

Joy in the House of the Lord

"A Declaration of Joy"

Isaiah Chapter 65

This is a year that, by the grace of God, we will abound in joy. Who doesn't want to receive the blessing of abounding in joy? May the joy of the Lord be our strength. That's a promise of God, and when we carry that joy, people notice. Today, in Pakistan, there's some pretty hard ground to plow. It's a dark place, and as a Christian there, one is mindful that they are the light in the midst of that darkness, and they're carrying the joy of God within them. A Christian carrying peace in a place like that stands out. A Christian carrying *joy* stands out, and a Christian who just smiles stands out.

An evangelist in Pakistan can preach the Gospel to thousands, but still not connect with people one-on-one - not reach out to them or shake their hand. People over there can have this very serious-looking, stern-looking face, but if we'll just stretch out our hand and say, "*God bless you,*" at first they won't know what to do, but they'll stretch out their hand and shake our hand. Just the fact that someone would stop and look them in the eye and speak a word of blessing surprises them - it disarms them - and a smile will come to their faces. That's a powerful weapon of our warfare - joy, peace, and the light of the glory of God we carry wherever we go.

There's power in that. We take it for granted at the grocery store or at the gas station, where everybody greets us and says hello, but there are places in the world where people don't greet us, - even places in *America* where they don't greet us like that. But *we* carry something inside of us, and God is really highlighting this gift of joy that we're to carry this year. So whatever we've been through, whatever battle we've been through, let's say, "*Lord, we want to abound in joy this year, in Jesus name.*" The Lord has a word that he wants us to hear today - something he wants us to carry in our spirits.

Matthew 24:14

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations and then the end will come."

Jesus had been asked by his disciples, *"When is the end going to come, and what will be the sign of Your coming?"* And Jesus began to speak to them about the end times and the "unfolding." That's one of the places in Scripture talking about *wars and rumors of wars*, and *famines*, and *nation against nation*, and *they will betray you to your neighbor*, and the *[agape] love of many will grow cold*. Not the *world's* kind of love - it's talking about Christian love - even *Christian* love will grow cold in the end times. Is that even possible that the Bible talks about there being a great falling away - a falling away by those who are faithful - and turning to the Lord?

They were saying, *"What will be the sign of that time of these things coming - wars and rumors of wars and nations against nations and people hating you and betraying you. What will be a sign?"* Jesus began speaking about the signs that would come, and this was one of them: *"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations and then the end will come."* The end's going to come one day. Do we believe that? Some of us are saying, *"Lord, let the end come a little sooner rather than later. Get me out of here, Lord! Things are getting pretty dark in this world - pretty challenging in this world - pretty dark and challenging in my neighborhood - pretty dark and challenging in my finances - pretty dark and challenging in my kids that are struggling with their own battles - or my health that's struggling inside of me."*

Sometimes we just want to say, *"Oh Lord, the end's got to come. Oh Lord, how long? How long must we endure this? How much longer? Oh Lord, just let the end come."* But Jesus is saying, *"There will be a day when the end comes."* One day Jesus is coming back. One day we will hear the trumpet sound and the cry of the archangel will go out and the Lord will descend. Then, those who are on the earth will be caught up together in the air with him. That day is *coming*. We might have differences of opinion about how *much* tribulation, if any, we have to go through till that day. But that day is going to come. Jesus says, *"Every day between right now and that day to come, let Me come in you. Let Me come into your heart. Let Me manifest My life, My Word, and My kingdom in you."*

This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the earth, and then the end will come. The end is going to come one day. But, between this day and that day, God wants his Word proclaimed. God wants his Word lived out of us. God wants there to be a *people* on this earth - in every nation of this earth - a *witness* in every nation. In every tribe and tongue and nation on the earth, God wants there to be a *people* who carry the light of the glory of God in them - a people that have the peace and countenance of our faith no matter what they're going through - a people that have a joy abounding in them no matter what's going on in their life around them - a people ready to share the hope that is within them.

We're ready to share the hope that's in us because God gave us hope when we felt hopeless - God gave us *peace* when we found it hard to find any peace in our souls - God saved us and raised us up. We were going to hell and he snatched us out of hell and delivered us into the kingdom of heaven. That's a mighty powerful God! In the New Testament, when it says "*this gospel of the kingdom*," the word "gospel" means *good news*. There's good news in the gospel - good news that God loves us - good news that God is for us. "*And if God be for us, who can be against us?*" There's good news that we can be forgiven of every sin. It doesn't matter what we've done or how far we've run away. It doesn't matter how low we've gone. God loves us - and God is for us. And, if we will just turn to him and call on the name of Jesus, he will *save* us. That's good news, isn't it? That is good news.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a theocracy, and there are very few people in that country who know the name of Jesus. It's a dark place - a spiritually dark place - and it's a *hard* place. There are blasphemy laws in Pakistan, and if anyone says anything against their religion, their prophet, or their word of God, they can be accused of blasphemy which is punishable by death - and they *enforce* the law there. That's why prayer is so important - to push back the darkness and open up the heavens. But, in that place, they're ready to hear some *good news*. They're ready to know some good news.

