

Christmas Eve Ahead of Time

Mon, 12/13 1:53PM 16:39

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

joy, god, lord, scripture, jesus, cry, speaks, life, heart, point, christ, writes, longing, lift, world, song, death, psalm, david, deeper

SPEAKERS

1

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We are treating tonight as if it were Christmas Eve service. Though it is only a third Sunday in the advent season. And throughout the advent Season, The Color Purple was one that is often used. You see, the three of the candles that we light over here are purple that is a color that signifies repentance. And Christians have often used a season of advent as a time to remind ourselves that we are in need of a savior and to focus our heart upon those things. The third Sunday in Advent, though the candle is pink, and pink signifies a color of joy. And joy can be elusive. Especially we seek it from things that are temporary. And I know that for many people, over the past 18 months or so joy has felt particularly elusive. And then as a season though, where we can remember that joy is something that we can have, even through the storms and the trials of life. There's something that can meet us in the depths of our sorrow, something that you have as a shore, and a certain footing on which the stand admin points us towards a joy. That is brilliant, and it's permanent in the midst of all of our yearning and all of our toilet. That's something that I want to look at with you here tonight. Before we do though, let's take another moment and pray. Holy God, we are distracted and distraught. So we ask that you would quiet our hearts that you would calm our minds, that you would open our ears so that we may be attentive and receptive to your Spirit. Lord, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts would be pleasing in your sight for We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. As you have seen throughout this service already, this is a time of year when all of the familiar songs come out. Again, we've gone through a number of them here already this evening. But I'd like to point us to an ancient song tonight, not just a familiar song, but an ancient song, one that speaks and eternal Word. The passage from the Psalms, it's one that I preached on a couple years ago during the Advent season here and but it's one that has kept coming to mind again recently this year. So I want to just offer you a couple more thoughts on it. This is Psalm four is verses six and seven. This is the word of the Lord. David writes his Psalm and he says there are many who say, who will show us some good. Lift up the light of your face upon us, oh, Lord, you have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine a bound? Who will show us some good. We know that cry, don't we? We've heard that one. That's the one that echoes through a lot of hearts. David is simply speaking something that is reverberated in all of our souls at some point who can show us something good. Was the early church father Athanasius, who said that? Well, all of Scripture speaks to us the Psalms in a very special way speak for us, they give voice to the things that so many of us have longed for. And David is doing that here. Again, he's saying that there is a longing for the good. And that especially comes up when we are faced with anything that is disruptive or distressing in life.

That's a cry that comes up when we feel overwhelmed or under equipped for this world. It's a cry that arises when we undergo tragedy or when we are faced with injustice, it's a cry that comes up if we simply feel lonely, or lost. It's a cry that often comes up when we are faced with the relentless death and division that mar our world who will show us something good. Do we even know what the good is for which we long though most of the time we set our sights shockingly shallow. We think that the good is there if simply the desires in our life are satisfied. And because we have that kind of a deficient view of what is good. And we look to the wrong places to meet that longing. I mean, you know this, but pay attention throughout this season in particular to all the advertisements that seek to leverage the very same dynamic, the very same misunderstanding what they'll show you is something that you don't have or someone that you are not, and then convince you that as long as you have that thing or you are that person, then life will be good. So a lot of times when we say who will show us something good. We're not saying a whole lot more than who can show me something shiny and new that will distract me in the midst of my despair. Maybe it's not always that perhaps in our more noble moments we do long for something more substantial to them. But those moments aren't as frequent as our Instagram hashtags might like to suggest.

04:34

Who will show us something good. scripture points us to what that thing is right here right

