

Grace Fellowship Church

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They Rejoiced Exceedingly with Great Joy

Matthew 2:1-12

We're going to be in Matthew 2:1, and make some observations, hopefully about joy, and I'm going to read verses 1-12 in a chunk, and then we're going to go back in and talk about it.

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found Him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship Him.' After listening to the king, they went on their way.

And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary, His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way." (Matthew 2:1-12)

So good passage, a lot of interesting characters. We have these magi, or wise men. We don't know exactly where they came from, other than they came from the East. Some theories say they originated in Babylon. Others say the Arabian Peninsula. We can kind of guess from the passage that these guys were probably pretty astute when it came to astronomy. They'd look at the sky and keep an eye on the constellations and the stars, because that's a central piece here of what happens.

Also we have the number of the wise men. We've always assumed kind of in tradition there were three, although the Bible doesn't tell us exactly how many there were. The reason we guess there are three is because of gold, frankincense, and myrrh seem to be three gifts. Although there could have been six, and they all kind of went in on those gifts. Or there could have been nine or 12. We don't know all that.

This issue of the star...What was it? There have been a lot of theories through the years about if this was a real star in the sky, if maybe it was a planet in full retrograde motion, or some people

say it was a supernatural occurrence, kind of like when God led the people of Israel through the wilderness, the pillar of fire at night and through the cloud by day. We don't know the answers to all those questions, but we could spend some interesting time digging into them.

What we're actually going to do is really kind of zero in on verse 10, when it says they saw the star and they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. They rejoiced a lot with great joy. In Greek, there it's like *megas chara*. It's mega joy. I was just reading that in preparation for this week, and it kind of gave me pause. I thought, *When was the last time I really felt great joy, like rejoicing exceedingly?* This is strong language.

I started thinking, *What is true joy? What robs us of our joy?* Immediately, I thought of Highway 124 during December. That's one place that robs joy. All the little parking lots in front of Target and T.J.Maxx also, joy robbers. What are the things that really rob our joy? How do we become more joyful people, like real deeply joyful? How do we understand society's emphasis on joy? Our culture is kind of obsessed with gratifying ourselves, personal pleasure or experiencing happiness.

If you look at just about any advertisement on TV, the subtext, the motivation is that this will make you happy. "Buy this car so you will be happy. Buy this body wash so women will like you, so you will be happy. Buy this cleaning product so you can get stains out of your clothes, so your husband will wear clean clothes, so you will be happy." It's just like all the way down at the base there is this narrative in our culture that's happiness. How do we really achieve happiness? Is it through our stuff? What is the source of our joy? What is the source of our happiness?

So any good biblical conversation about joy really has to begin with God Himself. The picture of God throughout the Bible is that He is simply the most joyful Being in the entire cosmos. Through and through without fail, God is extremely joyful. There are numerous places that depict this, but Psalm 104 says it amazingly. It says the Lord rejoices in His works. It's in the context of the creation and the beauty of the creation.

Maybe you could just call to mind in your own life and experience where you watched a sunrise or a sunset and you just kind of just rejoiced in the beauty of the creation, like, *Man, that is spectacular*. Or maybe you've been to the Grand Canyon and you've walked, depending on how scared you are of heights, about this far up to the edge, or maybe you walked right up here, and you looked down into this massive chasm, and it's red, and then it's orange, and there are purples and yellows all the way up, and you get into the sky, and it's blue and just spectacular, and you have that sense, like, *Wow! This is great!*

Have you guys ever been scuba diving or snorkeling? We did this on our honeymoon, and it was great. It was the only activity we did. We figured we had to do something other than eat and hang out in the room, so we did one activity. It was just snorkeling. We're going and we're looking at these fish, and there's like little living gems. The colors are spectacular, and it's just amazing.

Here's the thing we have to recognize about God: God rejoices in His works, and He doesn't just rejoice in one vista of one sunrise or one perspective on the Grand Canyon or just whatever fish

He can see through the limited field of vision on His scuba mask. Actually God sees all of it at once and rejoices in all of it at the same time. He exalts in His creation.

