

The Rejoicing King

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Date: 17 October 2021

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I wonder how you find singing. If you're anything like me, you probably don't wake up singing or shouting for joy. Perhaps you are more of a morning person and you love nothing more than a good sing in the shower. But for most of us, I suspect that not every hour of every day is spent joyfully singing. Because however much we do or don't enjoy singing, none of us, I suspect, experience joy every hour of every day. And maybe that sounds perfectly obvious. Maybe you're thinking it sounds unrealistic to be full of joy every hour of every day. But let me clarify, that's not the same as saying none of us are happy 24-7. Okay, if we never felt anything but happy, there would be something very wrong with us, wouldn't there? We don't yet live in a world where constant happiness is realistic or healthy or appropriate. Now, when I say joy, I'm talking more about the deeper bedrock joy in the Bible. Joy in the Bible is less like a spring or a fountain or a geyser, something that shoots up. It's more like an underground river. It maybe bubbles up here and there on the surface, but mostly it's just constantly quietly running underneath and feeding the ground and watering the soil and letting flowers and fruits sprout up on top. Joy doesn't always show, but it's always there, quietly watering our whole inner life. Now, if that's joy, then I wonder how you're finding it this evening. Perhaps joy is running pretty dry. If we're honest, things feel pretty joyless.

Or perhaps you come this evening overflowing with joy. You're bursting with joy. Or perhaps more likely you're in between. A steady flow of joy that keeps you quietly rejoicing, persevering.

Probably we could each point to times in our lives when we've been in each of those places. And so it's worth asking, isn't it, how can we find joy as Christians? Where do we go looking for joy?

Well, it seems like King David is someone who could tell us, doesn't it? Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous. It is fitting for the upright to praise him. Sing to him a new song. Play skillfully. Shout for joy.

See, the repenting king of Psalm 32 we saw last week has now become the rejoicing king of Psalm 33. Notice how neatly one psalm flows into the next. Look at the last verse of Psalm 32.

[3 : 2 6] Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous. Sing all you who are upright in heart. And then the first verse of Psalm 33. Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous.

It is fitting for the upright to praise him. David picks up almost word for word where he left us last week, enjoying the Lord's goodness.

Shout for joy. Sing a new song. Play stringed instruments. Let our joy translate into praise, he says. But how can we praise when our joy is dried up?

Well, in this psalm, the king gives us two reasons to rejoice. And because there are reasons that don't change, they are sources of constant joy for us to draw from in our walk with the Lord.

And the first reason to rejoice that David gives us is that God's word never fails. His word never fails. Sing, play, shout for joy, says David.

[4 : 34] For, for the word of the Lord is right and true. That little word for in verse four tells us David is giving us a reason to do those things that he's listed.

And his first line of reason is the dependability of God's word. For the word of the Lord is right and true.

He's faithful in all he does. God's word never fails because God is faithful always to do what he has said he will do. See how David's claim about the word of God rests on the character of God?

In verse five, the Lord loves righteousness and justice. If God only loves what is right, his righteousness, and he only loves doing what is right, that is his justice, then all that he says must be right and true.

Now, it's fine to say that, isn't it? But how do we know that? What evidence is there that we can take God at his word? Perhaps you're here this evening finding out about Christianity.

[5 : 52] And the idea of taking God's word seriously, of reading a book written thousands of years ago, and learning how to live by it seems a bit bizarre.

Why shape our lives around God's ancient word? Or perhaps you are a Christian, and sometimes you struggle to see how the whole Bible, all of God's word, can be trusted.

And trusted, indeed, to help us live today. Where is the evidence for that? Well, David writes, verse five, the earth is full of his unfailing love.

You want to know how we can trust God's word, says David? Well, where to begin? Reading the news, it certainly doesn't look like the earth is full of God's unfailing love, does it?

But I wonder, have we grown too short-sighted to see past the drama onto the set on which that drama is played out?

[6 : 57] See, the wonder of the cosmos, writes David, verse six, By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made, the starry host by the breath of his mouth.

The earth is full of his unfailing love. Because, says David, the whole thing was created by his unfailing word. The fact that there is such a thing as an earth, that we are living on a planet circling a star, and surrounded on every side by thousands and millions of stars.

