

The Radiant Joy of Advent

I. Introduction

A. Advent Giving Project

1. A little more info on ASELSI as an organization:
 - a) Along with their main Bible Institute in Chichi, Guatemala, ASELSI has extension programs throughout Central America and even beyond. They actually have extension programs for Latin American immigrants in the U.S.
 - b) A very recent, RVF-relevant development, is that as of LAST WEEK it was decided that Tim Plankenhorn will become an ASELSI partner, going down to Texas in April/May to get trained in how to oversee an ASELSI Extension program so that an extension program can be opened up in India with a pastor named Emmanuel Mesa, someone who Helping Hands has been connected with for many years. Emmanuel is a pastor who oversees a group of 40 pastors in South East India who share the goal of reaching 300 remote Hindu villages that have never heard of Jesus. And Emmanuel has been looking for ways to better equip these pastors, and the ASELSI curriculum appears to be the perfect fit!
 - c) So the church can be praying for this connection between ASELSI and India. We really are grateful for ASELSI and their goal to equip pastors primarily in remote places to spread the gospel not just in Guatemala but throughout the world.

2. Currently at \$

B. Advent Themes (Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love)

1. Joy (Shepherds Candle, color Pink, a symbol of the joy that comes through the advent of Jesus.)
2. Is there a difference between joy and happiness?
 - a) Dictionary Definition="the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation..."¹

¹ joy. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/joy> (accessed: December 9, 2016).

- b) Both our dictionary and the Scriptures use these words interchangeably. They are synonyms and have overlapping meanings. According to Randy Alcorn, there are over 100 different passages of Scripture where the words joy and happiness are used together (Esther 8:16; Jeremiah 31:13; Proverbs 23:25; Psalm 92:4; Psalm 32:11).
 - c) It is false to say joy and happiness are fundamentally different. John Piper —“If you have nice little categories—joy is what Christians have and happiness is what the world has—you can scrap those when you go to the Bible because the Bible is indiscriminate in its uses of the language of happiness and joy and contentment and satisfaction.”
 - d) It is unhelpful to speak of joy as some sort of unemotional transcendent known to only the uber-spiritual, and happiness as a worldly thing experienced by the less mature—when we do this, we unintentionally push away people who are seeking happiness away from the gospel.
 - e) “Happiness without joy is a masquerade, and joy without happiness is a spiritualized lie.”—Mike Mason
3. There are different experiences which bring us joy/happiness.
- a) There are a number of experiences that cause us to feel joy/happiness.
 - b) Many things in life bring us joy. One author, David Murray identifies seven kinds of happiness. “He talks about nature happiness, social happiness, vocational happiness, physical happiness, intellectual happiness, and humor happiness.”²

II. The Radiant Joy of Advent (Luke 2:8-11)

A. Joy in the Midst of Humble Circumstances (Luke 2:8-9)

- 1. In these verses, we find shepherds going about their ordinary tasks in the fields at night. The setting is humble, and their occupation is often regarded as lowly. Yet, it is precisely in this unassuming environment that the angel of the Lord appears, bringing good news of great joy. The angel's

² Randy Alcorn, "Is Happiness Different from Joy?," interview by Tony Reinke, *Desiring God*, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-happiness-different-from-joy>.

announcement is not reserved for the powerful or prestigious but is shared with those in humble circumstances.

2. This teaches us that Advent joy is not dependent on our external circumstances. Like the shepherds, we may find ourselves in what the world deems ordinary or even challenging situations.
3. The Christians experience of joy is rooted not in our circumstances—but rather our experience of God’s character. Our circumstances change (at times brining us real joy); but at others they don’t. Whereas the character of God is steadfast—and can always be as source of experiential joy for the Christian. Our joy is rooted in the faithfulness of God.
 - a) Psalm 16:11, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
4. The challenge of experiencing joy in all circumstances.
 - a) Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”
 - b) I am not suggesting that the Scriptures instruct us to suppress our sorrow, or ignore our circumstances—this is not necessary, healthy, or wise from a biblical perspective. Paul often expressed his grief about missing loved ones or losing friends or his own freedom. He called this “being full of sorrow and yet rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10). “As he acknowledged his pain, he also made a choice to trust Jesus that his loss wouldn’t be the final word. This is very different from the trite advice to “turn that frown upside-down.” Christian joy is a profound decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus’ own life and love. And that’s what biblical joy is all about.² 2 Corinthians 6:10, ‘...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing...’³
5. The source of our joy is not found in the externals but in the profound reality of the good news: "Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." True joy in Advent is rooted in the recognition of the Savior who comes to us in the midst of our everyday lives, no matter how humble or challenging they may be.