You realize there's a sunrise happening all the time all over the planet, and God sees it continually. The cosmos and the amazing nebulae and these beautiful things, God sees all that. His aquarium is the ocean. That's how God operates, and He exalts. He's joyous.

Then there are some of these passages in the Scripture which sort of peel back the veil and give us a glimpse into that heavenly realm, the throne room where God Himself dwells. When we look into that, we see worship and joy and rejoicing, and the angels are swirling around the throne, and the saints are crying out, and heaven is just this loud, joyous place.

Then Jesus, when He is walking the earth, He tells stories. He describes what the Father is like, and one of the best passages is in Luke 15. He tells three parables. He says, "This is what the Father is like: He's like the shepherd who loses one of his hundred sheep, goes out and finds him, brings him back, and rejoices. So is My Father in heaven when one sinner repents, rejoicing." He says, "He's like a woman who lost a coin, and then after searching everywhere found this coin." Jesus said, "There's joy in the presence of the angels." God Himself is rejoicing, just like the woman who found the coin, when a sinner repents.

Maybe the most stretching of all, the parable of the prodigal son. This son says, "Dad, I wish you were dead. Give me my inheritance now, and I'm going to go do whatever I want." He goes off, does whatever he wants, realizes his life is empty, spends all of it on wasted...perdition. He

comes to himself out there, and he comes home, and the father, when he sees the son from afar, goes through the indignity of lifting his robes up high enough that he can run down to greet the son, embrace him, kill the fatted calf, and throw a huge party to welcome back this son.

What we have to see there is this is the heart of God. He is joyful like a good father. He is joyful in His works. He is joyful on His throne. God's character is joyful. We know from the Scriptures that God looks at the havoc wreaked by sin and human disobedience, and He feels grief, and He feels sorrow over the tragedies on the earth, but that is a temporary reaction to a temporary situation. The earth was created out of perfection, and it will be restored to wholeness once again when Jesus returns. So God's abiding character is the characteristic of joy.

I don't know when you think of God in your mind what characteristics spring to your mind first. Is it holiness, power, light, voice? Whatever it is, I would suggest that one of them biblically we should have right on the tip of our tongues is joy. This is God's character. He is deeply joyful.

Then it should come as no surprise that when Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but he humbled Himself, taking on the form of a man and living among us, when Jesus did that, He was the exact representation of God's nature, right? So, Jesus, it's no surprise, is extremely joyful. Hebrews 1:9 says Jesus was anointed with the oil of gladness above all of His companions. The word *gladness* there is the strongest Greek word you can have for gladness. There's *chara*, which is joy. This one's like *JOY!* Like that, kind of.

So He's anointed with that. In other words, Jesus is like the most joyful person who has ever walked on the face of the earth, and this is why the sinners and prostitutes and drunks actually love having Jesus at the party. He's not a killjoy. They invite Him because He's a lot of fun without surrendering any of His purity, without surrendering any of His values. He's so deeply joyful.

Remember toward the end of His time on the earth, He gathers His disciples around. This is in John 15. He started speaking to them about the vine and the branches. "You guys are the branches. I am the vine. Abide in Me that you may bear fruit. The Father's the vinedresser." We know this passage fairly well.

Then Jesus talks about how if we abide in Him and His Word abides in us, we obey His commands, we love one another, ask whatever we want, Jesus says, "I say these things '...that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.'" (John 15:11) So God is joyful, Jesus is joyful, and then Jesus says to us, "Share in our joy."

So if we're serious about following Jesus and becoming like Him, it's good news, because that means we are going to become some pretty ridiculously joyful people. That's exciting. Jesus says, "I'm going to give you My Spirit. I'm going to teach you how to do this so you guys can learn joy, deep joy."

There's this mysterious exchange that happens where God grants us participation in His own joy, and that's what we have to learn how to tap into if we're really going to be joyful people. So how

do we do that, and how do we grow in that area? A couple of observations from our story with the magi.

1. *We have to pay attention to our wiring.* If you're filling out your blanks, that's the first word there, our *wiring*. I was reading through this passage, and I just kept thinking about verse 10. They saw the star, and they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. I started to think about, *What happens physically in our bodies and in our brains when we're experiencing deep joy?* How does that physically work? Because sometimes it feels like this real, touchy, gooey thing, but actually scientists have monitored and studied the brain to say, "Yeah, this is what's working. This is what's not working. This is what happening when we're experiencing joy."