And that things happen on this earth. That there is such a thing as news, and that we are here to read it. Well, all that tells us that God's word has not failed.

That in love, he keeps the world turning each and every day. The world turns on his promise from Genesis chapter eight.

While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. He's kept that promise today, hasn't he?

[8 : 07] As we saw earlier, the author of Hebrews writes about Jesus. He upholds the universe by the word of his power. God's word is dependable.

He spoke and it was. He promises and it is. Creation itself tells us how powerful and dependable God's word is.

Now, pulling into a wee lay-by for a minute, pressing pause. If we struggle with this idea that God created everything with his word, then we are going to struggle with this, aren't we?

If it's true, this psalm is poetry. But if verse six is not depicting something that really happened, then the whole psalm falls apart.

It's true, David has used artistic license when he writes about God making the starry host by the breath of his mouth. God doesn't have lungs. He doesn't have a mouth.

- [9 : 09] He didn't breathe out the stars like we breathe out mist on a cold day. But he did speak a word. And there were stars.
- Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And it was so. We're never told how that happened.
- What chemical processes or physical forces were involved. How long ago it happened or even how long it took. But what the Bible doesn't let us get away from is that whatever happened for the stars to exist, God did it.
- And whatever he did, he did it with his word. Before he spoke, no stars. Then he spoke. And there were stars.
- In Genesis chapter one, we read God said ten times. God said, God said. And each time, it was so. It was so.
- [10 : 16] So David's poetry here doesn't turn creation into a work of fiction. No, he takes what God did and he says it in a beautiful way.
- And we're designed to captivate our hearts. That's what poetry is really for, isn't it? Bringing the truth of the matter home to us in a new way.
- So pressing play again, pulling back onto the main road. God's word brought everything into being. And since that is true, we can look around and see that his word is faithful and unfailing because creation is still going.
- Perhaps someone's told you at some point in your life, I'm only going to say this once. It's so weighty. Whatever it is, it's expected not to need ever repeating. Once it's been said, it stands for good.
- Well, when God created the heavens and the earth and all that fills them, He only had to say it once. Such is the power and the dependability of his word.
- [11 : 27] He spoke and it came to be. He commanded and it stood firm. And as if to hint at where all this is going, verse 7 highlights specifically his mastery over the waters.
- Now, you and I can have a nice time at the beach. And when you miss the beach, you can even listen to the sound of crashing waves and ocean noises from the comfort of your own home.
- Some people find that relaxing. Well, to David, those soundtracks would be torture. In fact, the day at the beach would be a nightmare because the sea, the deep in the Bible, often stands for the forces of chaos.
- Listen to Psalm 89, verse 9. You rule over the surging sea. When its waves mount up, you still them. Psalm 93.
- Three, mightier than the thunders of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea. The Lord on high is mighty. The untamable chaos of the sea with its churning waves comes in the Bible to be a symbol for the threatening anti-God forces in the world.
- [12 : 44] But what does God do with the sea? He gathers the waters of the sea into jars. He puts the deep into storehouses. He commands the sea, tames it, bottles it with a word.
- Let the waters be gathered together into one place and let dry land appear. And it was so. And it remains so. So dependable is his word.
- He keeps the chaos in check with a word. The earth is full of his unfailing love because his word never fails.
- And all of this is designed to focus our hope on his word. Notice that call to worship in verse 8. Let all the earth fear the Lord.
- Let all the people of the world revere him. The whole world turns on his promises. So let the whole world depend on his word completely. Let the whole world worship the one who speaks light and life into being.

[13 : 50] Now what does that mean for us this evening ourselves? Well, I hope for non-Christians is that they would listen to God's word.

And one of the first things we teach new Christians is to learn from God's word. But however long we have listened and learned from God's word, we never ever stop learning to lean on God's word.

How often do we stop short of leaning all our weight on his promises? Promises to guide and protect, to provide and sustain and deliver, to save.

How firm are his promises? How heavily can we lean on them? Or verses 10 and 11, the pivotal verses in this psalm.

The Lord foils the plans of the nations. He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever. The purposes of his heart.

[14 : 56] Through all generations, his plans don't fail. His promises can't be broken. His word never stops short of being delivered. More than that, every other plan and promise and purpose depends on him.

