



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!

Who are you? Why are you?

“As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day, night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.”

John 9:1-7 (ESV)

Who are you? Not your name. Not what you do. Maybe a better question to ask is: *Why are you?*

We are all made for a purpose consistent with who we are. A can opener opens cans. A can opener does not toast bread; that is what a toaster does. Pastor Matt Lantz, on the Journey Woman podcast defines identity in this way: “Identity is a declaration that defines being that indicates design and direction.” A can opener is made in a specific way, with specific materials, and is defined by its creator for a specific purpose. Lantz goes on to say “Being a follower of Jesus isn’t just about going to heaven and doing what the Bible says. It’s also understanding that God

didn't run me through a machine, crank me out and mass produce us. We are His handcrafted, unique creations, each of us. As a result, if we are handcrafted and unique, then we have a function. Do you know what your function is?"

In 1687, believers came together in Westminster and created what some would call the most accurate and succinct summary of the Christian faith ever produced. They created a summary of Christian doctrine consisting of 107 questions and answers. Question number one of this quintessential document should be imprinted on our hearts and never forgotten:

Q1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

Each year, the Jews have an eight-day celebration called the Feast of Tabernacles. The celebration's purpose is twofold: remembrance of God's provision for the nation of Israel during their time of wandering in the wilderness (Num. 9:15-23) and looking forward to the millennial kingdom and return of the Messiah. During Jesus' time, a major feature of the Feast of Tabernacles was the lighting of lamps in the women's court in the temple. These great lamps would light the temple area as people came together to sing praises and dance in remembrance of God's provision. It was while these large lamps were burning in the temple that Jesus makes this audacious statement: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

In John 9:1, as a demonstration of this claim, Jesus proceeded to heal a man that had been blind since birth. This man probably woke up, like any other morning, expecting to live out his "why"—to stand at the temple gate and beg for alms. Little did he know that that by the time the sun would set, he would see the world around him for the first time in his life! This man represents the bleak reality that every person is born spiritually blind, until we choose to follow Jesus as our light and salvation.

Jesus then explains the reason for this man's blindness and why he was to be healed: "It was not that this man had sinned,

or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him" (v. 3). In these words we face a terrifying and beautiful truth: our lives are fully encompassed within God's eternal purpose. Job understood this when he stated: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

"... our lives are fully encompassed within God's eternal purpose."

Scripture overflows with stories of people who thought they could blaze their own trail, and every single time God takes their sin and uses it for His eternal purposes. Jesus then charges all believers to participate in God's divine plan: "We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day, night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World" (vv. 4-5).

Every one of us has a purpose. This purpose is not found in your work, or where you live, or even who you marry. Your chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. Sometimes, God's glory is revealed in happy circumstances, like a blind man being given his sight. And, sometimes, His glory might be found in the bleakest of times, like Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12). But one thing is certain: joy is found when we accept and trust Jesus to step into our darkness and allow Him to become our Light of our World.

In 1862, When Robert Louis Stevenson was twelve years old, he was looking out into the darkness of night from his upstairs window, watching a man light the street lanterns. When his governess saw him and asked what it was that he was doing, he responded by saying, 'I am watching a man cut holes in the darkness.' Simply put, is that not what Christmas is all about? 'Long lay the world, in sin and error pining', but then Jesus, the Light of the World, was born in a manger, cutting a massive hole in the darkness of the world.

This Advent season, find joy in glorifying God and pointing others to the Light of the World in how you act, speak, and love.

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. How can you, as a believer, be someone that 'cuts holes in the darkness' of the sinful world we live in?
2. If identity is a 'declaration that defines being that indicates design and direction,' what would be declared about you?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

Paul in 2 Corinthians has this to say about his 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor. 12:7), "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

1. What did Paul mean when he said that when he is weak, then he is strong? What does this look like in your life?
2. Man's tendency is to sinfully turn away from Christ and give glory to the things of this world. In what ways have you seen this happen in your own life? How can you practically give glory to God alone?

Read | “*The Lamplighter*”

by Robert Louis Stevenson

My tea is nearly ready and the sun has left the sky;
It's time to take the window to see Leerie going by,
For every night at teatime and before you take your seat,
With lantern and with ladder he comes posting up the street.

Now Tom would be a driver and Maria go to sea,
And my papa's a banker and as rich as he can be;
But I, when I am stronger and can choose what I'm to do,
Oh Leerie, I'll go round at night and light the lamps with you!

For we are very lucky, with a lamp before the door,
And Leerie stops to light it as he lights so many more;
And O! before you hurry by with ladder and with light,
O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him tonight!

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____



