

Title: Jump for Joy
Date: December 17, 2023
Subject: Joy
Scripture: Isaiah 9:1 - 7

It was if I was watching myself as it happened. The youth at the church where I grew up had just finished the Christmas play. We were busy putting away props and costumes and straightening up the room used as the staging area. There was one last stool to be moved. A paper grocery bag was on top of it. I picked up the bag just as Judy (one of four Judys among the youth and young adults in church) entered the room. She said the bag was hers. I decided to be funny. I released my grip on the bag. Judy's look of terror was amplified when the bag didn't go smooosh but crack. She exclaimed, "That was my grandmother's mixing bowl!" The blood drained from my face. I could have doubled for a snowflake. I left the room and wanted to go home.

There was no joy at that moment.

We're able to understand something by its opposite. For instance, we know there's evil because there's good. Darkness because of light. The same is true of joy and unjoy, disjoy, nonjoy.

The lead into our text presents the contrast to joy (Isaiah 8). It has one of the all-time "great" names: Maher Shalal Hash Baz which means "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." The name foretold good news for Judah's king - his enemies would be plundered. The bad news - his country would be judged and suffer.

In just a few years, the country to the north, Assyria, would pour down over Israel like a flood and a bird of prey. The reason for the judgment was the people had rejected the Lord (v. 6). They sought guidance from mediums and spirits but wouldn't inquire of God (v. 19).

There were rays of hope. The Lord is portrayed as the only one who can be relied upon as he will be a sanctuary for his people (v. 14). Only his will and plans work (v. 10). People can rely on God being with them (v. 10). He's the only one to be regarded as holy and feared (v. 13). He's a stone that causes men to stumble and the rock that makes them. Both of these point to Jesus. Ultimately, Isaiah says in v. 17: Read Isaiah 8:17.

But before things would get better, things were going to get worse, a lot worse, really bad. Read Isaiah 8:22.

If you're into Lord of the Rings, think Mordor and Mount Doom.

Get to our text. Read Isaiah 9:1 – 7.

The chapter opens with the word "nevertheless" and continues the contrast with the word "but." "Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom... But in the future he will honor..."

The gloom most affected the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. The Assyrian army routinely invaded them prior to taking the northern 10 tribes into captivity. Another area of gloom is identified. It's Galilee of the Gentiles also called Galilee of the nations. The northern part of Israel and the area next to it had become home to a conglomeration of people groups. Jews and Gentiles lived together.

The prophecy uses the defeat of Midian as a backdrop. Gideon, with 300 men armed with trumpets and torches in pitchers, routed Midian's 135,000 men. It was accomplished by trusting in God as the one who could achieve the victory (Judges 7:22-25). There was a lot of joy in the aftermath of the Gideon's victory.

The future victory would take place in the future 20 years after Assyria had taken Israel into captivity. The Angel of the Lord destroy the Assyrian army, 185,000 soldiers (2 Kings 19:20-37; 2 Chronicles 32:20, 21). There would be more joy after the tremendous victory God would give over Assyria.

The main part of the prophetic promise looks farther into the future, to the time when the Christ was to be born. God would honor Galilee of the Gentiles. Jesus grew up in Nazareth just west of the Sea of Galilee. A large portion of his ministry was north of the sea of Galilee in places like Bethsaida, Korazin and Capernaum which became the center of his ministry. People from around the world came through the area on the major trade route known as The Way of the Sea which ran from Egypt to Damascus.

This prophecy is fulfilled in the book of Luke. Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, praised God that his son would be the forerunner of the one who would be "the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace" (Luke 1:78, 79).

Eight days after Jesus was born, he was taken to the temple for the purification rights. Simeon was waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. We assume he was old because the Holy Spirit had revealed to him he wouldn't die before he'd seen the Lord's Christ. He took Jesus in his arms and praised God: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:28-32). Simeon declared God's truth that salvation was for all people.

Jesus also quoted the words from Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry.

