

Fighting for Christmas Joy

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Well, grab your Bibles and let's go to the gospel of Luke. I'm going to take three sessions out of our work on Luke I did many years ago and speak to you, challenge you, challenge me, encourage us to fight for Christmas joy. We'll be in Luke 1, beginning in verse 39. Luke 1, beginning in verse 39. Now, while you're turning there, listen to this: we are in a fight. A fight. The Apostle Paul said at the end of his ministry that he had fought the good fight. He charges Timothy to fight that good fight. We fight for truth and we must fight for joy in Jesus. Did you hear that? We must fight for it. Heaven help us, some professing churches today don't even know we're in a fight. The United Methodist Church, which has fallen in apostasy and wickedness, and this was decades ago, they came out with a, uh, edict maybe you'd say, I don't think it's that forceful, but for lack of a better word I will call it an edict, that their churches should no longer sing "Onward Christian Soldiers." That was just too militaristic, it's too violent. We need to be more pacifistic. We need to be more gentle about our music. Well, they'd lost the idea that we're in a fight. By the way, let's pray for our good Methodist brothers and sisters. Most of the churches I know are leaving the denomination because they can no longer stomach the stuff that's coming from headquarters and thank God for that. They need to know. I had a, a, a leader in one of the churches in Florence. He recognized me and he stopped me and he said, "Brother Jeff, would you pray for us?" And he gave the name of his Methodist church and said, "We're staying with the old doctrines. We're staying with the word." Now we disagree with them on some points, but I'm telling you, the old Methodists preached the gospel and thank God for them. And so he asked me, "Would y'all pray for us?" So let's remember these brothers and sisters, alright?

So some don't even know we're in a fight but let's remind ourselves that Paul said it's the good fight. I mean, you were raised up as a child knowing that just about all fighting was bad and, by the way, don't tell your children all fighting is bad, there's some things to fight for. It's all right for man to be a man when he needs to be a man if it's righteous. If it's righteous to be in a fight, you ought to be in a fight. But generally speaking most fights should be avoided. But there is a good fight and that's what the Bible calls our fight. You see, we fight in a war that we cannot lose. We fight from victory to victory. You see, we do not fight to gain that which we do not have, not in the truest sense, but we fight to reclaim that which is already ours. Christ won it for us. I mean, we have Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit, we have eternal life, we have the word of God, we have the

unparalleled experience of fellowship in God's church. We have so much but we need to fight to enjoy it, fight to drink deeply of it, fight to maintain it, fight to be refreshed in it.

That's part of being down here in this fallen, unredeemed humanity, this flesh body and the world and the flesh and the devil is going crazy out there in the world. As I was sitting, standing there singing with you this morning and thinking about how deeply it blessed me and helped me and how much I missed it, I thought, "Thank God for Grace Life Church of the Shoals, an oasis of sanity in a world that's gone mad." And can I say this to you again: we are not changing. Our doctrine is not changing. Our morals and our ethics, they are not changing. The whole world may go to hell but I'm not going with them.

We're to fight and every year in this season, this Christmas season, we need to fight again to reclaim what's already ours. We need to fight for true Christmas joy. That would mean we guard ourselves from getting too excited about Frosty the Snowman and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and all the flashy lights. I'm not saying those are all bad. I enjoy some of those, but I want to fight, and my joy didn't last with them because they turn those lights off after Christmas. Well, some of them stay up year round actually, but they, typically folks turn them off. And if not, they're going to burn out. But do you know what? The true joy of Christmas never turns off. It never burns out. It's worth fighting for. It's worth fighting to claim it again, to enjoy it again. You say, "Pastor, you know, Christmas and joy is emphasized everywhere this time of the year." But no, it really isn't. Most of what we see around us is counterfeit Christmas and counterfeit joy. So we come together again this year, lock arms together, brothers, sisters banded together to fight for Christmas joy. The next few Sundays I will intend to lead the charge to help fend off the ploys of the enemy and fight his counterfeit Christmas and his counterfeit joy. I want us to renew our vigor to resist these ploys so that we might honor and glorify our God, embracing the true meaning of Christmas, renewing our joy in Jesus and recapturing Christmas joy. We need the kind of joy that Mary and her cousin Elizabeth enjoyed that very first Christmas season. I've been enamored with this narrative. I just as I thought of it, I just kept coming back to this narrative of Mary rushing to visit Elizabeth and the deep – listen, these ladies had a spell. Don't tell anybody. Dignified, respected, wholesome, pure Jewish ladies and they were so filled with Christmas joy they just got beside themselves. So I want us to have some of that. No, I want us to have more of that this year, more of what Mary and Elizabeth had.

