Invitation to JOY – Elizabeth's Joy

This last year I have seen many couples married, and I have seen others split up. I have seen many births, joyous baby dedications and some funerals. I have seen churches flourish, and others struggle, new leaders ordained and excited about the future and others struggling to hold on. I have seen some businesses flourish while others have struggled. I have prayed for people and seen them healed and prayed for people and seen them promoted to glory.

There have been months of meeting the budget and others of not. Days of load shedding and days of electricity.

A year of the joy of seeing the fruit of ministry and of being worn down by the onslaught of secular humanistic thinking. 2024 has most certainly been a year of ups and downs, of victories and failures, of blessings & difficulties.

It has been a year that reminds me of marriage vows:

"I promise\ in the presence of God, our families and our friends\ to stand beside and with you always\ in times of joy and sadness\ in times of harmony and anger\ in times of health and pain.\ for better or for worse\ for richer or for poorer\ in sickness and in health\ and forsaking all others\ be faithful to you \ as long as we both shall live."

Vows are a good picture of the tensions in the Kingdom of God and this last year. The already and the not yet, the good the bad the pretty and the ugly. The Joy and the sorrow. As we look to our communities, nation, dare I say our earth & the resident earthlings it is so easy to get tired, despondent, disconnected & worn down.

The purpose of today is to connect with the Holy Spirit and joy. Today is an invitation to joy, and joy despite our circumstances, as with the vows I just read, "in times of joy and sadness", we will look at a biblical account of joy and hopefully through what I share with us we will discover joy.

The joy of the Lord seems inexplicable to those who do not possess it, if you are feeling joyless I pray that today will instil hope for joy in you.

Next week we will celebrate Christmas, and one of the traditions of the day is gift-giving. Presents bring us happiness, don't they? Mandy, when you buy me that new fishing rod, I will be happy, I promise. Happiness is dependent on circumstances.

Let me ask you, "Did you get some gifts last Christmas? Did they make you happy?" I am sure they did, let me take the line of questioning a little further, "Are those presents still making you happy? Do you even remember what they were?" Joy is something different to happiness. Joy is not circumstance dependent. Joy is an enduring attitude of the heart and spirit and should be a natural part of the Christian faith.

When I bought a pair of new shoes, I was happy. When my children were born, I experienced joy and continue to experience joy through them. Do you see that joy and happiness are two different things? The joy of the Lord is a constant gladness and cause to rejoice.

When Jesus died for us, He restored us to a peace with God that cannot be undone, and joy is birthed from an inner strengthening of our relationship with Him.

Do you know how many times the word JOY appears in scripture? **217 times!**

Do you know how many times the word JOYFUL appears in scripture? **16 times!**

Do you know how many times the word JOYFULLY appears in scripture? **11 times!**

If my maths is correct that means that joy or references to joy appear **244 TIMES! I am not a clever man but I suspect that the Lord may be saying something to us!**

In the Old Testament, the word JOY from the Hebrew is '*sim-khaw'* and *'saw-sone'* when translated mean glee, exceeding gladness, joyfulness, mirth, pleasure, rejoicing, cheerfulness, and a welcoming of gladness, joy, mirth, rejoicing.

In the New Testament, the word JOY from the Greek is χαρά *'Chara'* when translated means *cheerfulness*, calm *delight,* gladness, greatly exceeding joy, being joyful, living joyfully, having joyfulness in your life, being joyous in all circumstances.

Joy is all those things rolled together.

Allow me to set the scene.

Zechariah was a priest and went into the temple, and met with an Angel of the Lord. Even though he was old as was Elizabeth, they had all but given up hope of having a child. The angel promised that they would have a son who would end up being John the Baptist.

Mary who was engaged to Joseph was visited by the angel Gabriel, who told her that the power of the Lord would overshadow her and she would be found with a child, and she was to name the child Jesus and He would be the Son of God.

Let us read together this account where Mary and Elizabeth get together…

Luke 1:39-45 – "At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's

greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed:

"Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!

The passage tells of Elizabeth, an elderly woman who was given the "joy" of conceiving a child in her old age. After months of seclusion, her joy was realized as she greeted her cousin, Mary. Elizabeth's baby leapt in her womb.