04:40

in this particular passage. It shows us that that longing really is meant to be directed to the Lord. The Psalms are Hebrew poetry. And one of the features of Hebrew poetry is that they often written in these little couplets, these verses that come up in couplets and they are expressing a shared idea. They'll use different terms different words, different imagery, to present the same concept To listen again to verse six, when David says, who will show us there are many who say, who will show us some good, lift up the light of your face upon us, oh Lord, you see those ideas, those please those cries, those are not separate. Though we often set the gaze of our desire on lesser things, the highest good for which our hearts long is not a posh job or a perfect family or a painless life, the highest good for which our hearts long even if we don't always realize that ourselves is that the Lord would turn the light of his face upon us, and give us peace. That's the longing that echoes in the famous blessing that Aaron gave to the people of God. That's why that blessing reverberates so much as it does through the ages when Aaron said, The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord be gracious to you and make his face shine on you, The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you. The reason that reverberates so much with us is that that picks up on the longing that we have, whether we even know that's the longing we have or not, who will show us some good. That is the fervent cry of a wounded heart. And Advent is about celebrating the good news that the light of the Lord, the very face of the Lord Himself has come to us and met us in our deepest point of need. Admin is about announcing that the light of the Lord the very face of the Lord Himself has come to us and that's through the Promised Messiah. Another prophecy in Scripture, a famous one from the prophet Isaiah chapter nine says the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light those who dwell in a land of deep darkness on them. light has shined. And that light is God Himself come to his people. With the advent of this season, with the Advent season with Christmas itself, right, the heart of it, obviously, we're celebrating the birth of Jesus, we know that's right at the heart of all of this, and Jesus himself picked up on this kind of imagery when he's when he spoke about himself and about his purpose in this world. He used this kind of language that we hear in Isaiah. It's in John 8:12, that Jesus famously said, I am the light of the world. Whoever comes to me will not walk in darkness, but will

have the light of life. That's the great wonder of this Advent season. That's what we are celebrating that cry, will God please lift up the light of his face upon us is answered in the birth of Jesus, God Himself coming with us and for us, through His Son. That's the good, that's the good news, then that we hear. And then we have the share this particular season, that's the whole point of this season of the incarnation of God coming to be with us, in the person of Jesus. This wasn't just the obligatory visit, that you have to go to do the part of the family that you don't really like that's not what this was, this was a divine rescue mission. This was God coming to be with us and to stand for us to do what we could not do for ourselves, to live that perfect life, to undergo the consequences of all of our trees and to be raised in glory as we one day will be. And the results of that are incredible. Some of you have been with us here in the mornings, were right now, studying Romans chapter eight, and that that actually is one of the places where scripture sets out all of the results of this, what has happened for us in Jesus Christ, that we are adopted, beloved, the children of the God of the universe, that we are given this shore in certain status and standing and we have an inheritance that can never perish or spoil or fade, that in Christ, we are a new creation, and there is nothing that could possibly separate us from the love of God. In Christ Jesus, our Lord, none of these things can be taken from us because this is what God has done for us and given to us. That's the good for which we long. what Jesus has done is in no way incomplete in no way uncertain in no way insufficient it is abundantly sufficient. What he has done for us, is provide something that brings us that place of joy through any of the wild uncertainties around us. I want to remind you again here tonight is that Advent one of the things it does is meant it's meant to do one of the things it is meant to do is remind us that joy comes from our Savior, not from our circumstances comes from our Savior, not from our circumstances, the circumstances of life can bring you happiness they can, they can bring you the light you can appreciate in them but that's not the deep joy of what Scripture speaks. David even acknowledges that here when he speaks of they have he says you have put more joy in my heart and when grain and wine are bound. Now grain and wine here they stand for it follow with me, grain and wine.

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Israel ancient Israel was an agrarian society and so a bountiful harvest plenty of grain plenty of grapes was a sign of God's blessing. They delighted in that they celebrated that it's a good thing. He's not saying that's a bad thing. He's saying that is a good thing. You know how much fun it can be to gather with friends and family to share good food or good wine but these saying there's something deeper there you've put something even deeper in my heart. This is a point Maybe point of clarification here again we can celebrate we can appreciate we sinned delight in the things that God gives us even if they are something as as seemingly trivial as grain, and wine. But these things are not able to bear the full weight of your longings they were never meant to. You've done something more for me, David is saying there's something greater that you have provided. Happiness is something that's conditioned by our surroundings, our circumstances, our experiences, but scripture points us to joy and joy is more than just hyped up happiness. It's more than that. Those things can be fleeting, they can be unpredictable, they can be very transient. But joy is something that rises secure above all of those fleeting things because it is anchored in something deeper. It's a subtle delight that comes from knowing the love that God has given us and the peace that we now have in Jesus Christ. And so our joy can be constant, it can be steadfast, because the love of God and the peace of Christ are steadfast, and they are constant. And if we start to understand what Scripture is speaking of when it speaks of joy, we can see why there are so many places in Scripture when joy and suffering seem to be linked. And it may not because it may not seem like a normal connection to us in a lot of ways. But we see that there is a link there so many times if we understand what those things are speaking. We understand what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, the things that are now true of us. And for us in him, no matter what is going on around us. And we can see these things differently. In Christ had been chosen before the very foundation of the world in him you are known

