

Joy to the World

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Date: 25 December 2022

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

- [0 : 0 0] The scripture reading is from Revelations chapter 21 and 22. Starting in chapter 21 verse 1 we read, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.
- For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people.
- And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more.
- Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new.
- [1 : 2 8] Then in chapter 22 verse 1 we read, Then the angels showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city.
- Also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.
- The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.
- They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads, and night will be no more.
- They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.
- [2 : 3 9] And he said to me, These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.
- And behold, I am coming soon. This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Angeline. Well, once again, good morning.
- It's so great to be with you, and to celebrate Christmas together this morning. And especially welcome if it's your first time with us. If you're visiting us maybe from afar, or your first time in Watermark, a warm welcome to you.
- And a doubly special warm welcome to the children. It was so great having you singing up there. Thank you for singing. Children, that was really wonderful, and we're so glad that you're with us this morning.
- Now, for those that are maybe joining us for the first time, for the month of December, we as a church have been looking at these Christmas carols that we sing every year, and we hear playing of the speakers in the shopping centers, and on the streets.

[3 : 53] And we've been looking at these carols that we're so familiar with, but often we don't think a lot about. And we've been looking at the words to these carols, and the scriptures that have informed them and shaped them.

And so a few weeks ago, we looked at, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, this amazing song that speaks about the brokenness of our world, the problem of sin, and the longing for all human hearts, for healing, for redemption, for a Savior.

I love the words, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel. Well, not just Israel, all of us. Dispel the shadows of the night, and turn our darkness into light.

Describes, I think, the longing of every human heart, right? And we spoke about, Hark, the herald angels sing. This announcement of good news, of great joy. We spoke about, O Come, O Come, let us adore Him.

The call of men and women throughout the ages to make Christmas about Jesus, to fall on our knees, to join the wise men, the magi, and the shepherds, and to worship and adore Christ the King.

[5 : 03] And today, as our final Sunday of Advent, and our final Sunday of 2022, we're going to be looking at one more carol, this very famous carol, Joy to the World.

It's such a wonderfully joyful song. It captures, in many ways, the spirit of Christmas, the joy, and the hope, and the celebration. Do any children know how the song goes? Joy to the world, the Lord is come.

Yes, the case here is blocking her ears. That's what happens when I try and sing. Joy to the world, the Savior reigns. Let men their songs employ. And then you get this refrain, Let heaven and nature sing.

Let heaven and nature sing. Or repeat the sounding joy. Repeat the sounding joy. Such a song of celebration, and joy, and thanksgiving.

And yet, once again, similar to our hymn last week, sometimes, if we're honest, Christmas doesn't always feel that joyful, that celebratory.

[6 : 08] Oscar referenced it earlier. For some of us, Christmas is a difficult time. Remembering a loved one that has passed, maybe far away from family. Sometimes, if we're honest, all the joy and the celebration of Christmas can feel like a little bit of Christian hyperbole, a little bit of over-promise and under-deliver.

We talk about, the Savior's come. Joy to the world. But does Jesus' life and death and resurrection, does it really deliver on all the promises, especially the promises of the angels?

Good news of great joy for all people. Sometimes it can feel like, hey, maybe for everybody else, but except me. You know, every year we light the candles, right?

We light the candle of peace. Jesus has come to bring peace. And you think, peace? Where is peace in our world? You've got one nation declaring war on another nation.

You've got one tribe fighting against another tribe. Governments fighting against their people. Or even on a really micro level, within families, sometimes our world seems starved of peace.

[7 : 19] Where is the peace that Christ promised? Or we light the candle of joy. And we think, joy? Many of us live with this dark cloud of joylessness that permeates our lives.

Where is the joy that Jesus was supposed to bring? Or we light the candle of hope. And yet every year, December quickly rolls into January.

January. And we face another year of, maybe, hardship, difficulty, turmoil. The optimism of Christmas dissipates about as quickly as the wrapping paper on the gifts that we receive, right?

For those of you that are children, or youth, or yet, university, Christmas, joy, celebration. I hope you were really spoiled today. I hope your parents spoiled you rotten.

But let's be honest, school is coming again. January is coming again. Classes are coming again. Exams are coming again. And so sometimes Christmas can feel big on sentimentality, but a little short on concrete hope.

[8 : 26] In other words, how is Christmas with fluffy lambs and fairy lights and soft swaying music, and how is that going to help us as we go into 2023 and face another year of challenges and turmoil and difficulty?

Friends, for some people, maybe if we're honest, the Christmas shopping and the decorations and the food is a nice escape from the realities of life.

But when Christmas is over, life still happens, right? Well, today, I want us to think about Christmas and to take a step back. And today, I want us to see that Christmas is actually not just a historical event that happened 2,000 years ago.

the Christmas story is actually still being written. And the final chapters in the story of Christmas have not yet been fully told yet.

