

REPEAT THE SOUNDING JOY - Part Two

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CHRISTMAS JOY ANCHORED TO DIVINE PROMISE

We have never been more technologically poised to major on trivial, self-centered things. Every time my wife shows me Christians arguing about politics or theology or church on social media I find myself inwardly thanking God I have a life.

We seem to be more and more advanced in the capacity of more quickly focusing on and sharing lightness and self-absorbed nothingness to more people than ever before. We have created such a boundless appetite for the trite and the banal and the empty. Listen to the experts. More and more of them are asking what have we done and where is this going?

But there are still big things to think about. We should probably be grateful God in His providence has inclined the whole world (or at least most of it) to be drawn to a feeling of wonder at Christmas - even if it's unbelieving, uninformed wonder. It's almost as though we are all divinely helped to see something intangibly wonderful in the Christmas event.

We need to remind ourselves we're here today to celebrate the **specifically redemptive glory** of Christmas. We're here to be moved beyond mere fuzzy sentiment. This short Christmas series is aimed in whatever small measure it can to awaken wonder and thankfulness and praise. Freshly ponder Christmas joy all the way down to its roots with me today and Christmas Eve.

Here's the central heart of today's teaching. **Christmas glory means all of God's promises can be trusted. This is our deepest joy.**

Consider this text with me - **Acts 3:22-26** - "**Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. [23] And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'** [24] **And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. [25] You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'** [26] **God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."**

I have never in my life used this as a Christmas text. This is Peter's Pentecost sermon. He's explaining the coming of Jesus into this world. And the striking feature of this text is the way Peter, at least initially, seems to belabor the **preparation** of Christ's coming as much as the coming itself. Jesus didn't just **arrive**. He was **promised** before He **came**. And it's this element of **fulfilled promise** that seems the important part of the **advent message** in Peter's mind in our opening text.

He comes at this same point over and over again. First, in **verse 22** he says **Moses** predicted the arrival of a prophet like himself. And then Moses himself pressed, saying it was crucially important that everyone **listened deeply** to this coming one. In **verse 24** Peter said **Samuel** and **all the prophets who came after him** spoke of the days of Christ. Finally, in **verse 25** Peter wraps up speaking of **Abraham** and God's promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed through the coming (which is what that word **advent** means) of Jesus.

Surely Peter's point must be that all this preparation isn't an accident. God put a lot of work into **pre-announcing** this great Christmas advent.

Here's what I think this means for us today:

1) **CHRISTMAS ISN'T JUST ABOUT THE ADVENT. IT'S ABOUT A PROMISED ADVENT**

It is the particular glory of Christmas that Jesus didn't just **arrive**. A particular glory of Christmas is His was a **promised** arrival. That Jesus came means our God is a **rescuing** God. This is immeasurably precious and we'll give a whole teaching to it on Christmas Eve.

But that Jesus' advent was a **promised** advent means our God is not just a **redeeming** God. He is a **truthful** God. It means He is a **trustworthy** God. It means He didn't just rescue us on a whim or as a result of feeling good on a particular day. It means He is of such a nature that He **makes** promises and He **keeps** those promises. He can be counted on to **always be faithful to what He has said**. Never let the difficulties of life or the words of cynics steal that truth from your soul.

This is how the Apostle Paul restated the same foundational Christmas truth about our Lord's advent into this world in **Romans 15:8-9** - "**For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's**

truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, [9] and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy...."

It couldn't be stated more clearly. Christ came - first to the Jews - to **"show God's truthfulness,"** and to **"confirm the promises given to the patriarchs."** This demonstration of God's truthfulness would also lead the Gentiles to **"glorify God for his mercy."**

So Christmas means our God **tells the truth when He speaks.** Part of the glory of Christmas is we see the universe and our lives in this confusing world can have something sure to lean on and drill down into. Not all politicians tell the truth. Not all churches tell the truth. Not all pastors tell the truth. Not all bankers tell the truth. Not all teachers tell the truth. Not all scientists tell the truth. Not all judges and lawyers tell the truth. Not all professors tell the truth. Certainly our entertainers rarely tell us the truth.

