

Announcement

- Lives Impacted -1201 Names of people being prayed for ... ?Light Bulbs
- New/Renewed Givers – 150+, Over \$910,000 committed! This is real discipleship. When you move from nothing to something, it is significant!
- Normal 13 months – 8.8M.... Goal: 12.2 M
- Total Commitments and expected giving – 12,271,200 Praise God! High five your neighbor for generosity!
 - What if I didn't get in? And we know that Hundreds did not yet. If you did not fill out a card, we have assumed that you are giving the same as last year. But, to be honest, I hope you say "I want to be counted... I want to be a part of this thing! This is my church, my family, my mission, my Jesus. I want to be the team that planted 27 churches overseas. I want to be on the Green City team. So, don't forget me!" Even if your giving is the same as last year, we'd love to know that you are listening to Jesus – whatever he says." And, we'd love to know that you have prayed through your one more. Because this vision is all about lives... people who matter to God. Money is a means, but people is the end.
 - Also, if you have not put in a light bulb, That is A-OK, there is still time! In fact, this week, we added a bunch of slots – so if you have not had the chance to put one in representing your prayer that the light of Jesus will shine in them, then do it! If you don't have just one more you are reaching, but two more or three more, then you can put in extra light bulbs. The key is that we pray and the key is that we reach out. And this will remind us every week as we walk down the hall of our desire before God to do this right thing.
- Pray for One More
- Baptisms

Intro – JOY - Pray

The advent devotion theme for today is Joy. And who doesn't want Joy? Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

But it is not the American way to pursue joy, it is our goal to pursue success. Or, more clearly, to pursue our inalienable rights in the declaration of Independence – Help me out here – Life, liberty and the pursuit of _____. And, to be frank, happiness is nice. In fact, in the US, when parents are asked what they want for their children, they most often say “I just want them to be happy.” Now, according to scienceofpeople.com, there are statistically certain people that are happier than others. Women, are more happy than men. Millennials are the happiest generation. Finland is the happiest country. People who make between 75K and 125K are the happiest income range. Extraverts are happier than introverts and non-Neurotic people are happier than Neurotic people. Duh. That took a study. And people with 10 or more friends are happier than those with less.

Now, this is good news if you are a non-neurotic Finnish millennial extravert making over 75,000.

But the fleeting measure of happiness is exactly why Kelle and I never made it a life goal for our kids to be happy. Our two goals were that they grow up to follow Jesus and make good choices. And we knew that a side effect of following Jesus and making good choices is joy. Joy is essentially “happiness that transcends circumstances.”

Today, we are going to look at John the Baptist in John chapter 1. He is not normally thought of as a guy who exudes joy. More like a guy who is neurotic. But I think that is a bad description and he actually found some keys to joy that we can all learn from. So turn in your Bibles to John 1 and I'll catch you up on the story.

Intro to John the Baptist

- Crazy Birth Story
- Special Birth and town gossip
- Relationship with Jesus
- Don't be confused
 - Not the Apostle John. He was much younger and did not die for another 60+ years
 - So you have Apostle John, Baptist John
- Why John the Baptist is the perfect Advent Character
 - Signpost to Jesus
 - Sees something nobody else sees...
- His time comes

John 1:19-34

JB had joy because he knew his identity What kind of a church did JB found? First Baptist...

¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders^[c] in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.”

²¹ They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."

So, John is dropping this serious truth bomb on them. And he denies being three things. 1) The messiah. For years, they had been waiting – watching for the poetic, picturesque prophecies that point to the coming one. And John wants them to know... "Not it!"

Then they ask if he is Elijah. See last weeks message where Minister Alex explains where this idea comes from. And while John IS the fulfillment of the Elijah type that was predicted, he is NOT a reincarnation of Elijah.

Finally "Are you the Prophet?" In Deuteronomy, it was said that a Prophet like Moses would return to Israel. Turns out, that is the same guy as Messiah- see answer A. Nope, already said I am not him! So, he is not what they expected or hoped for...

