

Christmas, the Gift of Joy
Luke 2:8-20
December 22, 2019

Joseph M. William Turner (1775-1851) was a great artist. He was known for landscape paintings. Some of his pictures are very vivid with intense and vibrant colors, and some are mysterious, foggy and ethereal. One art critic saw some of the vivid pictures of landscape and said to Turner, “Your paintings are so vivid and colorful, but I have never seen landscapes look like that.” Turner replied, “Well, don’t you wish you could?”¹ I guess Turner saw something that the critic could not see. At least, Turner saw the scene, the landscape, and captured it in a way the critic could not even imagine.

If the shepherds, who visited the holy family, ever told the story of that night to other people, I am sure they could not believe what they said. I can imagine someone saying, “How could you see something like that? We have never seen anything like that!” Maybe the shepherds responded, “Don’t you wish you could?”

I wish all of us could see what they saw that night. I wish every person in the world could see that Christ is the Savior of the world. I wish that everyone knew they can find their hope in Christ Jesus.

A poet, named L.S. Clark, wrote a hymn that goes like this:

A baby’s hands in Bethlehem
Were small and softly curled;
But held within His dimpled grasp
The hope of all the world.²

The world in which the Christ child was born was a dark and violent world. It was a difficult time in Israel’s history. The Israelites were oppressed politically and depressed economically. They were conquered people, a defeated nation. Their sovereignty was lost and their land was occupied by their conquerors, the Romans. Their religious institution could not give them confidence or an assurance of God’s presence. People needed hope. They needed deliverance. They were desperate for an assurance that God was with them.

¹ From Charley Reeb’s sermon, “*Joy of Christmas*”, www.esermons.com

² <https://www.etsy.com/listing/464317171/a-babys-hands-in-bethlehem-christmas>

Into this desperate and despondent world, Christ the Savior was born. He came to give them hope and salvation.

Do you know what “sympathetic resonance” is? It is one of the laws of physics. Let’s say we have two similar objects close together, but they are not touching each other. If one of them begins to vibrate, the other will also begin to vibrate without ever being touched. It works well with musical instruments. Let’s say we have two pianos in the same room and they are tuned to each other. If I play a “c” note on one piano, then the other piano will also make a sound of the “c” note without ever being touched. That is called “sympathetic resonance.”

Our relationship with the Lord works in a similar way. The Lord has a sympathetic resonance.

When the Son of God came into this world, he came in human form. He was born, just like us. He was born as a baby, and he had to go through all stages of life, just like us. The only difference between Jesus and us is that he was without sin, and he is close to us. When a note of grief, sorrow, fear, or suffering is struck in our hearts it resonates in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. It resonates in the heart of God. There is no note of human suffering or joy that does not resonate in the heart of God. He has sympathetic resonance.

Just the knowledge of this gives us joy. We have God who understands us, who knows us, who can strengthen us exactly the way we need to be strengthened. The Lord not only understands us; but he is able to deliver us from our pain, suffering and misery.

Sometimes our situations don’t change even when we have a strong relationship with him and a deep faith in him. Like Joni Erickson Tada. After her accident, her situation has not changed. Even after many years of intimate relationship with the Lord, she is still paralyzed from the neck down. Helen Keller’s (1880-1968) situation did not change all her life, even when she had a deep faith in the Lord. Nick Vujicic, who was born without arms and legs, does wonderful ministry all over the world. He has great faith in the Lord, but he is still without arms and legs. His situation did not change at all.

However, their attitudes toward their situations changed as a result of being saved, as a result of having a deep faith. God delivered them from their feelings of misery – their bitterness and self-pity. They all found great joy in life.

Saint Paul said that “joy” is one of the characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit. Joy is what we have as a result of being obedient to the Lord. When we are obedient to the Lord, no matter what we face, we will always have joy in our lives.

In his book, *The Applause of Heaven*, Max Lucado shares a story of a man named Robert Reid. Robert has cerebral palsy. His hands are twisted and his feet useless. He cannot bathe or feed himself. Basically, he cannot take care of himself, but Robert knows that God wants him to live with joy each and every day. He will never be free from his condition, but he always counts his blessings, and as a result, his life is full of joy.

Cerebral palsy is a debilitating disease that does not have any cure. Robert could not have a normal life. When he was growing up, he could not ride a bike like other kids. When he was a young man he could not drive. He wished he could, but he couldn't, but he was not consumed with self-pity.

Even with his disease, he put his effort to learn. He graduated from high school and college. He has a degree in Latin. He not only graduated from college, but he also taught at a junior college. Later, he became a missionary. He went to Lisbon, Portugal as a missionary. He learned Portuguese there and carried out a powerful ministry. Currently, he is involved in prison ministry in the United States.

This is what Max Lucado wrote about him:

“I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him in his wheelchair onto the platform. I watched them lay a Bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers force open the pages, and I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, ‘I have everything I need for joy.’ His shirts are held together by Velcro, but his life is held together by JOY.”³

Christmas is the gift of joy. In verse 10, the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day...a Savior, who is the Messiah.”

Jesus is the source of joy. He is not only the Lord who understands us, understands our predicaments and problems; but he is also the one who saves us from all our sins, guilts and miseries, and gives us peace and joy.

³ Max Lucado, *THE APPLAUSE OF HEAVEN* (Word Publishing, 1990), pp. 6-7.

In this book, *Talking to Ducks*, James A. Kitchens says that there are two kinds of joy: internal joy and external joy. Internal joy comes from within. It is not affected by what happens outside. It comes from a deep relationship with the Lord. External joy, however, comes and goes depending on what happens to us. This is what some people call happiness. The word “happiness” comes from an old English word “happ,” which literally means “chance.” It corresponds to the Latin word, “fortuna,” which means “luck.” If things happen the way we want them to happen, then we are happy, but if they don’t, then we are not happy. Happiness is temporary. Internal joy is permanent and settled.

Pastor Tony Evans once told a story of his visit to New York City. While he was there, there was a blackout. It was in 2003. You probably remember that there was a huge blackout in the northeast. It affected Canada and eight states in the northeast. Everything was pitch black in all the streets and buildings. Everything was shut down, including the subway.

But there was one exception. It was a restaurant. It was not far from where Evans was staying. So, he went there. It was packed and there were people outside waiting in line. Evans went to a manager and asked, “How is it that you have electricity when the entire city doesn’t?”

The manager said, “When they built the restaurant, they put a gas generator just in case we lose the power, just like now. So, no matter what happens outside, we are not affected. We will always have power.”

Tony Evans goes on to say, “When you accepted Jesus Christ, he came into the inside. So, no matter what happens outside, you will always have power. You will always be filled with joy.”⁴

Christ being in our lives is what Christmas is really about,. May we all experience that this is Christmas, and may the good Lord fill your hearts with joy today and every day!

⁴ From *Tony Evans’ Book Of Illustrations* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009).