The name of their faith, *Islam*, means "*to submit*" - because their idea of God is that he's a "force" that everyone must submit to, and everyone must do certain things and not do other things, and always submit to God. But, God is a Father who wants a relationship with us, and he wants us all to be sons and daughters of God. And he's made a way for that through Jesus Christ, his son, and we can all experience a personal relationship with a God like that. That good news of the kingdom is very different from a kingdom that's dark and suppressive and that wants us all to submit to a *force* - but the real kingdom has a King who is a Father, and a King who wants to come and dwell in our heart - *and that's good news!*

People in Pakistan are hungry to hear that good news. When Tommy starts off in his meetings there, he says, "*God is a Father and he has a Son and his name is Jesus - and God is love and God loves you and God is for you and he brought you here now. He brought you here today to experience a personal relationship with the living God.*" Pakistan is one of those places in the world where God confirms his Word with signs and wonders and miracles. One of the ways he shows that Jesus is Lord and that his name is powerful and he is the Savior of the world is through his healing, through his freedom, through deliverance, and through changing lives right now.

Like anywhere else, people in Pakistan want to hear good news. As they experience miracles, then they will receive the Miracle Worker in their hearts. God is a Father, and he has a Son whose name is Jesus, and one of the ways that God expresses his love is through his healing power. As the people call on the name of the One who is the Healer, and expect him to move in their lives and in their hearts, they can invite him into their heart as Lord and Savior, and thousands are being saved with signs and wonders and miracles.

When Jesus was passing by, blind Bartameus said, "*Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me,*" and Jesus stopped and called him over and made him well. When the woman who had an issue of blood said to herself, "*If I could just touch the hem of his garment, I know he will make me well,*" and pressed in and took hold of Jesus, she was healed. And when the man that had leprosy came to Jesus and said, "*Jesus, if you're willing, you can make me clean,*" Jesus said, "*I am willing. Be made clean.*" This same gospel - this "*good news of the kingdom will be preached and will be proclaimed in all the world,*" and that's happening now in Pakistan.

That's a sign of the end times in all the world. There are people in Iran right now, with all that's going on there, who are being set free. There are so many that are coming to Jesus Christ in that nation. It's one of the places in the world where great revival is breaking out. More and more, in a lot of these kinds of countries, people are being saved. They're becoming Christians, but they don't yet have the courage to tell anybody. Before we judge them too harshly, we have to live in their shoes.

People there who need money will get a loan from the owner of the brick mill, and when they can't pay back their loan, they have to make bricks. They move into the compound with their family and they work. Their debt gets passed down from generation to generation to generation, because they're also being charged for their rent, for their tools, and their wheelbarrow, and they can never get out of debt. They're in debt, but when they hear the good news, that Jesus has come to bring good news to the poor and heals the brokenhearted, set the captives free, many are being saved in that place. In a place like that, people are being saved and baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It costs them something to give their heart to Jesus in a place like that. Sometimes, have we lost the cost? Have we lost the value? Have we lost the great reward we have from the God of the universe that we could be sons and daughters of God? Do we take it for granted? The Lord is awakening us - awakening us again to this great gift that we have - the gift of the blood of Jesus that forgives our sins. The gift of the blood of Jesus heals the broken-hearted and sets the captives free - *and changes our lives.*

God wants us to experience his kingdom when we go to heaven one day. But, he also wants us to experience the kingdom of God in us *now*. When Jesus says *"this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world as a witness to every nation and then the end shall come,"* what does he mean by *"this gospel of the kingdom?"* He didn't say this gospel of *"salvation."* He said this gospel of the *"kingdom."* The gospel of the kingdom of God *includes* salvation. That's the most important gift of all. That's where we have to start. We have to come to a place where we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that God the Father raised Jesus the Son from the dead in the power of the Holy Spirit, and so we are saved.