²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"^[d]

- Isaiah, interestingly is one of Jesus' favorite and most quoted books. You have 39 chapters of doom and judgement and then 27 chapters of Messiah, hope and Joy. 66 Total chapters. Similar to the Bible with 39 books of the old testament and 27 of the new testament with messiah, hope and joy. 66 Total.
- Chapter 40 is the transition chapter...and John B quotes from Isaiah 40. The beginning of a new thing. The messiah is coming. Hope and joy are here. And it literally starts with a voice in the literal wilderness, literally making a way for the LORD. It is a metaphor that becomes literal. And John says – you want to know who I am? I am just a signpost. I am just a herald. I am highlighting the next guy because he is a big deal.
- And friends, there is joy in knowing your identity. John does not self promote. He does not have to achieve. He is content with locusts and honey and camel hair. Why is it that he does not need this stuff? Because he knows who he is. He has nothing to prove and he is fulfilling his calling. I am the voice in the wilderness calling Make Straight the way of the Lord
- This should make you ask – this holiday season, where everyone is frenzied to find the elusive picture of happiness. That perfect meal. That perfect photo. That perfect moment under the tree. That perfect gift or mountain of gifts under the tree. It should make you ask. Does this really bring joy? Does the fleeting moment of the gift of a Nordstrom sweater or iphone or photo frame bring joy or just a fleeting moment of acquisition of something that, to be frank, will rust, rot or burn.
- And in place of that, how might a deeper identity bring real joy for you? How might it bring joy for your family? What if the Pharisees came to you and said "Well then, who are you?" Do you know what you would say. I'll give you an idea – you can say "I am a child of the most high God." Say it with me. .. Or, I am a prisoner set free. I am healed and transformed. I am bought with a high price. I am a child of God. Can you see how just knowing this deeply transforms your identity and gives you joy that transcends any understanding.
- OK, now lets take it a step deeper. What if you gave your loved ones the gift of affirmation of their identity this Christmas. Stuff you believe inside but never say outside.

- Mom – you have invested so much in me over the years and I am who I am because of you
- Brother – I treasure our relationship and love who you are becoming.
- Dad – you have sacrificed so much for me. You have outstanding character and have always been there. I never knew that as a kid, but sure appreciate it as an adult.
- Friends, accurately acknowledging identity can be the most joy bringing Christmas gift.
- But back to our voice in the wilderness...

²⁴ Now the Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

²⁶ “I baptize with^[e] water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

JB had joy because he knew the secret What is the secret?

The secret is that the one who is coming will change everything. I am not even worthy to bend over and tie his shoes. You think I’m cool and controversial? They are going to talk about this guy for thousands of years. He will shape the world and he is coming next.

You see, John’s baptism is just the setup. It is to get people paying attention. It is getting hearts stirred up and eyes looking. It is getting people open for the journey... the person... that is ahead.

Again, at Christmas, what is the secret? It is that all of the decorations and food and gifts are just the fluff. The nonsense. The frosting. The secret is that someone HAS come whose shoes we are not worthy to untie.

And it is a funny thing that this is a secret at Christmas... That the stuff just overwhelms the king. But when you pause to breathe on Christmas morning. When you open the Bible to read the Christmas story from Luke 2, you are in on the secret. Now that our kids are older, kelle and I have begun asking our kids at Christmas for one prayer request for the coming year. And we pray over each kid. And then we revisit it as we pray for our kids through the year. Guys... it is the best part of Christmas. It is the secret...

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Oh friends, I am noticing that there is a place name here, which should make you ask, where is Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, which means we need a **MAP**.

Now, Bethany on the other side of the Jordan is not the normal Bethany. This is the only time it is mentioned and it is a po-dunk nowhere town of dozens right here on the map. But the location is super significant if you are a Bible Nerd. If you are new to the Bible, this part will be meaningless, but if you are a geek... this is super cool. Because this is the third major event at this spot.

- This is the exact spot where Joshua and the people of Israel crossed the Jordan when God stopped up the river in Joshua 4. They crossed over on dry ground and this ushered in a new era – the people of Israel living in the promised land. Moses handed off to Joshua and he marched in – a new kingdom

- This is also the spot where Elijah did a Miracle with his apprentice Elisha in tow. He took off his cloak (Mantle), struck the water and it parted again! And they walked across into Moab (aka Jordan) and that is where Elijah didn't die but was taken up by the chariots of fire. But before he did, he asked the LORD for a double portion of his spirit to be given to his apprentice and handed over the mantle of leadership to him (which is where this saying comes from). Elisha then took that cloak, walked back, struck the water again – just to see if the Spirit was with him and the water parted a third time! And what was ushered in was a new era of the presence of the Spirit in Israel. So do you see the parallel? A leadership handoff and a new era.
- JB says – OK, team. This is the spot where one leader hands off to another who does greater things – I am handing off to Jesus. This is the place where kingdoms begin – and this is a new kingdom. And this is the place where Spiritual power is multiplied – the Spirit will come and boom, shakalaka – that is what is happening here! Is that a reason for Joy? I think so! OK, last reason.