Light is introduced in v. 2. From this point on, Isaiah, 700 years before Christ, writes as if he was looking back instead of ahead. That's the thing about prophecy. It's spoken as completed: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

Light. Light that dispels the darkness. Light that shows the truth. Light that points to Jesus who'd be the light of the world.

Isaiah has light on the brain when it comes to prophecies about the coming Messiah. He was enlightened. When speaking of the coming servant of the Lord, he records God's words: "I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (Isaiah 42:6, 7)...It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and to bring back those of Israel I have kept. I also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

The identification of the Messiah as light is declared in the New Testament. Sometimes prophecies are cited. Other times it waxes eloquent about the light bearer as in the non-traditional Christmas passage of John 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in

the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; His name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-12, 14).

Jesus testified of himself, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Light and joy are linked. A few weeks ago, I equated life to being in a tunnel. It's great when you can see light at the end of the tunnel. Knowing how some of us think, the thought probably went through some minds: "as long as that light isn't from an oncoming train."

The prophets only had the ability to look through the tunnel of hundreds of years to see the light that would come. That was enough to cause folks like Isaiah to rejoice.

Those who live in the fulfillment era where Christ's first advent has occurred can rejoice as well. V. 3 is about the nation of Israel. We heard from John 1 there were many who didn't receive Jesus... but those who did... experience light and life and joy. In that way the nation's joy would be an increased.

Two illustrations are given. The first is harvest. Many people today are disconnected from the harvest. They think food originates in the grocery store. They have no concept about what it takes to get the food there, of putting seeds in the ground, waiting for the crops to grow and produce, battling insects and weeds, then finally being able to reap corn, rice, soybeans, vegetables. The harvest includes plenty of work and sometimes the laborer doesn't feel a whole lot of joy as experiences the aches and pains of lifting bales and long hours in the field. But there's joy once the crop has been harvested.

The second illustration is of soldiers who've won the war. They're dividing the plunder from the those who've been defeated. The image hearkens back to battles of ancient times: to the victor go the spoils. They're joyful they're on the winning side and can grab the belongings and valuables of the defeated.

These illustrations point to God who increases the joy of people. He's produced the harvest. He's achieved the victory. He hands the resulting joy over to his people.

We come to the most familiar part of Isaiah's prophecy. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given."

Our minds go to the little village of Bethlehem. We imagine the scene of Mary, Joseph and the baby wrapped in cloths lying in a manger. We decorate the scene with whatever animals we think might have been there, the peaceful cooing of doves, how many shepherds had left their flocks, and whether there are other people there along with the location of the manger in a cave or building. We imagine the shepherds as they

leave the manger and spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. They're glorifying and praising God for all the things they'd heard and seen. They were filled with joy and were rejoicing.

Before we get to the rest of v. 6, we have to understand time is mashed together in prophecies. It's like looking at the mountains from an observation point. The mountain tops appear to be close together. But when we resume the drive, discover there's often great distances between them, distances that couldn't be seen.

The same is true with prophecy. The first part of v. 6 was fulfilled when Christ came to earth, born as a baby. The second part is spoken as already being true - but the fulfillment hasn't taken place.

Many Jews of Jesus' time didn't expect a child who would grow to be the king. They were looking for a political Messiah, an adult who suddenly burst on the scene and kick Rome back to the boot of Italy.

The baby Jesus didn't immediately start reigning as king, barking out orders and edicts. He didn't assume an earthly throne at any point during his life on earth. That was for the future and still is in the future. The emphasis is on what is yet to come when Christ will rule and reign over all people, the entire planet, the entire universe, beginning in the Millennium and going forever and ever and ever without end. V. 7 picks up on this. It's part of what the angel Gabriel promised Mary about the son she would deliver: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the House of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:32, 33). It's the grand theme of the Hallelujah Chorus: "And he shall reign forever and ever... king of kings and Lord of Lords." There's going to be a lot of joy. In the meantime, He seeks to rule and reign in our hearts, be on the throne of our lives, to be the king of our lives.

