

Rejoice

Christmas Day – 12/25/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Psalm 98:1-9 Pastor Keith Besel

[A Literal translation from the original Hebrew]

v.1 **“Sing to Yahweh a new song, for He has doing incomprehensible things!”**

v.4 **“Shout for joy to Yahweh, all the earth; break forth and sing with joy and make music!”**

Introduction

- ✘ The original Hebrew grammar of these verses are imperatives; that is commands from God, “Sing to Yahweh...”; “Shout for joy to Yahweh...break forth...sing...and make music!”
 - ➔ Commands directly from God in His Word, but I can already hear it loud and clear: “Nobody Pastor, and I mean nobody, had better tell me to rejoice.”
 - ➔ Some of us just don’t want to have fun and make merry at this Christmas season that starts today.
- ✘ Now, I know that this truth comes as a surprise; as a major shock to the holly-jolly system of the rest of you. But you can’t change it. It’s just a fact of life, that there are some people who simply relate more to the Grinch and Ebenezer Scrooge than they do to Tiny Tim and Cindy Lou Who.
 - ➔ And every now and then, if you catch one of them in just the right mood at the wrong time, you might even hear a pastor or two say, “Bah, humbug!”
- ✘ But all of us know from Bible passages like this one here in Psalm 98 what God expects, and truthfully what He desires to hear and see from His people; that Jesus is our deep down-to-the-soul Christmas joy!

I. For Some, It’s Hard to Rejoice at Christmas.

- ✘ But just because we know what God wants, expects and desires from us, doesn’t mean that’s what He’s always going to see, right? Let’s be honest: Christmas is hard work!
 - ➔ It takes planning and shopping and decorating and more. For introverts, all of that makes this the most tiring, draining and demanding time of year. Oh, and having to put on a happy face and pretend to be glad when you’ve been regifted – as a serious present – the same white elephant you tried to dump last year; or thanking Aunt Gertie for the fudge that your doctors says you can’t even look at or walk past without spiking your blood sugar and putting you at risk of a diabetic attack; these are the kinds of things that make Christmas a season that many of us can’t wait to go away.
- ✘ Now folks, there’s no need for us to take all of that Christmas crankiness too seriously, because after all everyone likes and needs a good Christmas rant now and then, just to blow off some steam, right?
 - ➔ But rejoicing at Christmastime every year – it’s just difficult for some people. It’s hard to “be happy” when you’re not. And when someone tries to force the issue by saying things like, “Come on, smile. It’s Christmas!” – that only makes it worse – piling on the guilt.
 - ➔ If you’ve ever dealt with depression or anxiety or the loss of a loved one at Christmastime, understand folks; it is genuinely hard to “rejoice” when everyone around you seems so perfectly happy.
- ✘ And if you are one of these people, it is important for you to understand the other side as well. Your family and friends – they really are trying to help. They truly want you to be happy,

because they love and care about you. I mean you can't really blame them for wanting you to experience the joys of Christmas cheer and goodwill.

II. A Real Reason to Rejoice.

✘ So let's explore this reality that we face for just a bit. First things first: Is there any legitimate reason for us to be happy today? Absolutely yes! As Christians, we know that Jesus is our Christmas joy. Yet, for some believers that still seems to be just a little bit too cliché.

→ So what is there in Christ's coming at Christmas that we can grab on to and find as a real reason to rejoice? With all the hardship in this earthly life, both the things that might have made this an especially difficult year; plus the likely scenario that the coming year has a very good chance of struggles ahead, we are all I'm sure, in need of some positive human contact, connection, and an honest reason to rejoice.

✘ So, let's get real! Jesus' coming as a human baby in the manger – it is the exact opposite of cliché! That's right, turn off your grinchy heart and show Scrooge out the door!

→ Though the marketing and retail gurus, as well as many within higher academia and a large majority of our culture today have tried to do so with Christmas, there is nothing fake, false, or plastic about rejoicing in Jesus' birth! Fake happiness and plastic smiles, right along with the human inventions of Santa and reindeer and mistletoe and unreasonable gift expectations and more have no real place in this celebration of Christ's birth.