We have to remember from the very beginning God created human beings in His own image, but also He created us to be in bodies. Ever since He took dust from the ground and breathed into it life, the breath of God, we are designed to be in bodies. So there's this interrelationship between our body's health and function and our spirit's health and function. There's just this connectedness that happens there.

I'll give you an example from the Bible, 1 Kings 19, Elijah. You guys know Elijah the prophet? He was on top of Mount Carmel, won the huge showdown against the prophets of Baal, killed like 450 of them, and came down the mountain. Jezebel threatened him, and he gets terrified. Something about what Jezebel says just spooks the mess out of him, and so he runs off into the wilderness.

In verse 4 of 1 Kings 19, "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.'" (1 Kings 19:4) It's amazing. Elijah is suicidal here. He's depressed to the point of suicide. He's saying, "God, just end it. End it now."

So verse 5: "And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, 'Arise and...'" (1 Kings 19:5) read your Bible. That's actually not what the angel said, just in case. "...an angel touched him and said to him, 'Arise and eat.' And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, 'Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.' And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God." (1 Kings 19:5-8)

It's amazing because Elijah has gotten to this point where he is so low physically that God realizes what this guy needs is like a little bit of blood sugar. There's been a drought here for a long time. There's not a lot of nutrition in the land these days. This guy needs some complex carbs, a glass of water, and some sleep. I know it doesn't sound particularly spiritual, but I really think if we're going to talk about joy and experiencing joy, a key component of that is just taking care of our bodies and taking care of our brains.

I got into this this week a lot. I started reading a bunch about the brain, and the brain is actually a pretty pliable, soft organ. It's like about a hundred billion nerves all interconnected, and the thoughts and the impulses move all through your brain about 260 or 270 miles an hour. It's an amazing, complex organ God has designed. It's kind of like a spider web suspended in fluid, and it's like the consistency of tofu. I don't know why that's important, but I thought it was curious because I always thought of brains as being much firmer than tofu, but it turns out they're not.

Anyway, for the health of our brain, in order for us to really experience joy, there actually has to be a pretty healthy balance of the hormones that are released in the brain. Dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, all of this stuff kind of has to be functioning well. What scientists have found when they study the brain is that when people are missing out on the right nutrition, they're missing out on the right hydration, and when they're missing out on sleep, it actually has a negative effect on your brain's capacity to experience joy.

Sometimes we've heard a thousand sermons about joy, and we've read a bunch of books about God's promises for joyfulness, and they're just not landing on us. It's like, *I still don't feel any joy*. Maybe part of the problem is our bodies are just not functioning at full capacity, and we need God to help restore the physical construct of our minds.

I want to show you a picture of a healthy brain. This is a SPECT scan. It basically measures brain activity. On the left is a healthy brain, and you can see it's all-around smooth. That means pretty much the whole brain is functioning and firing on all cylinders. Everything is kind of at or near capacity in its working.

Then on the right, we have an unhealthy brain, and all of those places, those holes, actually show parts of the brain that are just not working. They're not getting proper blood flow. They're not firing. So when you have a brain like the one that's on the right, it actually impedes your ability to experience joy. I think this one on the right is from a chronic alcoholic. This is the impact of a lot of alcohol over a long period of time on the brain.

You can go to that website. There are some pretty interesting brain scans on there about different things and the impact they have on our brains. The whole point of this is basically what God sent the angel to tell Elijah, I want to say to us as well. If we're going to talk about joy, let's get some sleep, let's eat some complex carbs...a little bit of fat, coconut oil, and milk are good for your brain...and let's drink some water, because your brain is actually 80 percent water. It's really important. There are some real simple, practical pieces there.

Exercise also helps a lot, especially exercise that requires coordination. One study suggests ping-pong is like the best brain-development sport, which is why I think we should be worried about the Asian economy. They're going to overtake us. I don't know if you guys have been to Asia, but they play a lot of ping-pong there. I've been. I can say that. Everywhere you look, there's just a lot of ping-pong going on.

