

WHEN JESUS APPEARS ALL GOD'S PEOPLE WILL REJOICE Luke 2:10-11, Revelation 5:9, 7:17

INTRODUCTION

I think it is safe to say that there has never been so much joyful exuberance at the birth of a child as that expressed at the birth of Jesus. I mean, I'm pretty sure my parents had a party when I was born but I'm also pretty sure they didn't have an angel choir show up. I'm pretty sure my mom's aunts and uncles thought it was pretty cool their little Ruthie was going to have a baby but I don't think any of my cousins leaped in the womb just because my mom with me in her uterus showed up. I think people came to visit my mom in the hospital but I know that no foreign dignitaries showed up with tens of thousands of dollars in gifts. If there is one thing that characterizes all the familiar stories recounting the birth of Jesus it is that people and angels were really happy about his birth.

This same joy that filled people and angels at the birth of Jesus will characterize all God's people and all angels when Jesus comes back the second time. During this Christmas season at River Hills, as we remember and rejoice in the birth of Jesus we have been considering five things that will be true when Jesus comes back the second time, at his second Advent. You see, this same Jesus who was born in a stable and visited by shepherds and magi and who was crucified on a Roman cross when he was about 30 years of age has risen from the dead and one day he is going to come back to this earth to finish the work he started when he was born. This afternoon we are going to see that God's people will rejoice when Jesus comes again like the angels and shepherds and magi and Mary and Zechariah and Simeon and Anna did when he came the first time.

Why were people and angels so happy when Jesus was born? The reason for the joy was that the birth of Jesus was recognized as the fulfillment of all the promises that God had made to his people for thousands of years. He repeatedly promised that he was going to send a Savior who would free them from their sins and from the misery that came into the world due to sin. This afternoon I want to draw your attention to just one sentence that the angel announced to the shepherds to show why the angels and shepherds were so happy. Luke 2:10-11, "And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'" With this one sentence the angels connected this baby, lying in a feeding trough in a barn in the town of Bethlehem with literally hundreds of promises and descriptions in the OT prophets of the great Son of David, the Servant of the Lord and the Savior of the world. God promised Israel's greatest king, King David, that one of his sons was going to sit upon his throne forever. He promised him that this son of David would bring salvation to all of God's people. Among the Jewish prophets, this son of David is called the Christ, in Greek; or Messiah, in Hebrew, which means "the anointed one." To be "anointed" meant that he is the one called and commissioned by God to reverse the curse that is upon the world. The OT prophets promised that this son of David would be the one who would overcome sin and bring justice into the world. Throughout the OT the arrival of this savior was always portrayed as an occasion of the greatest joy such as we heard when Bill read Psalm 98 for us. And so this is why we see angels and men rejoicing at the birth of Jesus.

What I would like to do now is to give attention to two places in the book of Revelation that describe the joy of all of God's people when this same Jesus comes back the second time. My aim is to show two of the reasons for joy at his coming so that each person in here will so trust in Christ that your joy this Christmas season will not be found in the temporary thrill of family reunions or new toys but in the permanent joy that Jesus Christ offers to all who trust in him. Friends, I want you to be happy forever and the only eternal joy in the universe is found in Jesus.

There are two things you need to know about the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation before we look at two sentences in the book. First, it is a description of what will happen in the world from the time of Jesus' ascension into heaven in about AD 30 until he comes again. Second, this description of reality is done through the use of highly exaggerated and symbolic language. It is poetry on steroids. It uses outlandish and impossible language to describe the fury of God at human sin and the glory of Jesus and the salvation that God is going to

bring to his faithful people when Jesus returns. One of the clearest examples of these outlandish metaphors is in Revelation 5 where the angel tells John that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David is able to open the scroll. But then instead of a Lion John sees a Lamb with a slit neck and seven horns and seven eyes take the scroll from the hand of God sitting on his throne. Now listen, when you get to heaven and you see Jesus, you are not going to see a lamb with a slit neck and seven eyes and seven horns that also has a hand with which to take hold of a scroll. Each part of the description of Jesus here is connected to an OT description of the Messiah and tells us something about the nature of Jesus and his work on our behalf. For our purposes this evening we are only going to consider two of the reasons for the joy that all God's people will experience when Jesus comes back again; one from Revelation 5 and one from Revelation 7.

MAIN POINT

All God's people will rejoice when Jesus comes back because...

I. Jesus, by his death, purchased us for God (Rev. 5:9)

In the book of Revelation people and angels regularly break out into songs and poems of praise to God and Jesus. Praise is the expression of joy. C.S. Lewis, the famous author and Christian apologist had it right when he said, "...all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... The world rings with praise—lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game—praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, cars...colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains...even sometimes politicians or scholars... (and) just as men ... praise whatever they value so they ... urge us to join them in praising it: 'Isn't she lovely?' 'Wasn't that glorious?' 'Don't you think that magnificent?'... we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation." After your little girl dances perfectly at her ballet recital you will clap and whistle and cheer not because someone told you it was your duty but because of your delight in your daughter. You will say to your family and friends sitting with you, "Wasn't she great?" The next week you will be showing the video you took to all who will watch and posting it on Utube so all the relatives scattered around the world can watch her. You will praise her in this way because of your joy in her and her performance. In the same way, when the angel and human choirs break out in praise to Jesus because he is found worthy to open the scroll it is an expression of their delight in Jesus and what he has done.