Let's look at it together in our text, Luke 1, beginning in verse 39. I'll kind of talk about the context after I read it.

39 Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, [cried out with a loud voice and said,] "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And how has it happened to me [this is Elizabeth speaking to Mary], that

the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

Now the context is that Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, at least on some level they're cousins, Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, through her husband Zacharias was informed by Gabriel the angel, that Elizabeth, though very old and barren of womb, would nevertheless miraculously conceive and she would bear a son and they're to call his name John and the Bible text says because he will be great. So Elizabeth is beside herself. You see, the lies of the feminists hadn't reached these ladies. They understand that it was of the greatest honor and most wonderful dignity and pleasure and gift to bear a child. Becoming pregnant and having children in wedlock is a great glorious gift from God. We joy in it and we treasure it, and we denounce the lie of our age that says that somehow that's a burden, that's a problem, that's in your way. That's not in your way, that is the way for ladies to have a life fulfilled and blessed and joyous and flourishing.

So Elizabeth is beside herself. Then Gabriel appears to Mary, a virgin betrothed to Joseph, and Gabriel says to Mary, "Now Mary, you're gonna conceive of the Holy Spirit and you're gonna bear a son, you'll call his name Jesus, and he will be the Son of God." So she's beside herself. It's what I call crushing joy. They're crushed with the humility that God would do this in and through their lives, give them such a role and a calling in their age, and at the same time they're crushed but not in this despairing, depressing, anxiety-ridden kind of crushing, but a good kind of crushing, humble crushing that God would do it, and then full of rich joy in what God was doing in their lives.

So we have this scene of Mary coming to Zacharias and Elizabeth's house, and then when they get together we have the multiplying of their joy. So I call the exposition of this text the multiplied joy of Christmas. It's meant to be multiplied. It's meant to be shared, alright? So I want us to take from our text several truths about true joy, about Christmas joy, and actually I'm not outlining the narrative flow so much as I am bringing out various facets of the one gemstone that is Christmas joy. They interlock and overlap but the facets are there.

First of all, I.: joy is given to be shared. When God saves you, you come to repentance and faith in Christ, there's a special joy that's ushered into your life and far from God just purposing to save individuals, which he does and that's wonderful, God's purpose is to form a people. Mary needed Elizabeth and Elizabeth needed Mary. They needed each other right now and that's what you need when you come to Christ and find joy, you need others to be around you who found Christ and found that same joy. It's meant to be shared. Matter of fact, Mary and Elizabeth coming together is the first inaugural fellowship of the church. Yes, it's in its infancy and, yes, it's not structured and formed yet, but it's it's a prototype, if you will, of local church Christian fellowship. You see, there's a part of Mary and Elizabeth's fellowship that none of us nor any other person of any other age could ever share in. I mean, they're both conceived a child by miracle. They both have been informed by the angel Gabriel that their child would have this great

purpose in life above and beyond anything else that's ever happened. So we can't share in that joy. We, we'll never experience that but there are some basic primary truths of joy here, Christmas joy, that we all share in alike.

Theirs was indeed, Mary and Elizabeth's fellowship was a fellowship of great and unique joy and so should be ours, but you gotta fight for it. Can't just watch the football games until late Saturday, spend three minutes with God on Sunday morning and expect to have a whole lot of joy when the pastor preaches the next morning. You've got to fight to get with God on Saturday night. See, the Jewish Sabbath started at sundown the day before and there's something to getting your heart ready on Saturday for the fellowship of the saints of joy on Sunday.

