



## Isaiah 61:3

### JOY

As some of you know, since coming back from holiday we've had a number of pressures on us. The problem with these things is that they can bring a person low. At the beginning of last week I spent some time preparing for this Sunday and the sermon seemed right but somehow it just wasn't coming.

I find that sometimes it's only in the quiet that we stop listening to ourselves and we hear the voice of God. It was sometime Tuesday morning as I was mulling over a few things that a verse was impressed on me that we looked at only a couple of weeks ago:

Neh 8:10 Nehemiah said, *"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

### THE JOY OF THE LORD

*"The joy of the Lord is your strength".* I know that there are a few people in the church at the moment that are under pressure and this is the message for us today: The joy of the Lord is your strength. Don't let the enemy rob you of the joy that comes through Christ. We've got far more to praise God for than to be sad about.

We all know the phrase "*the joy of the Lord is your strength*"; so why doesn't it characterise us? Let's be realistic about life – there are pressures that just make us feel depressed, make us mourn, make us grieve, bring sadness.

We know the Christian faith is about joy but .....

In our student days Rhiannon and I used to enjoy and evangelist and Bible teacher called Eric Delve who had an itinerant ministry to students. He's still around and has been in the Anglican ministry for decades now. He told a story of how some Christians seemed to have a problem with joy.

It went like this "We as believers are called to be joyful. Joyfulness is not the same as happiness. People of the world are happy – shallow wicked world. But we believers have a deep joy." There was only one problem and that was these people acted quite the opposite of what any sane person would imagine as joyful. DEEP JOY - "their joy was buried so deep that no-one was likely to ever dig it up".

On the other hand I have come across Christians who always put a smile on their face – even if they are not feeling the same inside. They feel that when they come to worship they should at least kind of look joyful even if they are hurting deeply inside.

Yet as we look at Nehemiah 8:10 or at Isaiah 61:3 which we read earlier, we find that we have a God who is characterised by joy. And as His people we should be people who have His joy and it should be our strength.

So what should joy be about as Christians? Actually just looking at the dictionary definition of joy gives us the answer and when we come across joy in the OT the Hebrew word conveys much the same.

### DICTIONARY

Collins Dictionary:

- 1.a deep feeling or condition of happiness or contentment
2. something causing such a feeling; a source of happiness
3. an outward show of pleasure or delight; rejoicing.

Joy involves not just the outward but the inward. Joy inside will always reflect on us outwardly. Just as sadness, mourning, depression also does.

As we come to communion this morning we need to dwell on a simple fact: Jesus is about joy. Now, communion is about death of Jesus which doesn't seem to be a subject that one associates with joy – sins forgiven, eternal hope. But we worship and glorified Jesus and we come to meet a living Saviour this morning.

We looked at Isaiah 61 a couple of months back and we were reminded that this passage was Messianic – it speaks of Jesus. I looked specifically at verses 1 and 2

VERSES

*Is 61 1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour  
and the day of vengeance of our God,*

We saw how Jesus brings jubilee. We saw that this could refer to what we celebrate at Communion this morning – freedom from sin, the favour of God in our lives when we came to Jesus in faith, but also that even today, Jesus brings freedom, release from darkness (Greek version uses freedom of darkness for the blind). He changes lives. We know all the rest. Our message is a message of joy. But we shouldn't ignore verse 3: Jesus is a Saviour who brings joy.

VERSES

*to comfort all who mourn,  
3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.*

These verses are presented as now verses. Our faith is a now faith, a mind-changing faith, particularly to those under pressure. Jesus came to bring comfort for those who mourn. Our faith is a faith of joy, not of mourning. Jesus has come to change our mourning to joy. WE HAVE EVERY REASON TO REJOICE.

Yes there will be upsets, there will be mourning, there will be depression but we are called to everlasting joy. But that's not presented in this passage as an then joy, but a now joy.

That doesn't mean that believers should never mourn, or ever have a bad day. These will happen because we live in a fallen world. People die, people behave badly towards us, accidents happen, people lose their jobs, we have family problems, there's a recession on, we get health problems, and sometimes our heavenly Father has to chide us. Let's have a look at a few verses from Psalm 30.

4 Sing praise to the LORD, all his faithful people! Remember what the Holy One has done, and give him thanks! 5 His anger lasts only a moment, his goodness for a lifetime. Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning.

Joylessness is something that should for a Christian only last a short time. It shouldn't characterise our lives because Jesus came to take away our mourning and bring joy into our lives and that's a now thing.

JOY IS SOMETHING JESUS BRINGS

You may say "I've got this problem, I've got that problem, how can I possibly be joyful?"

VERSE

Let's see how Jesus brings joy. Isaiah 61:3 tells us all. How did people mourn in those days

- ashes on their head
- miserable face
- tore clothes

Us: Joylessness always shows, grumpy, miserable face, don't care how we look, wear black.

Jesus has saved us not to mourn about life and sin and problems, but to walk in joy. And joy is something that Jesus brings. It's the joy of the Lord that brings us strength.

Firstly it involves inward change – He comforts those who mourn, and that gives rise to outward expression. He deals with our mourning – beauty, joy, praise.

The passage tells us how He changes things. Now note closely how He does it. In typical grace fashion he GIVES us things.

- crown of beauty – probably meant a nice turban in those days
- oil of joy/gladness – people put olive oil on their faces to make them shine
- garment of praise – people put on nice clothes

This is a story of grace. Joy is something that we don't have to work ourselves up to. Jesus gives joy. So if we're feeling low, what do we do? Once we have realised that Jesus is the joy-giver then we must receive it. Just like that. Receive it.

When we are mourning, sad, depressed one of the last things we will often do is something as simple as receiving God's grace. Receiving God's grace in any context is understanding what He wants to bring to us and receive it. Is God speaking to you this morning? Then don't let the enemy continue to rob you of something Jesus brings to you so freely.

#### Communion

- recognise our state which we feel we can't change
- repent that we have felt we can't change
- accept what Jesus gives

#### Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid  
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