

A Christmas Prayer Part 1

A Prayer For Joy

Luke 1:46-55

Memory Verses: 1 Peter 1:8-9

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Have you ever noticed how we often look forward to Christmas as that one thing that will fulfill us the most. The one day of the year that will finally make us happy and right every wrong. It's the most wonderful time of the year because it brings us joy, peace, love, and hope. That is until about 6pm on Christmas Day. That's when you look around the living room; paper's everywhere, the batteries are dead, the sugar crash hits, and suddenly the same child who moments earlier was singing, laughing, dancing, and playing is now crying on the living room floor because his toy no longer transforms. You're broke, tired, and Christmas is gone. How does the most wonderful time of the year often seem to end in exhaustion, brokenness, and disappointment? It's because we chased Christmas like a toddler on espresso hoping that it would bring us all the missing pieces of our lives... and it doesn't. It can't. Because we are chasing the wrong thing.

That is why we are going to finish out our year and the Christmas season the same way we started our year. Focusing on prayer. Because prayer is one of the greatest ways we can stay focused on the one thing that can truly give us lasting joy, peace, love, and hope; Jesus Christ. Look at this promise in **Psalm 34:17-18**. There is only one God who hears the prayers of his people and that is our God. There is only one deliverer and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one God who is close to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit... and so that is who we pray to and that is who we depend upon. **Christmas isn't about getting more stuff, rather it's about becoming more still** so that we can focus our attention on the Lord Jesus Christ who satisfies our souls fully. Prayer focuses us on Christ. Prayer makes all the difference.

And so we begin this series by looking to our first prayer, a prayer for Joy. **We ask the Lord this morning, "Lord, restore our joy. Not the fake, putting on a show, wearing a mask that says I'm okay, kind of joy, but real joy, deep joy. The kind of joy that carries us through the storm without losing heart. Lord, give us joy that lasts."**

Joy is necessary. Especially at Christmas. This season can get heavy for a lot of people and many people are looking for Joy in the wrong place. In the spirit of the season, in gifts, in parties, in activity. And when all is said and done... it just widens the hole instead of filling it. But if we recognize the truth; Jesus is the only one who can truly give us

joy, then we can connect to the joy that he gives us through consistent and intentional prayer to Him. We find this type of prayer in **Luke 1:46-55**. This prayer is often called The Magnificat, the song of Mary that she offers to the Lord when she hears that she'll give birth to the messiah. And it is filled with joy. Again look at **verses 46-47**. May our spirit's magnify the Lord and rejoice in God our savior.

This is good news; God doesn't just command us to rejoice, but he creates in us joy when we draw near to Him. In the Christmas story, joy breaks out in the most unlikely places; in a poor girl's song, in shepherds' fields, in a manger. And that's where we find our joy too, in his presence, not our circumstances.

I'll be real, I need this sermon as much as anyone. There have been many times at Christmas where I've stood on a stage leading songs or preaching sermons and still felt like something was missing. And that's because, like you, I often confuse joy with excitement, or success, or approval. But God's been showing me over the past year this; **joy isn't found in the absence of pain, or the pleasures of this world, but the presence of Christ**. The main point this morning is simple... **Prayer detaches us from the illusion of worldly satisfaction and connects us to the sustaining joy of Christ**.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to see here is that... **We Find Joy When We Magnify God In Prayer**. Look at **vs.46-47** again. As we learned at the beginning of this year, Prayer should always begin with praise. Praise, Repentance, Asking, and Yielding. Mary's prayer begins with praise. She magnifies the Lord.

The word magnify in the greek means to make large, to exalt as great. Mary begins with that which is supreme, the Lord who created all and rules all in his providential power. She chooses to focus on that which is greatest for a reason; if you place your attention on the greatest thing, your situation becomes less important. **Joy begins when we stop magnifying our problems and start magnifying our provider**. We often don't think about choosing joy. We think it's a mental state that we have to try and force, but it's actually the opposite. When we make the choice to rejoice, it turns our hearts to God, draws us into his presence, and then God's presence manifests joy in our lives. Jesus himself tells us that his presence gives us a joy that no one can take from us. **John 16:22**. Also Jesus reassures us that when we look to him in his word as well... we will find joy. **John 15:11**. This is why Paul commands us in **Philippians 4:4** to rejoice always.

When we pray praises our problems seem inconsequential. Our circumstances grow trivial. Our pain is replaced with the joy of his presence. **It's like a magnifying glass. What you focus on becomes bigger in your sight. If all you look at is what's wrong or what brings you pleasure, those**

things will fill your view. But when you look at Jesus everything else shrinks in comparison. **Prayer detaches us from the illusion of worldly satisfaction and connects us to the sustaining joy of Christ.**

The next thing we need to see here is that... **We Find Joy When We Stop Praying For Happiness.** Look at **Luke 1:48-50** again. Mary is in a very vulnerable and humble state. She is a poor girl and no one of consequence. She is a very young woman, some suggest around 14 years of age. She is unmarried and yet pregnant, which in that day was a death sentence at worst and exculsion at best. An unlike what our Catholic friends believe, she was not sinless or perfect. She was a normal sinner like you and me. And now she has to explain to her fiance and family that God has spoken to her and the child is his. In this state it would be easy to form a bad attitude without happiness or cheer. It would be fitting to be filled with anxiety, doubt, and fear. It would overwhelm even the best of us.