True joy is to be shared joy. You know, if something of unspeakable greatness and joy has happened to you, you want to share it, but you especially desire to share it with those who've had similar experiences. Well, Elizabeth is and Mary, their experiences is that for sure. I mean she's a relative. They have that in connection. Uh, they both have experienced this miraculous conception of a child and both have been promised that their child's have an extraordinary purpose in God's sovereign plan for the ages. So these two come together bursting with joy and happiness. Matter of fact, look at verse 39. Mary has just heard that she's going to conceive and it's going to be of the Holy Spirit. She's going to give birth to the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. She's heard that her cousin Elizabeth also has had a miraculous conception. And so verse 39, "Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry." She's fired up. I believe she just spontaneously rushes off to fellowship with Elizabeth about all these glorious revelations that she and Elizabeth have heard or received. This is a Spirit led union and a sacred relationship. Is that not what the local church is? The Holy Spirit of God must draw you, convict you, and birth you into God's family, then you come together in a Spirit-wrought family faith called a local church and that should bring happiness, that should bring joy, and when we come together, it's joy that's multiplied.

Now verse 39 says that Mary went to see Elizabeth. Uh, last part of verse 39, "to a city of Judah." Now we don't know what city of Judah. Scholars speculate that it was probably Hebron. Hebron was a hilly area outside of Jerusalem. Hebron was where Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah and Jacob had their home and is the place of their burial place. Hebron is where God met with Abraham and promised him a special, unique son. Hebron was where David was crowned king of Israel. There's a lot of significance to the region of Hebron. I believe that's where Zacharias and Elizabeth lived.

Look at verses 40 and 41 now. Mary "entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby," that's John in her womb, "leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." Here's John in his pre-born condition. And by the way, this is another reason why we believe in the sanctity of all human life, because God dealt with people when they were unborn as persons. Sanctity means is there's a uniqueness, there's a a separateness, a superiority to human life. Today we have people exalting animal life and demeaning human life. That's what

happens when you become godless, you get upside down; you get warped in your compassions and in your understanding.

So here the pre-born John the Baptist is shown even in his earliest stages of development to honor and rejoice in his Lord and Savior. The superiority of Jesus is seen clearly in our text. For example, John was conceived by the agency of a miracle, but Jesus by far greater miracle. Jesus had no human father, John did. John had a righteous father, Zacharias. Jesus, a more righteous, infinitely more righteous Father, God the Father himself. John's called the forerunner of Jesus. The angel Gabriel states that Jesus is the Son of the Most High, the Son of God, that he will inherit the throne of his father, David, that he will reign forever, his kingdom would have no end. None of that's promised for John. So immediately this greatness of Jesus is manifested in this fellowship of Christian, or Christmas joy.

And the Bible tells us in verse 41 Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. I wondered about that. Does that mean that is a conversion thing where she came, the Holy Spirit came in and she saw her sin and saw the promise of God's Savior? And I don't know, it could be, or it could be just a special anointing, but what is very clear is the preemptive or initiation of the Spirit in her heart. You see, you can't have Christian joy and you cannot have Christmas joy if the Spirit of God has not brought a work in your hearts. Only then do you see your sin and lostness and depravity and need and want, and only then can you treasure the sufficiency of Christ and his death, burial and resurrection on your behalf. The Spirit of God filled Elizabeth and she could see now at least with clarity what she could not see before.

All of these amazing events in this whole narrative, we see the sovereign preemptive work of God in these ladies' hearts. I mean, we don't have anything in the narrative about Mary being a special young lady, was so unique and so dignified and so righteous and so devoted that God decided based on that he would let her bear the Savior of the world. No. God preemptively said, "You're my choice." And it was unmerited favor. There's nothing particularly unique or special about her. I'm gonna let you in on a secret, this right here is mind-blowing. You ready? God does whatever he pleases. Doesn't matter what the Supreme Court says, doesn't matter what the President says. I'm gonna stop right there. Just doesn't matter. God does what God pleases for God's purposes and always for his glory. The preemptive initiating work of God.

