

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

December 3, 2023. "Advent: The Promise of Joy."

I Intro.

We're now just heading towards Christmas. Things are running at full speed and we want you to be a part of this great community. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

It's the second Sunday of Advent. Our journey towards Christmas. Advent is not actually a celebration of Christmas, but rather a time of waiting expectantly for the coming of the Christ. This can be kind of a weird season for us...and that's okay. This time of year we're always so focused on decorating, gifts, planning gatherings, thinking about what our Christmas will look like, we don't think about it also being a season of expectation. We all know Christmas is about Jesus. But everything is all mashed together. We really just want a month of Christmas, everything all at once. So, we forgot what it was like for the people who lived at the time of the birth of Jesus. They had been promised a savior, a messiah, who would come and free them from the captivity they were in. But it involved waiting. And NOBODY waits well. Advent is a time for us to learn to wait well. To live in expectation for the coming of the Christ. It's in this time of waiting, we have our character built by living for the promise of hope, joy, peace, and love. Last week we celebrated the promise of hope and we talked about what promise meant. Look up last week's devotion to get the background on that.. Today we talk about joy.

III Scripture.

This Sunday is about joy. So, some opening questions about your experience with joy.

Is joy a word you use on a regular basis? Why or why not?

What does joy mean to you?

Where have you found that joy comes from?

The scripture Sunday came from **Isaiah 55:1-3a**, and then **55:8-13**. If you watch the service we used The Message version because it seems to capture the feeling of joy in the words. Read those two passages and answer the questions about this passage.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What were some things you saw that spoke to you about joy?

What did you see about the nature of God that would lead to experiencing joy?

Some things we can pull from this passage about the nature and source of true joy.

Joy is this steady groundedness that holds you in place with hope. Especially when you may not be able to find anything that actually gives you hope...or joy. Joy is not a feeling. Joy is a choice in the moment to accept reality and still find hope. It's an inner calmness...almost peace, that others can see. And...joy only grows out of soil that is cultivated with things that can produce joy.

1. Joy comes from understanding how God works. This is the lesson Job had to learn.

"I don't think the way you think. The way you work isn't the way I work." God's Decree.

There is no way we can say this enough. To experience joy, we have to have our expectations for life replaced by how God wants the world to be. This is so difficult. Which is why many of us tend to be disappointed by things that are just our own expectations. People in underdeveloped countries experience joy, so we know it's not connected to things outside of us. Cultivating a life that grows joy is by understanding and accepting how God works.

2. The ability to experience joy grows over time. There is work to be done within our lives that helps us become the person in which joy can grow.

Doing their work of making things grow and blossom, producing seed for farmers and food for the hungry, So will the words that come out of my mouth not come back empty-handed.

They'll do the work I sent them to do, they'll complete the assignment I gave them.

Just about every analogy of spiritual maturity is agriculturally based rather than construction oriented. We like the mass produced, assembly line, understanding and practice of discipleship. Just crank out this standardized description of what it means to be a Christian. Then we wonder why people aren't experiencing joy. *"You don't feel joy when we want you to be like everyone else?"* We believe that the environment, culture, is cultivated, nurtured, that creates the most fertile, positive environment to grow and experience joy. This takes time, and is what actually produces real joy.

3. Joy can be seen by others. Do you know people who just ooze joy? They come into a room and it lights up. The reason why these people stand out is because we know people who do the opposite. It's like some people can actually suck the light out of a room. Joy is the overflowing presence of God. And those things that are filled with God will burst in songs of joy.

The mountains and hills will lead the parade, bursting with song.

All the trees of the forest will join the procession, exuberant with applause.

No more thistles, but giant sequoias, no more thornbushes, but stately pines—

Monuments to me, to God, living and lasting evidence of God."

We obviously can experience joy without anyone else around. I've had moments late at night, or all by myself, where I'm just overwhelmed by joy. BUT our purpose is to be a light, an example, of the goodness of God. We are to cultivate a life that grows joy, so that others can experience this same joy. Because others can see it all up in us. That was the promise to the people of Israel, and that is the promise still to us today. Jesus took that promise to the nation of Israel, and gave it to each of us.

IV Challenge.

We realize that joy is something that bursts from a deeper place within us. It can come from external events that also create happiness. But joy is more something that sustains us when our external world isn't so great. Joy comes from doing the work that cultivates a life that grows joy. So, we have to ask ourselves; **Am I making choices that limit my joy?**