

# When Christmas Lets You Down - Joy

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you don't know me, my name is Niels. I'm part of the staff team. It's my joy to bring you God's Word this morning. Yeah, it's a really wonderful time. I mean, we know it's December, right? It's a little bit colder.

I feel slightly less uncomfortable wearing long trousers. It's very nice, right? The air con we can turn off. No, it is nearly Christmas, and so we always have a, yeah, it's Advent.

We are going to think about Christmas and the great news of Jesus coming, yeah, basically every Sunday throughout December. And we're starting today with our, yeah, our new series.

And so why don't I pray before CK comes and brings us God's Word. Our Father, thank you for the coming of Jesus.

Thank you for the good news of great joy for all people. It's wonderful that in your love you sent him. We pray indeed for that. All people would come to know him, that many people who are lost, who are hopeless, would find joy in him.

[ 1 : 03 ] But that starts with us. Please, Father, today would you, for each one of us here, help us see the wonderful news of Jesus coming and give us great joy in that.

We pray that you would speak to each of our hearts this morning by your Spirit. Show us Jesus, show us his glory, that we would love him and rejoice in him. In Jesus' name, amen.

Great. Good morning, church, and happy Advent. Today we have a scripture speaking to us about where we can look to for true joy.

So let's turn to Ecclesiastes 2, verse 1. We read, I said in my heart, come now, I'll test you with pleasure, enjoy yourself.

But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, this is mad. And of pleasure, what use is it? I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine, my heart still guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold on fully till I might see what was good for the children of men to do under heaven during the few days of their life.

[ 2 : 22 ] I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female servants and had slaves who were born in my house.

I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces.

I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of men. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem.

Also, my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

[ 3 : 32 ] Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it. And behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Then in 1 John 1, verse 1, we read, That which was the beginning, which we had heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest, and we have seen it and testified to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard, and we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the word of God. Great. Thanks, CK. That's great.

Now, yeah, Christmas. I don't know if you're looking forward to Christmas. It depends a little bit on your stage of life and family situation and those kind of things. But I think most of us are looking forward to it, right?

[ 5 : 02 ] Even if it's a time off. But actually, the main reason, I think for most of us, is that it's about joy, right? As you've heard in the reading, Christmas is about joy. I mean, what do people wish each other?

A Merry Christmas. And Merry, it's an old English word, but it means, well, joyful, right? Have a happy Christmas. And then you go, I mean, that's pretty common. All kinds of other languages.

Maybe you're French, and it's a Joyeux Noël. And other, you know, I've looked at various languages. You know, it's always a Merry Happy Christmas because that's what we want.

I mean, traditionally, right, we sing joy to the world. God rest ye merry gentlemen. Good tidings of comfort and joy. Even the secular Christmas, right?

Have a jolly, holly Christmas. And have yourself a merry little Christmas. It is a feast of joy. And if we're honest, isn't that what we actually want?

[ 5 : 57 ] We want joy, right? One thing that we have as humans, I guess my first point, we have a desire for joy. I mean, what do we want in life? We want to be happy, right?

We want to be fulfilled. We want to be satisfied. We want to be joyful. That's what we all want. I mean, you want, what kind of job do you want? I hope you want a job that you enjoy, right?

No one wants a job that they don't enjoy. What kind of marriage do you want to have? What kind of family do you want to have? Well, a family that brings you joy, right? Now, sometimes people, they are in situations where they're less joyful.

Maybe you're working in a very brutal, demanding job. But ultimately, it's still for joy, right? Because you will earn money that you can spend and have a good life.

Or maybe you can provide for your family and they can have joy, right? Ultimately, it's for joy. You know, you sometimes see the monks and with their fasting and their beating themselves.

[ 6 : 52 ] They still do it for joy. They want to go to heaven and think, well, yeah, I want joy there. So let me do this, right? The person who tries to help others, who spends all his time serving the poor, actually, they get joy out of doing that.

I mean, no one wants to be miserable, right? No one wants to be angry. We all want to have joy. It's like it's hardwired into us, right? We need joy. We seek joy.

