**First Things First**

**ABC’s of The Christian Life**

 Jesus and the Quest for Joy

 Advent, Week Three: How do we “rejoice in the Lord”? 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

**The Problem:** Joy is hard to define, even harder to find, and hardest to keep.

**“Rejoice always.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16**

 Joy is not a personality trait. Joy is not denial, blind optimism, or pasted-on smiles. Joy is not the private domain of extroverts, unicorn herders or rainbow mongers. Nor is it optional. Hardly any command in Scripture is repeated more than “Rejoice!” Leviticus 23:40; Deuteronomy 12:7, 12, 18; Psalm 2:11; 32:11; 64:10; 97:12; Luke 6:23; Romans 12:12, 15; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 3:1; 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; *etc., etc.* Joy is the permanent possession of every child of God, a barometer of our salvation. Is it truly elusive? Or are we looking in the wrong places? And how can we rejoice always when life so often brings heartache?

**The Solution:** Joy is our participation in the life of God as we, by faith, see Him glorify Himself in demonstrating His righteousness (both in grace to His people and judgment upon His enemies).

“These things I speak . . . that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” John 17:13

 Because no person or force can thwart God’s plans or purposes, and because He is perfect in righteousness (both loving and just), He is supremely happy, or joyful. Joy proper is not an emotion, but a state of being. Thus the “joy of the Lord,” is God’s own joy, in which He lives eternally in communion, Father, Son, and Spirit, and which He shares with His sons and daughters who have His life. As righteousness is the sum of God’s attributes, joy is the sum of His passions, and it is given to us.

**The Dynamic:** The Eternal Spring of Divine Joy

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16:11

 "It is good news that God is gloriously happy. No one would want to spend eternity with an unhappy God. If God is unhappy then the goal of the gospel is not a happy goal, and that means it would be no gospel at all. But, in fact, Jesus invites us to spend eternity with a happy God when he says, ‘Enter into the joy of your master’ (Matthew 25:23). Jesus lived and died that his joy--God's joy–might be in us and our joy might be full (John 15:11; 17:13). Therefore the gospel is ‘the gospel of the glory of the happy God.'" John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* p. 26

**Practicing Joy:**  Five things we need to know about joy.

1. Joy is the Fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22, 23; 1 Timothy 1:11

 We can’t fabricate in humanity what grows only in divinity.

2. Joy is the twin of righteousness. Romans 14:17-19; Revelation 18:20; 19:7

 We can’t possess God’s joy while loving what He hates.

3. Joy celebrates God’s grace. Luke 1:47, 58; 10:20; 15:1-10; Acts 13:48

 We can’t have joy while trying to earn God’s love. We can’t enjoy others when we aren’t extending them grace.

4. Joy delights in God’s work in others. Phil. 1:4; 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19, 20; 3:9

 We can’t have joy as a selfish possession. We won’t be happy when we can’t rejoice with those who rejoice. Romans 12:15

5. Joy thrives in trials of faith. Matt. 5:10-12; Lk. 6:22, 23; Jas. 1:2ff; 1 Pet. 1:6

 We can have joy at all times when pursuing God’s word, will, and plan, as did Jesus. Hebrews 12:1, 12; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 7:4; 8:2.

***When God gives us His life, we receive His joy as well, but that joy increases and is made full, especially in our trials, as we righteously follow God’s plan, celebrate His grace, and delight in the joy of others***.