

Joy that can never be taken away

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[0 : 0 0] is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her. Now I know I'm stereotyping, but normally when you have two women come together, they're likely to be joyful anyway.

What's more, if they're both pregnant, in a miraculous way. But you see, this is no ordinary joy, is it? For we read that Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit.

And evidence of that is not seen just in her joy, but in her resulting utterance as well. She recognizes in Mary a woman most blessed, a woman highly favored by God.

Likewise, as we turn to Mary, she too is full of joy. For she begins a song, verse 46, like this, My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

In other words, what we're reading is a joyful song. And we know too that Mary is filled with the Spirit, because earlier in verse 35, it says, The Holy Spirit will come on you, the angel prophesied, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

[1 : 1 6] So in both Mary and Elizabeth, and in her baby too, we have supernatural joy. Joy that's not simply about having a baby, joy as though that is, but something more than that.

So what is the cause of this supernatural joy? Well, Mary's song elaborates, and I'm going to read it in one go, so you get a sense of it from verse 48, actually from verse 47, My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Why? For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me.

Holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm. He has gathered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.

[2 : 3 0] So what does Mary rejoice in? Well, the fact that God is mindful of the lowly. He lifts up the humble, she says. He fills the hungry with good things.

He is mindful of the humble state of Mary. By contrast, Mary says he scatters the proud. He brings down rulers. He sends the rich away empty.

So it's pretty clear, isn't it, that Mary is looking to God for her joy. Not her circumstances, not even in her lowly status as a young virgin.

No, she's looking to God, the God of her forefathers. She's looking to his character and to his promises to Abraham and his descendants.

And that's a more secure and permanent basis for joy, isn't it? Because it's not dependent on our circumstances from day to day, but on God's character, which is unchanging.

[3 : 32] Now, right now, I think Australia is pretty buoyant at the moment. Victoria has just passed, I don't know how many, 36 or 37 days without any coronavirus cases.

And, you know, if you go around on the streets and in the cafes, you can sort of see everyone's mood lifting, can't you? But I think and I sense that it's also a very fragile and insecure kind of mood, isn't it?

Because all it takes is for one outbreak and people's anxieties will return again, won't they? And if your job or your business is relying on staying open, well, you'd be even more anxious, wouldn't you?

And that's true in life generally, isn't it? If we fix our joy solely on having a good job or being healthy or having enough money in the bank, well, that joy evaporates the moment those things are taken.

And we know these things, they come and go quite easily, don't they? You see, I'm not denying for a moment that we don't get a lift from these sort of things.

[4 : 40] So just to give you a rather trivial example, as I've emerged from lockdown and people start seeing me for the very first time in many weeks, I've lost count of the number of people that have said to me, wow, Mark, you look so good.

You've lost so much weight. Now, I'll be lying if I didn't get a little bit puffed up every time that happens. But if that was the only thing that gave me joy, that would be so insecure, wouldn't it?

I'll be looking at myself in the mirror all the time, you know, counting those calories instead of enjoying my meal and wondering, you know, is that going to come around my waist again? I'll be sort of like, you know, wondering, oh, why haven't they talked about my appearance today again, you know?

She hasn't seen me for a few weeks. Why hasn't she commented that I've lost weight? It would be so fleeting, wouldn't it? That kind of joy. And I suppose that goes for a lot of other things, isn't it?

When we first get a job or we get told we've got a clean bill of health or even major things like, you know, passing our exams with the, you know, excellent ATAR. I mean, we feel joy, don't we?

[5 : 52] But, you know, how long does that really last? Not long, is it? I don't know about you, but I actually want a more deep-seated joy, a more lasting joy that doesn't fluctuate based on how my life is going.

And Mary tells us that she's found that joy. She's telling us that this joy can be found in God who doesn't change in His promises which He always fulfills.

And yet, as you've heard her song, she says that this joy is to be found only by the lonely. Why? Because God's favor is inclined to people like that.

Now, if you read the song, Mary expresses it in a number of ways. She calls herself His servant, verse 48, that is, she's submitted to God. She says, His mercy extends to those who fear Him, that is, those who humble themselves before God.

And then, in verse 54, she refers to Israel as God's servant. Now, I don't know how you feel about being numbered among the lowly, to see yourself, you know, not as high and mighty, but in humility needing God's help.

[7 : 12] You see, sometimes we think it's money and power that will find us joy, wouldn't it? After all, we look at the rich and the powerful and they have all they want in life, so it appears. So, why wouldn't they be joyful?

But instead, God's favor is on those who see their need for Him and therefore look to Him for salvation. Which is why at the very start of the song in verse 47, Mary calls God my Savior.

That is the basis on which she's singing the whole song to us. Now, of course, she's not just thinking of God as coming to save only her. No, as we read the song, she's recalling God's promises to Israel, to God's people who have been waiting for a long time for salvation.

That's why we had that reading earlier in Isaiah in chapter 9 and verse 1. For there we find one such promise. It's on the screen again. Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who are in distress.

In the past, he humbled the lowly, the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the future, he will honor, lift them up, Galilee of the nations by the way of the sea beyond the Jordan.

[8 : 27] The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. And then the verses of joy. You have enlarged a nation and increased their joy.

They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. And so we see this in this prophecy that people are humbled, made low, but then they find joy.

And interestingly, in the very few verses later on, we find that promise of the coming Messiah, of the coming King. For it says, For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders.

And this is the promise of Jesus coming, isn't it? And it's this promise that many, among many, that Mary now sees is being fulfilled, not just for her, but in her as well, in her son, in her baby that she's about to bear.

So Mary's joy is actually a double joy, isn't it? It's the joy of knowing that God is finally going to fulfill his promises to Israel through her, but then, as a result, for her as well.

