



Christmas 2019 Finding Peace and Joy at Christmas

Summary: God sent us a gift of peace and joy in Jesus, but each Christmas we risk missing it because we feel the crunch, the crash, and the crush of the season.

Two words stand out at Christmas – peace and joy. You find the words everywhere, often surrounded by wreaths, snowflakes and candles. We put them on Christmas cards and sweaters and wrapping paper; city workers hang them from the streetlights; stores plaster them on their walls and windows with bold colors. They are the promise of the Christmas story.

Listen to the familiar history of what happened so long ago near Bethlehem:

Luke 2:8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of **great joy** which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth **peace**, goodwill toward men!”

15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

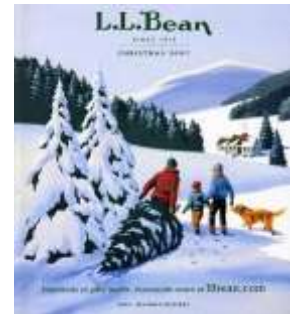
Friends, the promise of Christmas is that God has sent us both joy and peace in Jesus:
great joy which will be to all people
peace on earth, goodwill toward men!”

They are gifts to us from God.

The problem is, no matter how much we surround ourselves with the words themselves, experiencing them is another matter. So I want to talk with you this morning about the dangers of the Christmas Crunch, the Christmas Crash, and the Christmas Crush – three threats to the joy and peace God wants to give.

Some of you are feeling the Christmas Crunch right now, it's actually been building for weeks. Everyone knows it's Christmas and so there's all this planning to do, decorating to do, shopping to do – do, do, do! And do it all with a festive holiday smile. This is the moment when memories are made, right? This is what we're supposed to do! We're look nice and act nice. We say nice things and do nice things, and it's all supposed to be joyful and wonderful and easy, like all the commercials show us.

If we're doing Christmas "right" there should be snow, and pine trees, and plaid, lots of plaid, and smiles, and hot cocoa, and gifts that make people go, WOW – you should probably have sleds and snowballs and snowmen, and if you can throw in a Golden Retriever, all the better – make that a puppy and you're practically the king or queen of Christmas!!!



And so you feel this Crunch – to get the look right – for the house and for yourself and maybe even for the kids. So you're wondering - where did they get those decorations, how do you make one of those – I need to run by the craft store. Oh, and did you see the new style of Christmas sweaters? I keep looking for one, but they're always sold out in my size. And what exactly should I wear to the holiday party or Christmas Eve service? I wore that one dress last year and don't want to wear it again.



You feel the crunch when it comes to parties and events things we want to go to, but how do you fit it all in? And oh, yeah, we need to get gifts for the kids to take to their event. I need to figure out what to get for so and so at the office. And what's the etiquette here - are we supposed to put out a gift for the mailman or Fedex driver, or the person who delivers our newspaper? It's hard to do Christmas "right."

My friends, if you are not careful, you'll be driven by the images you're being sold of someone else's idea of a perfect Christmas, and the pressure to do it all, make it all, have it all, will crush you – even if you tell yourself you're just trying to do it for others, to do "Whatever it takes to make this a special Christmas for the kids, or the grandkids, or whatever."

Listen: Christmas is not about stressing out to make memories. Christmas is not about an aesthetic, a look or feel, that has more to do with Northern Europe and the American Northeast than it does with the Middle East where Jesus was actually born – in a stable, without sweaters, or plaid, or pinecones.

And Christmas is most certainly not about spending too much money to get everyone what they want. You don't need to go into debt to celebrate the truth of what God has given you; you don't need to buy approval and appreciation from your family and friends

Look – I'm not anti-Christmas. I take my family to see decorations and lights. I love the Christmas feel – we've got a Christmas tree in the living room and obviously several here at the church.

So, I want to encourage you - It's OK to be full of Christmas – it's OK to decorate and have fun, but don't be crunched by it all. Christmas is good when it helps you remember Christ – but if Christmas is stressing you out, that's a warning that you're doing something wrong.

Even if you find the perfect sweater or dress, or sweater dress, even if you have the perfect tree, throw the perfect party, and serve the perfect meal, but you don't make yourself and those around you more aware of Christ, if you don't point toward Him as the ultimate satisfaction for our greatest longings, if you don't experience the joy and peace that was promised at His birth, what good is it all?

So if you're feeling the Christmas Crunch, let me give you a gift – the gift of truth, found in Scripture:

Proverbs 17:1 Better *is* a dry morsel with quietness,
Than a house full of feasting *with* strife.

Proverbs 15:17 Better *is* a dinner of herbs where love is
than a fattened ox and hatred with it.

In other words, keep it simple and fill it with love. What good is it to look great personally, or have the room look great, what good is it to put on an amazing Christmas spread, and have no joy, no peace?

