

Full of Joy

Advent: Hope, Peace, Love, Joy

John 1:19-34

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December 17, 2017

This morning we continue our series in Advent. Advent looks backward and forward. It looks forward to Jesus' second coming which gives us hope and peace. We covered this forward-looking aspect of Advent the last two weeks. And as Jordan taught us so well last week, in view of Christ's second coming, we need to live lives of holiness as we wait. This week we begin to look backward to Christ's first coming. We'll look at John the Baptist this morning. He's the one who prepared the way for Jesus. It only makes sense that as we prepare for Christmas that we would look to the man who prepared the way for Christ at his first coming.

Sorrow Gives Way to Joy

Some have said that Advent is like pregnancy.¹ The waiting is hard and uncomfortable. The delivery is clearly painful! And the longer the wait and the longer the delivery, the more difficult it is. This is true for all pregnancies. But it's especially true for couples who have a hard time getting pregnant. It can be very discouraging. We experience something similar as we wait for Christ's return. There's a lot of difficulty in this life. And it can be painful and discouraging.

But if you've been blessed to have children, you know the joy that comes with the birth of a child far outweighs the anxiety of waiting and the pain and anguish of child birth. In a similar way, the joy of Christ's coming far outweighs this light and momentary affliction we experience as we wait. (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17).

When Jesus spoke with his disciples about leaving them and returning to the Father in John 16 he said, "You will weep and lament.... You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (vv. 20-22).

As we've seen over the last two weeks, we live in a world of woe, as we await the return of the Lord. We experience brokenness in our world, in our relationships, and in our hearts. But when Christ returns, our sorrow will give way to joy (cf. Jer. 31:13). There will be comfort for God's people (cf. Isa. 40:1), comfort and joy, comfort and joy.

The same was true before Jesus' first advent. There was sorrow then as well. Israel was living in a wilderness of sin and waiting for the coming Messiah (the Christ), like a woman in labor. But when Christ came, there was joy (cf. Lk. 1:14)—at least for those who received Jesus as the Son of God and believed in his name (Jn. 1:12).

John the Baptist was one of those whose sorrow was turned into joy. In John 3:29, he said, "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly (or is "full of joy," as the NIV says) at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of

¹ Gross, Bobby. *Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God: An Introduction and Devotional Guide*. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2009, 35-37.

mine is now complete.” John’s waiting was over. Israel’s tiresome waiting was over. The bridegroom had come. The Messiah (the Christ) was here. Sorrow gave way to joy.

But why? What was it about Jesus that caused John so much joy? And what is it about Jesus that can give us joy as we wait for his return? How can we have joy in this broken world?

In our passage this morning, John the Baptist tells us. His testimony about Jesus tells us why we can have joy while we wait. And it has everything to do with who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish.

John 1:19-34²

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²²So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

²⁴(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” ³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³²And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” ³⁴And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage is all about Jesus. Sure, John the Baptist is the main character. But he’s simply a witness that John the Evangelist (the writer of the Gospel of John) has called to the stand to testify about who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish. As we listen to his testimony about Jesus, we’ll see why John was full of joy and how we can be full of joy as we wait for Jesus return.

The passage is divided into two parts. Verses 19-28 tell us who John is. They establish the credibility of his testimony. Verse 29-34 give us his testimony. They tell us who Jesus is and why he came.

JOHN (1:19-28)

So let’s begin with John. Who is John the Baptist? He was a witness who prepared the way for and pointed people to Jesus. This teaches us something about who we should be as well. It teaches us that a witness is someone who prepares the way for and points people to Jesus.

In verse 19, we’re told that a delegation of priests and Levites were sent from Jerusalem by the Pharisees (cf. v. 24) to learn who John was and why he was baptizing people in the wilderness. But when they ask who he is, all John wants to do is tell them who he isn’t. He gives three denials. He

² Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

says, “I’m not the Christ, I’m not Elijah, and I’m not the Prophet.” For the sake of time, we’ll only look at the first of these three denials.