Verse 42, a new Covenant of grace is enacted, "And she cried out with a loud voice saying, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!'" "Through this child," Elizabeth is saying, "Through this child, Mary, you're caring God's doing a new thing." That's why I love Christmas because once he comes it's on, man. It's on. We can see it then. The Bible says as Jesus was working on earth and completing God the Father's redemption plan for the securing of the children, that the angels in heaven in, in, in, in a, in an amplified sense from the text look and gaze in amazement at the wonder of it all. Mary's amazed that her relative Mary is carrying the baby Jesus and is going to birth this Savior of the world.

The Bible says she cried out and then says she cried out with a loud voice, verse 42. I really want to try to enact this because you can't get the feel of it. Well, maybe you can. If you've raised three girls and been married to a lady, that, by the way, is quite expressive and beautiful in many ways. She cried out with a loud voice, "Mary, Mary, Mary!" Now you just can see it. I love the unique precious dignity, beauty and emotions God's given ladies. I love ladies being ladies. I love the the vulnerability. Throw dignity and pride aside and Elizabeth is saying, "I can't get over this, Mary. Can you believe this?" It's just wonderful. Boy, we need some of that. We need to fight to get a little bit bigger taste of this Christmas joy.

The word here "cried out" comes from the word "anaphoneo," just exceedingly loud, greatly, exceedingly loud. Imagine what the neighbors were thinking. Well, maybe something will break out here at Grace Life one day and the church, there's a church about on every corner right here, you know that, don't you? And the churches will say, "What in the world are they doing down there? The Reformed pastor of the Shoals and they're acting like a bunch of Pentecostals." Why not if it's of the Holy Spirit?

Verse 43, "And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?" What great humility. Now wait a minute, timeout, timeout. Elizabeth ain't just nobody here. John the Baptist is in her womb conceived by miraculous guidance of God's power, and Elizabeth has no thought to that. She's enamored with Jesus and Mary who gets the high honor of bearing Jesus. You gotta understand that every Jewish girl in this age longed and hoped that their boy would be the Messiah because it was taught all through their their, their teaching, and their prophecy in their text that one day one would be born who'd be the great Savior for Israel. Now they had blind spots. They didn't understand the Gentiles would be woven in, at least most of them didn't. Thank God we're all Gentiles, amen? We got in on the blessing but for these two girls of young ladies of such perhaps low esteem in the culture, this is just a magnanimous event and we ought to be like Elizabeth that we delight in those that God honors, we pay respect to those to whom deserve respect.

Elizabeth acknowledges what Mary's calling is and that Mary's service of carrying the Son of God and the Savior of the world surpasses all other callings of all other women of all the ages. Now listen to me: Mary is honored by Elizabeth but not worshiped by Elizabeth. Elizabeth is, in effect, honoring the God who so blessed Mary. You see, fleshly super, fleshly superstition twists these things and gets them upside down. When Pam and I were in Greece, we visited several of the Greek Orthodox Churches and it was a special a, a weekend where they were celebrating the death of Mary. Isn't that right, Pam? Did I get that right? And they would come in and they would kneel and they would kiss the picture of Mary. I don't know how they knew it was Mary. We don't have any photographs of Mary. But they would kiss a painting of Mary and put trust in Mary, and as the Roman Catholic doctrine teaches it, she's a Co-Redemptrix. Listen to me: there are no Co-Redemptrix's. There's one Redeemer and his name is Jesus.

So we honor those God honors and uses but we do not worship them. She calls Mary the mother of our Lord and again, humanly speaking, she is. A proper honor for Mary. Then

she refers to her baby Jesus as, "my Lord." How could Elizabeth get all of this already? Well, verse 41 says she was filled with the Holy Spirit. See, the Spirit of God reveals things to you that intellect cannot grasp and God's chosen the agency of the preaching of the word to be involved in the Spirit's illuminating process in our hearts and our lives.

Now the word "Lord" here, I think when you hear this word "Lord, kyrios," two ideas should come to mind. 1. He has the right to rule. 2. He has the power to save. Aren't you glad that the one who saves is the one who has the right to rule? And aren't you glad the one who has the righteousness to rule is the one who has the power and willingness to save?

