



Feelings are important, right? I think we would all agree that they're important, but I think many or most of you here would say with me that feelings are not all-important. Yet, I think we live in a world where feelings, for many, are the ultimate definer of reality. One example is with gender. We live in a world where someone's gender is more defined by their feelings than by their biological sex. Now, before we accuse others of this, I want you to ask yourself if you might make your feelings the basis of reality. So, let me test you. How do you evaluate churches you visit or even a church service here? How do you judge other people? Many times will talk about how something or someone made them feel. I'm not saying feelings are bad, but are we making feelings the ultimate judge? Let's just think of the most common question we ask one another: **How are you?** What's the assumed word at the end of this sentence? It's "feeling." Oftentimes people interpret that to be a feeling question. Now, I'm not saying everyone assumes this, but I think it's assumed many times. And that is a problem if feelings are defining what's true.

Why do I say it's a problem? Well, how many of you have felt something that you've later discovered isn't even true? What matters more? Truth or your feelings about something? I remember with someone in my life how they struggled with certain things and would say, "But I just feel. . . ." And my response was, "Good thing reality isn't defined by your feelings because that's just not true." This is something I learned through a dark season in my life. I had been going through a deep season of discouragement, anxiety and depression. God got me to a point where I was at a crossroads. I realized I was either going to die at some point if I kept going down this path of bondage or, by the Lord's mercy, I would fight to believe the promises of Jesus. I had no other options. One of the applications I made in my life was that when people would ask me how I was doing, instead of talking about the discouragements and struggles and feelings, I would say, "I'm doing well." And when I said that, I would be thinking about the blessings God had given to *me*. I'm God's child. I'm blessed in Jesus. I have a wonderful wife who loves me and I love her. I have wonderful children. And the list could go on and on. I actually am well. Now, when I thought about doing that, I actually hesitated because I also thought, "I'm lying if I tell people I'm well when I'm not *feeling* good." But I realized my feelings were dominating my view, and they needed to be put in their proper place.

As I share this, I want to emphasize that I *wouldn't* give this counsel to everyone. Some of you have so squelched your feelings that you need to give them their proper place as well, and so you *should* communicate them because they do matter. But if you've exalted feelings to the highest category, then you would benefit from what I just stated. All-in-all, what I want to emphasize by saying all of this is that we are more than feelings. Reality isn't confined to our individual feelings. Our feelings are a part of us. Jesus himself teaches this when he says we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Our entire being is to work together in their various ways to harmonize and express a united love for the Lord.

Now, at this point, you might be thinking, "What does this have to do with Christmas? And what about joy?" Well, we've seen already in our Advent series that as we've looked at God's teaching on hope and

peace, that these words don't just refer to feelings. Hope is a steadfast assurance in God and his promises. Peace is more than a feeling of calm. Peace has a name, and Jesus as reconciled us to God and reconciles people for God's eternal glory so that one day we will live in eternal wholeness and shalom. The same is true for joy. Joy isn't just a feeling. If you define joy as primarily a feeling, you miss its richness. I would actually say that you strip it of its actual depth of beauty and meaning.

So, **what is joy?** Is joy just a feeling? I believe the feeling of joy is just the tip of the iceberg. There's 90% more that people often miss out. So again, what is joy? Let me put it another way. **When things are difficult and hard and maybe even emotionally devastating, does that mean you can't possess joy?** Yes, that might be a radical sounding question, but I ask it this way because again, we can tend to think that negative emotions and joy cannot coexist. But we're going to see today that not only can they, but for a Christian, that is the case.

