

## I. Messiah's Message: A series for Advent

### A. The reason for the series

1. I called this year's Advent Series Messiah's Message for several reasons.
  - a. First, I think the Advent season gives us a focused opportunity to think carefully and deeply about Jesus Himself, who He is.
    - (1) Messiah
    - (2) Son of God
  - b. Second, Advent provides a unique opportunity to explore why Jesus comes into the world.
    - (1) God sent His only begotten Son as an act of love, both for the Son and for us,
    - (2) that God sent Christ with a message,
    - (3) and that Christ is the message God sent.
  - c. So, as we think about these Advent themes, we are asking not only what message does God have for us in this season, but
    - (1) how does Jesus Himself embody the message of God, and
    - (2) how does Christ's church embody that message in the world today?
2. We have looked at Christ in whom we have abounding hope, and Christ who is our heart guarding peace, and we come, on this third Sunday of Advent, to Christ who is our returning joy.
3. **We need a message of true, sovereign joy this morning.**
  - a. We need a message that affirms that the joy God is and the joy God experiences in Himself is available to us.
  - b. There seems to be a famine of joy in the world, and even in the church today.
  - c. **We need Messiah's Message of Returning Joy today.**

### B. The current famine for joy

1. A hostile, fallen world steals joy
  - a. Chronic disappointment -
    - (1) the Result of an Enduring Pandemic on an Instant Gratification Culture
    - (2) We thought it would be over in 14 days. That was 10 months ago.
    - (3) Isolation anxiety siphons joy.
  - b. Acute fear and anger
    - (1) For more than a year we have been inundated with messages from society and culture that have diminished joy in the pursuit of anger and fear.
    - (2) Billions of dollars have been spent to convince us that anyone who does not think like we do is a threat to our personal peace and prosperity.
      - (a) Political campaigns flourish on the idea that if they can make people afraid their world will collapse without them,

and make people angry that others are standing in the way of their well-being, then they can win elections and gain power.

- (b) And it doesn't matter whether we actively engage in the process or not, the unrelenting nature of the political process affects us, demanding our energy and attention and stealing our joy.
  - c. Between politics and pandemics, all of us have been affected by processes in our social and spiritual contexts that minimize hope, disturb peace, and diminish joy. **We desperately need Messiah's message of returning joy in this Advent season.**
2. Long term effects of the efforts of sinful humanity to save itself and create its own utopia without God results in an acute depletion of joy in the spirits of the faithful.

### C. **Isaiah 35 and the promise of sovereign joy**

1. To hear this message from God's heart, let's turn to the prophet Isaiah, to the 34 and 35th chapters.
- a. Though I want us to focus on chapter 35 this morning, 34 and 35 are a unit, they go together, and you really cannot appreciate chapter 35's message of profuse sovereign joy without chapter 34's shocking message of profound judgment.
  - b. Chapters 34 and 35 form a striking contrast between the results of human activity and divine activity.
    - (1) When humanity is left in charge, they turn a garden into a desert wasteland.
    - (2) When God is in charge He turns a desert wasteland into a verdant garden.
2. Isaiah 34: the result of human effort = gardens to desert
- a. Edom,
    - (1) representing all the nations of the world, attempts to rule in the world as if the world belonged to them
    - (2) the results are disastrous
      - (a) Incur God's judgment
      - (b) Suffer devastation of violence
      - (c) Endure the desolation of the land
      - (d) Overrun by unclean, wild beasts
  - b. We make efforts today, through politics, science, education, economics, the arts to create a living context conducive to joy, yet without God.
  - c. Thus our efforts are as they have always been whenever humanity promotes itself over God, doomed to failure.
    - (1) Eden - out of the garden into the field
    - (2) Babel - out of unity into confusion
    - (3) Jerusalem - out of fellowship into exile
  - d. **What hope is there for joy?**
3. Isaiah 35: the result of divine sovereignty = desert to garden
- a. God reverses the results of sinful human effort

- (1) The wilderness will be glad 1-2
  - (2) Anxious hearts will be encouraged 3-4
  - (3) Physical limitations will be removed 5-7
  - (4) Restorations will be assisted 8-9
  - (5) The redeemed shall return with joy 10
- b. **True, lasting, heart filling, life changing, hope giving, peace keeping joy comes to our hearts and experience when we yield to the work and will of God in Christ Jesus.**

## II. Christ: The Christian's Joy

### A. Christ alone is the guarantor and source of joy.

1. Our present and future joy rises from the redeeming, restoring work of Jesus Christ.
  - a. All the promises of God for joy are "yes" and "amen" in Him.
  - b. Only his successful life of perfect, sinless faithfulness and his substitutionary, atoning death on the cross secures the favor of God and the possibility of sovereign joy.
    - (1) We follow Him into the Holy of holies
    - (2) He is our righteousness and hope and peace
    - (3) His work alone gains our favor with God.
2. And only as we abide in faith in Him does the Spirit of God produce the fruit of sovereign joy in our lives.

### B. **Real, true, lasting, sovereign joy, God's own joy in His glory, can only be ours as we abide in faith in Jesus Christ.**

## III. How to Fight for Sovereign Joy

### A. Kicker: the ransomed must return

1. The ransom must come back from judgment, back from exile, back from sorrow and pain and suffering, back from loss and grief and mourning.
2. **Sovereign joy, though a gift and the work of God, must be fought for and secured in this fallen world.**
3. Piper: *Pursuing joy in God is a non-negotiable way of honoring God. It is an essential.*
4. Future joy requires forgetting the past and enduring in the present
  - a. **Philippians 3:13-14 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
  - b. **Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)** *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

### B. How to Fight For and Secure Sovereign Joy

1. Pivotal Question:
  - a. **How can I obtain, recover, or secure a joy in Christ that is so deep and so strong that it will free me from bondage to worldly comforts and security, and will impel me into sacrifices of mercy and mission, and will**

***sustain me even in the face of death?***

- b. The fight for joy in Christ is a fight for the strength to live a life of self-sacrificing love. (Piper p. 20)
2. How to Fight for Sovereign Joy
- a. Repent and return to your foremost love (Rev. 2:5)
    - (1) **Revelation 2:5 (ESV)** *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.*
      - (a) The problem was that they left their foremost, primary, single most significant love: Jesus.
      - (b) The need is to return to an uncluttered, pure, personal love for Christ, for who He is not just what He does.
      - (c) **We are not pursuing joy as an experience but joy as a Person: Jesus**
    - (2) This must come first or all the others six get reduced to Pharisaical strategies for self-improvement.
  - b. Be faithful, even unto death (Rev. 2:10)
    - (1) **Revelation 2:10 (ESV)** *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*
    - (2) Paul (1 Corinthians 13):
      - (a) if I give my body to be burned but have not love, I am nothing
      - (b) the love that faces death without fear is love for Christ whom I trust and cherish more than anything or anyone else in this world, even my own life.
  - c. Turn away from worldly philosophies and false doctrines (Rev. 2:16)
    - (1) **Revelation 2:16 (ESV)** *Therefore repent.*
  - d. Hold fast to what you have until Jesus comes (Rev. 2:25)
    - (1) **Revelation 2:25 (ESV)** *Only hold fast what you have until I come.*
  - e. Remember what you have received and heard, keep it and repent (Rev 3:3)
    - (1) **Revelation 3:3 (ESV)** *Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent.*
  - f. Keep God's word and hold fast to love (Rev 3:10-11)
    - (1) **Revelation 3:10-11 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*
  - g. Be zealous for Christ (Rev 3:19)
    - (1) **Revelation 3:19 (ESV)** *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.*