

Victory of the Lamb – December 9, 2018 – What if . . .

Isaiah 61:7 – There is Real Joy – Pastor Bill Limmer

Even though we typically think of the holidays as a happy time, December can be a time of loneliness, pain, sorrow, and snowflake size tears. But What if there was more to Christmas than the hustle and bustle, jammed parking lot, long lines, and buffering internet sites. What if there were more to Christmas than traditions? What if there was joy everlasting?

The other morning when I was running in the premature January cold, I saw a mom taking her daughter into daycare. The mom has her coat on and her shoulders all hunched in and is walking her daughter in. Her daughter with her hand holding her mom's is skipping. There is a difference between adults and children right. I mean when is the last time you skipped? Did you skip when you took your child into daycare. Doubt it. You didn't even skip after you dropped your child at daycare. Did I say that out-loud?

Sometimes what keeps us from joy is that we are willing to set our dreams of joy on things and circumstances that are temporary. For example, Bob and Beth were so excited to buy their three year old son this amazing gift. And sure enough when he opened it, he oohed and awed over the present. It was great but it came in one of those packages with all those plastic ties that are all but impossible to cut off and while Jim was trying to cut off all those ties, the little guy began to play with the box that the present came in. The box was a great buy at 59:99 right?

Or try these joy robbers on for size. Crushing disappointment like many of the GM workers are now facing. Shock and disbelief as the doctor rocks your world with the diagnosis of cancer. You get the notification on your phone that an amazon package has been delivered. Sweet! But when you get home the package is not on the doorstep nor anywhere to be found. The package was misdelivered or stolen. Just five short years ago Jon and Kathy promised their "I do's," only now this is the first Christmas of "I'm done," and all the pain it took to get there. Adversity is so common place that everyone we meet is fighting a battle we know nothing about. What is your battle?

One of the biggest robbers of joy is the performance trap. The performance trap is a life that is based on what we do and how well we do it. Jim and Terry both college graduates live in constant fear of parenting fails with everyday of school and every interaction and request. It is just sucking their life and joy out them as their children grow older. They try to comfort and console each other. They have a fairly healthy view when the other "fails" but when they fail there is inner shame and hate. Steve is super concerned about making the right call when it comes to the stock market and his joy fluctuates with the market. Occasionally he will share a success story but he is careful in case the market turns and someone asks him how he and his stocks are performing.

In the performance trap there is an inner feeling that says no one can really know how I feel, or what I'm thinking, or what I have said or what I have done because it is not good. No one must know my struggles because they will know I am defective, weird or even dangerous. There is a continuous sense of guilt, condemnation, and worthlessness. Negative emotions, especially anxiety and anger, result in irrational fears, smoldering resentments, outbursts of rage, excessive mood swings and depression. We pray or don't pray to God on the basis of what I have done or haven't done. We will go to communion on the basis of what I have done or haven't done. We often think that God's love for us is based on what we do or don't do. We expend a lot of energy covering up our messiness. Even when we are able

to cover up in front of others we know it is fake and phony. We feel as if God doesn't or can't love us. Why would he? How could he? We have left so many t's uncrossed and i's undotted.

This is how sad the performance trap is. You want to shame, mock, and get back at people who have failed or done things we have disagreed with, or done things we have done but perhaps haven't been caught. And then somewhere along the way, we think God wants that for us too. That he is going to get us back because we did or said the right thing our heart was not in the right place. Performance driven people have a pain that is real, a struggle that is real, and a defeat they feel is certain. One of the problems of our own righteousness is that it sets us up for failure from the beginning because we are all sinful. Romans 7:19 **For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.** And I know you know how this goes, and I know how this goes because I run and win this mental, emotional, and spiritual treadmill race everyday.

One of the most fascinating things about the Bible is that it doesn't attempt to cover up the "stuff" of God's people. Every Bible hero has issues and battles and blunders, like we do. And in the middle of all that Isaiah 61:1 **The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.** Jesus knows the truth about us. We can play pretend. We can play hide and seek. But Jesus knows the real us. He knows who and what we are hiding and why we are hiding it in the first place. God is not out to get us for X, or Y or Z. Jesus gave his back so there are no God get backs for us only grace which is the good news of great joy that is for all people. And he treats us not as we deserve, not as our sinful nature would treat others but with grace. Jesus brings joy because he rules with truth and grace. Truth without love is dogmatics. Love without truth is sentimentality but truth with grace is everlasting joy.

Our source of joy is not in what we do for God, but rather in what God has done for us and that bring us joy. Instead of heaping shame upon shame on us relentlessly through social media and the court of public opinion, instead of get backs for our sin we receive forgiveness. Verse 7 **Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.** The forgiveness is so overwhelming it is a double portion. It washes away our sin without a trace. Our sin doesn't decrease God's grace, it increases it. Grace is for all people so we can say along with Isaiah **I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.**—

God's love can't be achieved; it can only be received. He is debt deliverer, fault forgiver, gift giver, mercy multiplier, the one who is mighty to save, the prayer listener, the promise keeper; the performance trap releaser. Jesus is not just the infant God, the crucified and died God, he is the living God who conquered sin, death and Satan and brings eternal joy among his gifts. The Joy that Jesus brings is real.

Outside of Christ, I am brokenhearted; Inside of Christ, my heart is filled with his love. Outside of Christ, I am captive; inside of Christ, I am set free. Outside of Christ, I have been defeated, in Christ, I am already victorious. Outside of Christ, I am empty, inside of Christ, I am full. Outside of Christ, I am poor; inside of Christ, I am rich. Outside of Christ, I am weak; inside of Christ I am strong. Outside of Christ, I am only a sinner, but in Christ I am saved. Outside of Christ, I am miserable; inside of Christ I am joyful.

People's lives are messy. People are messy on both sides of the cross. What that means is that Christians aren't perfect this side of heaven in their thoughts, words and actions. Christians are still sinful. Christians understand that our mess doesn't disqualify us from his love it only reveals more of God's love. While our faith is imperfect and fainthearted, we may rejoice that God has clothed us with the threads of his perfect life, death and resurrection victory. The robe of Christ's righteousness is long and wide enough to cover every sinner's twisted human thought, word, and deed and every accusation of Satan and so it is for all who will receive Joy to the world. Because Jesus plus nothing equals everything joyous.