So we have to pay attention to our wiring and just how our brains are functioning. That's one piece of the joy picture. The second piece really comes out of verse 2.

2. *How we perceive or see the world around us.* So in verse 2 of Matthew 2, the wise men show up and they say, "Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw His star when it rose and have come to worship Him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him..." (Matthew 2:2-3) Okay, the magi look to the sky and they see this star, and to them, it is an amazing symbol of God's work in the world, and they're following that star because that is what God is doing.

For Herod, he looks at the same sky, same star, and he feels threatened and troubled. He feels like his little personal kingdom is on the ropes, and he's going to cook up this plot to send soldiers into Bethlehem to kill all of the infants because he feels like he has to snuff out this new King who may have been born in Bethlehem.

There's a deep lesson in that for us because when we look at the world around us, what are we looking for, and how do we perceive it? Are we seeing it like the wise men, like the magi do, where they look and they say, *That right there on the horizon is the work of God, and I'm going to follow that*, or are we like Herod, and we look at the same sky and we go, *Oh man, this is trouble; we're in big trouble here?* This has a big impact. The world around us has an enormous capacity to impact our joyfulness and the way we look at the world.

So Paul, in Philippians 4. This is a great letter in the Bible about joy. If you really want to get into joy and cultivate joy, I would recommend spending several weeks just digging into the book of Philippians with Paul. Anyway, there he gives one of the keys of joy, and it's in verse 8. He tells the brothers there, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is

just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Philippians 4:8)

He's not telling them to live in denial as though the world around them is all hunky-dory and, *Well, we'll just overlook all the bad stuff.* No, that's not the idea. Paul is saying, "Have your eyes open. Look at the world around you, but when you see what God is doing, the commendable, beautiful, pure, lovely things, think about those. Spend your time, feed your imagination on the stuff God's doing, not on the negative stuff."

It's funny because now that I turned 30 like a week and a half ago and I'm starting to do more dad stuff, more man stuff...we don't have any kids yet...but I've just recognized I'm drinking more coffee. Today I fixed the garage door. I mow the lawn, and I started reading the news. This is one of my *man activities*. I just feel like my dad would do it, so it's time in my life to understand what's happening in the world. If you're less than 30, maybe you'll get to 30 and you'll have the same experience, like, it's time to grow up and read the news.

So that's what I've been doing, and I thought about Paul's list of things here in comparison to what I see on the news. Paul says, "Look at the things that are true," and I'm amazed by how many news stories are just rumors, like, "This guy thinks it's very possible the entire economy is going to go down the tubes." That's not true! It's just a rumor. We don't know for sure. That's somebody's opinion, but that's not like rock-hard truth.

Honorable. No, we focus in the news mostly on dishonorable activities. We don't focus on lovely things; we focus on scandals. We focus on injustice rather than acts of justice. Most of the news is saying, "There's injustice here. There's in justice here. There's injustice here." There is injustice all around the world, I know, but it's almost like we can get this overload of negativity from the society around us that trains us to look at the world like Herod looked at the world. *Ooh, that on the horizon is a threat.* Paul is saying, "No, no, no. Learn to look at your life with an eye for the beautiful stuff, the stuff God *is* doing, and this can become a source of joy for you."

Sometimes we don't even realize we're looking at something and not seeing the joy. Sometimes we just fall into our patterns of thought and there's nobody along in life to really help us jolt out of that negative thinking. I'm recently married, so this is our first holiday, Amy and I, going through the Christmas season together. It's a lot of fun.

For me, before I was married, I lived in Buddy and Jody's basement with a bunch of guys, and so for us, Christmas mainly meant there would be some leftover cookies from some parties that would end up down on the counter, and so that was like the main meaning of Christmas. We're all pastors, so also Jesus is in there.

We didn't really decorate at all. I remember one year I felt marginally guilty we hadn't done any decorations. So I went to the dollar store, and I bought one of those little cardboard cutout Santa Clauses with the little rivets at all the joints so you can kind of shake it, and it's kind of like

wobbly. I didn't know how to hang it up. I didn't have anything to hang it with, so I took a metal clothing hanger and stuck it through his head, bent it around, and hung it from a bookshelf.

