joy.

When God opens our eyes to see (believe) He IS Joy – we will begin to live in Joy.

Prayer TIME

Pray for others: *(with a pastor or friend)*

- Ask God to open the eyes of a friend or neighbor you have been praying and speaking of Jesus with to know the love and joy of Christ.
- Ask God to open the eyes of a believing friend who are looking for joy in every place but God.

Lies:

- They are waiting for God to do the amazing or remove the pain to have joy.
- They believe the amazing or the removal of pain is better than the presence of God – and His joy!

Others praying for you: *(with a pastor or raise your hand and others will come to you)*

- If you are longing for joy, wanting joy, and doubting it is in God – ask him to open your eyes to truth – He alone is joy!

God is not a Genie in our life. He the great and glorious presence that fills our soul with joy.

Truth:

- You did the ultimate amazing thing on the cross removing our shame, guilt, and despair - to give us joy!
- The joy of God’s presence given to us in the cross – is greater than him changing our situation.
- Ask him to open our eyes to see and believe that this is true. His joy is what we need.

“Sometimes the most unyielding skeptic gifts us with the most profound confession.”