[9 : 43] And that's why in verse 49, she says, She's greatly blessed, for the mighty one has done great things for her. Now, I know that many of you, like me, have experienced that joy.

At one point in your life, it did dawn on you that God has called you to something much bigger in life. You heard the good news of Jesus, of the gospel, and you were convicted by it, by the Spirit's work in you.

It's a bit like the shepherds on the night when the angels appeared on the hill, you know, another group of lowly people that God comes to. Remember what the angel said.

I've got the verse on the slide. It's just in the next chapter of Luke. The angel said, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people.

Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He's the Messiah, the Lord. In other words, this good news of Jesus brings great joy.

[10 : 47] Do you still remember that day when you heard about Jesus and you were filled with joy? Do you remember that moment when you knew your sins were forgiven and that you were loved and known by God?

That was not meant to be a fleeting moment of joy, is it? Just for there and then, but no, that great news was meant to cause great joy for the rest of your life.

For every day you will know that you are now part of God's plan of salvation. Your life has been changed forever. You are a child of God forever.

And for me, every time I bring to mind these promises of God, spirit-filled joy wells up in me. little old me, lonely person in Melbourne, nameless, except maybe for, you know, among you, lovely folk here at HTD, and yet, favoured by God, saved by the death of His eternal Son.

My name, recorded in the book of life forever, one day, coming face-to-face with my Saviour, Jesus.

[12 : 07] Friends, it may be that the events of this year may have robbed you of joy. Maybe robbed too strong a word, stifled perhaps. Lockdown in Melbourne, yep, it's been hard, hasn't it?

Or perhaps you've been struggling with a lot of other things like illness or being unable to find work or being isolated and not being able to see people. All these simple pleasures that we've had in life which we've taken for granted have been taken from us, haven't it?

Even the simple act of being able to meet, what a joy it's been, but that has not been our, you know, our part of our, best part of our eight months this year, has it?

And yet, because of this great news of Jesus, there is a deeper joy that we have, that not even all these things not being able to meet can take away from us, can it?

It's the joy that Mary sang of that comes from knowing Jesus, knowing we're secure in Christ, given to us at Christmas time, this true gift from God.

[13 : 18] And so, if today anyone here have not experienced that joy, then let me invite you make this Christmas the first time that you experience this joy, that you know this joy.

If you need to, come talk to me afterwards, but delve deeper into this great gift of Jesus in God's Word. Have a read of the Gospels, maybe Mark, the Gospel of Mark.

Maybe get a friend that brought you here to talk through it with you or read it with you because this is a great gift that we've got, this gift of joy that comes through knowing our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father, how blessed are we that we have found favor in your eyes to be lifted up even in our humility, to be fed with the knowledge of your Son, to be filled with the power of your Spirit.

Fill our hearts with joy in believing. Ground our reality and life in this deep, deep well of everlasting joy found only through faith in Jesus which can never be taken away, which we know one day that this is now just simply a foretaste but one day we will have an overwhelming abundance when we come face to face with your Son, Jesus, in glory.

[14 : 43] In His name we pray. Amen. Well, as Helen had said earlier, we had planned not to be able to sing so in response, we're actually going to sing, say a psalm of praise but I'm going to get Helen, would you like to come up to lead us a psalm 100?

So, Psalm 100 is a psalm where the psalmist gives grateful praise and it's to be read responsibly. So, in light of what we've heard today, why don't we do that together?

I will begin and ask that you respond with the words in colour bold. Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before Him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us.

We are His. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.

[15 : 57] Give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the Lord is good and His love endures forever. Faithfulness continues through generations.

Great. So, with what we've heard tonight on the passage in Luke, I think it's timely for us to consider for ourselves what we place joy in in our lives, particularly during difficult times.

So, for the next few minutes, I'll ask you to please turn around to the people next to you and to consider and discuss the question on the screen, which is, how do we maintain joy in times of difficulty?

So, feel free to stay in your seats and just turn around to the people next to you and discuss. So, it's good to hear that there are lots of good conversations happening that you can continue after the service.

So, now we're going to move to a time of prayer led by Daniel. Let's pray.

[17 : 24] God of all creation, as Mary sings, your mercy extends to those who fear you. You performed mighty deeds, brought down rulers, but you lift up the humble.

Lord, especially this year, in all its difficulty, we've been made low. We have realized our humility before you. Our Lord, thank you that you did not forget us, that you don't leave us alone.

I thank you that you sent to us your spirit, your son, and your salvation. Our Lord, may we always rejoice in this gift. May that joy ever increase as we look forward to the day we'll see you face to face.

Our merciful God, you also St. John the Baptist, your messenger to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation. I give us grace to heed his warning and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy, as Mary did, the coming of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, one God, now and forever.

So as we look forward to Christmas, we also pray for our Holy Trinity Christmas at Home outreach. our Lord, we are glad to celebrate with our friends and neighbors after the year that has been.

[18 : 48] Please give us boldness to invite those people along to join with us. Please be at work in them as they hear your word preached and the message of joy in the coming of the Redeemer.

Our Lord, we also thank you that we've been at zero corona cases for over five weeks now. Our Lord, we rejoice at the further easing of restrictions, especially that we can sing together in praise to you at church.

We're so grateful to be able to meet in person for all kinds of church fellowship, studying the Bible together, the youth and the kids finally seeing each other face to face after enduring such a strange year.

Our Lord, make that we would learn to appreciate this fellowship anew so that we may look forward even more so to the perfected fellowship that we will have with all your people and Christ himself in glory in the new creation.

But for now, Lord, please be with us. Please be with the welcome team and with Steph as they work hard in caring for our family here at church. We also pray that you'd bring healing to the many places still in the midst of outbreak in Europe and America and all the others.

[20 : 05] Lord, please be with all your people all over the world in these difficult times. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.