you are loved, in Christ, God has come to us delivered us from his sins, the light of his face, has been lifted up upon us as He calls us to himself as beloved children of the Heavenly Father. So when things are hard in life, and they are they are hard, we don't pretend that they're not joy is not some kind of blissful naivete or childish idealism. It's a settled delight that comes from knowing the character and the purposes of God and what He has done for us. So a man named Dan allander writes about this kind of connection between suffering and joy and one of his books when he says this. He says, in fact, it's surprising, but most of my joy has come within the frame of dark and troubling times. It's common in the midst of heartache and confusion. In fact, it seems uniquely related to death, the death of a friend or a friendship, the death of a dream or an illusion that masqueraded as a worthy desire. Those deaths have been the inevitable frame for joy. And again, you may hear that it may not make sense at first, it may sound very callous, it may sound very insensitive, but he's saying that the hardest times of life drive us to seek refuge in something. The hardest times of life drives us to seek refuge in something in what other than the good news of Jesus resurrection can provide us the comfort we need when we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. That's why Jesus Himself spoke to His disciples and he said, You have sorrow now, but I will see you again. And your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. Jesus Himself is telling us that our joy is anchored in him. That doesn't mean though, that joy always wears the makeup of cheerfulness. Sometimes it does sing the minor key of lament. But it's anchored in something deeper, true. You've put more joy in my heart than when grain and wine are bound. David said, and maybe you hear this and you're thinking, I see some of those connections. But that's just not where I am. I'm just, I'm just not there right. Now. How do I get to that point? Look, sometimes joy isn't in almost an involuntary reaction. It can come to us it can be unbidden, or unsought, it can flood our senses, it can lift our spirits, though more often more often. It's what happens when we consciously and intentionally turned to the Lord, when we consciously and intentionally remind ourselves of what it is that he has done for us in Jesus Christ, and what is true of us, and for us now in Jesus Christ.

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And I don't mean to suggest that it's just a mechanical cause and effect there, you make a conscious decision to do that everything is all right again. But when we learn to do even things that we're doing here now, hearing what it is a God has promised to us in His Word, lifting our voices in song, offering our hearts up in prayer, turning ourselves again to the Lord, even when it's not the easiest thing to do. That is something that nurtures real joy because David says joy is something that you have given you have put it in my heart. He said, I didn't manufacture it on my own. You have put it into my heart and that happens when I draw near to you. When I turn again to you, when I rejoice in what you have done when I remember that you have lifted the light of your face upon me that you have come to us in Jesus. Although we're not singing the song tonight, Joy to the world. I know you know it. In fact, it's the most published Christian hymn in North America was written by Isaac Watts 1719 300 years ago. Think about that people have been singing that song for 300 years. And you know, the song may know a lot of the words for that one Watts wrote that. He used two scriptures in particular to help him with that to use Genesis three and Psalm 98. Genesis three talks about the consequences of Adam and Eve's rebellion events against God about the curse that came down upon them, and even upon all of creation. That's why part of the song says, sins and sorrow grow and thorns infest the ground. But then you use nine, Psalm 98, to show us what it is that God has done and what that means because part of Psalm 98 says, The Lord has made known his salvation has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations all of the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. So make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth, break forth into joyous song and sing praises, because of what God has done for us, because he has shown us the good thing because the light of His face has been lifted up upon us in Jesus Christ and because of what he has done for us in Jesus, he has placed more joy in our hearts than when grain and wine or anything else abounds. Let's pray.

Strengthen us, oh God in the power of your Spirit to bring good news to the poor, to lift the blind eyes to sight to lose the chains that bind and to claim your blessing for all people keep us faithful and your service until Christ comes in final victory. And we shall feast with all your saints in the joy of your eternal realm. Through Christ, with Christ in Christ and the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor yours Almighty God now and forevermore. Amen.