Verse 44, "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears," this Elizabeth talking about Mary coming in, "the baby leaped in my womb for joy." Two things powerfully resonate from these ladies, and I apologize about my voice. I'm out of practice. Two things come out strongly: faith and joy. Their faith is just over the top. And ladies really teach us men something here. Ladies had that superior capacity to feel more deeply in their emotions than men generally speaking, and so when something hits a lady's heart and mind, she just naturally seems to step over into faith stronger than most men do. God knows so many of our fellowships around the world have been held together by godly, humble, praying, Christian ladies, ladies of faith. I'm enamored with these ladies. I mean, they just really bless me by their humanity and the depth and the greatness of their faith. You see, the one in whom we have faith and the one in whom we find deepest joy, that's the cornerstone of our fellowship. You don't have a fellowship of sweetness and love and joy unless individually you have faith in Christ and treasure and joy in Christ. Yes, we're to work at our fellowship but it gets kinda easy, it becomes sort of a downhill slope if you'll come in here fellowshiping with Jesus, treasuring Jesus and filled with his joy. Then all of a sudden you don't bug me as much as you used to. You don't bother me like you used to. It doesn't matter what your hobbies are, what your background is, what silly, stupid football team you cheer for. I cheer for mine, you cheer for yours. I don't, that don't come close to my joy in Christ. And that's what keeps us together.

Elizabeth and Mary had that, a deep faith and a deep joy. There's something of a contrast. Van Doren brings us out in his commentary. In God's great epic works of creation you have Eve in the first epic work of creation, then you have Mary in the second epic work of creation. Eve in pride believed Satan. Mary in humility believed God's word through Gabriel. Eve in the first creation believed that man could become God. Satan said, "Eve, if you'll eat of this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you can decide your own right and wrong, and you can be like God." Isn't that what our world is telling us today? Eve believed that lie. Mary in contrast believed not that she could become like God, but that God was becoming man in the child in her womb, Immanuel, God with us. Eve embraced the lie and brought death into the human race. Mary believed the truth. It was the human agency that brought the life-giver into the human race and he's been building his church, his ekklesia, his called out ones, ever since then and he will not fail at this.

I have five points. That's point number 1. The other points are shorter. Christian joy is meant to be shared. We certainly see that here. The nearness of Jesus brings joy. I mean the entire narrative of great joy here centers in the coming of Jesus. We saw this when Zacharias was visited by Gabriel. We see this as Mary runs in joyous excitement to bring the news to Elizabeth's house. We see this as John in the womb leaps for joy over Jesus as Elizabeth cries out that Mary is bearing the Savior of the world. It's all about the nearness of Jesus. "Now, pastor, I don't have much joy." Well, how close are you to Jesus? Some of you are not fighting. You expect me to do the fighting for you. "Pastor, you pray, you study, you get with God, you get filled with joy and help me." Well, I'm supposed to do that and I'm going to do that. You've gotta fight with me. Brothers and sisters, do you realize everything else, everything else that you're joying in other than him is a robbery of you, is a lie to you. It's a counterfeit that can't last. Now, let's be balanced, nothing wrong with enjoying the common graces of God even in the Christmas season, but in the back of your minds there must be a steadfast resolve, "Those lights are pretty but I know the Light of the world. Those trees are evergreen but I know the One who has eternal life." Always, always, always seek it. Seek Christ and seek the nearness of Jesus.

III. Spiritual fellowship produces joy. We talked about that. But in far too many professing Christian congregations, there's so little of true spiritual fellowship that even the regenerate in the membership don't really grasp Christian fellowship and Christian joy. There's just not enough of it there. Might be a lot of Baptists there, might be a lot of Presbyterians or Methodists, or Catholics, or what might be a lot of those there, but I'm talking about folks who've gotten what Mary and Elizabeth have. I've been laboring at this for decades and I finally know what a mature church looks like, and more than that, I finally know what a mature, mature church feels like. Feels good. There's a sweetness and a blessedness and a union and a, and a harmony and a joy that only God can do if enough of us are walking in that joy. Spiritual fellowship produces joy. True spiritual fellowship isn't embracing and rejoicing over true doctrine and all true doctrine exalts Christ. Just seems today that the majority of congregations are more social clubs than spiritual fellowships. They're, they don't, they don't have what Mary and Elizabeth have. More of a social fellowship built on fleshly sentimentality or emotionalism but not true spirituality based on sound doctrine. I really, I really have no desire to stir your emotions. I want to so preach the truth of the word that the Spirit of God causes your emotions to get stirred about truth. Then it's worse than cocaine, I've got you then, you're hooked. Then it's not Jeff Noblit's shenanigans. Our presentation is that Christ is revealed through truth that stirs your emotions. No one ever thrilled my soul like Jesus. Praise his name. Today, too often all the craze is what I would call the Sunday Entertainment Event. They put on some half-baked world, worldly amusement show and some feel-good psychology with a little Jesus frosting on the top to make it look orthodox. But no, that's not what Mary and Elizabeth had. Their fellowship is Christ-centered. The Spirit of God and the things of Christ bring together, that's the only church there is, is when the Spirit of God and the truth of Christ have brought us together.