When I was studying for this sermon, I looked into a Bible dictionary for the word study on "joy," and it said that joy is **"Closely related to gladness and happiness, although joy is more a state of being than an emotion. . ."** Feelings are a part of the definition, but notice the last part. Joy is more a state of being than an emotion. A state of being means that joy is more related to ultimate reality, and our feelings ought to flow from the ultimate reality. But what is the ultimate reality. As the dictionary went on, I discovered this: **In the Old Testament, joy is closely related to victory over one's enemies.** (Lexham Bible Dictionary, Logos). So, let me give a few Old Testament examples. In 1 Samuel 18:6, we read, **"As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments."**¹ The people were singing and dancing with joy. Why? Because David struck down Goliath of the Philistines – their great enemy. In Psalm 21, King David speaks of how the Lord blesses him, and in verse 6 says, **"For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence."**² David then continues to speak of what God's presence does for him: **"Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you."**³ God and his protection and victory are the reason David has joy. Then in Isaiah 35, when Isaiah prophesies a day when sin and enemies will be defeated says, **"And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."**⁴ Why is there joy? The sorrow and pain is gone. They're home with the Lord! Then we have one of my all-time favorite Bible verses: Psalm 16:11, which says, **"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."**⁵ I love this verse because I fight sin with this verse. All sin promises pleasure. God promises eternal pleasure. How much pleasure do you actually want? And do you believe God is more glorious? David says that in God's presence are pleasures forevermore. The path of life is the path to his presence! So, that's why David would even write that joy comes when he's home with the Lord and then all pain and sorrow are gone because God is ruling in grace! God himself is the summation of joy.

Do you see how joy is closely associated with victory over one's enemies – and that joy isn't only a feeling? The expression of joy comes because there's a greater reality that is the foundation: the enemy is defeated, people are set apart for God, and there is hope!

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Sa 18:6.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 21:6.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 21:8.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 35:10.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 16:11.

This Bible dictionary then went on and said that **in the New Testament, joy is still closely associated with victory; however, the victory focuses more on eternal salvation.** Maybe you recall the scenario where Jesus sends 72 people out to proclaim Jesus to others. He sent them out in 36 teams. When the teams returned, Luke records the following: **The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”**⁶ Why do they have joy? The demons, the enemy, are subject. But then, do you remember what Jesus says in response? Jesus affirms that he is victorious over Satan and the demons. And then he says, **“Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”**⁷ Why should the disciples rejoice? Because they are eternally secure to be with the Lord forever in Heaven! This is emphasized later in Luke 15. The religious hypocrites were grumbling about how Jesus was receiving tax collectors and notorious sinners, and then Jesus asked them, which of them doesn’t rejoice over one lost sheep? Then Jesus declares God’s joy when he saves *one lost person*: **I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.**⁸ God himself rejoices in his own power and glory in rescuing sinners from their sinfulness. And all heaven together rejoices in God’s glorious power to rescue sinners by reconciling them to him. Then, one more passage I want to share. Many of us have been going through the book of John for our discipleship groups, and we’ve discussed chapter 3, and John the Baptist in particular. Do you remember the scene where John’s disciples notice that the crowds are getting larger around Jesus and lesser for John? Then John gives an amazingly beautiful response: ²⁸**You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’** ²⁹**The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.** ³⁰**He must increase, but I must decrease.”**⁹

Why is John’s joy complete? It’s because his source of joy isn’t wrapped up in this world and the temporary ups and downs of life. His joy is wrapped up in Jesus. Why? Because he said just like in their day, they would focus their attention on the bridegroom going to receive his bride – the focus is not on himself, but on the bridegroom – Jesus.

Listen, how many have you gone to a wedding and then thought to yourself, “Why is nobody focusing on me?” No. It makes no sense. In our culture, we focus more on the bride; so, we’d emphasize her. Either way, John’s illustration makes sense. And so, John doesn’t just say that he should decrease. He says that he *must* decrease. John isn’t the point. John isn’t the source and culmination of joy. Jesus is the source and culmination of all joy! So, John’s joy was complete. People understood that they were to look to Jesus, not John! His joy is complete.

As I say all of this, now I want to bring this reality even deeper into our hearts. We’re talking about Jesus’ advent in coming to this earth 2,000 years ago. How is Jesus actually the foundation, source, and culmination of joy? I believe the Scriptures reveal that **Jesus is the joy for the longing heart and the longing creation.**

During Christmastime, we hear so many Christmas carols with words that gives ideas of joy: rejoice, hallelujah, glooooooooooria, joy to the world! And as we have those songs and then even hear what I’ve said so far in this sermon, people could say, “Christmas is just a time to ignore reality.” My family and I watched Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade, and at one point, a commentator said that Christmas was

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 10:17.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 10:20.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 15:7.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:28–30.

