

Sermon Notes
GCF Valley
Luke 2:8-15
Joy to the World?

It's called the Paris Syndrome. Some refer to it as the Paris Effect.

- A. It describes the disappointment that many first-time visitors to Paris, France experience while visiting the city.
- B. WSJ 2015....
- C. When your lofty expressions of what life must be like in Paris come crashing down with the disappointment of life as it actually is in Paris, you may be suffering from the Paris Effect.
- D. For many of us, it's also called the year 2020.

Merriam Webster's Dictionary just released the word of the year for 2020.

- A. Seems like there could have been some stiff competition this year. (examples...)
- B. The word of the year is pandemic. Clearly we do not need to actually visit Paris to experience the Paris Effect.
- C. We feel it today: our expectations about 2020 did not materialize and instead, we received a crash course in disappointment that we really didn't ask for or want.
- D. I'm not sure what other words were in the top 5/10 this year but I'm pretty sure "joy" was not one of them. Joy did not make the cut.
- E. Perhaps this is because joy seems to be in such short supply for many of us.
- F. During this Advent season, we'll hear and sing a lot about joy. But is there much joy in our world? Are we a joyful people? Is your life trending in a joyful direction?
- G. If real joy seems elusive – even almost unattainable in your mind – then Advent is for you.
- H. If you think the "joy ship" has passed you by in 2020, think again.

Look with me at how our story unfolds here in Luke 2:8. (READ)

- A. If you have ever watched a children's Christmas play, the role of the shepherds seems to belong to the rambunctious boys in the class.
- B. They don't speak, dress in old tattered clothes and their only job is to fall down at the right time.
- C. Nobody really wants to play the part of shepherd in the Christmas play. And nobody really wanted to be a shepherd in the first century.
- D. During the time of the Patriarchs (Genesis) and throughout much of the O.T., shepherding was a noble profession. But not now, in the first century.
- E. Shepherds were the lowest class of society. (could not vote, hold public office, testify in court etc..)

- F. Mishnah (Judaism's written record of the Oral Law) was clearly prejudiced against the shepherds: "no one should feel obligated to rescue a shepherd who has fallen into a pit."
- G. The shepherds were a mostly miserable bunch of guys.

Luke tells us that these shepherds were doing what they do – watching their sheep.

- A. V9 – the biblical idiom here is they "feared a great fear!"
- B. When the glory of God in all his resplendent holiness suddenly breaks in on ordinary people who live in the darkness of sin and the misery of sufferings in this world, the only response is great fear.
- C. Even when godly people encounter God or his angels in this way, fear is the legitimate response. (Ex. Moses, Isaiah)
- D. For sinners, it's always a fearful thing to see a manifestation of God and his glory.
- E. If you don't know Jesus (not repented of sins) you should be afraid.
- F. Don't sing "Joy to the World the Lord is come" as if it doesn't matter whether or not you know the Lord.
- G. If you don't know Jesus personally, you don't want the Lord to return and come for you because on that day, he will only come in judgement. (Hebrews 9:27)
- H. We are way beyond the Paris Effect now aren't we? This is the effect of our sins against a holy God that require a just punishment.

The shepherds are "fearing a great fear."

- A. Very little joy coupled with great fear....sounds remarkably normal. (2020)
- B. The shepherds were joyless sinners and weary sufferers who needed a rescue.
- C. Who's going to help them? Who will help you when you need to be rescued?
- D. You don't have to have an angel of the Lord show up in your living room to know you need a divine rescue....(this earthly life can be much harder than we expected)
- E. The Christmas story reminds us that God has a way of working in the most unexpected of circumstances, to the most unlikely of people.
- F. These shepherds qualified on both accounts. They needed a divine rescue.

And a divine rescue is what they received!

- A. READ V10-12.
- B. The shepherds were Jewish but they were not O.T. scholars. They are not thinking about how the birth of Jesus fulfills prophecy and inaugurates a new kingdom.
- C. All they know is that an angel of the Lord spoke to them "good news of great joy for all people."
- D. This is one of the boldest lines in the entire N.T. (Luke, a Gentile, Roman citizen)
- E. I think the shepherds would have been just fine with any news but more bad news.
- F. But they received "good news of great joy!"
- G. Our Bibles speak of joy over 200 times but only "great joy" in single digits.

- H. Great joy is rare. Unique. We should take notice in our Bibles.
- I. Examples (David's successor, 1 Kings 1:40; Passover restored, 2 Chr. 30:26; resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Matt.:28:8; Luke 24:52)
- J. Here we read of good news of "great" joy for all people at the birth of Jesus Christ.
- K. This tells us something life-changing, extraordinary is happening. But why?

There is great joy for all people because God has acted decisively to save sinners.

- A. V11: this is heart of Christmas.
- B. God kept his promise to deliver his people from their sins. God has acted on our behalf so that we can be saved.
- C. This is different than any other world religion. (I must act/fulfill my religious duties and hope I've done enough to God to save me)
- D. The good news of great joy is that God has taken the initiative to rescue and redeem your life.
- E. In the birth of Jesus, God has acted to redeem all people. (not just kings and rulers, peasants, shepherds, men, women, every ethnic, racial, economic class...)
- F. The gospel is good news for literally ALL people!

Notice the effect of this announcement of great joy for all people. (READ V14)

- A. Of all the moments to be alive and on planet earth at a specific time and place, this has got to be one of them!
- B. Can you imagine what that must have been like for these shepherds to witness the heavenly army praising God?
- C. It's no wonder the shepherds wasted no time in making a beeline for the manger. (V15)
- D. You can read the rest of the story as Luke describes it in chapter 2....but these shepherds told anybody and everybody about their unforgettable night.
- E. God showed up in the most unexpected of circumstances (open field, manger) to the most unlikely of people (shepherds, sinners, sufferers) all of whom now had a reason for joy.

Matthew Henry many years ago wrote "joy in God is a duty of great consequence in the Christian life; and Christians need to be again and again called to it."

- A. I'm calling us to this kind of joy this morning.
- B. Joy is foundational to our Christian life yet so difficult to experience in daily life.
- C. Our sins make us miserable; our sufferings make us weak and our hearts are the primary battleground.
- D. Perhaps you find some similarities with the shepherds. (an unlikely candidate for joy this Christmas)
- E. Christmas should remind us that our rescue could never come from within. Trying to muscle your way through life is not the answer.

One of the reasons we tend to be so distressed and lack joy at Christmas is because we live as if Christmas is about other things.

- A. It's about gifts, songs, family, cookies and Hallmark movies...
- B. Nothing inherently sinful about these things. But they are never meant to rule our hearts. Christ is meant to rule your heart. Is he?
- C. Looking for joy in the Christmas season – in things around us – is our version of the Paris Effect. We will be disappointed!
- D. Don't look to Christmas to give you joy. Look to Jesus for real joy.
- E. When everything is stripped away, what are you left with?
- F. If you are looking to Jesus...see a Savior, sin-crusher, God who will always love you, Living Redeemer, King of Kings etc..
- G. Do you really want to know true joy this Christmas? You'll find it in Jesus.

Joy, like nothing else, shows whether we really and truly believe the gospel.

- A. Yes, days are hard. Long seasons of disappointment do come.
- B. But Christ is our ever-present eternal joy in the midst of our earthly realities.
- C. One author: "the whole world is looking for joy."
- D. Indeed it is. Let's pray that we would be among them. Let's pray that God would give us grace upon grace to become them.