→ Instead, the words of Psalm 98 – these are truly what Christmas is all about! Verse one, "Sing to Yahweh a new song, for He has done incomprehensible things! His right-hand and His holy arm have saved for Him."

→ The word that I translated there as "incomprehensible things" is "palah" (פָּלָה) in the original Hebrew. It most often refers to acts performed by God, designating either cosmic wonders or historical achievements on behalf of His people; that is things that are unusual; things humans cannot do. So when we humans become aware of these things, we're moved to astonishment. Because these acts of God are especially abnormal in character to us, they are impossible for us to fully explain or comprehend, yet we believe them to be absolutely real because they have been done by God. These truly are miracles that drive home the depth of God's care for the souls that He created and desires to be saved.

✘ So, as we consider what God has done in the earthly birth of His Son, the incomprehensible wonder of it all fits perfectly with the way that this Psalm describes God's actions. Verse two, "Yahweh has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations." Think of the angels appearing to the shepherds, declaring the birth of Jesus and singing out the *Gloria in Excelsis*; and consider the fact that Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians (1:30) that Christ is the very righteousness of God in human flesh.

→ Yes, in Jesus; in His birth for sure, but also in His ministry with all of His miracles – and even more in His suffering, death and resurrection to pay for and take away the sins of the world, the end of verse three is proven to be especially true, "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

✘ Our God really has done something incomprehensible; marvelous beyond words! The Creator of the entire universe; who is everywhere at all times and who fills all things has limited and humbled Himself to become a human being...to work salvation for all souls of all time! And that means His gift of salvation from sin is for me! It means His gift of salvation from sin is for you!

→ The ends of the earth have seen this saving work of God. Not one corner of this creation is beyond the reach of what God can, will, has, and does redeem by the shed blood and the

victorious resurrection of Jesus. So, if you are feeling like Scrooge or the Grinch; or if you're just plain hurting – lost or sick, addicted or ashamed – then make this the Christmas that you come closer and look into the manger of Bethlehem one more time. And see there in the hay dear friends, the tiny hands of God that were pierced and now bear the scars of His saving work for you! Gaze upon the infant feet and the tiny rib cage that were also pierced because He loved you before Himself.

→ It is a marvel indeed. No wonder people ask, “How could God do such a thing?”

✘ But you see that's the point: when you look at the baby lying in Mary's arms, you are looking into a mystery that is beyond what our human words can ever tell. The countless words of men and the astonishing songs of angel choirs cannot do any of it justice.

→ The very love of God is born there in a stall. The hope that all of mankind aches for is restored. God – yes God lies in the manger bed giving you His very self! There is no love greater; no mystery deeper than Jesus Christ born for you on this day.

III. Rejoicing Today is Genuine – Not Fake.

✘ So, what now? With this mystery of love and grace presented to you; even to the one or two of you grinchy old Scrooges, there really is only one proper response isn't there? Rejoice! “Sing to Yahweh a new song!” There's nothing fake, phony, or false about it. But instead genuine, honest, deep and real rejoicing; joy deep down in your bones because God loves you so much that He left His throne in heaven and took on human flesh to live with you; to die for you, and to rise again so that you will one day rise from death as well. All that is true in God's Word about Christmas is for you!

→ Yes, your joy and mine now is so deep and so real that verses 7-8 tell us that even the very elements of earth are responding with praise and worship. “Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together.”

✘ And why not? As our Gospel Reading in John 1:14 declares the Good News, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

→ You see, you don't have to pretend to be happy today. There's no need for fake tinsel or artificial good cheer, because yours and mine is a real joy; the joy that surpasses all of our understanding; joy because the Prophet, the Priest, the King is born! The promised Messiah has come, and His love is here now for you. Jesus is our Christmas joy!

Conclusion

✘ The last thing we want to do is force the music and now we have no desire to do so, right? Right? Verses 4-6, “Shout for joy to Yahweh, all the earth; break forth and sing with joy and make music! Sing praises to Yahweh with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, Yahweh!”

→ “Joy to the world! The Lord has come!” Dear Christians, let the joy come out...today and forever! Amen.