about peace. We should be laying aside our differences and loving each other. When I heard this commentator, who works for national news, said that, I thought to myself how ironic that he was saying that because I think many times, news anchors can perpetuate the divides. While at the same time, we can't ignore the real issues that are happening globally just because it's Christmastime. Look at what's going on in Israel. Real death, real families being torn apart. Look at poverty-stricken countries like Sierra Leone that was already poverty-stricken before 2020, and yet in recent years has experienced a 150% increase in cost of living. Think about the mass shootings that continue in America. Has God really wished this world "joy?" If we look around this world, we might be tempted to think that at best Christmas is a time to ignore the problems. At worse, we could think God is mocking humanity. But, like as I stated a few weeks ago, if we look above the loom – if we agree to view this world from God's perspective (which is always accurate and is reality), then we can see that Jesus is the joy for longing hearts and a longing creation. So, briefly, let's discover how Jesus is the joy for both of these.

1. Jesus is the joy for longing hearts.

All the way back in the Garden of Eden, I'd say that Adam and Eve lived in the state of joy. There was no enemy. They lived in delight. But then an enemy came in – the serpent. And the serpent won. He deceived Eve, and Adam went right along with the lies. With the enemy winning, joy left. Adam and Eve experienced a separation from God because of their sin, and all creation fell into brokenness due to sin's entrance. But God brought forgiveness and promised that there would be a serpent-crusher to come. This seed of the woman who would one day bring deliverance for humanity and all creation.

As Genesis continued, Moses writes with longing for victory over the serpent-crusher. We see how God is defeating the curse to bring about children and to continue the genealogy. We see how God blesses sinners, overcoming the curse. There's ideas of the enemies defeat. Then, of course, we read of Egypt and its crushing while God rescues the Israelites. Then, as God brings them back to the Promised Land, God promises to defeat their enemies. In the midst of these battles there is joy and praise and rejoicing when the people trust and obey the Lord in battles. Of course all of these physical things are to point to the greater battle over the serpent-crusher. We need the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Ruler who is going to set people free from sin and set this creation free from the curse.

Once we get to King David, one who pictures and points to the Messiah, we are able to enter his mind and learn of his heart towards the Lord by reading his psalms. Earthly victory over enemies isn't the ultimate point of God. Joy isn't found in whether you defeated some other army. In Psalm 33, David starts by praising the Lord because of his steadfast love, faithfulness, justice, and creative power. He calls the whole earth to be in awe of the Lord and to submit to him. Then he writes, **"¹⁶The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. ¹⁷The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. ¹⁸Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, ¹⁹that he may deliver their soul from death. . ."**¹⁰

David's not just talking about other armies and peoples. He's including himself and Israel. Salvation is found in the Lord. And what is salvation? In verse 19, David says deliverance from the soul from death. How is one's soul delivered from death? In the next verse, we read: **²⁰Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. ²¹For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.**¹¹ Our soul is delivered through faith in him. David adds that our heart is glad in him. The word for glad in the

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 33:16–19.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 33:20–21.

Hebrew is the word for rejoice. Our heart is rejoicing in him. He himself is the glory of glories. He himself is our steadfast love and eternal hope! King David raises our eyes above the temporal. King David reminds us that, yes, this world is cursed. This world is broken. But God has promised the serpent-crusher. God will right all the wrong. And this reality ought to compel us.

So, I have a couple questions for us: **What type of joy do you want, temporal or eternal? Practically speaking, do you live for temporal joy or on the basis of your eternal joy (state of joy) in God and his promises?** Jesus' advent 2,000 years ago was God's declaration that joy has come and is going to reign. Remember what Mary said when she knew she was carrying the serpent-crusher? **"⁴⁶And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.'"**¹² She goes on to declare God's promises of rescue and redemption. Jesus' entrance is a declaration of eternal joy and security – even though in the temporal Mary would experience physical and emotional pain in her life through not only carrying Jesus, but mothering him and eventually watching him be crucified. But she knew her God. She knew his promises. Her joy didn't rest in this life. It rested in God and his promises of eternal victory.

Remember again what Jesus said to his disciples? Don't rejoice you can cast out demons. Rejoice that your names are written in the book of life! Do you remember when Jesus said that there will be people at the judgment who say they cast out demons in Jesus' name, and yet he'll say "Depart from me, I never knew you?" Don't place your joy simply in the temporal. That doesn't mean we can't experience feelings of joy in certain things. But is your joy anchored to the eternal or is it drifting around in the sea of this chaotic world?