Where does that leave us? We need to know our way. We need a reliable path to follow. God always tells the truth. **Let this sentence land with weight on your soul: God never says anything that isn't absolutely and fully true.** There is no such thing as an empty promise from God. There is never an idle threat from God. His words are the deepest reservoir of reality and reliability. Advent proves God tells the truth. Advent proves God keeps His promises. **We mark our calendars with a coming that proves God is faithful.**

2) **GOD IS TRUE TO HIS PROMISE EVEN WHEN IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HE IS**

We have another great text to look into: **Micah 5:2-4** - **"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. [3] Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. [4] And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth."**

We've studied this whole prophecy in detail in Christmases previous. Micah's is one of the most overlooked of the wonderful Old Testament Advent prophecies. Of note today is just one thought. When Micah made this glorious prophecy it was one of the **least likely times for it to be believed.**

It's one thing to let lofty thoughts soar while the fireworks are bursting, the band is playing, and the flag is unfurled. We all know and enjoy our great moments and they're worth celebrating. But Micah's words had to have a particularly empty ring to them when he spoke. Israel was sinking into complete oblivion. The Northern kingdom was already destroyed. And Judah was about to come under the sternest judgment of God for her unbelief and rebellion. **There was nothing remotely hopeful on the near horizon.**

Then comes Micah. God speaks through Micah about Advent - about the great coming King and Redeemer. And God manifests this most majestic of all promises precisely when such a promise looked the least likely or even possible.

The lesson? Please hear this, church. It's precious beyond my ability to tell it. God's promise - God's truthfulness - God's faithfulness to keep His word - is never to be measured by the limited horizon of our circumstances. Perhaps you can't imagine the freeing power of divine grace penetrating was seems to be the hopelessness of your present circumstances. Perhaps you can't imagine the tangled knot of all your sin ever coming under the mercy of a heavenly Father's mercy. Perhaps you can't imagine God loves you anymore. Perhaps you can't pinpoint any hope on the horizon.

And what I'm trying to draw out of this text from the prophet Micah is this - **God's grace isn't limited to the reach of your imagination.** God's word overrides dark circumstances even when the circumstances don't seem to carry any hope of their own. There is always this bigger picture with our promise-keeping God.

So here's where I am going with all of this. It's my concluding point:

3) **STAND IN JOYFUL WONDER AT THIS GLORY OF CHRISTMAS IN THE MIDDLE OF YOUR PRESENT NEED**

This is glory to marvel at. Jesus came into **this** world - **your present world.** He didn't come into Narnia. This isn't some middle earth myth. There is no gospel record beginning with the words, "Once upon a time...." Jesus came to Bethlehem - six miles from Jerusalem and 9322 kilometers from Newmarket. His coming is attached to a specific date on the calendar.

But there is something else I want you to notice. Before He came the whole world was being prepared to learn something important about the Father who sent the Son. It is one of the most praiseworthy features of our God. The coming of the Son was a **prepared** event. And it was a **promised** event. That's what we've been considering this morning.

Now here's what that **means**. It means God will never lie to you. He will never fail to keep His promise. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. There is absolutely nothing in heaven or earth or under the earth that can change that.

You may sense that faithfulness and you may not. But that doesn't **change** His nature one bit. He is rock solid and trustworthy. If you don't see it yet, then you just don't see it. But He is. And He's proven it in meeting our deepest needs in Christ Jesus.

My final plea then is for you to come to Christ. The bottom line of this message is there is nothing trustworthy outside of Him. Ignore Jesus Christ and you will live to see you have sold out to traitors. Our deepest longings can't be met in lies or illusions. Jesus came to reveal a trustworthy God. And if you repent of your sin and run to Christ He **promises** forgiveness and eternal life. And God sovereignly used thousands of years of documented history just to prove to your discouraged heart today that He always keeps His promise.

And Christians listening today, pass on the legacy of a faithful God to your children. Let the next generation hear of God's faithfulness from your lips. Find the great stories of a faithful God from your own life. This is one of the great glories of Christmas that must be retold.