They're still coming. We're still in the midst of the story, and the story of good news of great joy is still being written and untold before our eyes. Today, I want us to see that Christmas, that Christ coming 2,000 years ago, His life, His death, His resurrection, was the beginning of good news, of great joy, but it's not all that there is.

[9 : 41] And there's more to the story and the announcement that the angels proclaimed on that day. In other words, today, I want us to see that Christmas calls us to a living faith and a living hope in the midst of a broken and a difficult and a tumultuous world because the Christmas story has not yet finished being written.

Okay? Christmas calls us to a living hope and a living faith in the midst of a broken and difficult world because the story of Christmas has not yet finished being written.

The reason is this. At Christmas, we celebrate Christ's first coming, His advent. But Christmas also anticipates and promises Christ's second coming.

Look at the final verse that Angie read to us today in Revelation 22. Children, I think you've got in your packs something to write. Look at how this, you need to tell me, how does this verse end?

Jesus says this, Behold, I am, what does it say? Coming soon. Do you know in the final chapter, Jesus says that three times?

[10 : 54] Verse 7, Behold, I'm coming soon. Verse 12, Behold, I'm coming soon. And the second last verse of the entire Bible, chapter 22, verse 20, Jesus says, Surely, I am coming soon.

Christmas doesn't only celebrate Christ's first coming, it anticipates and looks forward to the day when Christ will come again. Friends, the story of Christmas is really the story of how Jesus entered into our broken world, our painful world, to rescue and heal and redeem humanity, but to bring us to a world of wonder and grace.

And the brokenness and the pain and the tears of our world have an expiry date on them. But there is a world coming that Jesus is coming to initiate or inaugurate or bring about a world in which truth and joy and peace and the things we celebrate have no expiry date.

How many of us have had Christmas parties in the last month, right? How many of us are tired of Christmas parties? Okay? We've all had office parties and CG parties and neighborhood parties and many Christmas parties.

And what do we all play at Christmas parties? Secret Santa. Okay? And so everyone's got to buy a gift and you've got to either put it in the middle or maybe at your office you take someone's name out of the hat and you've got to buy a gift for somebody.

[12 : 16] Okay? And so what do we do? We all go online and we order something and then invariably the post is full and it's slow and your gift doesn't come in time for the Christmas party.

And so what do you do? You print a picture of your gift, right? And you give it here's your coffee mug it's on the way, right? Or here's your book it's coming.

Friends, every element of our Christmas celebration is like giving somebody a printed picture of the internet promising the real deal that's still to come.

The very best elements of Christmas are like a picture that's been printed anticipating the reality that is still to come. And so this is what this Christmas carol points us to.

It calls us to a living faith in a broken world because the final chapters of Christmas have not yet been written. And so let's look at this passage that Angie read to us this morning and let's see how the Christmas story wraps up.

[13 : 14] Revelation 21 and 22 describes the final chapters of the Christmas story. Because it describes the world that Christ has prepared for us. And one of the things we see, we should have it on the screen, one of the things we find, the world to come, the world that Christ is going to bring about is not a world of clouds and angels playing harps on the clouds.

It's described as a city. A city. And that means it's a real physical world with real physical bodies for those that are redeemed. It's a world in which there's life and activity and productivity and real relationships.

It's going to be a real physical world that we get to enjoy and celebrate. It's a world in which, as our song said, the Savior reigns with Christ the King. And He reigns in truth and grace.

And that's an amazing thing. Picture a world, imagine living in a city in which every relationship, every conversation, every aspect of the world is baptized or flooded with truthfulness and gracefulness.

Where every conversation you have, you never have to second guess, never have to doubt, never have to wonder what somebody's real motives are, real intentions behind their words.

[14 : 32] A world permeated by truthfulness, a world permeated by gracefulness and kindness. Jesus is bringing a real physical world in which the Savior reigns but He reigns in truth and grace.

A world in which He not only reigns righteously but the effects of His reign are felt throughout every corner of the world where every aspect is put right according to the way that God originally designed it.

Here is going to be a world in which God and humanity are so combined, are so united that they're described like a marriage, the two becoming one. Where we see God face to face, we're no longer distant, there's no barrier between us.

I didn't actually think about it earlier but in Angie's reading as she read it, I thought about it in chapter 22, it says, we will see His face. We will see His face.

I don't know if you've ever been on a work trip or you've been away and separated from your family, your loved ones, maybe your wife, your kids, or your parents and so you long for Him.

[15 : 35] You want to be with your family. Maybe you had to go on a work trip and you're away for your child's birthday and you just think, oh, I wish I could be with them today and there's that longing or maybe you live in Hong Kong and your family lives somewhere else and you wish at a time like Christmas you could be with your family.