JB had joy because he knew the Lamb and the Plan – What kind of Shoes did John the Baptist wear?

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

So, John has been talking about Jesus... now he SEES Jesus. The lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. His reference here is to the substitutionary sacrifice. Every Jew would know exactly what he was saying. They had all been to the temple where every day lamb's were sacrificed for sin. The idea is that that sin of the person involved is transferred to the lamb and the lamb is sacrificed on their behalf. In so doing the sins are paid for in blood.

So when John announces Jesus... everybody would know he is announcing his death upon his arrival. Kinda morbid. But John was never shy about being graphic.

³²Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."¹

And then the capper. Because if people were not thinking about the Spirit because this was the Elisha-spot, well, they are now. John – and the whole crowd – literally saw the spirit come on Jesus like a dove. Was it a dove physically that landed on him? Was it a ghost-like backlit aura in the shape of a dove? We don't know. But John knew exactly what it was. And now he says "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Way better than water. Now to baptize means to immerse – to dunk you all the way under. And when you are baptized with the Holy Spirit, what do you get?

- You get the very presence of God living inside of you. Friends, so many people are yearning for transcendent power in their lives. This is it. God inside of the believer. He lives in you, rests there and reminds you every day of his presence.

- When the Holy Spirit comes on you, you get power – to say no to sins that have dogged you for years, to live right – ie make good choices, power to give yourself away in service and in love and in humility.
- When the Holy Spirit comes on you, you get perspective. In other words – God shows you the world through his lens – lost and found. Purpose and meaning. Right and wrong. Justice and mercy.
- All of this is joy inducing. I mean can you think of anything more transcendent and beyond circumstance than having the Spirit of God living inside of you?

Music Starts

Friends, you are in the second week of welcoming Jesus. Preparing room in your heart for HIM this Christmas. Making the pace of life work in such a way that you get joy in his presence and his spirit. That your Christmas is wrapped around HIM – the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the one who's sandals I am unworthy to untie, the one who will Baptize you with the Holy Spirit. He is your purpose and your identity. This is why joy is not a feeling. Joy is not circumstance. Joy is a person.

Merry Christmas. Spoken word.

The lamb has a plan. You know it big man.
The story is known from Pakistan to Sudan and Iran to Bhutan
He came to be the middle man in the plan to empty the garbage can
of your pathetic life and replace it with his treasure beyond measure
Whether you came in a sedan or a minivan, the lamb wants to ban
the effect of sin in your soul
He's come to make you whole
Just like John, who said at the Jordan,
The king is here to bring about pardon
His banner is unfurled, for every boy and girl
Behold the lamb who takes the Sins of the world

His message I'll speak, his flag I will fly
But those birkenstocks he's got, I am unworthy to untie

I am flawed by the facade of the wad of voices whose choices are a fraud
They say I should maraud, do what's outlawed or look for those who applaud
What I deserve is the firing squad, but what I get as a gift I accept with a nod,
I am a child of the most high God

I find some serenity in knowing my identity is found in the one who has no obscenity
He is powerful and pure, he will baptize with fire
If you need to inquire, the choir will inspire with the one we admire
He will beat the one who is a thief and a liar
And if you just trust the truth you acquire, you know he will come an baptize with fire

It's not in the decorating, or buying, or toys,
It is only in Jesus you will find your joy
So at Christmas this year, make him the focus of life...

His powerful presence will cut like a knife

Through the trivia of colors and movies and food

To that moment in history that the world understood

That God broke in to accomplish the good

That we never could because God would bring his kingdom to earth

Through a babe and a birth that would rock you and me and show us our worth.

He invited some strangers to come to a manger to the image of God crammed into a bod

Of a infant, so helpless, the son of God.

Could it be? They all ask as their thoughts were all swirled.

Yes, oh yes, behold the lamb who takes the sins of the world.