If you're trying to make it all happen, to make everyone happy, and make it all look right, listen to this:

Col 2:16 ... let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

This week I want you to make a conscience decision to find a way to rest in Christ, turn to Him for strength, rely even more on Him – invite Him into your planning, invite Him into your gift-giving, throw yourself on Him and say, “Lord, I'm Your servant. What's Your Christmas plan?” And ask Him to fill you with the joy and peace that God promised He would bring.

Now, some of you can't fully understand what I was just talking about – that seems like a lot of adult stuff and all you're really thinking about is when you get to open your presents.

You're the ones I want to warn about the dangers of a Christmas Crash. Have you ever had the experience where you eat too much sugar, or too much ice cream, and you get all amped up and energized and then you crash? Or you stay up too late playing and hanging out with friends and then you crash? That's what I'm talking about.

Some of you are looking forward to Christmas because you think, you hope, that all your dreams are about to come true. It's a magical day of hope and wonder. You've made a wish list, you've made sure everyone knows what's on it, and now you're just waiting to see how much of it you get.

And my friends, I'm warning you – there's a strong possibility that you're headed for a Christmas Crash. Because sometime on Christmas afternoon or Christmas night after all the gifts have been opened and beautiful boxes and bags have been emptied, you're going to hear this little voice in your head and heart asking a question: is that all? Is that all I got?

And look, it doesn't matter if you're eight, or if you're 38. Many of us will hear that question in our heads and in our hearts. We'll experience a Christmas Crash as all of the hopes and plans and expectations we've been building or living with for weeks now crash into the reality of what actually happened – the gifts we actually received and the way the day really went.

There will be parents who thought that if they just gave the kids that one thing they've been asking for, or that big, impressive gift, everything would be great. And yes, the kids liked it, but there was still a fight over something or an attitude about something else. Or they're bummed because you didn't get the bigger one. Or, you didn't get the blue one, or that other thing they were asking for too.

My friends, let me tell you while there's still some time to slow down and brace for impact – Christmas, the way most people celebrate it, makes promises it can't keep. Something or someone is going to disappoint you this Christmas. There will be a Christmas Crash in most of our homes this week – it might be a little fender bender, or it might be a twenty car pile up, but I'm warning you, the risk is real because we all have these little human hearts beating in our chests and they're almost impossible to satisfy with temporary stuff.

And that's what Christmas is – it's temporary. The season is temporary and the things we receive during the season are temporary.

Do you realize, everything you're going to give and get for Christmas is just a temporary houseguest on its way to the landfill or the donation pile? Everything is going to break or fade or not be interesting anymore. The clock of your appreciation and enjoyment is ticking.

And if you're like most people, all this Christmas stuff is nice, but come New Years Day, it's all getting packed away and hauled back into the attic as we prepare for 2020 and start thinking about all the new ways we're going to be better this year.

My friends, we were made for eternity, and only eternal things can truly satisfy us. That's why if your joy and peace come from a season of celebration and gifts, you're going to struggle when the season is over and the gifts you got are the only gifts you got, and the gifts you gave haven't really changed things that much.

This is why you need to receive Jesus – it's like receiving one of those cool Russian nesting dolls – because in Him you find gift after gift after gift.

First and foremost, we receive salvation – that's what the angels announced, isn't it?



Luke 2:10 ... I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Now, a savior is no good unless you need salvation. And we all do. We need to be saved from our wandering hearts and lives, from our selfish desires and expectations, we need to be saved from the coming judgment of all those who rebel against God. And so, God sent us a Savior. And this news gives us joy and peace.

But Jesus told us all kinds of other things He was doing for us and giving to us as well:

- He promised God would adopt us as sons and daughters,
- He calls us into community, with Him yes, but also with each other so we have
 - o a place to belong,
 - o a family to be a part of,
 - o a place to receive and
 - o a place to give.
- He promised that He was going to prepare a place for us,
- and while we wait we have received the Holy Spirit, the comforter.
- God gives our lives purpose along with guidance and wisdom for how to live them.

These are just a few of the things we receive in Christ, and they're all bundled together, one doll nestled inside the other – so that, if you have one, you have them all.

My friends when you make Christmas about Christ, there is no Christmas Crash, no let down, or come down, because you just keep discovering gift after gift from Him.

And that brings me to the Christmas Crush. You see the fact is some people are here this morning, they're doing this Christmas thing, but they're really just trying to be polite. They actually can't wait for it all to be over because they're feeling crushed by Christmas, and that's often the result of a sense of emptiness, loneliness, or loss.

Few of us are actually from Northern Virginia, or DC, or Maryland. Most of us are transplants brought here by work, or school, or by being attached to someone who was. Home is somewhere else, family is somewhere else, but you're here and so, your heart hurts. Maybe it's another cold Christmas at home, alone. And maybe that's you as a single.