Back in verses 36 and 37, Gabriel tells Mary of Elizabeth's miracle to urge her to go to Elizabeth, and they get together over Jesus. They get together about Mary carrying Jesus and the true church has been getting together about Jesus ever since. And by the way, this

is essential. Mary needed Elizabeth and Elizabeth needed Mary and the church needs one another. We need this fellowship. We need to come together and meet together in joy, joy over the purposes of God, joy over the plan of God, and joy over the person of Jesus Christ, all made clear to Mary and Elizabeth by the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. And that's the way he makes it real to us.

4. Spiritual humility is the secret to joy. Again, in verses 42 and 43, Elizabeth has this great honor bestowed on her carrying John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, but she completely forgets herself, she completely forgets the role she's playing and the role her special, miraculously conceived son will play in God's purposes because she fully meditates on the person of Christ and that's where joy is. Joy is being so enamored with Jesus you forget yourself, and then whatever role God has for you in his kingdom, hallelujah, that's fine. Elizabeth says, "Hey, I'll take John the Baptist. Praise the Lord, you get the Son of God, and that's better." It's just, it's just Elizabeth's heart. I'm blessed to pastor people that overwhelmingly so when we're looking for workers just basically say, "What do you need me to do? I'll do it." And that's where Elizabeth is. That's that's a, and by the way, that's when joy comes. That's when joy comes because it's not what you're doing for God that brings you joy, it's the God you are enamored with that brings you joy. Humility is the secret to joy.

5. This, we're ending with this: Jesus is Lord of joy. He's Lord of joy. We see this in Gabriel's word to Zacharias. We see this in Gabriel's words to Mary. We see this in Mary's words back to Gabriel. We see this in Elizabeth's words to Mary. We see this when John leaps in his, in his mother's womb at the presence of Jesus. He was Lord in eternity past. He was Lord in Mary's womb. He was Lord at his birth. He was Lord during his earthly ministry. He was Lord when they nailed him to the cross. He was Lord when he surrendered of his spirit to the Father. He was Lord when he was laid in Joseph's tomb. He was Lord when he was resurrected from the dead. He was Lord when he ascended back up into heaven. He is Lord as he sits at the right hand of the Father, faithfully interceding for his own, his church. And he will be Lord when he comes again to rescue his own and judge the rest. He is and forevermore shall be Lord and he is Lord of joy. All that Jesus is and all that Jesus does culminates in our joy but you gotta fight for it. You gotta work for it. Have you noticed, this might be a new revelation to you, I don't know, have you noticed that if you'll fight for your marriage you'll get more joy out of your marriage? Have you noticed that? But you know, on the scale of things that brings you blessing and joy when you fight for Jesus and nearness to Jesus and closest to Jesus, that's the pinnacle of all joys.

Mary and Elizabeth come together because they can't not come together. When I was first converted 43-ish years ago, nobody, nobody, nobody had to tell me to go to church. I would say, "Are you kidding me? What He's done for me, how He's changed me, I've got to find the other people that have been through this." I didn't even know I was saved at first, I just knew it was wonderful. I just know I felt the deepness of my sin and the wonders of Christ and the forgiveness of Christ, and I was learning to treasure Christ and I just wanted to be around other... Mary and Elizabeth, it's like, man, all the forces of of hell couldn't have kept them from getting together right now. Do you understand when

the primary reasons you come to church on Sunday is to fight for joy again because you've got to tasting some of that swill out there in the world this week and it tasted pretty good, but something back in the back of your heart and mind said, "Yeah, but this stuff right here ain't the real stuff. I need to go to church and get the real stuff, the real lasting true joy that I need. I need to say no to my flesh and no to my longings and no to my lust." You say, "But, pastor, I had a bad week and I failed the Lord and I I've sinned and I've wallowed in some of it. I'm I'm ashamed of it." Run back to church and say, "God, help me to get a new rich taste of You."