The Holy Spirit was on Elizabeth. As she trusted God for her child, Elizabeth's joy sprang up when her baby moved in the presence of the unborn Jesus.

THE PRESENCE OF JESUS BRINGS JOY

John 15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

"Your joy may be complete", other translations say:

- *That* your joy might be full.
- Full measure and complete and overflowing.
- And your joy wholly mature
- Will fill your hearts with overflowing gladness!

The presence of Jesus brings joy, even before He was born. It is not that Jesus was born; the joy came at the fact that He would be born. Elizabeth exclaims, "The baby in my womb leapt for joy!" Jesus says it this way;

John 17:13 "…that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."

That we may have the full measure of His joy in us, supernatural, wonderful, powerful, abundant, overflowing, fully accomplished Joy!

Joy is not about what has happened, or what is happening, it is also about what is going to happen… Joy can often be found in what will be, not what is.

What are God's promises over your life that have not been fulfilled yet? They should bring joy.

Even if you are going through difficulties now, remember the promise of God in Romans that He will work all things for the good of those who love Him.

Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God will work ALL things for the good, even though it may not feel like it in this moment, that is His promise for you and for me.

Think of the words of the worship song Way Maker;

"… Even when I don't see it, You're working
Even when I don't feel it, You're working
You never stop, You never stop working
You never stop, You never stop working"

What if we could experience joy right now, not because of what is, but because of what could be… Even though you may be going through a difficult time right now, know that **the last chapter has not been written**. Surely this promise brings joy to your heart.

Jesus in the Gospel of John says to us;

John 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand.

Because of its supernatural origin, the joy of the Lord—our gladness of heart—is present even through the trials of life. We know we are children of God, and no one can snatch us away from Him. Surely this promise brings joy to your heart.

The Apostle Paul says it this way:

Rom 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, (39) neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Each of us as children of God are prized and treasured by majesty and nothing can snatch us away from him, and in Christ Jesus, nothing can separate us from His love! Surely this promise brings joy to your heart.

Christ's Presence brings joy! The Shepherds knew this, the Good News brings great joy!

Luke 2:8-11 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (9) An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. (10) But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

The angel brought good news of great joy that will be for all the people, he brought this news to the Shepherds. A Saviour has been born! Why is this good news and why will it bring great joy?

In a nutshell, In Jesus, **THE POWER, POLLUTION, AND PENALTY OF SIN HAS BEEN DEALT WITH!** Surely this promise brings joy to your heart.

There is a '**but'** here - we cannot produce joy.

When I was growing up, I saw a movie and decided I wanted to make myself a robot. I got a shoebox, put sticks into it for arms and legs, blew up a balloon for a head and painted the eyes, nose, and mouth on it. Sadly, it never came to life.

I was an entrepreneurial type, so I felt like chocolate, but my mom would not let me have any. I read on a chocolate bar once that it contained milk and sugar, I thought easy, surely if you just put milk and sugar in the freezer it would turn into chocolate? Sadly, it didn't.

It is a similar deal and my robot and chocolate as with joy, we cannot produce joy…

JOY IS FOUND IN A PERSON

The joy producer… Jesus Christ. When we are focused on Him, on His Presence through the Holy Spirit, there is fruit.

Again, we cannot produce fruit any more than we can produce joy. **We do have a role to play**, in planting the fruit tree, adding nutrients to the soil, watering it, caring for it, pruning it, and if cared for properly, it will produce fruit.

When we focus on Jesus, on His promises in His Word, when we apply it, live it, and are obedient to it, we will see fruit. What fruit? Fruits of the Spirit, which are;

Gal 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Do you see it? Fruit of the Spirit is JOY! Biblical joy is the result of a Christ-Prioritised life.

A question, **"How fruity are you?"**

Do you know that today you could honour Jesus by living a life of joy? What does it look like in your life to choose joy despite your circumstances?

Joy is an important part of Christian life, it is what gets us through difficult times, that is why Nehemiah proclaimed,

"Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." **Neh 8:10**

Today you are invited to Joy

- The Presence of Jesus the joy producer, in our lives brings joy
- Joy can often be found in what will be, not what is. Believing His promises brings joy
- A Christ-prioritized life brings joy

What "joy" is God inviting you into?

Will you allow Holy Spirit to reveal to you the joy set before you for this season?