³ <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/chara-joy/>

B. Joy in the Revelation of God's Salvation (Luke 2:10-11)

1. The angel's proclamation unfolds with a message that resonates through the ages: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." The heart of this joy is revealed in the subsequent declaration: the birth of a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. The arrival of Jesus is the revelation of God's salvation for all humanity.
2. The announcement is good news, and the birth will bring great joy.
3. The reason and cause for joy is the birth of the savior.
 - a) Savior=reflects the call of Jesus to deliver His people...used in the Old Testament almost exclusively of God who delivers His "people from enemies that seek to destroy and disease that seeks to kill."⁴ Deliverance or rescue has both physical and spiritual implications.
 - b) Christ=is indicative of his role as the promised Messiah...Lord=although not explained further here..."It serves as a literary foretaste of what is to come. The term will clearly come to refer to the absolute sovereignty and divine relationship that Jesus possesses as the one who brings salvation...Savior points to his role as deliverer; Messiah points to his office in terms of the promised Anointed One of God."⁵
 - c) Lord indicates his sovereign authority...Jesus' birth is set in the middle of Roman history, in the reign of Caesar Augustus. However, for Luke the key historical figure is not the powerful Roman ruler; it is the frail child, Jesus, the Christ, who is Lord."⁶
4. In Advent, joy is not merely a fleeting emotion but a deep and abiding response to the reality of God's redemptive plan. The birth of Christ brings joy because it signifies God's initiative to reconcile and save His people. The joy of God's people is not determined by our struggles but by our future destiny.

⁴ Darrell Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1: 1:1-9:50, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1994), 217.

⁵ Bock, 218.

⁶ Bock, 225.

- a) Habakkuk 3:17-18, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”
5. Remember David Murray’s seven kinds of happiness/joy, what Luke describes is the Seventh kind of joy humans can experience. All of those in God’s common grace are available, except the final one which David calls ‘spiritual happiness.’ He calls it a joy that at times contains more pleasure and delight than the other six put together. And that is the thing that you can’t have until your sins are forgiven and you are reconciled to God—you are made right with him.⁷
6. As we reflect on this season, may our joy be anchored in the assurance that God, in His unfathomable love, has provided salvation through His Son.
- C. Joy in the Personal Encounter with Jesus (Luke 2:11)
1. The angelic proclamation culminates in the announcement of the Savior's birth. The joy is not theoretical or distant; it is personal. The shepherds are invited to go to Bethlehem and witness the miracle for themselves. Their joy is not based on secondhand information but on a direct encounter with the newborn King.
2. In our Advent journey, joy is not meant to be a distant concept but a personal experience of encountering Jesus. The invitation to come and see is extended to each one of us. As we draw near to the manger in worship and contemplation, may our hearts be filled with the joy that comes from a direct and intimate relationship with the Savior. This indescribable joy can only be a response to one thing- experiencing the Savior’s love intimately. No other thing on earth ever elicited such a response until that night. It is a joy that exists solely in the space between one’s soul and the person of Jesus, where the fullness of His love is realized through His advent.

⁷ Alcorn, interview.

3. ¹ John 1:14, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

III. Closing Thoughts

- A. The radiant joy of Advent, as unveiled in Luke 2:8-11, beckons us to a profound understanding of joy in the midst of humble circumstances, joy in the revelation of God's salvation, and joy in the personal encounter with Jesus. Our joy is not contingent upon our external situations but is deeply rooted in the character of God, whose faithfulness is unwavering. As we navigate the challenges of life, we are reminded that Christian joy is not the denial of sorrow but a courageous decision to trust in Jesus, knowing that He holds the final word. Let the joy of Advent be a resilient and transformative force in our lives, anchored in the good news of the Savior's birth. May this season draw us into a personal encounter with Jesus, where our joy finds its completeness in the fellowship with the Father and His Son. As we celebrate the advent of our Savior, may the joy of His love fill our hearts and radiate through us to a world in need of His light. Amen.

Bibliography

Alcorn, Randy. "Is Happiness Different from Joy?" interview by Tony Reinke. *Desiring God*, 2015. <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-happiness-different-from-joy>.

Bock, Darrell. *Luke*. Vol. 1: 1:1-9:50. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, edited by Moises Silva. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1994.