It was like, *All right, there's some Christmas decorations, and I feel pretty satisfied, not just for this year, but that'll probably do for the next two or three years.* It hung there through the entire year actually as a remembrance of Santa Claus and of Christmas in June, July, and all the way through like that.

So for me, Christmas is just wonderful. I enjoy it. I appreciate it, but now that I'm married, I realize my wife loves Christmas much more than I do, and we've been having some conversations about the way our family is going to celebrate Christmas.

Amy was talking to me, and I was saying, "It's just an expensive time of year and also a lot of decorations." She's like, "Jon, don't you see you're missing it? This is Christmas. For me, Christmas starts November 27 and it lasts until January 1." I thought, *Oh.* She goes, "Christmas is a time to be extravagantly generous. It's to give good gifts and to cook great food for the people you love and to hang lots of lights, actually," which was the particular point of our conversation, hanging of the lights and all of that.

So we just were going back and forth, and what I realized is that somewhere along the line, not even intentionally, I had come to view the Christmas holiday as so-so, not that great, and I wasn't feeding myself on the joy and the real goodness of God in the season. I was getting more caught up in how expensive it was, and I don't really want to hang lights, and all of this stuff. I actually,

really needed my wife. I'm grateful God gave me Amy to help me appreciate Christmas. There are a lot of reasons, but one of them is Christmas.

So I don't know if you have that sense ever in your own life where you just slip into these patterns when you look at the world around you, and instead of being like a magi, seeing the star and going, *That's the work of God*, you're looking at your job, or you're looking at your family, or you're looking at the people around you, your friends, or whatever it may be, and you're looking at that same sky, and you kind of have that Herod reaction, like, *This is no good. This is kind of a threat.*

As another example, last night we were eating dinner with this young Iraqi man, and he grew up in Baghdad. During the war, he was accidentally shot, and so he had to be medevac'd out to Jordan for treatment. While he was in Jordan, he got word from Iraq that his mother had been killed by terrorists, and so he's pretty distraught. He makes a decision he's not going back to Iraq. It's just too dangerous. He applies for a Visa, ends up in the United States.

So he's living in the United States for a little bit of time, and he decides this summer actually that he's going to make a trip solo up to New York City to see the Statue of Liberty. We're eating dinner last night, and he actually had made a little home video of his experience driving. His car is amazing. He has this huge sword of Ali and all this Arabic covering the entire back windshield. It's very funny.

He took this trip in this car up to New York, and mainly the video pauses, or the different episodes of the video were him driving into a new state and stopping at that gas station. He'd get out. "This is the gas station in Kentucky." He'd kind of do some film, and then the next clip in the video would be him. "This is the gas station in Pennsylvania." "This is the gas station in Ohio." "The gas station in Buffalo."

It was funny because at every gas station, he would actually zoom in on the price of gas. So Iraqis are concerned about the price of gas too. It's not just an American thing. He's zooming in like that and everything. It's pretty funny.

Finally, he finally gets up to Manhattan, and he is filming his exchange, giving money to the person at the gate so he can go through, park his car, get on the ferry, and ride out to the Statue of Liberty. So he's there, and he's paying, and then he starts pulling forward, and he's videoing as he drives, which is not a good idea. I'm like, "Why are you making this video while driving? Who gave you a license?"

Then you can see on the video that up ahead the mist in New York began to clear just a little bit, and he saw the Statue of Liberty, and you see the video start shaking a little bit. He goes, "There it is! There! There! There it is! It's the Statue of Liberty!" He starts going crazy about the Statue of Liberty. I've seen the Statue of Liberty before. It's nice. I appreciate liberty. I'm glad to be an American. I went up the Statue of Liberty. I looked out from the Statue of Liberty. It was wonderful, but I did not react to the Statue of Liberty with the same level of passion or same

level of joy as this guy did, because this guy has a deeper appreciation for what that statue means in his life, based on his background and where he is now and everything. He *loves* that statue.

I was thinking about that last night afterwards when we got home, and I thought, *Man, I want to be the kind of guy who drinks deeply of the excitement of seeing the Statue of Liberty.* I want to be the kind of guy who when I look at the sky, sees that star, and it's like, *Man, God's doing something. The King is over there. I have to go that way.* I just want to be the kind of person when I look at the world around me, I'm able to recognize the pure and the holy and the lovely and the commendable things, and feed my spirit on those things, because those are the things that really give birth to joy, the action of God in the world.