And yet Mary says bring it on. Her attitude is this; I will forgo temporary happiness for eternal joy. If she were praying for happiness she would have prayed, God choose someone else. If she were praying for happiness she would have prayed, God help people to not judge me and or try to stone me. If she were praying for happiness she would have prayed, God, why can't I just be like any other girl and just simply get married and live the American Dream. And yet, she doesn't pray any of that. Instead her response is bring it on. Why? Because she knows that being in God's will will bring joy and satisfaction. She focuses on the blessings and not the curses. She focuses on the goodness of God and not the trials and heartaches of ministry. Her mindset is that of **Romans 12:12**. She rejoices in tribulation because her hope is in Christ. And she is praying to that end. She believes in **Psalms 16:11**. She knows that this God's path and therefore his presence will give her the fullness of joy forevermore.

And again she points to the mercy of God. Not her ability but God's mercy. Even though he is giving her a tough assignment, she sees this as a gift. The point is simple, we often look for happiness instead of joy. What will make me feel good right now. What will make me smile, give me butterflies, boost my ego, give me a high. This is why spouses cheat. Temporary happiness instead of long lasting joy. This is why people steal. Temporary happiness instead of long lasting joy. This is why people look at porn, why people talk about people behind their backs, why we lie, cheat, kill, gossip, slander. This is why we sin. We think we can find joy in our selfish desires only to find out they bring more pain. And this is why we bings tv and cheer for losing sports teams and have hobbies that cost thousands of dollars. We are chasing something to give us happiness... but it doesn't give us joy. Because the things

that give us happiness are fleeting. Joy is not a temporary position. It's a matter of the heart. Happiness is a feeling, joy is a posture of the heart. We need to be like Mary and sacrifice happiness for joy! **Stop chasing the temporary things that make you happy and place your faith in a God that gives you eternal joy. Prayer detaches us from the illusion of worldly satisfaction and connects us to the sustaining joy of Christ.**

The last thing we need to see is that... **We Find Joy When We Depend On God.** Look at **Luke 1:51-55** again. Mary turns her prayer to the works and attributes of a worthy God. He has strength, might, and wealth. He humbles the proud, exalts the humble, fills the hungry, helps his servants, remembers his offspring. He knows our hearts, and he speaks to us in various ways. We are his offspring and he is our Father God. The point she is trying to make is this. God I know who you are and I know you are faithful and trustworthy. What you have done, you will do again. I can put my trust in you. I can depend on you.

Nothing will give you more Joy than knowing a God like this has your back. He has your best interest at heart and is fighting for you. Mary's prayer echoes **Psalms 28:7**. Our prayer must reflect **1 Peter 1:8-9**. We have not seen this God with our eyes, but because of his faithfulness and salvation we find our joy in him.

So how do we depend on God? Simple, through prayer, the word, and worship. Through giving and serving and loving and evangelizing and discipling. When our lives are for God we are depending on God. Prayer is the easiest way to depend on God and probably reveals our dependence the most. Prayer reveals our faith and desperation for God to do what only he can do. **One who depends on God inevitably puts a high priority on prayer.** Joy comes through dependence on God, dependence on God is revealed through prayer. **Prayer detaches us from the illusion of worldly satisfaction and connects us to the sustaining joy of Christ.**

Application

The application this morning is simple. If we want the Joy of Christ to dominate our spirits, especially at Christmas then we need to dedicate ourselves to prayer. And our prayer is this; First, we magnify the Lord. We put our eyes on him and off of this world with its pleasures and problems. Second, stop praying for happiness and pray for the Joy of the Lord. We pray that we would be willing to sacrifice all the temporary things that give us momentary highs, and instead pray for long lasting satisfying joy in the middle of God's will for our lives. Third, we depend on God by remembering who he is and what he has done. He will never fail us, he has never failed us.... he won't fail you now! This is the key to rejoicing... so again I say rejoice always!

Conclusion

Hudson Taylor had a special connection with Christmas. Christmas was the day he gave his life to Christ as a little boy and Christmas is the day he met his wife as a man. He didn't see either of these as coincidences, rather he saw them as the providence of God. Why? Because he believed Christmas was about joy and not happiness. Yes, accepting Christ as his Lord on Christmas when he was a boy made him happy. Yes, meeting his wife on Christmas as a man made him happy. But both of these instances instilled him a sense of long lasting joy. He said that the Christian walk will not always make you happy, but it will give you joy. Marriage will not always make you happy, but it will give you joy. The two things in life that exemplifies a life of joy, salvation and marriage, both happened to him at Christmas.

This Christmas, will you chase happiness... will you focus on your circumstances... will you depend on yourself to be glad? Or will you sacrifice that for the never ending all sufficient and sustaining joy of the Lord? If so it begins with prayer. **Prayer detaches us from the illusion of worldly satisfaction and connects us to the sustaining joy of Christ**