

Finding The Joy of Christmas

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Date: 07 December 2025

Preacher: Dylan Marais

[0 : 0 0] Well, obviously Christmas is just around the corner. You can almost feel it in the air.! It helps when you hear Boney M's Christmas album blared across the shops wherever you go.

! But one of the feelings that we associate with Christmas is the feeling of joy. It wouldn't be nice if Christmas was full of joy. Not just a small amount of joy for a small amount of time, but all joy all the time. But if your family is like most, then Christmas can be a time that highlights the difficulties that you find in finding joy and happiness. Maybe you can relate to the story of a family struggling to find joy at Christmas time. They want it. I mean, who doesn't want joy?

But they don't know how to get it. And so there's the young mom, and she's stressing to make the perfect Christmas dinner, which means you need, what do you need? Ham, glazed ham, special glazed ham. Oh my goodness. And all the other treats that go along with it. Her husband has invited his work friends for Christmas lunch, and their wives always put on a stunning Christmas dinner. And so she's got the stress of making the perfect supper. Her marriage is beginning to show signs of strain, and shows she's putting her hope in the Christmas dinner, so will let her husband see that she can live up to the wives of all of his friends. The husband, well, he's hardworking. He's professional, but he's feeling the strain of providing for his family and the work environment that demands results.

He's starting to drink to help him take the anxiety away. But his drinking has begun to cause problems at home. There's a few arguments that have turned into ugly shouting matches.

And then there's the children. They spend a lot of time on social media, and the parents are too busy trying to provide. They expect to have the best clothes and the best toys. And they're going to turn up their nose at anything that isn't currently cool. This little family wants to show love to each other.

[2 : 1 5] They want to find joy in their relationships. But the only place they're looking for joy is in their relationships, in their work, and in the stuff that they get. They're focused on getting joy from the things of this world. And because of that, instead of hugs and laughter and happiness, there's stress, there's strain, there's tantrums, and there's tears.

If that's your experience, you might just be asking, well, why does the Christian message, why does Christmas promise joy? Especially at Christmastime. And why is it so hard to hold on to?

And is there a better joy, a deeper joy, a more longer-lasting joy available to us? And then how do we get that? Well, to help find these answers, we're going to look at a Bible prophecy from Isaiah.

It's a prophecy that was made to God's people some 700 years before Jesus was born, before the first Christmas. And like us, God's people at that time were looking for joy, but they were looking for it in all the wrong places. So we're going to look at struggling to find joy. So in the time of Isaiah, God's people were living in a time of incredible stress. The reason for that is they had a threat to their very existence by an invasion from a number of major world powers that were coming to invade Israel at that time. And so they had a very good reason to stress. So, you know, talk about stress at Christmastime. If something's going to rob you of your joy, it's going to be being invaded by foreign powers. But the problem is that even though God had promised to provide for and protect them, God's people are looking for joy in anything but God himself. And even though this was written nearly 3,000 years ago, they're going to do exactly what people do today to help with stress and find joy without God. We're going to see that the woman focused on making themselves look pretty, and the little trinkets that life gives, and the men started drinking. So our main passage is in

Isaiah 9, but I'm going to take us back to Isaiah 3 and Isaiah 5. So Isaiah 3 says this, The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, strutting along with swaying hips, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. And it goes on to speak about their perfumes and the clothes that they wear. And so they go shopping to make themselves look pretty and attractive. And friends, I guess we haven't changed much. I think the girls were tick-tocking nearly 3,000 years before it was invented. But the men weren't any better. They just wanted to drink and party. And so Isaiah 5 says this, Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, but who stay up late at night till they're inflamed with wine.

[5 : 26] Now the passage goes on to say, They have harps and lyres at their banquets, pipes and timbrels and wine, but they have no regard for the deep people will go into exile.

And so we see that life hasn't changed in nearly 3,000 years. People are still running after the same things back then that we are running after today if you don't have God in your life. This is exactly the kind of thing you're going to do to find joy, especially when you feel your happiness is under threat. But these are joys that don't last and ultimately they don't deliver on their promise.

They're going to break under the strain of you trying to get too much from it. And like anything that bends too much under pressure, at some point it's going to break, it's going to snap back and come back to hurt you. And that's what happens when people drink too much. That's what happens when ladies go shopping too much. Because you run out of money and you run out of relationships.

It is utterly useless to keep looking for joy in things that don't give it. God's answer is to look for joy in Him. He gives joy that can handle life stresses. And that's the promise we have in Isaiah 9.

He promises that if we trust in Him, He will maximize from today. We're just going to look at that at verse 3. So it's Isaiah 9 verse 3. It says this, you have enlarged the nation and you increased their joy. They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. And so you've got this note of joy. It appears four times in those verses. God is promising joy, but it is God who promises joy in Him. It is Him who has enlarged the nation. It is Him you increase their joy and it is people who rejoice before or in you as their Lord. And so we're going to look at how God maximizes our joy. We're struggling to find joy because we focus on the things of this world to give us the joy that only God can give. So now let's look at God maximizing our joy.

