

Sermon- The World Wants What You Have

Scripture: Luke 2: 8-20

Sunday, December 16, 2018

Christmas, the favorite time of year for most people. Just listen to one of the songs that everyone knows, **“It’s the most wonderful time of the year, with kids jingle bellings and everyone telling you, be of good cheer, it’s the most wonderful time ...** you get the picture. Consider these numbers. You might be aware that consumer spending is the largest portion of the US GDP. Well, what you may not know is that 1/6th of the US consumer spending happens at Christmas. But here is a Christmas fact that surprised me even more. It turns out if you were look at the whole world, the biggest economic stimulus across the globe, also happens to be the Christmas season. In the US, some retailers have been known to play Christmas music even in the summer. Why? Because it makes people spend more. Why? Because just listening to Christmas music makes people feel good. And it brings those associations of gifts to your mind and you end up spending more. But I want to mention a word about Christmas music. The prerequisite for a song being considered Christmas music is not that the lyrics should be about the birth of Christ. For a song to be considered Christmas music, it should have the feel of the Christmas season. And it turns out that there is a secret sauce that creates the feel of Christmas season. There is a music researcher called Adam Ragusea who studied the musical arrangements of the most popular Christmas song of all time, White Christmas sung by Bing Cosby, A Christmas Gift for You by Phil Spector and All I want for Christmas is You by Mariah Carey. And what Adam Ragusea found is that there is an interesting chord progression in all of these songs. It is a sequence that goes from a major tonic chords like C Major and F Major into a transition to a D minor 7 flat 5. I think that is what it is called. And to describe the feel of this transition in words, Ragusea says it is like the music is melting into this warm, spicy deliciousness. Now the technicalities of

music lie totally outside my area of expertise but I am really drawn to the concepts that distill out in any field. And the concept here is this. The Christmas season has a certain feel and association in the human mind. If you can recreate this feel in music, you have a Christmas hit. And the feel that says Christmas is a warm, spicy, deliciousness. Now remember everything that I have been describing to you is about secular Christmas. And what I am saying is that, secular people who by any other measure want little to do with Christ, will quite happily decorate their homes with Christmas trees, go to Christmas parties, give gifts to their kids and listen to that warm, spicy delicious Christmas music. All that is on one side of December. On the other side are the church people. The insiders. And when the insiders to Christmas look at all this Christmas celebration outside the church, they usually have one of two reactions. They say, look at those people out there, there are taking the Christ out of Christmas. Or they will say, those people are making Christmas too commercialized. Now hear me carefully. I am not saying that those statements are not factually correct. They do have some truth to them. But here is the deal. Secular people don't care what we think about how they celebrate the Christmas season. They will declare that nobody is going to steal their Christmases and with great satisfaction plant their kids on the Mall Santa's knee and dream of white Christmases and sleigh bells and mistletoe. There is something about Christmas fever that it has become an irresistible phenomenon to both secular people and even people from other religions.

But before we figure out what to do about this outside desire to get into Christmas, lets go inside the real Christmas story and take a look at what made this celebration so special in the first place. There are many places we can enter into the Christmas story, but I have chosen to enter through the announcement of Christ's birth to the shepherds. It happened in this way. One night when the shepherds were out in their fields watching their flocks by night, which actually meant in the shepherding world that

the ewe's were ready to give birth, suddenly, an angel from heaven appeared to them and said,

Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a ^[d]manger. So the angel was telling them that there was a very special birth had taken place. A very special lamp actually. This baby was both Lord and Savior to them and the whole world. The angel then told them that they would be given a sign that they could go personally verify. And as if that message, messenger and the timing of it all was not spectacular enough, that one angel was joined by a whole multitude of angels singing, "Glory to God in the Highest, and Peace and Goodwill towards men". And then they all disappeared. The Shepherds of course had to go find this baby. And they did. And when they did, they were overjoyed. They went back praising God for enabling them to see and hear everything just as the angels had told them, it would be.