"All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved." That's all it takes. It's not what we *do*, or what we've *done* - not how good or bad we are - or how much we sinned last night. The gospel of salvation - the good news of salvation - is that we can receive Jesus in our hearts and be saved. And yet, Jesus is saying this gospel of the kingdom will be *proclaimed*. This gospel of the kingdom includes salvation and begins with salvation, but there is *more*. The kingdom of God is when we let the King of kings and the Lord of lords rule and reign in us. It's not just being blessed by God, it's being obsessed by God - not just being *blessed* by God but being possessed by God.

Yes, he's our Lord and our Savior, but he also wants to be our Lord and our King. He wants to come rule and reign in every area of our life - in our mind and how we think - in our heart, in the things we desire, in the words that come out of our mouth - in our body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit - in our going out and our coming in - *"in our everyday walking around life,"* as Eugene Peterson says. We *know* the gospel of salvation. We *received* eternal life - we're going to heaven when we die - *but* are we living with the fullness of God's kingdom in us now?

A lot of us that are falling short of that. Even right now, the Holy Spirit is inviting us to say, *"Oh Lord, I thank you that you're my Savior, but are You also my King? Am I letting You rule and reign in my thoughts, in my heart, my words, my desires, my action, my business, my marriage, my family, and my neighborhood? Am I letting You rule and reign as the King of kings and the Lord of lords?"* Jesus said in Luke 17 that the kingdom of God is within us. It's not something where we say *"Look, here it is,"* or *"It's over there."*

The kingdom of God is within us, because we surrendered our heart to the King. We surrendered our *mind* to the King - our *words* to the king - our *life* to the king - our *business* to the king - our *ministry* to the king - our *school* to the king. He is King. He *rules*. And he wants to reign in us. But some of us hold back. We're still on our throne. We're still doing what we want to do and when we want to do it. God says, *"Go here."* But we say, *"Maybe tomorrow. Here I am, Lord - send them."* The grace of the Lord is here if we would humble ourselves and say, *"God, You take the place on the throne of my heart. Thank You that You're my Savior, but I want You to be my Lord. You save me from hell, but I want You to manifest heaven in me right now."* That's the kingdom of God.

That's the gospel of the kingdom that will be proclaimed to all the world. Yes, it starts with salvation. There are many people in the world getting saved by the droves - on campuses and in tent meetings, thousands and thousands of people all over America are coming to be saved, healed, and delivered. We're praying, "*Oh, God is a God of miracles. He's the Way Maker.*" But it's happening now, all around the world. People are getting saved like we've never known, and in the places where they can't even record the salvations.

But there's more. Yes, God is saving souls, but he wants there to be a people on this earth who *look* like Jesus - a body of Christ where we have the Spirit of Christ living in us, where God's moving *through* us and he's pushing back the darkness through us - opening up the heavens through us - bringing life and love and power and grace through us wherever we are. That's this gospel of the kingdom that must be proclaimed in all the world as a *witness* to nations. A *witness* is somebody who tells what they *know*, tells the truth that they have in their heart, and who offers the reason for the hope that is within them. *That's* being a witness.

When Jesus came to earth, that was the kingdom of heaven - the kingdom of God - coming into this earth. He was casting out demons, causing blind eyes to see, deaf ears to hear, the lame to walk, and they all shouted for joy. That was the kingdom of God breaking into earth that began when Jesus came. The book of Revelation chapter 11, says that there will come a day when the proclamation is made that the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. But right now, we live in-between the first coming of the kingdom of God and the fulfillment of the kingdom of God when Jesus comes again.

Right now, he wants to live in us. He wants his kingdom established in us. The kingdom of God is at hand. It's here because Jesus is here, wherever two or more are gathered in his name. In his presence there is fullness of life and fullness of joy, and he's right here among us. We live in-between the first coming of the kingdom and the fulfillment of the kingdom. Every time we say Yes to the Lord, his kingdom is coming. Every time we surrender and submit more of our life to him, his kingdom comes - his kingdom *grows*. Before Jesus comes back, there will be a people on this earth who look like Jesus. God will have a Church on this earth - a remnant who are not only saved, but who are being sanctified. They've not only allowed God to come and save them but they are continually receiving the blessings of God as he is living his life through them. There will be a people on this earth who move in the power and the authority of the name of Jesus in their words, their prayers, and in their proclamations, but they will also have the character of Jesus in their hearts, because he is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. *He's their King ...He's their Lord.*

Prayer - *Father, in Jesus name, we thank You for Your Word that was sown into our hearts. God, we make a fresh decision right now to be found as people who are occupying until You come. We are being about Your business and Your kingdom that is alive and well on the inside of our hearts and lives. God, may it manifest in the way we live, even this day and this week. And, Lord, fill us with Your joy! We pray that in Jesus name. Amen*