And when we don't have it, we feel it. And when we do have it, we, yeah, we feel good. We notice it. We want joy. And also we want joy, I guess, it has to come from somewhere, right?

None of us, we just have joy automatically within ourselves. It comes from something. Maybe it comes from your job. Maybe it comes from your family. Maybe it comes from the things you do.

We need a source of joy. And what is that? Well, no wonder we're looking forward to Christmas because Christmas, it does promise joy, doesn't it? You go to the shops and everything looks so happy and colorful and all the wonderful things, right?

[ 8 : 01 ] As soon as things, as soon as, what is it, Halloween here, that's over, the Christmas decorations come up in the shops. Buy these presents. Make your loved ones happy. Come and celebrate. Buy these, you know, buy all these wonderful foods.

And they are great things, right? I mean, most of us, we know that they do provide joy. Presence, that can be a wonderful thing. I mean, sometimes people just buy you socks.

But, you know, some children, you know, you get an Xbox. Surely that makes them happy, right? Or some new headphones or whatever. They provide some joy.

It's a thoughtful gift, you know. And having a meal together, isn't that what we always do? So, every birthday, let's have a meal together, Chinese New Year, mid-autumn and Christmas, having a wonderful meal together, those kind of things.

It brings us joy, right? It brings us pleasure. But, as we thought about earlier, the big question before us is, does it last? Does it actually keep bringing us joy?

[ 9 : 02 ] Because when we look at the normal Christmas things, we see that it brings just, yeah, it's just failing joy. I mean, it's great joy during the meal. You have a wonderful time. But how long does that last?

You know, two days later, you go back to work. How much of the feeling is still there? It doesn't really last, right? How much do you still remember? And those presents, I mean, some kids, even before they go back to school, they're already bored of their present.

You know, maybe that, like before, that iPhone, it seems like for a bit. But how long does it really last? Maybe a year? Maybe a year. Think about the big picture. How about 10 years later?

100 years later? Right? Actually, it's only temporary. And even then, does it provide full joy? How much joy does it provide?

So maybe you have a new iPhone. And you go to work, and your work is terrible. Does it make up for it? Hey, I don't care about my terrible work, because I now have an iPhone. To be honest, it doesn't really, it's not really enough, right?

[ 10 : 03 ] Hey, I've got an iPhone, but yeah, my marriage is still breaking apart, you know? It's actually not right, and not enough joy. It doesn't last, and it's not enough.

Anyway, we know that. I mean, that's why we're looking forward to Christmas, right? Because the previous one didn't work. If the previous year was so good, why are we looking forward to it now? But how do we respond?

You know, certainly in the world, if Christmas doesn't satisfy, how do we solve that? And I think one big problem is that, for most of us, the message of the world is just try harder.

Spend more, right? Just buy a bigger present, and then your kids will be happy. Buy more food, better food, and then it will last, right? I don't know. When I was in the UK, I worked in public transport, so not like high earning, but I had this colleague, his wife and two kids, he would spend \$10,000 on Christmas presents.

He'd be saving up for a long time for Christmas. I just, why? Why so expensive? Well, because he really thought, you know, big presents, more happiness.

[ 11 : 13 ] So, I need to spend, spend, spend, spend. Well, I think that is what most of us think, right? If we just had more money, then we could have the Christmas that we need.

Well, I think that's why we had that first reading from the book of Ecclesiastes. I think this is such a helpful reading. Now, if you're new to the Bible, it sounded probably really strange.

This was written, well, presents himself as a king, the king of Jerusalem. That's why he gets slaves and multiple wives and that kind of thing, because he's a king from thousands of years ago.

But Ecclesiastes means the teacher, like a philosopher. He gathers people and teaches them something. And he wrote this pretty miserable book about life, life without, well, life without God.

And it's pretty depressing. You've heard the word vanity a few times. And we preached on this book one and a half years ago, but I think half of you weren't here. Vanity. Well, what is vanity?

[ 12 : 12 ] It's vapor. It's a kind of, you know, smoke that just disappears and that you just can't grasp with your hands because it just, yeah, it disappears so quickly.

