

Kingdom Joy

By Pastor Greg
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Luke 2:9-12

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It's A Wonderful Life has been a long time favorite of mine. It's become a Christmas tradition in my family to watch this movie (along with *Ernest Saves Christmas*, which is a classic all its own, know what I mean Vern?). Jimmy Stewart stars as George Bailey who seemed miserable his whole life; dreaming of the things he'd do and the places he's go, only to be stuck at home working at the family business. One day, one Christmas Eve, things really get bad, and George considers taking his life. It seems the business misplaced \$8000.00 on the very day the Bank Examiner shows up to balance the books. Finding out that he's worth more dead than alive, George Bailey considers taking his life. And as he stars down at the river that runs through Bedford Falls, I half suspect he would have jumped, that is until Clarence shows up.

One of the things that has always baffled me is why Clarence didn't just tell George that Mr. Potter had stolen the \$8000.00. Why didn't he just say, "I know who has the money George. Mr. Potter found it in Uncle Billy's newspaper". And then George could have walked right back into town and told that Bank Examiner to go check Old Man Potter's accounts. But see, that would have simply solved George's problem. It would not have changed his life. Clarence decides that a lesson on Joy is just what this man needs. And spends the rest of the movie showing George what life would have been like had he not been born.

Okay, I don't want to spend all my time preaching about a movie, but it is strikingly similar to some stories told in the Bible. One is the story of Job. Job had a terrible day. In one day he loses all his animals, his farm hands are killed, his shepherds and servants are killed, and all his sons and daughters die. To top it off, Satan is out to destroy him. Job laments his misery, crying out to God, asking why. Now, God could have told Him plain and simple. God could have said that it was all a test; a way that He could prove to Satan that indeed we frail human beings were worthy of His love. But He doesn't. Not once does God explain Himself to Job.

Instead, it seems that God is trying to get Job to realize that joy is not found in the circumstances of life, but in faith; an unwavering trust in God.

The other story is about the Lost Son which Jesus tells in Luke 15. It seems the youngest son is miserable at home. He longs for the excitement a distant land might bring. Searching for joy, he blows all his money on wild living. Surprisingly, he doesn't find joy there. So he decides to go back home, and the reception he receives is staggering. The father allowed him to go, hoping that the son's eyes would be opened, and that he would see his life with a new perspective. The truth is, this son would never find joy at home until there was first joy in his heart.

For some, the concept of Joy has become something more than what is intended. Some feel that joy can only be found when things go their way; when all is well and life is as it should be. And some spend their whole life looking for that one big event or long for freedom in order to find joy. However, God desires that our joy be found not in the things or circumstances of life, but in His love and in His promise for us. This is what I call a Kingdom Joy; a joy found neither in the outward things nor in outward pleasures, but a joy that is birthed within us by our faith in God's promises and in the depth of His love.

Now I suppose the next logical question on everyone's mind is how do we get this kind of Joy? Well, to answer your question, this kind of Joy is birthed by faith. Long ago God made a promise. He said that He would give us a Child (Isaiah 9:6) And He told us what this child would one day do for the people of all nations. He says, *"You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."*¹ (Isaiah 49:6) This Son one day promises that *"everyone who believes in him will have eternal life."*² (John 3:15)

This Kingdom Joy is something that no one can take from us. It is not swayed by circumstances or dependant upon material blessings. A Kingdom Joy is found when we see the world through this one simple truth; *"For God loved the world so*

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation.*

*much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”*³ (John 3:16) When we know the depth of the Father’s love for us, when we feel His arms embracing us, when we are dressed in His robes of righteousness, then we will know this Kingdom Joy. This is the kind of Joy that enables a person to rejoice in the Lord in spite of their circumstances and in spite of their material blessings. And this Kingdom Joy is found by our faith in the promises of Jesus. Jesus says that He will grant eternal life to anyone who believes in Him. We must believe this by faith. And it is through this faith we then will find Joy.

That’s why the announcement made by an angel nearly 2 thousand years ago talked about Joy. *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!¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”*⁴ (Luke 2:9-12) By faith the shepherds traveled into Bethlehem, and they were not disappointed. I believe their hearts were filled with joy.

Faith in the promises of God gives birth to a Joy that is steadfast and immovable. This faith believes what Jesus has said and trusts in His promises. And it is because of this faith that we not only see the world in a whole new way, but we start looking to God as our source of Joy.

This Christmas season, I would challenge you to stop depending upon circumstances to find joy, and to stop looking for joy in the things of this world. Instead, have faith in this Child God sent us, and find Joy birthed in your heart that no one can take away.

³Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*.

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