

Sunday 17 December 2023

Life Group Leaders' Notes

Series: Living Without Fear

Title: Living With Joy In A World Of Fear

Key Text: Luke 2:10-11

In a world where there are so many reasons to fear, it is possible to live with hope. The words 'do not be afraid' are declared throughout the Christmas story.

This message to 'not be afraid' was given to Zechariah, a faithful but childless priest, who was told that he would become the father of John the Baptist, even though he and his wife were very old (Luke 1:12-13). It was repeated to Mary, a young unmarried woman at the other end of the age scale who suddenly discovered that she would become a mother-the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:30-32). And we see that same message was given to a very frightened group of shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-15).

Let's look a little closer at these words from Luke 2:10-11: *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."*

There are some great truths contained in these few words that show us how we can live without fear:

1. Don't be afraid because you can experience great joy (Luke 2:10; Matthew 2:10; Hebrews.1:9; Romans 14:17; Luke 15:7; Isaiah 61:3; Nehemiah 8:10)
2. Don't be afraid because you can be saved (Luke 2:11; Matthew 1:21; Isaiah 53:4-6)
3. Don't be afraid because you can live confidently under the rule of Jesus (Luke2:11)

Apply

1. Don't be afraid because you can experience great joy. Joy is one of the greatest needs of our world today. Happily, joy is a recurring word throughout the Christmas story and

throughout the Bible. The message of Christianity and of Christmas is good news in a bad news world (Luke 2:10). When Mary met Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist, Elisabeth said 'As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy' (Luke 1:43). When the wise men saw the star, they were overjoyed (Matthew 2:10). The life and ministry of Jesus was marked by joy, especially from the crowds who witnessed His teaching, miracles and compassion. Jesus Himself was anointed with the oil of joy (Hebrews.1:9). His disciples became known for their joy, even when they were persecuted and imprisoned (Romans 14:17). Joy, in C.S. Lewis's memorable phrase, is 'the serious business of heaven.' Real Christianity is a joyful faith. In the story of the Prodigal Son, the Father (representing God) throws a big party when His son turns back to him. There is 'rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents' (Luke 15:7). When the spirit of the Lord is on us, we will 'receive the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair' (Isaiah 61:3). So then, the good news of Christianity is that when you come to know the Lord, you will not be sad and depressed. You don't have to despair or be defined by your circumstances, experiences or what people say think or say about you. Instead you can have an inner joy even in the most difficult of times. As Nehemiah 8:10 says: "Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." You can experience great joy in your life when you experience Jesus.

2. Don't be afraid because you can be saved (Luke 2:11). What is a saviour? A saviour is someone who rescues people from danger, from trouble, from oppression, fears and enemies. Now God can do all that for you, but Jesus came specifically to save us from the greatest the problem every person on earth faces: the problem of sin. The Bible teaches that everyone has sinned and needs rescuing from the power and pain of living independently from God. Sin is a root in every human heart that first incites us to do wrong and then captures us and finally destroys us. That's why everyone needs saving and that's why Jesus came (Matthew 1:21). The famous Christmas song from Boney M puts it like this: "*Oh my Lord/You sent Your son to save us/Oh my Lord/Your very self You gave us/Oh my Lord/That sin may not enslave us/And love may reign once more.*" Jesus was born to die as He came to earth on a rescue mission for all humanity. At the Cross He would lay down His life, the pure for the impure, the innocent to for the guilty to save us from our sins by His shed blood (Isaiah 53:4-6). The good news is that Jesus came to save us from everything destructive, both internally

and externally. This means that you can be forgiven for your sins. You can be free from whatever holds you captive. You can have your heart cleansed and healed. You can live in purity and purpose and be sure and so that's you will spend eternity with God. When you know that you certainly don't have to fear.

3. Don't be afraid because you can live confidently under the rule of Jesus (Luke 2:11). Christ is not Jesus' second name. Christ is a title which means Messiah, the anointed one, chosen to sit on that eternal throne and to usher in the peace and security that this world needs. Lord means that He is ruler, the sovereign, the Lord of the universe. In other words, this Messiah who was born is God Himself. And we too can be part of His kingdom living under His authority. Many today want the nations to be ruled by sharia law or communist dictatorship but the best way to live is by recognising that Jesus is the head over everything. His reign always brings freedom from fear. For as the famous carol "Joy to the World" proclaims: "He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness. And wonders of His love, and wonders of His love, and wonders, wonders of His love." You will never regret it when you receive Jesus as your saviour and Lord. Today you can experience the love of Jesus that drives out fear. The Christmas message is a universal message, for all people at all times. No one is excluded. It is for the poor shepherds and the rich and educated wise men. It is for men and women. It is for single and married. It is for young and old. It is for black and brown and white and olive skinned. The Christmas message is a personal message: It's good news for you: a Saviour has been born to you. For sure God loves the world but He also loves you personally. You matter to Him. He knows you by name. He lived for you, died for you, rose from the dead for you. The Christmas message is an ever-relevant message. It's good news for today (Luke 2:11). The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. While He is not physically here on earth, we can still know His love, His joy His peace, His comfort, His power by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Today pray and draw near to Jesus.