We who live now can have even greater confidence than those in the Old Testament. With Jesus' death and resurrection, we even read of Jesus' example in Hebrews 12, where we're commanded to, **". . .run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."**¹³ Did Jesus feel shame on the cross? Yes! Was the cross painful and tortuous? Yes! Yet, Jesus had joy set before him. That joy was so strong, he could endure the cross. Jesus' hope and trust was in the Father and in the joy to come.

The author of Hebrews goes on to call all of us who have trusted Jesus to the same mind. Why? Because Jesus endured the curse of sin on himself in the place of sinners. That means he crushed the serpent's power to accuse us of sin. Jesus was cursed so we wouldn't be! And through Jesus' resurrection, he conquered death so that the curse of death has lost its sting. We now await eternity! Eternity is so glorious, we can endure with immense, real joy set before us. This is what it means when the Scriptures reveal that joy is more of a state of being. I'm always in the state of joy because God is always victorious. Even through death, he is victorious over the enemy. And since you and I are united to Jesus, we are always united to Joy and united in victory! This is so steadfast that this ought to shape my emotions of joy and happiness. And even when I feel shame and fear, I can always know I live in the state of blessedness (which, by the name relates to terms of happiness and joy).

Jesus is the joy for longing hearts. While sad or enduring or hopeful or happy, we have a joy that's deeper and more foundational. Being reconciled with God, we have the Triune God and his promises for

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 1:46–48.

¹³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 12:1–2.

us! That's joy! The baby in the manger declared it. The ascended Jesus proves it! And guess what? Jesus is not only joy for our longing hearts,

2. **Jesus is the joy for the longing creation.**

I add this because sometimes we can only talk about Jesus making us feel internally better. But we can't forget that this world is broken, and Jesus is victorious over all aspects of the curse – including this creation. In a few moments, we're going to sing the hymn, "Joy to the World." I mentioned a couple weeks ago that this hymn was actually written to speak of Jesus' second advent. Meaning, when Jesus comes again in the future. **"No more let sin or sorrow grow//Nor thorns infest the ground//He comes to make his blessings known//Far as the curse is found."** Oh what a day! Joy to the world indeed! Jesus being King means victory over all enemies of God – sin and death.

And we see this clearly in Romans 8. Paul talks about how this creation is groaning under the curse, and then says, **"²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved."**¹⁴ When those of us who trust in Jesus see God face-to-face, God will also restore all of creation. No more groaning for anything! Then Paul says that in this *hope* we are saved. I mentioned this a couple weeks ago in my sermon on hope. This is our steadfast assurance we have to look forward to if you've rested in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. He is coming again to restore us and all things! In this hope we are saved.

Now, what should our response be? In Romans 12:12, Paul says, **"¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."**¹⁵ I mentioned a couple Sundays ago how easy this is to memorize. I hope if you haven't, you'll do it. Paul brings joy and hope together. We have steadfast assurance in the future hope which gives us a state of joy that overpowers our temporal circumstances.

I confess that this past week, the day I was to write the manuscript for this sermon, there were *many* things that went "wrong." Vehicle issues, sickness, multiple doctor visits, and even other things. I'm so grateful I had studied about joy the day before. Knowing that God loves me, secures me and is guiding me in all things and causing all things to submit to my eternal good changes my outlook on the temporal. Jesus is victorious over all enemies – all my eternal enemies and your eternal enemies. I have Jesus. I have joy. If you have Jesus, you have joy! In the struggles of work, parenting, daily life – you have joy! Even more than this, people who are suffering around the world can have joy because Jesus. I met people in poverty-stricken Sierra Leone who loved Jesus – knowing he is their joy (even though they hardly had anything)! You see, Christmas isn't an ignoring of reality. Instead, it's a reminder of reality so that we can live in this world faithfully on into the world to come!

Jesus came 2,000 years ago and is guaranteed to come again. Do you have Jesus? If so, you have joy. Jesus is the joy of the longing heart and the longing creation.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come and is coming again.

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:22–24.

¹⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 12:12.