

**THE REAL JOY GIVER****Luke 1:39-56****(Read Luke 1:39-56)**

**Intro:** You've experienced it, I'm sure. You've certainly witnessed it. The arrival of a child or grandchild or the word of a very welcome but unexpected diagnosis. I remember when the American POWs came home from Viet Nam, some of whom had been in captivity for as long as 10 years. It was sheer, palpable, and completely unmistakable JOY as the men came off the planes and their families engulfed them in hugs and kisses. It was the real deal. You would have had to have been blind and a rock to not be moved emotionally by it. Joy does that. It moves us. It thrills us. It transforms us.

The danger is, joy, while it is real and unmistakable, can be fleeting and be gone in a flash. I'm not trying to be a downer on this day when we celebrate joy, but I want to present a fact: joy, without Jesus, is temporary. The opposite is a fact too – Jesus is the source of endless joy. C. S. Lewis wrote "*Joy is the serious business of Heaven.*" and that's why the angel told the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem *I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.* Luke 2:10b-11. Since joy is the business of heaven, let's look at all of its benefits.

First . . .

**When Jesus shows up people are changed**

- The text I just read from Luke spotlights Mary and Elizabeth, who, in the eyes of their culture, are two lowly and shamed women.
  - Mary is little more than a teenager, and certainly a peasant girl. That's three strikes against her: young, female, and from a lower class. That's lowly. Mary was also an unwed mother. Not only is that shameful, it also is a capital offence – sex outside of marriage is worthy of death by stoning. And of course she was pregnant because she had been promiscuous, who believes that overshadowed by the Holy Spirit stuff, anyway. Mary was lowly and shamed for sure.
  - And Elizabeth was in a similar boat. We talked about her a couple weeks ago, so we won't spend too much time on it now. Though she was in the priestly class, she was little more than a peasant and her shame was the fact that she had somehow displeased God and he had stricken her barren. And now, in her old-age, she was shamed with childlessness and no legacy.
  - But God saw them in a completely different light. He knew them for who they really were – godly and obedient women, both of them. They were his servants, and the very ones whom he has chosen to begin the transformation of the world.
  - John Piper writes this about these cousins, "Mary and Elizabeth are wonderful heroines in Luke's account. He loves the faith of these women. The thing that impresses him most, it appears, and the thing he wants to impress on Theophilus, his noble reader, is the lowliness and cheerful humility of Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth says: "*And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me?*" Luke 1:43. And Mary says: "*The Lord has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.*" Luke 1:48. The only people whose soul can truly magnify the Lord are people like Elizabeth and Mary—people who acknowledge their lowly estate and are overwhelmed by the condescension of the magnificent God."
- Both are blown away with joy at the humbling truth and, and as Piper points out, Elizabeth's words say it all, "*But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*" Luke 1:43. That's what God's grace does – it astounds us with joy.
- So despite the situation Mary and Elizabeth come from, God's plan and grace pulls them from it and sets them on a higher plain. That's how Sam Storms can say, *Joy is not necessarily the absence of suffering, it is the presence of God.* And that means . . .

**When Jesus shows up nothing will be the same**

- It stands to reason, God will not allow us to stay where we are. What fills Mary's heart with joy is that God is on the side of the underdog – and especially those who call on his name. Mary points this out three times in her song, which comprises most of the text I read as I began this talk. In *verse 50 she sings, "His mercy extends to those who fear him,"*; in *verse 52, he "has lifted up the humble";* and in *verse 53, "He has filled the hungry with good things".* That's one side of God's holiness. The other side is that God puts the high

and mighty in their place. Mary mentions this three times also: verse 51, "*he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.*"; verse 52, "*He has brought down rulers from their thrones*"; and verse 53, "*The rich he has sent away empty.*" God the Son came to humanity as the son of a peasant girl and born in a stable. And yet generations to come would call her blessed. That's what Jesus does. Everyone takes the same route to redemption. A passage we just looked at in our study of Galatians points this out when Paul says, *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* Galatians 3:28. That's why we say, the ground is level at the foot of the Cross.

- Before we move on let me quickly point that Mary is not unaware of her special blessing, but, at the same time, she's not hung up on herself. Her praise doesn't focus on the immediate blessedness of her having this child, but on the ultimate outcome of the coming of Messiah. His mercy will extend from generation to generation. That is truly tidings of great joy any way you look at it.
- It's just like this . . .

### **When Jesus shows up there is great joy**

- Think back to Genesis passage Karen read earlier and let me give you some background. (Recount the beginning of the chapter) Abraham was obedient, but he could not have been happy about it. I mean who would? This was the child he had never expected, and now God was telling him to sacrifice him on the altar. But he went about the plan, right down to raising the knife kill Isaac – and that's when God stopped him – he had a replacement for the sacrifice. Can you imagine Abraham's relief? Can you imagine the sheer joy?
- Jesus's coming into humanity was just that – a just in time delivery that brings sheer joy. Right when we needed him most – he came into humanity with a plan to make things right between his Father and humanity. That's a reason for great joy.
- And let's look at Elizabeth again. There was a lot of joy there. Our text says when Mary came into Elizabeth's home, the baby in her womb essentially did a somersault, AND "*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.*" (1:41) Elizabeth interprets this stirring within her as motivated by joy – and why not? That is how the Angel saw it: "*I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people*" (2:10). The baby in Elizabeth's womb was responding in joy to the child in Mary's womb.
- I don't picture Elizabeth as an overly gushy and emotional person. In fact I see her as a dignified and measured woman of God. And that is why its interesting to see that her response is anything but quiet and reserved. Her loud cry is one of sheer joy and anticipation. Think about those POWs coming home after many years. Think about the joy of running into an old and dear friend when you haven't seen them in a while. Happiness abounds. That's how I picture it as Elizabeth greets and embraces Mary, and almost shrieks with joy. But her greeting is more than loud, it is spiritual and Spirit-filled. When Luke uses the phrase, "*was filled with the Holy Spirit,*" it is usually of prophets or others who are about to speak out in prophesy under the power of the Holy Spirit. In this case – the prophet is an elderly mother-to-be. The Holy Spirit brings joy.

**Conclusion:** IQ stands for Intelligence Quotient and it measures . . . one's intelligence. Now, let me ask, what's your JQ – your Joy Quotient?

Jesus came into humanity to save humanity – no matter who it is. In the case of the two women in our text from Luke, God wasn't concerned with their station in life. He was looking for faithful servants to carry out his plan. They both obeyed and experienced great joy. Abraham and Isaac, BOTH faithfully followed God's very unusual command – and were delivered just in time. They experienced great joy. Following God's plan brings joy. No matter who you are, God has a plan for you. Follow it and experience that great joy. In the early 1900s, evangelist Billy Sunday said *If you have no joy, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere.* What's your joy quotient? Any leaks? Try the real Joy Giver. Amen.