You're going to wake up on Christmas morning at your place – maybe your roommates have gone home and you're left there wondering what to do, how to spend the day. I remember celebrating Christmas in Japan on a Marine Corps base in the barracks. It was terrible, and lonely.

Or maybe you're the empty nest couple and after all those years celebrating with the kids, now they're grown and gone and you can't make it to them or they can't make it to you. And Christmas is different from what it used to be. You feel like you've lost something and you can't go back to it.

Then there are those who will be celebrating their first Christmas without their loved one, or yet another Christmas without their loved one. All the memories you made have a final chapter now. There's no adding to them because he or she, or they, are gone. And you miss them, and you have to figure out what Christmas means without them. It's tough.

On the other hand, maybe you wish you were lonely, because Christmas means you're going to have to see so and so. And you're going to have to get together with your dysfunctional and dramatic family and you could do just fine without it all thank you very much. You feel the Christmas Crush as things and people you usually avoid are all gathered in the living room or around the table and you're bracing yourself the whole time waiting for the grenade to go off or the bomb to drop. How long, exactly, do I have to stay before it's rude to leave? Aren't awkward family moments one of the most reliable things about the holidays?

Then there's the cynicism some of you feel – like Christmas doesn't work, I don't get all the hype, it must be nice to be able to do all that but we can't afford it, or that's not my family, so can we just get this over with?

Listen, we have to acknowledge that if you're constantly fed this stream of ads full of happy people, and pictures on Instagram of happy people at fun parties, and Pinterest boards full of great ideas, and Christmas movies full of happy people and satisfying endings, you're surrounded by festive Christmas music - you're going to feel a little disappointed and depressed by the distance between what you're seeing and hearing around you and what you're experiencing on the inside of your life.

And look, I get it, I feel it too. The idea that's there, no matter how much you fight it, that you need to make your wife smile as big as the women in the ads, that you need to make your kids as happy as the kids in the commercials, that you need to get your lights up like the neighbor's that you need to really come through and be the big dad this year. We try to fight it, but it's always there, always pushing its way back in. And before you know it, you're feeling cynical, frustrated, or depressed – you're feeling the Christmas Crush, because, we've lost sight of Jesus in the middle of a holiday that actually carries His name.

And so we need to remind ourselves of something. We need to listen to what the prophet Isaiah wrote hundreds of years before Jesus came. He said,

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.

3 You have multiplied the nation
And increased its joy;
They rejoice before You
According to the joy of harvest,
As *men* rejoice when they divide the spoil.
4 For You have broken the yoke of his burden
And the staff of his shoulder,
The rod of his oppressor,
As in the day of Midian.

5 For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle,
And garments rolled in blood,
Will be used for burning *and* fuel of fire.

Here's what I want you to see – God comes to a people who are crushed. They walk in darkness and He brings them light. They were under the rod of an oppressor and God broke it. They wore a yoke and carried a burden, and God broke it. Then God takes the instruments of war and uses them as fuel for the fire while giving His people joy, great joy. And here's how it all happened:

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of *His* government and peace
There will be no end,

If you walk in an attitude of darkness this Christmas, if you feel crushed, know the joy of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He will break the things that are breaking you. He is with you conquering your loneliness. He enables you to be salt and light – to impact and endure your family and friends at all those get-togethers. He makes it possible for you to be the person He wants you to be in the lives of the people you love. He is the substance of all things.

And so here's what you need to know before you walk out of here today.

If you feel the Crunch of Christmas – you need to rest in Jesus.

If you're headed for a Crash after Christmas – you need to know that all your needs are met in Jesus.

If you're feeling the Crush of Christmas – let it all remind you that we live in a dark and broken world that desperately needs our Jesus.

So here's what I want you to do this week. I want you to take some time, each day, and read the book of Luke in your Bible. It's a biography of Jesus, we read some of it earlier – and I want you to find all the references to joy or rejoicing. Depending on your translation, there should be between 18-22 of them, and you'll find 7 in the first two chapters.

And, I want you to pray – talk to God about your joy and your frustrations, talk to Him about your hopes for Christmas and for life – talk honestly, openly.

I want you to look - who around you is in need of joy and what can you do to point them toward it and Jesus the true source.

And then I want you to come, come back for our service on Christmas Eve at 5PM as we read Scripture and sing songs that help us keep Christ in Christmas and point us toward joy and peace ourselves.

Let's pray.

And one more thing, a special gift for you before you leave – a Christmas blessing:

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Joy and Peace - not by your power, but by His.

If you have any questions about things you've heard this morning, and you want to talk, please let me know, I'll be up front here after the service, and my email address is in your bulletin.

God Bless.