

sText: Is.61:1-3, 7-11

Target audience: Christians

Topic: Joy

Theme: The evangelistic power of joy

My purpose for this message: To help Christians see that pursuing a life of joy in Christ not only changes us, it can change the world.

Delivered: July 3, 2005 @ KEFC

Joy to the World

PRAY.

My daughter and son-in-law celebrated their 4th anniversary last week. Back when they were dating and I didn't know much more about Doug than that he was from NJ, a baseball pitcher for Temple University, and a pretty new Christian, I invited him to go canoeing. Turned out to be more of an adventure than either of us expected but that's another morning's story.

As we floated down the Pequea Creek I asked him, "Doug, how did you become a Christian?" He said that there were other Christians on the baseball team. I pressed him, "So, was there something that they said that persuaded you, or, what was it that drew you to Christ?"

He replied, "It was all the joy that they had."

One day Jesus was rather ominously explaining the future to his disciples.

"Watch for a pattern of calamities: false messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes, tsunamis; Christians so badly persecuted that some abandon me." But then in the middle of his bad news, this good news surfaced: "But before the end comes (Matt.24:14): the whole world will hear the gospel." Whether *everyone* alive at a given moment, or simply *some* from each culture, tribe, or language group, we don't know. But for sure, the gospel is going to be *widely* heard.

And people like you and me are going to help tell it. But how do we get a hearing in this age of unbelief, of cynicism and skepticism, of relativism where one man's truth is another's lies? Not, how can we *tell* the gospel, but how can we get people to listen?

After a quarter century of observing people as a Christian, I am increasingly persuaded that just as our works either open or close the door to a gospel hearing, so does our demeanor: miserable or joyfilled. Joy is a gospel language most of the world can understand. And Scripture tells us that joy is the consequence of God's work in us.

FIND Is.61. Isaiah was the Billy Graham of the Old Covenant, God's premier spokesman in the southern kingdom, especially in the capital city of Jerusalem. *And*, he spoke publicly about Messiah more than any other prophet.

Let's READ vv.1-3, 7-11. Very early in His ministry, Jesus walked into the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth, and preparing to teach, He was handed a scroll. Unlike our Bibles, a scroll contained a single book: this one, Isaiah. Opening to this very chapter, he read the first verse, then half of the second, and then sat down. The hall was hushed as he said, "Today, this is fulfilled in your hearing." Isaiah's words were not simply an offer of hope to discouraged Jews in Jerusalem; they were an offer of universal hope to all mankind. Perhaps more specifically, hope for needy people. Jesus pointed out to the Pharises, "It's the sick people—not the healthy—who need a doctor."

Only needy people are looking for hope. The man with no needs, needs no hope. But needy people are *desperate* for hope. So that's who Jesus opens his arms to: the

poor, brokenhearted people, captives, spiritually blinded people (folks imprisoned in darkness), the grieving, the mourning, those in despair.

He offered them much more than sympathy; He offered antidotes for each malady.

- Good news for the poor
- Bandages for the brokenhearted
- Keys for captives
- Light for the spiritually blind
- Comfort for the grieving
- [crown of beauty] A bride's turban for those sorrowing over some tragedy
- [Oil of gladness] Body oil, perfume for those in mourning
- Glad praise to God for the despairing

Glad praise to God for the despairing. Misery replaced. They got what they needed: good news, bandages, keys, etc., Natural reaction? Joy!

REREAD v.7. When God gives His people what they need, they are joyous. They rejoice; they rejoice, they rejoice! REREAD v.10a. *I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God.* Why again? Because He met me at the point of my need. And as a result... (REREAD end of v.9). Again, [REREAD v.11]. The lost of all the nations comprise an audience that is watching Christians on stage. These unregenerate people want to see if this good news has made a difference in them, or are they still miserable? Does anything about our normal demeanor persuade the watching audience of nations to *acknowledge that 'those Christians' are a people the Lord has blessed?*

I am increasingly captivated by joyful people. In part, because they seem to be such an endangered species. Much of the world seems angry, moody, unhappy. Ask any customer service representative. Ask anyone who works in an airport baggage claim department. Many unhappy people today. And yet, not so different from yesterday when people faced famine, war, feuds, disease, crime, neglect, short life, and a lot of meanness. Joy is the exception. We'll have to put it in a zoo so we can all look at what it once looked like in the wild!

C.S. Lewis lost his mother to cancer when he was just 10. It rocked his world and rediscovering the joy of his carefree boyhood became a quest for Lewis. Surprising no one more than himself, he found it through faith in Christ. His book *Surprised by Joy* is about his pilgrimage from atheist to Christian. He was not simply looking for a feeling of pleasure, but something more durable, more lasting. He found it in Jesus, filling his being with what Peter calls an "inexpressible and glorious joy." (1 Pet.1:8).

Our world is on a quest for something like that. They need what we've got. But it's doubtful morose, downhearted, sorrowing and unhappy Christians will capture their attention; they see folks like that every day. They work beside them. They're married to one. One of them is their parent. They listen to those kind of people every day on the telephone. I think many people are like a Diogenes with a lamp, shuffling from person to person, looking without expectation, for someone strikingly different: happy; joyfilled.

The 2nd stanza of perhaps our most popular Christmas' carol goes...

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns,
Let men, their songs employ.
While fields and flocks, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

Isaac Watts lifted the words from Ps.98: “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music...”

Have you been that affected by the gospel? If so, people know it. They can tell. They watch and draw conclusions. About anything, don't they? They watch and draw conclusions.

When I went to Pittsburg this week for our national Free Church conference, my cordless shaver had somehow switched itself on and ran the battery down. After 3 days without a shave, people were looking at me and drawing conclusions that either I was growing a beard, or had a shaver malfunction. They could tell.

Several weeks ago at the Maryland Museum of Science at Inner Harbor, I watched a woman working the snack shop outside the IMAX theater. She started an energetic conversation with every customer, especially the children.

When I got to the counter, I asked her, “You like your job don't you?”

“I do. I love to brighten people's day.”

“I can tell,” I said. We all watch others and draw conclusions. When they see our demeanor what will they conclude about our Christ? “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song...” Have you been that affected by what Jesus did for you?

Concl:

The night Jesus was born in a Bethlehem barn, an angel suddenly appeared and spoke to some shepherds, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.” Great joy for all people. Could those not yet in God's camp observe it in us? Could they tell? Oswald Chambers reminds us that it's not automatic: “A life of intimacy with God is characterized by joy.”