There's a day coming when that separation, that feeling of homesickness will be utterly gone because we'll be truly at home, face to face with God. I don't know if you've ever been on a way on holiday and you try and phone your family.

These days we FaceTime or you WhatsApp call or you Zoom call and it's nice but it's not quite the same. But sometimes you have those times when the connection is really bad and there's long silences and then you both try and speak and you speak over each other and the conversation is just a nightmare.

Do you know what I'm talking about? I hate those calls. My family lives in Africa and the signal is not always very good and the electricity is always off and the power is down and we have those calls and it's more frustrating than rewarding.

And so sometimes can I confess sometimes I just take the phone and I just kill it. I just can't handle it. I'm so frustrated by this call. It's such hard work. If we're honest sometimes even our relationship with God can be a bit like that.

[16 : 56] It feels like the connection is bad and there's long silences and then it feels like you don't know what he's saying and he certainly doesn't sound like he's hearing what you're saying and it feels like the connection is bad.

Friends, there's coming a day Jesus says in the new world we will see him face to face. We will be with God and he will be with us in the same room. No more lost connection.

No more brokenness. We will be with him. Look at what else it says. It says in verse 4 it says he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

Death will be no more. There will be no more mourning. No more crying. No more pain anymore for the former things have passed away. Friends, when Christ comes again and brings about the world that is to be forever heaven is going to be a place where there will be no more sadness, no more despair, no more agony, no more anxiety inducing thoughts, no more panic attacks, no more brokenness where all of those things are going to dissipate and become non-existent entirely.

I don't know if you've ever woken up in the middle of the night from a bad nightmare and you sit upright in bed and your heart is beating and suddenly you realize it was just a dream and it kind of, your heart calms down, you realize it's not true.

[18 : 20] There is coming a world that Jesus is going to come back and bring and everything that is sad and everything that is broken and everything that causes despair and hardship and panic attacks is going to become untrue.

It's going to be like a distant memory from a distant world. Christmas promises that Christ is coming again and all those things will be put away. And conversely, Jesus tells us that the very best things in life, the most heart-wrenching stories of compassion and kindness and justice and mercy are a small glimpse, like an internet picture of the world that is to come.

Look what else he says here. He says, Behold, I am making all things new. I'm making all things new. I don't know if you've ever seen the movie Toy Story. Anyone like the movie Toy Story?

Children, do you like Toy Story? No, you don't like Toy Story. Okay. I know why you don't like it and I'm the same. I liked Toy Story up until the part where you meet the kid next door.

Do you remember do you remember Sid? The neighbor to Andy and Woody and Buzz Lightyear. Right. What does Sid do? He takes toys and he pulls them apart and he destroys them and then he puts them back together again but they're a mixed match of toys.

[19 : 36] Right. And they're kind of this broken thing. They kind of work but they don't really work. Okay. This is Sid's toys. Sometimes life in this broken world can feel a bit like that.

It can feel like life is broken and someone's trying to put it together again but it doesn't quite work. Sometimes relationships can feel like that. Right. They kind of work but they don't really work like they're meant to work.

Friends, soon, very soon, Jesus is coming again and Jesus says, I'm going to make all things new. He's not going to just kind of put us back together and sort of fix us and duct tape us together.

I had a friend once who said, if something's broken, duct tape it and if that doesn't work, you haven't put enough duct tape on it. Okay. So if you've got a broken boat, just duct tape it together and keep on going.

Sometimes life can feel a bit like that, like it's been duct taped together. Jesus is coming to make all things new. To put away the brokenness and the duct tape of our lives.

[20 : 39] Jesus is coming not just to kind of fix us and sort of put us together. He's come to make all things new. And what does that mean? Well, look at what our song said. At the end of the Christmas story, it says, there will be a place where there's no more sin or sorrow to be found.

Sin and sorrow are the two twin evils of our world. Two sources of pain because of our sinful hearts and the brokenness of the world in which we live. No more sin or sorrow will be found, nor thorns infest the ground.

Genesis 3 talks about one of the consequences of sin coming to the world. There's this multitude of sorrows. It's like the soil of our lives are infested by thorns and thistles.

And so our relationships and our work and even our hobbies and our families, it feels like even amongst the best things in life, thorns seem to somehow grow in the midst of it.

And yet, even back then in Genesis 3, God promised that there would be one, a man who would come, born of a woman, who would take upon himself the thorns and the brokenness of our world, who in a very literal sense would wear a crown of thorns, one who would take upon himself the thorns and the curse of the world so that those who trust in him, those who receive him as their king, would receive favor rather than affliction and grace and kindness rather than turmoil.

[22 : 04] Friends, this is what Christmas is about. Jesus, the Redeemer, has come to take upon himself the curse and the brokenness and the thorns of our world to come and bring us and deliver us from as far as curse is found, he will bring his blessings.