He calls the shots. So it's his word where we hang all our hopes. All our fears. The one who spoke the world into being has said that one day the curtain will fall.

And he will come himself and do away with all the chaos and evil and sin and save and gather everyone who has ever trusted in him to be with him forever.

Perhaps that's the first time you're hearing that plan. Maybe it's the hundredth time or the thousandth time. The question for all of us is, does your life depend on that plan?

When you see the waves crashing? When you see the waves crashing? And the chaos threatening? The nations raging? Sin winning?

[16 : 05] The devil prowling? The world spinning out of control? The devil? The devil? Is your one hope that his word is true? Is your only answer God said?

And so it must be. His word gives us deep, deep security. And so his word can give us real, real joy, says David.

Because in a world full of sadness and sin, God's righteous and just plans and promises are unchanging and dependable.

His word never fails. And so if our hope is in his word, then that is a constant source of joy for us, even when things are not how we know they should be just yet.

And the second reason, then, that David gives us to rejoice is that God's salvation is sure. His salvation is sure. The Lord foils the plans of the nations.

[17 : 16] He thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever. The purposes of his heart through all generations. Therefore, verse 12, blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.

The people he chose for his inheritance. The nation that has this God ruling for them. His word over their lives and in their hearts. Well, there is a nation that is truly blessed.

Now, as much as we would love to say this of our nation, and as many times as it has been said of our nation and other nations, the nation that David has in mind is not, in fact, 21st century Scotland or the USA or any number of other nation states throughout history.

Because while it's generally true that nations do well when they honor the Lord and they suffer when they dishonor him, well, the specific nation that David is thinking of is, verse 12, the people he chose for his inheritance.

In the past, God chose one family out of all the families on the earth to bring blessing to every family, the nation of Israel. Not the modern nation state, but the family of people descended from Abraham.

[18 : 36] And the Bible never, ever draws a line from that family to modern nation states. Rather, it does draw a line from Abraham to those of faith who are the sons of Abraham, says Paul in Galatians 3.

Those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. So whose God is the Lord today? Well, it's those who have faith in God through Jesus Christ to save us.

As David puts it in verse 18, the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love. Those who trust the Lord then are truly blessed.

And that's where David zooms in, in the second part of the psalm, is our hope and our trust in the one who alone can give us true security and joy.

Verse 13, David gives us a heaven's eye view. And then verse 15 lets us see with God's x-ray vision. From heaven, the Lord looks down and sees all mankind.

[19 : 49] From his dwelling place, he watches all who live on earth. He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. So we're dealing here, aren't we, at the level of the heart?

And not what we do as such, but what we hope and trust in. Even what we fear. And even at that level, even at those depths, God sees us truly.

That is where he deals. And remember, David's concern throughout this psalm is our joy. And he traces the root of that joy, not simply down to our habits and interests, but down, down, down to our basic, most basic hopes and fears.

What's in our hearts? It's there, he says, that we are either cultivating joy or suffocating it. Because at heart, we all depend on something for our lives.

And that something will give us either security and life, or it will give us nothing. See, what were some of the things that people hoped and trusted in back then?

[21 : 00] Well, David lists a few in verse 16. The size of an army, great strength, horses. He's talking there about military strength. Now, humanly speaking, when David was writing, that was a huge deal.

If you were a king and you didn't have an army, well, you wouldn't be a king for long. Wars back then were not fought by drones. They were fought by warriors that had to be strong and guys on horses.

So you needed a lot of horses. So a nation's hope for survival would normally have rested on its military power. That's how great a hope it was.

And that hope lives on, doesn't it? Kim hit the headlines again this week, vowing to build North Korea, quote, unquote, an invincible military, as he had his pictures taken in front of his new rockets.

But guided missiles are a misguided hope, says David. Where does that dependence on human strength ultimately get ye?

[22 : 09] Verse 16. No king is saved by the size of his army. No warrior escapes by his great strength.

The horse is a vain hope for deliverance. Despite all its strength, it cannot save. It cannot save. It's a false hope.

Because of those pivotal verses again, 10 and 11. Who's in control? Who saves? Who delivers? The Lord foils the plans of the nations.

But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever. He brings the plans and purposes of nations to nothing. Only his plans, his purposes will come to pass.