This my friends was the very first Christmas. Now do you hear a theme through the different elements of this story. The angels were full of joy as they proclaimed the message. The message was so joyous. And that joy infected the shepherds and the whole community must have been light up with joy that first Christmas. Now admittedly, the second Christmas would not have been that joyful with Herod's baby killing spree and the baby Jesus going under cover. Also there are no records of any joyous birthday celebrations for the rest of Jesus' earthly life. But after he died and rose and sent his Holy Spirit to earth, things started to change. People's lives started getting transformed. They were becoming Born Again. And in that process a new joy was introduced into the human experience. What joy am I talking about? Well in John 15:11, Jesus Christ describes it like this, *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.* Jesus Christ told his disciples some really interesting things about joy in this passage. Firstly, Jesus is saying that he carries around

a deep well full of joy. Heb 12:2 puts it this way, “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross”. In other words, Jesus derived joy from doing his Father’s will. And the challenges of it were all insignificant compared to the joy Jesus had in obedience to his heavenly father. Secondly, in John 15:11 he is saying that he wants his disciples to know and experience his joy that he knows and has. Because when they know this joy, that will be a full and complete joy. It will be a permanent joy. A joy that cannot be taken away from you. This joy is different from the good feelings you can get from pleasure or even happiness. Because pleasure and happiness can give you a lot of momentary satisfaction, it is like a teaser that leaves you hungry for the real thing. But when Jesus Christ gives his joy, it is a deep, full and satisfying joy that is complete and everlasting. CS Lewis wrote about this kind of joy in a book titled *Surprised by Joy*. In this book CS Lewis essentially is a description of his long and slow journey to giving his life to Jesus Christ. But what will surprise the reader is that what CS Lewis was not looking for Jesus Christ initially. He was looking for a deep joy. But through that long journey that took him through the study of a lot of literature and Norse mythologies, in the end he was drawn to Jesus Christ and comes to realizing that Jesus Christ is the son of God. In the moment of that discovery he stops seeking joy and focuses on Jesus Christ. And the moment his focus was on Jesus Christ, that was when he truly experiences the fullness of joy that he was seeking when he began his journey. See friends, when you know Christ, he gives us the joy that he has. And what joy does Christ have? In John 8:29 Christ says, *“for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”* Christ’s joy comes from having this deep relationship with his heavenly Father and always doing the things that give His heavenly Father joy. And when His Father has joy, then he has joy. This is what Phil 4:4 is talking about when it says, “Rejoice in the Lord and again I say rejoice”. So the idea is this friends. When you have a deep relationship with Jesus Christ, then you do the things that please Him. And when your Heavenly Father rejoices over you, that will give you a joy that cannot compare with anything the world can give. Neither can the

world take that kind of joy away from you. This is the joy that the angels were talking about, that first Christmas. The Good News of great joy in this dark and difficult world is this, that a Savior has been born. And that Savior will give you the ability to relate to and please the God who made the whole universe. It is the highest kind of joy. It is the joy that Christ himself has. It is the joy you can have because the Savior was born on Christmas.

That leaves us with this problem. What do we do about those outside who see the external signs of Christmas joy and want so desperately to replicate it for themselves. Well, I would say this friends, don't dis the way people who don't know Christ celebrate Christmas. Don't dis, empathize. After all they are only seeking that special joy that CS Lewis was seeking all his life. And CS Lewis was seeking it because human beings were designed to experience this level of joy. Joy is a big deal for God. If it were not so prophet Isaiah would not be saying, *Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people And will have compassion on His afflicted.* God wants his whole creation to rejoice. They just don't know the secret to finding true joy. You don't get joy by seeking pleasure. You don't get joy by seeking joy. You get joy by hanging out with the highest being who actually knows joy. Jesus Christ.

So this Christmas don't be anybody's Grinch. Let them have their Christmas. But feel free to share the joy you have from hanging out with Jesus. When they see the real thing, they will want it too. That's the joy the angels were talking about. They will see that it is even greater than the joy of a white Christmas. Go tell that to whoever needs to hear it. Go share some joy this season. Let us pray.