That is what life is like. That is what so much in life is like. It just disappears so quickly. And now, of course, this passage isn't literally about Christmas because it was hundreds of years before Jesus.

But as you've heard, this passage is all about pleasure. Right? The teacher said to the philosopher, hey, I'm going to try pleasure. I'm going to see if I can find meaning in pleasure.

If I can find joy, lasting joy in pleasure. And this guy really tried everything. Right? Verse 4. You know, I made great works.

I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

[ 13 : 08 ] I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

I gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, many concubines, the delight of the sons of men.

Earlier he talked about, you know, wine. Let me have lots of wine. You know, he tried everything. He wanted, okay, let me try everything. And nothing that I wanted, I kept for myself.

I just want, I'm going to try everything. And yet, verse 11. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it.

And behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind. And there was nothing to be gained under the sun. In the end, it was vapor. There was nothing gained.

[ 14 : 04 ] Nothing lasting. No lasting difference from everything I did. And look at how much I spent on it. Was this really worth it? Right? If it doesn't last anyway. It was fun, but it didn't last.

Right? He would have, I mean, this guy would have an amazing Christmas celebration, but it wouldn't last. And back in January, he looks back, the joy is gone. And I think what we, what makes this so powerful, again, this is the king of Jerusalem.

Right? He says, I was greater than any king before me. I mean, it looks like Solomon. King, King Solomon, I know, he had like an annual income of one and a half billion dollars or something.

Sorry, US dollars. That's crazy, right? So imagine this is the most rich and powerful guy around. And he says, well, pleasure didn't work.

I mean, imagine if you're the richest guy in the world, what kind of Christmas party would you give? Right? You wouldn't just play, all I want is Christmas. You would fly my Mariah Carey over to come and perform.

[ 15 : 09 ] Right? Imagine what kind of presents he would give. He would give Ferraris to everyone and those kind of things. This is the richest guy ever. And he says, it doesn't work.

You know, I spend so much. And if he can't do it, well, what hope do we have? Right? If the richest guy, you know, you look on Amazon and you're browsing and, okay, maybe this will make me happy.

Well, Jeff Bezos or something, right, who owns Amazon, he wouldn't be happy. Then what hope do we have? And that's the thing here, right? The richest guy with the most money, you still can't find happiness in, well, in presents, in feasting, in consuming.

You can't. That is the message here. And maybe that's something you really feel. Maybe you're a Christian. Maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, but you just know that, okay, every year we have Christmas and it feels good, but then it doesn't last.

Am I doing something wrong? No, you're not. Right? It may feel good for a bit, but Christmas doesn't last. The presents, the feasting, it doesn't last.

[ 16 : 21 ] And even while it's there, it's probably not good enough. So I don't know what you're thinking in a few weeks' time. Maybe you're optimistic that now you're going to get it right. Or maybe you're kind of cynical, yeah, another Christmas, running around, getting presents, and I'm probably going to get disappointed again.

Well, yeah. None of these things can provide the real joy that we want, the thing that lasts, the thing that we have this desire inside for.

But the Bible says, no, but it is possible. The Bible says, yeah, it promises everlasting joy. And the problem is not what we seek, but where we seek it.

And the answer, well, we've heard it in that second reading. So if we turn to 1 John or 1 John, depending on where you come from, that letter in the New Testament, John, one of the disciples of Jesus.

Because this talks about the real Jesus, not the presents, not the trees, not the feasts, the birth of Jesus. And this is about lasting joy. And it's quite a complicated passage, but let's work backwards.

[ 17 : 30 ] Because what is he writing about? Well, 1 John 1 verse 4. And we are writing this thing so that our joy may be complete. Hey, we write this to you so that our joy, you and us together, that we can have full joy, fulfilled, complete joy.

Right? He's saying, hey, I'm going to tell you how to have complete joy. How to be fully fulfilled. And what is that source of joy? Well, verse 3. That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us.

And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. He says, hey, I invite you to come and share with us. Come and join us.

Come have fellowship with us. Why? Well, we have fellowship. We share with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. We have a relationship with persons, with God, the Trinity, the Father, the Son, the Spirit, the Creator, everything.