I Ain’t Him

It’s important to know who you are. But it’s also important to know who you aren’t. John the Baptist knew who he wasn’t. He emphatically denies that he is the Christ; “He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ’” (v. 20).

The Christ is the Messiah. The one who was promised to come and save God’s people. The one everyone was waiting for. John knew he wasn’t the Christ.

Dale Bruner tells the story of a child who comes home from Sunday School and his parents ask him, “What did you learn in Sunday School?” The child responds by saying, “I learned about God.” So his parents dig a little deeper. “*What* did you learn about God?” To which the child succinctly replies; “I ain’t him!” That’s profound. Bad grammar, but good theology.³ It’s important to know who we are and who we aren’t. And it is especially important to know that we ain’t the Savior. Jesus is! John knew this.

The One Who Prepares

But if John wasn’t the Christ, then who was he? That’s what the religious leaders want to know. He says he’s the fulfillment of Isaiah 40. He’s the voice of the one crying in the wilderness; “make straight the way of the Lord” (v. 23). In other words, John sees himself as the one who would prepare the way for Jesus.

Isaiah 1-39 speaks largely of Israel’s sin and God’s judgment on them. Then we get to Isaiah 40, and the prophet says, “Comfort, comfort my people, her warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned.” Beginning in chapter 40 Isaiah begins to talk about salvation and restoration. The one who would bring salvation and restoration is clearly the Lord. But Isaiah also speaks of the coming Messiah. But before God’s salvation could come through his Messiah, there had to be another. Someone crying in the wilderness; “prepare the way for the Lord” (cf. Mal. 3:3). John was the fulfillment of that promise. He was preparing the way for the Lord.

How did he do this? Through baptizing. And as we learn in Luke, his baptism was a baptism of repentance. He called people to repent of their sins. And he announced the forgiveness of sins (Lk 3:3). John prepared the way for the Savior by showing people their need for a Savior. You can’t understand the joy Jesus brings if you don’t first understand the sin and the judgment Jesus delivered you from. So John’s role was to prepare the way for Jesus.

The One Who Points

But he also pointed people to Jesus. When asked why he was baptizing people, he says, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie” (v. 27).

At every turn, he’s given an opportunity to talk about himself. But all he can do is talk about Jesus. He continues to divert people’s attention off of himself and onto Jesus. All he does is prepare for Jesus. All he does is point to Jesus. We’ll see this clearly in verse 29, when he says, “Behold, the

³ Carson, D. A. Class Notes, ID 5000 Biblical Theology and Interpretation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, October, 2008.

Lamb of God...” Behold; look at Jesus, not me! Or as he says later in chapter 3, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v. 30).

Sermon illustrations are designed to shed light on the Bible, to make it clear. They’re like a spotlight. Spotlights aren’t supposed to be on the stage. They’re supposed to illuminate what’s on the stage. But so often, in modern preaching, sermon illustrations are like a spotlight that has been rolled onto the stage. Preachers are supposed to point people to Jesus. But their illustrations often say, “Look at me!”

That’s not John the Baptist. In verses 6-8 of the prologue, we read, “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.” It wasn’t about John. It was all about Jesus. His role was to prepare people for and to point people to Jesus.

This is so instructive for us. We live in a me-centered world. We’re constantly encouraged to promote ourselves and our image, to tell people what we’ve accomplished and what we’ve been through. John just wanted to point people to Jesus and to prepare people for him.

God will use us to bring people to salvation. And this is a great privilege. But none of us can save anyone. Only Jesus saves. Our role is to give our lives to preparing and pointing.

None of us are John. He was unique. He stood at the crossroads of all history; he straddled the old covenant and the new. He was the last great prophet. Jesus said about him that there was nobody greater who was born of a woman (Matt. 11:11). We’re not John.

