

Pre-Sermon

- Introduce myself
- Update on RLA
- Today: Advent... Neh 8
- Read Neh 8:9-12 (ESV)
- Pray

Intro

- CHRISTMAS IN ALASKA
 - I'll never forget one cold snowy Christmas Eve when I was 5 years old.
 - I grew up in Alaska, and while I love Christmas in LA – less traffic and fake snow at the Americana – Christmas in Alaska is the real deal.
 - 6 feet of snow outside our house
 - Wood-burning stove to keep us warm inside the house
 - A Christmas tree that we literally cut down from the forest behind our house.
 - The reason I remember that particular Christmas is because there was one present that year that I wanted more than I'd ever wanted anything else.
 - And it wasn't just me. Every kid wanted it.
 - It would change our lives forever...
 - Christmas eve... having a hard time going to sleep
 - Christmas morning... There it was: The first ever Nintendo NES 8 bit game system.
 - It had two games: Super Mario Bros. Duck Hunt
 - Two buttons: A and B
 - The two of us played it till our thumbs hurt and our hearts rejoiced.
 - It was as if Heaven had come down.
 - What I just described... joy *in* circumstances.
 - How can we get a joy beyond our circumstances. Many of you...
 - We try to change the circumstances... God wants to change our hearts... give joy.
- And in Neh 8...

Story of Nehemiah 8

- Summarize the story of Neh 8:1-8
 - Nehemiah is about the return from exile, but to understand exile you gotta understand Eden.
 - EDEN TO EXILE → RETURN FROM EXILE
 - What's happening in Nehemiah 8
 - Thousands of people gather to hear the word of the Lord read
 - "platform" = tower – big enough to hold 14 people
 - 6-7 hours
- The Word of God – proclaimed, explained, applied
- People: listened... responsive... (amen, raised hands, praising God, on their faces, weeping)
 - But there was one thing lacking in their response, JOY.
 - and it seems that Ezra and Nehemiah thought it was the most important thing.
 - Summarize vs. 9-12 – stop grieving...

- Vs. 11 - “the joy of the Lord is your strength”
- Hebrew word for joy:
 - Hebrew: Simchah (you get more joy if you pronounce it right)
 - Means... a gladness in your *whole disposition*...
 - associated w/ the heart, the soul and with the lighting up of the eyes.
 - Word used in weddings, festivals, and victories
 - Joy = strength
 - Joy is not... a cute sentimental feeling...
 - Joy is not the whip cream on your mocha frappachino
 - Joy is strength. Joy is life-changing. Joy is what we want and what we can have in God.
 - Dif than Happiness.
 - Happiness is a feeling based on circumstance (Clippers... book... coffee...)
 - Then... **Joy is delight that is settled in the soul**
 - Transcends circumstances.
 - Coexist...
 - Bedrock...
 - That’s what joy is.
 - Now let’s look deeper in this passage to see how we get this joy beyond circumstances.

Joy comes not from the absence of sorrow but from the presence of God.

- We often think of joy as the opposite of sorrow, or what you experience when nothing bad is happening.
- 8:9 – “For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.” Very emotional scene.
- Not only confessing their sin... grieving the loss of their city...
- He’s not simply saying, “don’t grieve,” He’s saying, “don’t stay in your grief” “don’t wallow ...
- God doesn’t tell them to change their circumstance but to change their perspective.
- We always focus on circumstance... If... If... If...
 - We think we lack joy because of what we don’t have in life.
 - I don’t have... job/money/girlfriend/house
 - Our joy is based not in whether we lack but in what we have.
 - You’ve got God.... (infinite/unlimited source of joy)

○ **Psalm 16:11**

- **You make known to me the path of life;**
- **in your presence there is fullness of joy;**
- **at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

- Joy of the Lord (not a message of generic joy)
- Doesn’t minimize pain...
- The danger in reading this passage is to think that an appeal to joy dismisses the other emotions.
 - That it’s simply saying: grief is bad, joy is good. Be joyful.
 - No. Grief is the appropriate and right response to loss, pain, and hurt...
- Joy does not dismiss other emotions it puts them in perspective
 - Joy and grief can both be proper responses to life’s situations, but they are not on the same plane.
 - Joy ultimately eclipses sorrow
 - **Ps 30:5 - Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.**
- When the joy of the Lord is your strength, it can withstand a variety of emotions and circumstances.
 - There’s sorrowful joy
 - There’s exhausted joy
 - There’s overwhelmed joy
 - There’s somber joy

- There's exuberant joy
- **Billy Sunday**
 - **"If you have no joy, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere."**
- Joy is not the absence of sorrow or pain, it is the life-giving presence of God amidst any emotion or circumstances.
 - The second insight for living with joy beyond circumstances is this;

Joy is a gift to be received and a discipline to be cultivated.

- Joy is a gift to be received.
 - Byproduct.
 - It's a gift that God loves to give.
 - God is for your joy...
 - Different than typ: God is a killjoy. a grumpy old man who wants rote obedience with no joy...
 - God is... God of joy. (Pleasure. sex was God's idea. Food.)
 - God is for your joy... more than you...
- But while joy is a gift to be received, it's also a discipline to be cultivated.
 - **Vs. 10 – Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready."**
 - How does God teach them to cultivate joy?
 - Eat a good meal
 - Be generous to those who can't afford to
 - Explain: "eat the fat and drink sweet wine" = feast
 - Explain: "send portions to anyone who has nothing"
 - These practices produce joy.
 - Eating...
 - Every time you take a bite - sensation that can produce joy
 - Not just fueling your body... people.
 - Communal
 - Giving
 - Every time you give to someone else, it loosens the grip of greed on your heart
 - And you become a more joyful person
 - OT
 - Feasting
 - Giving
 - Maturity is the ability to delay gratification
 - MARSHAMALLOW EXPERIMENT (Stanford)
 - "No" to weaker desires... "yes" to greater desires
 - Apply: Choosing happiness vs. striving for joy

God does not merely give us joy. He is our joy.

- Gifts/Giver – Greatest gift is giving himself.
- The most unusual circumstance
- We started by talking about God's people in exile.
- If you think exile was desolate, imagine this.
 - Unwed teenage girl. Pregnant. Nowhere to go. Starting labor contractions.
 - Talk about circumstances... These were the opposite of joyful circumstances...
- **Luke 2:8-11 (ESV)**

- Good news not good advice
 - (ascent/descent)
 - The Christmas narrative reminds us that God's
 - Majesty is shown in meekness
 - Power perfected through weakness
 - Joy comes not in taking but in giving
- A Savior (a lot of problems in the world... greatest: our sin separates us from God)
- Manger to the Cross – Heb 12:2 – “for the joy set before him”
- *The incarnation means that all our longings and desires are fulfilled in a person.*
 - JESUS IS OUR JOY... hope, peace, love, victory, purpose, life, satisfaction, glory
 - Joy is a byproduct...
 - *If you want joy... don't obsess over joy, fix your eyes on Jesus.*
- ...a joy that doesn't depend on circumstance.
- Call to faith and repentance. (not just a feel good – add some joy to your life – kind of sermon)
 - You have settled for shallow joys.
 - My chief joy
 - Trust in Christ. Cling. Wait. Hope. Believe.
 - **Psalm 51:12**
 - **Restore to me the joy of your salvation**
- Look to Jesus. He is our joy.
- Pray

Extra

- Christmas Chronicles
- 2 Chron 20