And so our only hope for rescue, for security, life, joy, is in him. What good news that is for our brothers and sisters in North Korea.

[23 : 08] And what good news that is for us. But what a challenge to you. I wonder what is it that we are tempted to maybe rest our hope in that is not the Lord.

What are the earthly strongholds that we build for ourselves? Probably it's not an army. Maybe it's the bank account.

Maybe the unpredictability of the past year has tempted some of us to hope in our savings. Or financial security with its promise that having enough money in the bank can see us through any problem that might arise.

Or further back than that, even perhaps we might depend on our work. Keeping a good job. Or putting in the right number of hours.

Or putting out the right quality of work. That might be something we're tempted to rest our hope in. With its promise to provide everything that we need. Or even further back than that.

[24 : 14] Perhaps we're tempted to trust in our preparations. Getting a good degree. Gaining skills. Right standing. Good connections and networks to make it in the world of work.

Maybe that is our hope this evening. I had a conversation with a guy once. He managed to hit nearly all three in one. If I don't work this hard, he said, I won't get a good degree.

Which means I won't get the job I want. Which means I won't ever be happy in life. The irony was, all the while, he was working himself into deeper and deeper states of anxiety.

And eventually he just burnt out. His hopes were crushing him. Because he had rested his hopes and his whole life on his own strength and intellect to save him.

Now don't get me wrong. Human work and wisdom and wealth. None of these things are bad things in themselves. But when our hearts begin to lean too heavily on these finite things to give us what they were never designed to give.

[25 : 25] Well, they will all eventually give way. And let us fall into deep insecurity and fear. The very opposite of joy and hope. Because those circumstances of our lives don't have the power to deliver us or keep us safe.

Or give us the joy that we long for. Where then does our only real security lie? Well, verse 18 tells us, The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him.

On those whose hope is his unfailing love. To deliver them from death. And keep them alive in famine. It's not our plans.

Our promises or purposes that deliver. It's his promises that save. He gives us lasting security in his perfect will. His word is so firm.

And so his promise to save is secure. And so we see this true joy that David calls us to. Comes from having our hope not in this world.

[26 : 34] But in the Lord and in his word. Perhaps you do trust and hope in the Lord and his word this evening. But joy still feels very far away.

Well, if that's you, let me encourage you not to stop pursuing joy. Not to give up cultivating joy. Joy in God's word isn't so much an on-off switch.

That we can flick on instantly. It's something that comes much more slowly. But it runs so much more deeply. Comes with time.

Time spent meditating on God's word. On his goodness. On his faithfulness. His rescue. Time spent resting on his precious and very great promises.

Time spent learning to live. And to trust in every word that comes from the mouth of God. Some of us at different points in our lives need help with that steady growing of joy.

[27 : 44] Again, if that's you, don't be afraid to ask. Of course, ask the Lord. But ask a friend. Someone that you trust to pray for you.

To help you work through it. To help you grow in joy. It might be slow. But we know that it's a gift that the Lord loves to give. Because it's part of the fruit of his spirit.

And if his spirit lives in us. Then he will grow us in joy. We wait in hope for the Lord. For he is our help and our shield.

In him our hearts rejoice. For we trust in his holy name. His word never fails. And his salvation is secure.

So let us trust in him. And hope in him. And have joy in him. Let's pray together. God our Father.

[28 : 51] We thank you that your promises are true this evening. Because you are faithful. What you have said you will not take back. Nor can the circumstances of our lives.

Our Heavenly Father. Or disrupt or interfere with. Or interrupt your plans. Your purposes. We thank you our Father for the comfort that is.

When life is not working the way that we would hope. We thank you that when things are tough. Your promises are still true. That you continue to provide.

And sustain. That you continue to save and deliver. And our Father we thank you that you do not leave us to trust these promises on our own.

That you have made us brothers and sisters in the Lord. Knit us together as a family. A church. And so we pray by your spirit.

[29 : 53] You would please grow us in joy. And you would please help us to lean ever more fully on your word. Help us to trust one another.

To share our joy. To grieve with those who grieve. And to rejoice with those who rejoice. Father we pray that you would continue to make us into a family.

Of brothers and sisters that rejoices in ye. In any and every circumstance. For you are enough for us. We pray and we thank you for these things in Jesus name.

Amen. I have justice. Amen.