

Without guessing about what was written, let's consider what was said. Jesus literally said, let any among you without sin cast the first stone. There was only one among them without sin and that was Jesus. If they were waiting for Him to cast the first stone, they had a long wait coming.

Her encounter with Jesus changed her fate and her life. That was a cause of pure joy for this woman. It can be our source of joy as well.

3. The Source of Our Joy

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, - Galatians 5:22 NLT

Why do we celebrate joy at Advent? Because the coming of Jesus demonstrated the love of God, and the promise of redemption. When we have a relationship with Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in us.

What is the source of joy according to Galatians 5:22? How do we create an environment in our lives for the Spirit to create an abundant harvest? What are some things that can "stunt the growth" of joy in us?

WRAP-UP

Joy is not fleeting like happiness. It endures because it is based in God's love and His promise of salvation through Jesus. Joy is not something we can create apart from God. It is the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in us. When we make time to focus on God's presence, to delight in His handiwork and worship Him, we cultivate the soil in which joy can grow.

MEMORY VERSE

10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! - John 15:10-11 NLT

Challenge – At Advent let's take the opportunity to pause and reflect on the coming of Jesus into the world, bringing good news and great joy, but also to look towards His return and the joy of our salvation.

Joy Welcome to Our World #3

INTRODUCTION

We hear a lot about joy during the holiday season. We find joy in songs, joy on greeting cards, joy on coffee cups. But what is joy and is it the same as happiness? Jesus never told us to do what makes us happy. But He did teach us what brings true joy. So, let's start by recognizing the difference between happiness and joy, and then identify the false joy the world offers versus the true joy from God.

Ice Breaker

What brings you the greatest happiness at Christmas?

Key Passage

9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, 10 but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. 11 The Savior--yes, the Messiah, the Lord--has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! - Luke 2:9-11 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Happiness is not Joy

If you were asked what would bring you the greatest joy you might respond with something like, winning the lottery, finding the perfect spouse, getting my dream job/house/car/vacation... But would that bring you joy or happiness? Do we recognize the difference?

10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! - John 15:10-11 NLT

Jesus told us what would make our joy overflow. What is it?

When Jesus explains His obedience to God's commandments, He says that as He obeys, He remains in God's love. He does not depart from the love of God. He dwells there. And He tells us this so that we will be filled with joy.

What are some circumstances that might cause you to question God's love for you? What are some of the eternal truths of God's word that assures us, despite the trouble we experience in this world, that we will always be loved by God? Have you ever decided to trust God amidst adversity?

Joy is a pervasive and consistent state of well-being. Happiness fades when the thing or activity that created the happiness is gone. But the joy that comes from knowing God's love is not going away because God's love for us is not going away. It is unconditional and unchanging.

2. Lies and False Joy

Joy is anchored in our relationship to Jesus and the offer of salvation He brings us. Unfortunately, the world offers us copious false narratives that tell us what will bring us joy. Some of those competing lies about joy are illustrated in the story of the woman caught in adultery.

3 As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. 4 "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" 6 They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. - John 8:3-6 NLT

- Lie #1- Intimacy outside of your marriage will bring you joy.

10 Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" 11 "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." - John 8:10-11 NLT

If this woman was committing adultery, then either she or her partner, or both had a spouse. (By the way, where did he go?) How many marriages have been destroyed by this lie? When we are focused on our own pursuit of pleasure, ignoring the pain we inflict on others, it produces fleeting happiness at best, and ultimately leads to shame.

What justification do people give who believe this lie that we are entitled to pursue our happiness regardless of the consequences? Have you witnessed or been touched by the fallout of doing so?

- Lie #2- Self-righteousness and being in control bring you power and that brings you joy.

The Pharisees were seeking their joy through the exercise of their power. First, they accused the woman of sinful, unlawful behavior. Were they truly more righteous than she? We don't know, but the public demonstration of her sin did stand in contrast to their display of religious piety. Secondly, they tried to trap Jesus and demonstrate how they were right in demanding the woman be punished, and possibly that Jesus was wrong if he disagreed with them.

It is tempting for us to believe this lie, that our righteousness makes us superior to others. What is the difference between self-righteousness and true holiness? If self-righteousness involves comparison to others, to what do we measure our holiness? How do we feel towards those we view as being "wrong"? Do we find joy in their punishment, or do we have God's heart of mercy?

This is how Jesus responded to the Pharisees- He wrote in the dust. What did He write? We don't know. But we do know what He said to them as He wrote.

7 They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" 8 Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. - John 8:7-8 NLT