We have a relationship, fellowship. Come and join that relationship. And you can see that Jesus is kind of emphasized, not just the Father and the Son, but his Son, Jesus Christ.

[ 18 : 44 ] Jesus is, well, his human name. The name that he got in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. And that is at the heart of this passage. And that is at the heart of this passage, the mystery of Christmas, the mystery of Jesus' birth, that he was, well, fully God and fully man, both of them.

Because that's the key. And if we can see who Jesus is, I think that says why Jesus is the one who can provide that lasting joy. Because first, I think one thing that John really emphasizes is that, well, Jesus was fully human, fully man.

And that means he's kind of physical, right? You hear the physical. Hey, that's what we have seen and heard and touched, right? We touched with our hands.

We could touch this. Jesus was a physical human being, born 2,000 years ago as a human baby. Now, why does it matter that it's physical?

I think it kind of affirms our desire for joy, right? Because actually, if we think of joy, we usually think of that physically, right? We think of food and drink and activities and those kind of things.

[ 19 : 58 ] And then you hear, you know, relationship with God. And that sounds like, you know, floating, nothingness, kind of airy-fairy. And that is not the thing here.

Because anyway, that doesn't feel right, right? We are physical people. We enjoy, we have physical joy. And Jesus says, no, no, I have come here.

Yeah, he's become human. Joy is good. Feasting and presence in a way are good. We are physical people. And Jesus, well, came. And he became physical.

He became a human. And yet, so much more. If he was only physical, only material, I mean, all material things run out, right? He couldn't provide everlasting joy then.

But what does John say? Well, what became physical? Well, that which was from the beginning, right? The one who was there before everything else.

[ 20 : 53 ] The one who made everything, right? Or what does he say? The word of life. The life was made manifest. We proclaim the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us, right?

That is who Jesus is. He is the life. Not a life. Not someone who has life. He is the life. The eternal life.

The everlasting source of life. That source of life, he became human. He came to us. And that changes everything. I mean, if someone has life, they can lose it.

And it can run out. If someone is life, he would have to stop existing, right? It doesn't run out. And so, at the heart of Christmas, here is a person who is life himself, everlasting, never-ending life that will never run out.

And he didn't stay up there. He didn't stay distant from us. He came to us here in this world where we look for joy. That is who Jesus is. Fully man, fully God, right?

[ 21 : 59 ] Fully everlasting life and yet here as a human for us. So that we can enjoy life with him. So we can relate to him. And those things you see all throughout Jesus' life.

Not just as a baby. I mean, when Jesus grew up and started ministering, do you notice how much feasting he did? Right? He constantly had meals with people and ate with and invited everyone.

All the tax collectors and sinners and outcasts. They were all welcome to come and eat with him. And he went to a wedding and made hundreds of bottles of wine, right? You know, he doesn't mind feasting.

He is no ascetic, right? Here is feasts. And yet, all the time giving spiritual life to people. And even the future, right? So, you think of heaven, whatever.

The new creation. How is that described in the Bible? Well, a wedding feast. A wedding feast that lasts forever. Why a feast and a banquet? Because that is what brings us joy, right?

[ 23 : 03 ] It's just something far better than any Christmas dinner. But that is a banquet, right? That kind of joy is what he's offering. And yet, not just any banquet, but the throne of God at the center.

And then, like rivers of life flowing from the throne and bringing life everywhere. That's the picture of the future. A banquet, yeah, with a river of life coming to us.

And so, that is, yeah, that's what John promises is the answer. And in a way, that's not something strange to us, right? It's almost, it's what we were made for.

Why do we have this desire for joy? Why do we want true life? Well, because we were made by the source of life himself. I mean, you know, life doesn't come from non-life, doesn't it?

We have life because it was given to us by the life. The one who made us. The famous saying by Augustine hundreds of years ago, you have made us for yourself.

[ 24 : 01 ] And our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Makes sense, right? My phone was made for electricity. That's what it needs. My car was made for fuel. That's what it needs.

We were made for Jesus. And that is who we need. And not that he needs us, that he needs our worship or our singing. He doesn't need anything. He's got the Father and the Spirit, right?