But there is so much we can learn from his example about how to prepare and point. We too can be involved in helping people see they’re sinners in need of a Savior. And we too can point them to the Savior. We can share the gospel with them.

JESUS (1:29-34)

And that’s what we see John doing in the next part of our passage. In verses 29-34, John tells us who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish. He tells us that Jesus is the Son of God who came to take away our sins and give us eternal life. This is the reason why we can have joy as we wait for his return.

The Son of God

Everything John the Baptist says about Jesus is driving toward his conclusion in verse 34. “And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” Who is Jesus? He’s the Son of God.

John the Baptist is John the Evangelist’s first witness he calls to the stand to testify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That was John the Evangelist’s main purpose for writing his Gospel. He wanted people to come to believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing they would have life in his name (20:31).

John the Baptist was sent by God (v. 31) to testify that Jesus is the Son of God. And that only through Jesus can we have eternal life. That’s why Jesus came—to give us eternal life. That’s why John says in chapter 3, “For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (v. 16).

But how does Jesus, the Son of God, give us eternal life? John answers that question in his testimony. He lists two things about what Jesus came to accomplish. And these two things are how we have eternal life.

The Lamb of God

The first is the fact that Jesus is the Lamb of God. In verse 29, John says, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The Gospel of John highlights the Passover more than any other book. And here at the very beginning, we see that Jesus is the Passover Lamb.

Who would have ever imagined?! The Messiah, the Christ, would not only be our perfect prophet, priest, and king, but that he would also be the perfect sacrifice for our sins? The great Shepherd of the sheep also became the lamb. He laid down his life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). He gave his life so that we might have life. That’s how the promised Savior saves his people.

Jesus came as the light of the world. He came to reveal the Father to us. But he also came to give us life. In him was life, and the life was the light of men (v. 4). In our sin, we live in darkness. In our sin, we deserve eternal death and separation from God. But in Christ, God has come near to us. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (v. 14). And not only that, he also died on the cross so that we could be delivered from eternal death and given eternal life. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by teaching us that we are sinners in need of a Savior. But John the Baptist also pointed to Jesus, the one who died for our sin so that we could be saved. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

That’s the first way that the Son of God gives us eternal life. He dies in our place as the Lamb of God to take away our sins.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

The second way he gives eternal life is through baptizing us with the Holy Spirit. John came baptizing with water. But he pointed to the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (v. 33). What this means is that through Jesus we can be born again. The creator of the whole universe (v. 1), Jesus, came into his creation so that he could recreate a people for himself. He came to make all things new.

In verses 11-13, John the Evangelist says, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Those who receive Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Those who receive Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. They can become children of God. They can be born again.

In our trespasses and sins, we’re dead spiritually. We have hearts of stone. And that death is eternal; we will experience the wrath of God eternally. We will be separated from God eternally. But Paul tells us that those who were dead in trespasses and sins; those who were by nature children of wrath; they can be made alive together with Christ. They can be saved by grace (Eph. 2:1-5). They can be given a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. We can become totally new (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

In fact, if we want to be saved, we must become new creations. We must be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that unless you’re born of the water and of the Spirit, you cannot enter

the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5). We must be born again (Jn. 3:3). And through Jesus we *can* be born again. If you receive him, if you believe in his name, he has baptized you with the Holy Spirit.

So this is how we are saved. This is how we're given eternal life. Through faith in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, through faith in the one who died in our place, we can be delivered from death. And through the Spirit, we can be given eternal life and a new heart.

John the Baptist teaches us this. He bore witness. He wasn't the Christ. But he pointed to Jesus who was the Christ, the Son of God. And if we believe in him, we can have eternal life.

Conclusion

Do you see why John was full of joy? Do you see why his joy was complete? The long, painful pregnancy had ended. The long-expected Jesus had come. The Christ child was born. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Son of God came to save his people from their sins and give eternal life. O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy. If you believe these glad tidings, you too can be full of joy. Your sorrow can turn to joy as well.