[8 : 02] God says that we will only find true joy if we find Him. It's God who increases His people's joy and their joy is in Him, not in the stuff of this world. But why is it that only God can give joy that lasts and not the stuff of this world? After all, the stuff of this world is easy to get.

God sometimes feels like far away. Well, we find a clue in the Bible word for joy itself. To have joy in the Bible is to have a good mind. The Bible word for joy in these texts is a composite word of good and mind.

So to have biblical joy is to have a good mind, which is kind of strange. You think to yourself, okay, how does that work? It's working according to the purpose that God made it. It's functioning correctly. It's functioning well. You go back all the way to the story of Genesis chapter 1, where God looks at the world and is doing what He wants it to do. It's working well.

And God says, this is good. I want the world to work like this. And the way it was working is that mankind was listening to God, doing what God wants, but doing it in relation to God, not just rooting around and doing what He wants on planet Earth with the stuff on planet Earth. In fact, there's one test where God says, well, if you're not careful, you're going to look for joy too much in this world. And as a test, here's a piece of fruit. And so they, instead of reaching out and sort of holding on to God, they, Adam and Eve, the first people on planet Earth, they reach out and grab the stuff of this world because it's easy to see. It's appealing. And if I take that, that's going to be easier for me to have joy than in this God who makes it, who they would, who they said makes it difficult, although He obviously doesn't. So the word good in the Bible means that everything is working according to the purpose God made it. It's functioning well. What that means is God wants us to have joy. He created us to have joy. We are designed to have good minds that can enjoy God as our Father and enjoy His creation in relation to each other. Having a bad mind means rejecting God and just looking at finding joy in the stuff around us. What that means is you cannot have maximal joy, the joy that God intends if you don't have a relationship with Him. Or worse, if you've got a bad relationship with Him. And so looking for joy in all the wrong places is having a bad mind. It's a mind that doesn't work. It's excluding the God who made the world and thinking, well, I can do it on my own.

It's a mind that doesn't work properly. Respected Bible teacher John Piper says this. He's reflecting on Romans 1 verse 28. Romans 1 verse 28 says, since people did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind or a bad mind, a mind that isn't working.

[11 : 13] And then Piper says, this is who we are by nature. We do not want to see God as worthy of knowing well and treasuring above all things. And he says, you know this is true about yourself because of how little effort you expend to know Him and because of how much effort it takes to make your mind spend any time getting to know God better. Wouldn't it be sad at Christmas time if you were so involved at the things of Christmas without giving any thought to the story behind it, to God and to Jesus?

You're going to get the smallest taste of joy, but all the other stresses and anxiety is going to chase it away. Christmas isn't going to be able to deliver joy if you don't have God in the picture.

You can have some joy. We all know the stresses Christmas brings, especially when you overspend and then you have to go through the whole of January. Oh, the longest months where there's no food, there's no money and no joy.

According to God, in order to have joy, we need to have our minds working properly. And that's why we need Jesus. We're just not good enough of a psychic surgeon to get our minds working properly. In fact, we've convinced ourselves, our own minds, that we don't need God to have decided it's going to be bad. It doesn't want to be good. You need someone from the outside to come and help you fix that. Of course, then we self-medicate, putting stuff into our mouths, whether it's anxiety pills, whether it's alcohol, whether it's clothes we put on ourselves, whether it's relationships, and none of that is designed to provide a good mind.

In fact, it makes it worse. It just poisons us, poisons our minds. So the only person that can fix us is God and the son that he sent into the world that we celebrate at Christmas time. And that's what Isaiah goes on to talk about. So Isaiah 9 verse 6 says this, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[13 : 59] Psalm 9 verse 3 says God is going to give us joy. Here's the reason why we're going to have joy. Because of this child that he's going to send us. We're going to unpack these verses at Christmas time.

But what I want you to get from here is this immense power and ability of this person that's going to come into the world. Of Jesus. How do we know about the power that he had? Well, you've just got to read the stories of the Gospels.

The healings that Jesus does as he walks around Israel. Walking on water. Raising the dead. Feeding people. Releasing people from oppression.

From demons. Doing stuff that no one else can do. And ultimately they kill him. Because his path of joy was maybe just a little bit too much.

Too hard. People wanted an easy, quick joy. An easy, quick fix. Get rid of our enemies. Don't tell me about the things I need to change on my inside.

[14 : 58] That's too much hard work. Listening to Jesus they realize, no, but they were the problem. Their minds are the problem. And Jesus says, you've got to come to me to fix your mind. And so they kill him. No, we don't want to listen to that.

We're going to kill him. And then the ultimate miracle. That shows Jesus' mastery over sin and death.

Is the resurrection. God raises him from the dead. And that proves beyond the shadow of a doubt. That he is the one that has got the power to change our minds.