But of course, there are times when we look at the world around us and really it just feels like there's nothing out there. We're looking for the star, we're looking for the Statue of Liberty, we're looking for anything, for Pete's sake, and it just feels pretty bleak out there. It feels pretty dark. We have seasons like this. Elijah had seasons like this. So there's another source of joy as we go through this passage. There's one more source of joy I want to talk about and the experience of the depth of joy here.

3. *The Word within us.* Remember Jesus says, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you..." (John 15:7) Sometimes we read that and we think, *Oh, Scripture memory. Yes, we need to memorize the Scripture.* Actually, I love Scripture memory. I think that's a big part of it, but I think when Jesus is talking about His Word abiding in us, He's talking about His story. He's talking about the deep truth of who He is and the impact that has on us. Even when the world all

around us is completely bleak and dark, He's speaking about that truth that persists and that supernaturally gives birth to joy within our own hearts. That's good news actually.

Here in this passage in Matthew 2, with the wise men, it's interesting because they show up in Jerusalem, and Herod hears about this. So he goes to his scribes and his religious guys, and he says, "Where's this King going to be born?" They turn back to Micah 5:2, and there's this prophecy that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem and that He will be the Good Shepherd of His people. There's so much contained in that one statement that the true King has arrived, the Messiah is being born.

You bring all these threads of the Old Testament together, and that Word of truth acts like an anchor. It acts like something deep down in our hearts that we can latch ourselves to even when the world around us seems like it's falling apart. There is truth there that can become the source of joy because it's God's own joy working in us.

This week I spent some time studying the Old Testament because I wanted to find out what were the occasions of joy in the Old Testament? Why did people rejoice in the Old Testament? When were the times when joy really seemed to well up among the people of God in the Old Testament? So I went through all of them, and I was looking at all of the different words and everything like this, and it's very interesting because these instances of joy seem to clump around a handful of different themes.

As I was going through, I realized, *Wow!* We could divide them up different ways if we wanted to, but for me, the way I was reading it, I was like, *It seems like there's about six different things here that really give birth to joy, that are just deeply sort of joyful things in the Old Testament.*

One of them we already talked about a little bit, but there's this joy around *creation* and God's interaction with creation. It says in Psalm 19, God sets the sun on its course, and it runs across the sky day after day like a bridegroom the morning after he's married, just full of joy. When God is creating in the book of Job, the angels are shouting with joy. So there's a sense of joy connected to the creation itself.

Then there's also joy, quite a bit of joy, in the Old Testament around occasions of *worship* and interacting with the presence of God. So Psalm 16:11: This is a real famous one. "...in Your presence [God] there is fullness of joy..." (Psalm 16:11) Also when the people would gather, and they'd make sacrifice, and they'd come together, there's this explosion of joy among the people.

"Shout for joy," the psalmist says, and when David brings back the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, he's giving this prayer of thanks in the book of 1 Chronicles, and he says, "God, in Your presence is strength and joy." This is another place where joy just seems to gather in the stories of the Old Testament.

Another one of these places, the third one, is when the true *King* is in place. This is cause for big time joy. So it mentions this when David finally gets to become king. It says the people explode in joy. Not literally explode. It wasn't like they got so excited and they just like *bang!* That's not

what it means, but figuratively, they were very joyful. Then Solomon, the same thing. It talks about Solomon when he's a good king, and he's established, and he's anointed, the people are joyful.

Later on you get to Jehoshaphat, and they've had a series of bad kings, and the nation has gone astray. Jehoshaphat restores the worship of the people, and it says there was not joy in the land like that since the time of David, because Jehoshaphat was a good king. Then we get into the Psalms, and God is the King. He's the Ruler. He's the Sovereign. There is this cause for joy that the true King has arrived.

There are a couple of other examples. *Restoration*: In the Old Testament, when God restores things that were lost, joy erupts. Beautiful passages in Isaiah talking about how, "You will have joy when I bring you back into the land." Nehemiah: One of the most famous passages about joy in the entire Old Testament is after they've rebuilt the city. The walls have been restored. Ezra and Nehemiah get together.