But he just loves to share his joy. He loves to share his love. And knowing that, that is our greatest joy. That is where we find meaning and purpose.

That is what life is about, finding the fullness of joy, finding complete joy in relationship with Jesus. A joy that will not last just for one year, that in a billion years from now is still a treasure, an eternal delight, unlimited for us.

And it sounds too good to be true, except that it's not. It's real. Because that's what John says, right? This is real. We've seen it. We've heard it.

[ 25 : 06 ] We've touched it. I mean, back then you couldn't take photos and videos. But we've got eyewitnesses. We testify to it. This is real. We've seen it. We've experienced this life.

We've experienced this relationship. You can have it too. And that's why John, he wants to share it. He wants to, we proclaim this so you can join us. And you can have this everlasting joy, this complete joy.

Come to Jesus. And that's what he wants to share. And with everyone, and with everyone here today, no matter who you are. So again, maybe you were here, you wouldn't call yourself a Christian.

This is the joy you were made for. I don't know if you've looked at it much. Isn't it worth investigating? If you feel empty, if you feel like there's something missing, well, check out Jesus.

Because he promises that this is the real thing. And yeah, because you do need to come to it. It's not automatic. It's not that Jesus came and now everyone in the world has joy.

[ 26 : 09 ] Just like John says, hey, we invite you to come and join. All right. Because even though we were made for it, why don't we experience it now? Well, kind of we've walked away.

The fact that we're currently not experiencing this is, well, because we've walked away from it, right? We've walked away and tried to find our joy in other things. But the wonderful thing is Jesus, he'd love to have us back, right?

He died to forgive us. And he welcomes us and he says, come back, come and find your joy in me again. And not in all those empty things that you know don't work, that you know don't satisfy.

But even as Christians, we believe this, we say yes and amen to this. You know, is this really real? Where do we find our joy? You know, as we look to Christmas, we're probably preparing for it, maybe buying presents, right?

I've got some carousel notifications. And, you know, we're looking to prepare. But do we think it makes us happy? Right? When you're doing your last minute Christmas shopping on the 23rd or 24th, you know, and you're stressed.

[ 27 : 20 ] Why are you stressed? Maybe because you're not meeting people's expectations. Or maybe do you think that, well, I need to get this right to get a good Christmas. We can relax.

You know, the real joy doesn't come from the presents, right? The real joy comes from Jesus. And we can relax, right? We can find joy. Just lift your eyes to Jesus. Or maybe it's January and it's like Christmas never happened.

It doesn't matter, right? Because we have Jesus. Whatever else didn't last, we're still with him. He still loves us. We can know him and talk to him. And one day we'll be with him. He's got everything you want and need.

And it's okay. You can even tone down Christmas a bit, right? We can share. We can go and do something good in the world. We can help the poor and needy. We don't need to spend all our time on just the best Christmas because we know it doesn't work and we already have Jesus.

You know, can we make some shoe boxes? Can you volunteer with a charity? It's a good way to tell yourself, actually, you know, I don't find my joy in this. Maybe parents, you know, are you, of course, it's great to get presents for your kids, but are you also teaching them that this is not the real thing that gives the real joy?

[ 28 : 32 ] Now, you need to work out what it means for you. But, yeah, where do we find our real joy? But ultimately, I don't want that to be a kind of no, say no to this, say no to that, right?

What does John want? He wants us not to say no to presents. He wants us to say yes to Jesus, right? It's about finding our joy in him, seeing the great treasure he is and savoring and delighting in him.

So, can I encourage you to do that? This Advent, why do we start early? Well, because our hearts need time to warm up, right? We need time to find joy in Jesus when we are too distracted with other things.

So, take time to meditate. Take time to know him more by faith, by the spirit. Take time to delight in how you will know him even more later, what you have now.

And the more we meditate, the more we'll be excited in the midst of stress, in the midst of disappointments. And when Christmas lets you down, when everything else lets you down, you can have the deep joy in Jesus, all because he came with Christmas 2000 years ago.

[ 29 : 41 ] Isn't that wonderful? Jinx moral. I'm going to silence.