Now in 5:9 the joy of men and angels in Jesus is due to the fact that he, by his death "ransomed people for God." Jesus himself used this same language in describing the purpose of his life. He says, in Mark 10:45, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many." The reason that Jesus was born in that manger, the reason he lived upon this earth for thirty years, the reason he never sinned but always obeyed God, the reason he performed miracles was so that he could die. Listen, you and I are going to die but none of us would ever say that the reason we were born was so that we could die. Therefore, this is the central question you need to answer in order to understand Jesus and his coming into the world: why did he have to die? Why couldn't he have lived 80 years and written a bunch of books and traveled around the world healing people and then be taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire like the OT prophet Elijah? Why did he have to die?

The answer is in our verse in Revelation 5:9 and it is this answer that is the source of all the joy in heaven. He died so that he could, literally, "buy" people for God. He died so that God could "own" us, so that he could live with us forever and we could live with God forever. The idea here comes out of the world of debt slavery. In Bible times if you amassed so much debt that you couldn't pay it off you would sell yourself into temporary slavery to the person to whom you owed the money in order to pay off the debt. If you had a wealthy relative he or she could "buy" you out of your slavery by paying off the debt. The metaphor fits our condition perfectly. God has given us everything, our life, our continued existence, everything we have is a gift from God. He gave us all this so that we would love him and our neighbor. We have taken all that he gave us and instead of investing it in his work we have used all these resources to please ourselves. We have ignored him and our neighbor and thus we are in his debt, we owe him our very life. We have no way to pay off this debt and so we are destined for the debtor prison, which is hell. However, God sent his Son into the world and he used his life to love God and neighbor and then he gave his life as a payment for all who will trust in him. He paid off our debt by his life and death so that we can live with God in his kingdom forever as free men and women.

How would you feel if you had hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt that you could not pay off and then your wealthy uncle paid your debt for you? The joy you would feel at being released from that debt is but a small inkling of the infinite joy that all who trust in Jesus as the one who paid our debt will feel when he comes again. Forever, we will know that the only reason we are able to live with God, in his kingdom is because Jesus paid out debt by giving his life for our life.

All God's people will rejoice when Jesus comes back because...

- *Jesus, by his death, purchased us for God*
- *And because...*

II. Jesus will be our shepherd forever (Rev. 7:17)

In Revelation 7 we are given another glimpse into the future when all those whom Jesus bought for God will be standing around the throne of God and praising him, expressing their joy in Jesus. When John sees this multitude worshipping Jesus he asks an angel who they are. The angel answers that these are the people who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” How do you make robes white by washing them in blood? Without going into the details this is another reference to the fact that the only reason that anyone will be in heaven is because of what Christ has done by dying for our sins. The only people who will rejoice in the appearing of Jesus the second time are those who, while they live, wash their robes in his blood, that is, trust in his life and death and resurrection as the only reason that God will accept us into his presence.

Now notice that in vv. 15-17 we have a description by the angel to John of the condition of all God's people throughout all of eternity. I want you to look at v. 17. That Lamb whom we saw in chapter 5 who was slain, who was the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who is the Root of David, who is worthy to take the scroll, who stands in the middle of the throne of God and thus is God, this Lamb will be our shepherd forever. He will guide us to springs of living water. This language is connected to so many OT passages but most famously it reflects the language of Psalm 23 which says in part, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” So the Lamb is the Lord and he is our shepherd who will lead us to the rivers of living water.

What a glorious description of our condition forever when the Lamb who was slain and by whose blood we have been washed clean from our sins watches over us and guides us. He will forever be our shepherd. He will forever, make sure that we will never want any good thing. He will forever, direct our steps in the paths of righteousness. He will forever lead us into green pastures. He will forever slake our thirst with living water. He will forever wipe away all our tears. Our joy will be full and forever because this Lamb will be our shepherd. Friends, while now we do not know the fullness of that reality; yet we can now live in the joyful anticipation of that day. Just like children this night live in the joyful anticipation of tomorrow morning, we can live now in the joyful anticipation of that glorious day. Long for that day, not the day you get married or you get a job or get to leave home or you get to retire. Do not settle for the superficial and ephemeral joys that this world offers but set your heart upon that deep and eternal joy that is coming when Jesus comes again.

All God's people will rejoice when Jesus comes back because...

- *Jesus, by his death, purchased us for God*
- *Jesus will be our shepherd forever*

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