The names in v. 6 are referred to as the throne names of Christ. Wonderful Counselor: king who determines what needs to be done to complete his plan of salvation and follows through on it, causing the world to be in awe. Mighty God: powerful, unconquerable warrior and champion. Everlasting Father: loving, compassionate, kind, gracious, merciful being who protects, comforts, provides, sustains...and does it forever. Prince of Peace: the one who brings wholeness, completion and well-being - the fulfillment of eternal life.

Sometimes the Bible uses joy and happiness interchangeably as the happiness in view is deep-rooted. Shallow happiness, that of many people, is dependent on circumstances also known as happenstances. If they're favorable and positive - if good things happen, things go the desired way, the sky is blue - then they're happy.

Author James Dyet notes how this contagion has infected Christians. "There is a dangerous attitude reflected in the conversation of some of the Lord's people today. They gripe when money runs low and trouble runs high, but exclaim *Praise the Lord!* when their pockets are jingling and things are coming up roses. They have not yet learned to distinguish between happiness and joy" (Living Above the Circumstances, p. 96).

This was a lesson the disciples had to learn. They'd been sent out by Jesus to tell the Good News Jesus offered. They returned with thrilling stories of demons submitting to them in Jesus' name. Jesus told them he was aware of their victories, "Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:17-20). The use of spiritual power is nice, but salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus is an immensely greater reason for joy.

Queen Victoria knew something about power. She became queen of the British Empire at 18 and ruled for over 63 years. She was one of the most powerful people on the planet. Her reign, known as the Victorian Age, was marked by incredible advancements and achievements. She was nicknamed “grandmother of Europe” as her nine children married into royalty from other countries. Over time her monarchy became less political and more symbolic. She was a benevolent matriarch who strongly emphasized moral and family values.

It seems she came to know Christ as her Savior after she had attended a service at Saint Paul's Cathedral. She asked the minister who conducted the service if a person could be sure of getting to heaven. He said no. This was all reported in the papers and a man named John Townsend wrote to her to encourage her to read John 3:16 and Romans 10. She wrote back that she had placed her trust in Christ for her salvation.

Queen Victoria stated her favorite letter was M, explaining it came from 1 Corinthians 1:26. The verse reads “not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.” She'd tell people it says “not many” rather than “not any.”

J. Warner Wallace is a homicide detective who came to know Christ as Savior when he used his skills to investigate the claims of the New Testament. He's the author of *Cold Case Christianity* and other books defending Christianity. I heard a little of an interview on *Focus on the Family* on Wednesday. He made an absolutely profound statement: “I'm not a Christian because it works for me.” One of the ways he illustrated was a Christian kid in high school who takes a stand for Christ may become the most unpopular. He went on to state: “I'm a Christian because it's true.”

Peter was part of a group that went to a Christmas Eve service in Princeton, New Jersey because they heard it would be fantastic. The usher informed them there was to be absolutely no talking prior to, during or after the service. An associate pastor requested the attendees to refrain from singing as the professional choir found it difficult to perform when unprofessionals sang.

The first song was “O Come All Ye Faithful.” Peter and friends couldn't resist singing. The usher who'd already shushed their whispering before the service returned to hush them. The second song “Hark, The Herald Angels Sing.” Peter's group waited until the second verse before joining in. The usher returned, warning them “One more time and you are out.” The usher strolled by the group every few minutes to glare at them.

Candles were lit during the last song and Peter began to sing. The usher returned, put a heavy hand on Peter's shoulder and told him, “You have to leave, son. You're singing again.” Peter recalls, “At this point we were on the last verse of “Silent Night” and in unified Christmas Eve defiance, our whole row started to sing. We sang the hymn with ever increasing gusto.” He wondered if they'd be escorted or dragged out.

The usher relented. The song ended. The candles were extinguished. The group started to leave when the usher met them, shook their hands and exclaimed “Merry Christmas. Please join us for the Sunday Service this next week.” Peter ends the story, “We went to the church across the street the next Sunday.”

Joy begins with having a personal relationship with Christ and should flow out.