And that's an amazing line. It says, Revelation, Angie Redditor, says, no longer will anything be accursed. Well, in the words of our songs, he will make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.

Think about that. As far as the curse is found. You know what that means? It means in every sphere of life, in the farthest corners of our world, where brokenness and pain exist, in that day, Jesus will bring healing and redemption and resolution.

Friends, in our lives, where our identity feels broken and our self-worth feels broken, where we feel shame, where we feel guilt, we are relationship with ourself and our relationships with others, our relationship with God, even our relationship with creation, even the environment itself, are all tainted and affected by the curse.

And every aspect, every sphere of life, where brokenness has entered in, Christ is going to bring his healing, redeeming grace. He will bring his blessings far as the curse is found.

[23 : 27] There is not a square inch of the entire cosmos that has been affected by sin, that Christ won't bring his healing and redeeming grace. Even creation itself, the trees and the mountains, the forests and the environment will experience and prove his redeeming grace.

In the song, Joy to the World, that we're going to sing in a few minutes, it says, fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains will repeat the sounding joy. And Angie, you read about it in Revelation 22, it describes the trees and the rivers and their leaves and the healings that they bring.

and describes a place how 12 months of the year the trees produce fruit. I don't think that's literal. I think what it means is heaven's going to be a place where there's no winter, no barrenness, no death, no frost, never winter, summer all the time around.

It describes a place where there's never night, there's never any shadow of darkness in that place because light will permeate every aspect of creation. Scotty Smith says this, the valley of the shadow of death will soon become the playground of eternal life and joy.

And so friends, Christmas tells us that Jesus came born as a baby in a manger, but that manger was dismantled and converted into a cross upon which he would die and hang for the sins of the world.

[24 : 44] But even that cross is not the end of the story because that cross is one day going to become a throne from which the Savior will rule and reign in truth and grace over all of the new world.

Friends, Christmas calls us to live with living faith and living hope even in the midst of a broken and fractured world because the Christmas story is not yet finished being written.

Jesus came but he's coming again and he's going to make all things new and he's going to put right all that is wrong with the world. Jesus is coming again and so joy to the world, the Lord has come but oh boy, he's coming again.

He's coming again. Now, what does that mean? How should we respond? Well, let me give us two things very quickly. Firstly, our song that we're going to sing, Joy to the World, tells us.

It says, Let every heart prepare him room. Let earth receive her king. I don't know if any of you have been receiving guests this Christmas. Maybe you've had family coming from afar and so what do you do?

[25 : 45] You prepare their room, right? You make the bed, you write a little card on the bed, you put chocolates on the bed and you clear out the junk out of the cupboards and you make their room ready and prepare them room for your guests to come, right?

Friends, what does it look like for us to prepare him room in our hearts, to clear out the junk and to welcome heaven and earth's true king? What does it look like to fall on our knees and say, Christ, come and have your way in my life?

Friends, this Christmas, Christ is coming. Let every heart prepare him room. Let every heart receive heaven and earth's true king. But here's the second thing. At the end of Revelation 22 it says this, the spirit and the bride say, come and let the one who hears come.

Let the one who is thirsty come. Let he who desires take of the water of life without price. Jesus issues us an invitation. He says, I am coming but why don't you come first?

Come and receive the gift of life that I give. At the end of Matthew chapter 2 you know the story of the wise men? There's an amazing line where it says, and they went home a different way.

[26 : 55] Remember they went and they found Jesus and they anticipated going back to Jerusalem and telling Herod about the newborn king but they were told in a dream that Herod was a charlatan and so they went home a different way.

Friends, maybe you came to church with one attitude today. Maybe Jesus wants you to go home a different way. To go home a different person. To go home with new hope, with new joy in your heart because you've received heaven and earth true king.

Friends, Christ has come and He's coming again. Let's open our hearts and receive Him. Let's come and drink of His grace. Let's come and worship Him together. Friends, Christmas calls us to a living faith in the midst of a broken and fractured world because Christmas hasn't yet finished being written.

It anticipates Christ coming again. So let's open up our lives and open up our hearts and receive Him. Let's live with hope and faith this year. Joy and love knowing that Christ has come and He's coming again soon.

Let's pray together. Father God, thank you for every one of us here today. For the children, for the elderly, for those that are just beginning their lives and those that are in the second half of their lives.

[28 : 04] For those that are seekers and those that are worshippers. God, for those that have come from afar and those that call Hong Kong home. God, we thank you for every gift of grace this morning. Lord, we thank you for Christmas and I pray that as we make our way into 2023, God, we will live with living faith and living hope because you, Christ, on the throne, you rule and you reign and you come again to make all things new.

Jesus, thank you for the promise of Christmas, the hope, the joy, the celebration of Christmas. We praise you and we love you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.