You see, when you sin as a child, God's child, you don't run from Jesus, you run to him. You don't come to church because you want to, you come to church because you need to and then that'll help you want to, and then you'll need to again. I come in here every Sunday and try to preach the world out of you and preach joy back in you because that's what God did to me this week as I was studying this for you. It's just always for me too. I mean, as I study, I find renewed joy and then I preach the truth to you, and the Spirit enables you to grasp those joys too, and they're multiplied. And then you take the new joys you have in God's truth, and you sharing one to another, and it's multiplied again. The multiplication of Christmas joy.

So we're going to fight together and see if we can't by Christmas day get our Christmas joy meter up here so much so that if he didn't buy me that present, it's okay because all that stuff's fun but can I give you a side note on Christmas and family life? Your children will joy in and honor what they see coming out of your heart. It's not whether or not you do Santa Claus. It's not whether or not you have a tree. They'll know what's in your heart. And Pam and I just always told our kids, "We do some fun things, babies, but Jesus is what this is about and He's our real joy, He's our real treasure." They'll get that. You can't just put on something they get it. It's gotta be in here because that joy multiplies. It's infectious. And you make a lot of mistakes and fall short. Pam can tell you that because she's watched me, but if you're humble about it and strive afresh, try to do the best you can, God will bless.

You know what we're gonna do next Sunday night? Next Sunday night Brother Tom is gonna lead the singing and we're just going to have a deluge of Bible truth. We're going to speak it. We're going to sing it. We're going to celebrate and we're going to multiply Christmas joy. That's what we're gonna do.

You remember the silly story I've told you many times about the preacher down at the train station. Before they had other modes of transportation, the preacher's down at the train station and he's just sitting there. Train comes in, train goes. Train comes in, train goes. One of his deacons was there and the preacher didn't know the deacon was there, but the deacon was watching his pastor and he finally went on there and said, "Pastor, what are you doing?" He said, "What do you mean what am I doing?" He said, "You've been sitting here a long time and you just watch a train come and watch a train go. Why are you doing this?" And the preacher said, "I wanted to see something move that I didn't have to push." That's why I love... it's silly, isn't it? That's why I love the Shoals' Christmas praise. I guess I do push it some from up here, but I don't have to do the work.

I just sit back there and multiply the joy. I don't know how you can miss it. I don't know how you not get in on it. I just don't get it. I just don't get it. Okay, go ahead, get out in the world and give your church, your local church and the fellowship, give it a wink and a nod and God is gonna tan your tail feathers and he's gonna get your attention and you're gonna wake up one morning and say, "O God, I gotta get back to church. I gotta get back to the word. I've got to get back to the Lord. I gotta get back to those people who know Jesus and Jesus' joy. I've got to have that again." Don't you love God for that? He don't let his own go too far.

In John 15:11 Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy," not anything else, "My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." You already had it, but do you have it full? Jesus said, "I want you to have it full." Jesus said in John 14 his peace was not like the peace the world gives, praise the Lord. John 18 he said his kingdom is not like any kingdoms of this world and that includes that his joy is out of this world. You see, we've been given the key to true, blessed, lasting, eternal joy, a joy only found in Jesus and infused and illumined by the Spirit of God. Let's enter afresh into his joy and multiply it together this Christmas. Let's fight together to have the same joy that Elizabeth and Mary had that first Christmas season, a true joy that's Spirit-wrought and Christ-centered.

All of God's people said. Now if you'll join with your pastor in saying I'm going to put some effort into rekindling true Christmas joy this year, would you stand? I'm gonna put some effort into rekindling Christian joy, Christmas joy this year.