Only Jesus has the powers of a God. He's divine. That's the whole point about Isaiah 9. And Isaiah 7. Various other prophecies in the Old Testament. Of God himself coming into the world in the person of Christ.

Only Jesus has the powers of God. To heal and renew our minds. And change us from having a bad mind. A mind that focuses on short-sighted solutions to life problems.

[15 : 57] To having a good mind. A mind that focuses on God. And trusts his plan for my joy. That's a joy that sees through life's problems.

And instead focuses on the long-term gain I get. From the promise of God. And that's why the Apostle Peter. He was no stranger to pain and persecution. He writes this in 1 Peter chapter 1.

I don't have it on the screen. You might want to find it. It's the reading we had earlier on. So 1 Peter chapter 1. From verse 3. I'll find it as well.

So we can take the same amount of time. Although I think if you've got phones. It might go a little bit quicker. 1 Peter 1.

From verse 3. He says this. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There's hope. In his great mercy.

[17 : 00] He has given us new birth. And into an inheritance. That can never perish. Spoil. Or fade. And so there's the promise of the resurrection.

And the promise of a future. An inheritance. That nothing can take away from you. It's kept in heaven for you. Meaning it's being kept safe. And who are we?

Well you. Through faith. Are being shielded by God's power. Until the coming of the salvation. That is ready to be revealed. In the last time. So there's a promise.

Of a future resurrection. There's a promise of an inheritance. That's the resurrected life. On planet earth. It's redoing Eden. It's promising the blessings and the goodness of Eden.

All the joy that we can have. In the world and in God. In stuff that doesn't break. That doesn't break down. And verse 6 says this.

[18 : 06] In all this you greatly rejoice. We have joy in the things that God promises. Though now. For a little while. You may have had to suffer grief.

In all kinds of trials. And so there's joy. Even though it may not remove the problems of this world. It sees through the problems of this world. It doesn't focus on the problems of this world.

And then find solutions in trying to mitigate that. In the world. It looks to the future. It looks to the promise of God. It looks to the resurrection.

It looks to the promise of an inheritance. Of a redoing of the world. Of a renewing of the world. That we're going to be able to enjoy. And so that stops us from grabbing and grasping.

And running after the things here and now. We can relax a little bit. And trust God. Even though the problems are still rolling.

[19 : 01] We can only have joy in a life that doesn't deliver us. The resurrection promises that I am going to get everything I need to have full joy.

But I will only have joy if my mind is fixed on the promise of future joy. Not in short-sighted searching for every scrap of joy I can get now. Now. That means for us.

In order to get real joy we need to shift our focus. You need to shift your focus. Away from hoping that relationships, money or stuff is going to get what you want now.

But rather trust in what Jesus promises. And what he promises is life to the full. That starts now. But it will only be fulfilled in the future. The irony is that when you do that.

When you give up looking for joy here. But looking for it in the future. You're much more likely to get joy now. Because you're not holding on so tightly. Or searching so frantically.

[20 : 07] For joy in relationships. In money. And stuff. You maximize your joy now. By shifting your focus and getting it later. You maximize your joy by shifting your focus to Jesus.

Well let's go back to that family we started with. To see how trusting in Jesus can make a difference. The young mom. She's still stressing.

Going to make a lovely Christmas lunch. But she's not overly stressed. She's not focused on what the husbands, friends, wives are going to say. She doesn't need to compare her worth with them.

Her worth is in Christ. Which is of far greater value than a well cooked or badly cooked meal. The kids. Well they still want nice toys. But they're not overcome by jealousy and snobbishness.

They've been taught by their parents that sharing what they do have with each other. Is of much more value than having the most expensive name brand stuff. And any parent will know that to get that kind of knowledge into a child takes divine intervention.

[21 : 17] The husband. He still feels a strain of work and family and bills. But instead of drinking too much. He trusts in Christ to provide. He takes his anxiety and spends time in the Bible and in prayer.

At Christmas meal he grabs his family. Gives them a big hug. And all the guests can see he's truly joyful for the small things in life.

And they begin to wonder at what has given him this sense of joy. And friends this is what Jesus can do for you this Christmas in your life. The rest of our Christmas series.

Or sign up for our Discover Jesus course. That will run in February next year. And you can come along to that. You can ask all your questions. You can find out the truth of who Jesus claims to be.

And how he can change your life. But for now let me pray for us. Lord Jesus we acknowledge that we run too easily after the things of this world to find joy.

[22 : 23] And we know that they don't really give it. Lord. We've convinced our minds that we can find joy in relationships. In money.

In stuff. And we think we can do it without you. Lord we're sorry for that. But we want to hold on to this promise that you do give us joy. The joy.

The joy. The joy of full joy of the resurrection to come and the life everlasting. Help us to trust in that joy. And then to enjoy the things around us to the full.

Because we're not holding on to them too tightly. Amen.