

## **Advent 3 – Dec.13/20 - Cultivating Joy – Isaiah 9:1-7**

1. It was Blaise Pascal who said “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. They will never take the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man.” Does this quote resonate with reality? Why or why not?

*This is obviously simply a personal reflection question to get your group “on topic”. The hope here would be to have your group move to perhaps reflect on it as it relates to their own lives – are they motivated in a pursuit of happiness? If they are comfortable with such a personal reflection a really good follow up would be to ask if they have found the joy on the other end of the things they search for it in?*

*There might also be wisdom in bringing in from the sermon the reflections of C.S. Lewis who said that nothing in this world will be able to satisfy this longing because we were made for something else.*

### **Read Isaiah 9:1-7**

2. (vs. 3) Isaiah’s promise includes joy, a joy far beyond anything we can possibly imagine. On the heels of the promise come 3 affirmations that all begin with the word “for”. These are the reasons we can have a joy beyond imagining. What are those reasons?
  - I. *The ending of oppression by the work of grace (this is the reference to Midian where God diminished the army of Israel to 300 vs. the 135K of Midian so that they would know it was God’s doing and not their own strength)*
  - II. *The utter undoing of all that is wrong with the world. War and conflict are not only brought to an end but even the memory of them is wiped from the face of the earth.*
  - III. *God is known as wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace and there are the material realities of this messianic kingdom being worked out upon the earth – peace, righteousness, and justice.*

3. (vs. 6) On the heels of that first quote Blaise Pascal adds "There was once in man a true happiness of which there now remains to him only; the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings... but these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable Object, that is to say, only by God Himself." This seems to be what Isaiah affirms in vs. 6 – that God increases our joy by making himself known in Jesus as Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. What do think each of these titles mean and how can knowing God in Jesus as these things increase our joy?

*Wonderful Counsellor – the one who is able to walk with us in whatever we are facing because he (Jesus) has gone through the whole of human experience – there is joy in knowing that he is Immanuel – God WITH us.*

*Mighty God – means hero or champion – the one who fights for us – the one who takes on our enemies of sin and death in his cross and resurrection and vanquishes them forever – there is the joy in knowing that our ultimate enemies have been defeated and have no power over us.*

*Everlasting Father – the one who comes to initiate relationship – to bring us into a new family – adopt us as his children – that we might call him Father – there is joy in being loved and known.*

*Prince of Peace – the one who has come to bring wholeness and full flourishing upon the earth – peace where there is conflict – prosperity where there is poverty – healing where there is disease... – he has come to inaugurate such a kingdom and will come again to bring it to its consummation – there is joy in the ultimate future of the world being flourishing in every aspect of life.*

4. Our joy is not just in knowing God, it is also rooted in a future hope. The “for” statements of vs. 4 and 5, and the continuation of the last “for” statement in vs. 7 speak of a future hope of a messianic kingdom of beauty, peace, righteousness and justice. How can having our joy located in such a future hope help us to navigate our present circumstances?

*Christianity doesn't invite us to escape our circumstances but to grieve them in light of this future – the way the world ought to be under his kingship. In light of this future kingdom we certainly grieve but we grieve with hope - a hope that will make it possible to endure our current circumstances – a hope that will not allow our current circumstances to pull us under.*

5. In vs. 3 Isaiah speaks of God's activity in giving us joy (you have increased it's joy), as well as our participation in that joy (they rejoice before you). How can our rejoicing, our life of praise and worship deepen us in the joy that God gives us in Jesus, in the future we have in Him?

*When we praise something it is where we fix our attention. If our attention is focused only on our present circumstances they will be all consuming and as a result erode our joy – but if we put our attention on Jesus and the future we have in him that will hold our attention in the midst of our circumstances – and we will know he is with us – loves us – and has ultimately won the victory over all that stands against us – and as a result of faith in Him we are heirs of His eternal kingdom*