



# JOY

## ADVENT | Week 3

What the world needs is joy. At some level, we all know that, but really internalizing that truth changes the way we see the world around us and the people living in it. Ultimately, just about every activity we pursue and every relationship we nurture is in the pursuit of joy. We want to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. And yet, we never seem to succeed. It's just not enough.

But we are a species that was created intentionally by a loving God to resemble and reflect Him in this broken world. This Creator God is a God of joy because He lacks nothing. That's instructive. The sovereign God of the cosmos is full of joy—and His great desire for every human heart is that they experience joy as well. What if we really lacked for...nothing?

Joy is the outcome of fulfillment.

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11, ESV). God the Father sent the Son so that the redeemed would actually “enjoy this life with Jesus’ enjoying.” He wants His joy to be our joy. What God has is enough; He is fulfilled. What He has given us is enough, even in the midst of a corrupt context. We are fulfilled, and the free gift of grace is not merely everlasting life, but never-ending joy!

It's like the great old hymn, *Joy to The World* by Isaac Watts reminds us:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,	Far as the curse is found
Nor thorns infest the ground;	Far as the curse is found
He comes to make His blessings flow	Far as, far as, the curse is found.

The ground we walk on has been cursed because of sin. But the King of glory has reversed the curse and made joy available to all mankind. May we all experience and appreciate true and lasting fulfillment this Advent season. Joy to the world!

## The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus

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“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

### 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (ESV)

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Here’s a snapshot of where we are today. A woman’s choice to kill her unborn child is celebrated by many as an essential freedom. Gay marriage is legal and not only socially approved, but celebrated. A growing number of people believe one’s gender and sex have no connection, and a dizzying array of new gender descriptions have been suggested: transgender, non-binary, bigender, pangender, genderfluid, and agender. Those who disagree with these positions may be labeled misogynists or bigots.

How can it be that people can see things *so* differently?

Make no mistake, this is the work of the enemy. Can’t you hear his voice, as in the garden to Eve, “Did God *really* say...?” Listen as he undermines God’s authority to define good and evil, God’s design for life, for personhood and for marriage. He

is still whispering in humanity's ear as in Eve's, "Do what seems right to you!" And the end is always destruction (Prov. 14:12).

In the apostle Paul's final letter to the Corinthians, we see this spiritual battle in the forefront of his mind as he encourages believers not to give sin a foothold, "that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs" (2 Cor. 2:11). In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 Paul addresses how it is that people can celebrate evil and abhor the good designs of a holy God: the god of this world, Satan, has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the truth of the Gospel.

Paul makes great use of contrasts (dark/light, blind/seeing, veiled/unveiled) to illustrate the dramatic transformation that happens at the moment of salvation. How interesting that Paul's own miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus involved being blinded by a great light and gaining his spiritual sight! As someone who formerly persecuted the church, Paul is uniquely qualified to say that the "message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18, NIV).

Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church is complicated. In 1 Corinthians, he lovingly but directly addresses their sinful strongholds, divisions and spiritual confusion. False apostles had crept into the church and were assaulting Paul's character and misrepresenting the gospel of Christ. This was a source of huge stress and grief to Paul.

He writes, "I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you" (2 Cor. 2:4). Because he loved them, he told them some hard truths. Paul demonstrates humility and love as he brings the conversation continually back to Christ: "What we proclaim is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." He is not concerned so much with their allegiance to him but their allegiance to Christ.

In verse 6, Paul turns our minds back to that awesome moment of creation, when God created everything from nothing by His Word and by His will. Specifically, he goes back to the moment when God illuminated the darkness, reminding us that He is the same all-powerful Creator God who illuminates our hearts and minds to see the truth of the gospel and believe in Christ, who is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:19).

Jesus described the moment of salvation as being spiritually "born again" (John 3:3). "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). The mark of this new creation is that he has the indwelling Holy Spirit of God to empower, counsel, teach, convict, comfort, help, strengthen and lead him. What depths of joy that brings!

And while this new creation doesn't come with a new physical body on this side of eternity, Paul comforts us in that too: "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18). We have a glorious inheritance awaiting us! We will be with Him again.

During the Advent season, we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Christ. This is nothing short of God clothing Himself with humanity. He is Emmanuel, God with us. When we behold Jesus' face in the manger, we behold the glory of God in the fullest!

**"He is Emmanuel,  
God with us."**

### Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. Paul uses light/dark, seeing/blind, unveiled/veiled contrasts repeatedly referring to the condition of the hearts of believers vs. unbelievers. If you have trusted in Christ for salvation, think back to that moment when the lights came on for you spiritually. What was it that "flipped the switch"? Praise God for His work in your heart.
2. Paul goes on to say that believers have this "treasure" of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ in "jars of clay," that is, common, fragile vessels that show off the spectacular power of God in our weakness. Reflect on this truth in your life. What are some ways that His power has been made perfect in your weakness? (See 2 Cor. 12:9.)

### Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. Do you have any friends, family members, or co-workers that see the world very differently from you? How do you stand firmly in your beliefs and interact with them in love?
2. Have you ever thought differently—or, wrongly—about an important spiritual issue? What did God do to change your mind?
3. What can you do this Christmas season to experience the full joy of your salvation as a new creation in Christ?

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