They gather all the people, and they read the Word to all the people from early in the morning until noon, and the people are weeping, and their hearts are pierced by the Word of God.

Nehemiah and Ezra say, "No, no. Listen. This is actually a good thing. Rejoice. The joy of the Lord will be your strength." There's this joy connected to God restoring. It's not just this manufactured, kind of, *Well we'll just pluck up our joy meters and be happy*. This is like the joy of the Lord will be the strength of the people.

Then we have *forgiveness*. There are a lot of places, but when God forgives sin, joy springs up.

Psalm 51: David has committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he's crying out to God, "Have mercy on me, O God..." (Psalm 51:1) "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation..." (Psalm 51:12)

The whole passage is all about God forgiving.

Then the last one is when *victory* comes for the people of God. When the Lord shows Himself mighty, He wins the victory over the enemies, over the oppressors. He has put the enemies to shame.

So what is that word within us? If you look at those areas in the Old Testament where joy springs up, it seems to clump together, the occasions of joy in the Old Testament, and then you put those next to Jesus and what we know of Jesus, it's pretty astounding because we know Jesus died on the cross. He rose again on the third day, and Paul says He is the first fruits of the new creation. The joy of creation suddenly...*schheww!*...converging in on the person of Jesus, the new creation.

We have that joy of the presence of God ...*schheww!*...zeroing in on Jesus, Immanuel, God with us. Jesus saying, "I will give you My Spirit to be with you." We have that joy of forgiveness available in Jesus ...*schheww!* We have that joy of restoration. He's putting things back together that were broken in our lives ...*schheww!* Like that.

He's the King. He's the true King, and that joy of the true King comes together in Jesus, and the victory. We know when Jesus died on the cross, He took all the principalities and powers and He put them to open shame by rising again. He defeated the enemies once and for all, not just the

Roman Empire, not the Assyrian or the Babylonian Empires. He defeated sin and death and Satan on the cross. This is a big time, once-and-for-all massive victory.

So what we start to see when we put all these pieces together is all these promises and these sources of joy in the Old Testament come crashing together and converge on Jesus Himself. When Jesus, the Word of God, resides within us, He becomes that source of joy that cannot be taken away. That's what He says in John 16. He says, "I give you this joy, and you're going to have the kind of joy that cannot be taken. No matter what happens to your physical body, no matter what happens to the world around you, I will become within you the source of joy." That amazing joy we talked about from the beginning, God's own joy, Jesus' own joy, becomes our joy. It becomes our joy, the Word resident in our hearts.

So this time of year, I don't know where you are. Maybe you're like deeply joyful. Maybe you're deeply joyless. Maybe you're somewhere in between, just kind of working your way through life. We all have room to grow in these areas of joyfulness, and so I want to close by praying that God would work in our lives in all three of these areas.

So Father, we do ask You to teach us about Your joy. Paul said he had learned the secret of being content in every situation. Paul *learned* contentment. Lord, in the same way, might we learn joyfulness? We pray, God, in our physical bodies, the hardware You have given us through which we experience joy, would You restore any parts of our physical brains that are not operating well? Would You lead us in just healthy ways to treat our bodies so that we can live at full wholeness and full capacity?

Lord, we pray that as we look at the world around us, You would give us Your eyes to recognize Your work. When we look at the sky, let us see the star. When we look at the horizon and the mist begins to fade and that amazing whatever it is in the horizon becomes clear, let joy spring up within us. Help us, God, to learn to feed ourselves on that vision of what You're doing.

Finally, Lord, we pray that deep down in our hearts, You would begin to just give birth to that joy of following You, the joy of Your victory, the joy of Your forgiveness, the joy of Your salvation, Lord, the joy of Your restoration, the joy of Your sovereignty, the joy of Your creation, the joy, O Lord, simply the joy of You. We pray Your joy, O Lord, would be our strength. We pray You just would do it. Please do it. We open ourselves and submit ourselves to Your work in our lives, and we thank You, and we pray this all in Jesus' name, amen.