

Advent: Joy

James 1:2-3; Lamentations 3:19-26; Romans 8:22-39; Romans 15:13

Advent:

The word advent literally means ‘a coming or arrival’. Advent not only focuses on Jesus’s first coming (His birth), but also on the ongoing hope for his future return. Advent invites transformation - not just celebration. It is a spiritual season that shapes how Christians live, practicing: hopeful waiting, peace-making, selfless love, and joyful trust.

In this series so far we have looked at how the prophecies of the OT provided hope to Israel while they waited for the birth of Jesus. Then, when the Messiah was born, peace, love, and joy came down to earth giving hope to all.

Today, I want you to think about how we are still waiting. However, because we know that He has already come once before, we can rejoice in the waiting for Him to come again.

Good Old Days:

Christmas is often a time of reflection and nostalgia, but if all we do is look to the past, we lose sight of the present. No one realizes that you are in the ‘good ol’ days’ when you’re in the moment, but when you look back it isn’t the burnt cookies, missing gifts, or perfect bows that you remember. Pain and perfection is forgotten in memories but moments of shared love, joy, peace, and hope last a lifetime. What we see today as mundane becomes the nostalgic memories of tomorrow.

So we have a choice. We can let circumstances and expectations overwhelm us to the point of exhaustion or we can find joy in the little moments along the way. The main thing I want you to leave today thinking about is this: joy is not rooted in circumstance but in the unchanging reality that God keeps His promises. We can experience joy in ‘not yet’ while we wait for the ‘almost’.

Already- but not yet:

Advent is about waiting (in the Old Testament and now). It has never been about pretending that things are ok. It is about learning how to wait with *expectation* instead of *despair*. Advent teaches us how to live faithfully in the in-between.

The birth of Jesus is what changed everything. When the angels appeared to the shepherds in Luke 2, they declared that joy had come. Good news of great joy wasn’t announced because life suddenly became easy. Great joy was announced because God had come near.



The Already: The first 2 sections represent ‘the already’. The kingdom of God has entered our broken world. Hope, peace, love, and joy are available now through a relationship with Jesus.

The Not Yet: This is the time after Jesus's resurrection and before His second coming. The world is still broken, loss still exists, grief still lingers, and pain doesn't disappear at salvation. **We live in the holy tension of promise fulfilled and promise unfinished.**

Quavah:

The Bible Project is doing an Advent podcast series this month also. In the 'Peace' episode there was something that really caught my attention. In ancient Hebrew, there is a word *quvah* (a type of measuring cord). *Quvah* is the noun while the verb form (action) is *qav* (to be fully extended or to be taut).

The *quvah* can only serve its full purpose when it is stretched to capacity. There is tension in it being pulled tight but not to the point of being broken. It is not pleasant to live in this level of tension but it is generative and creates energy. In other words, the cord has a purpose. The purpose cannot be achieved until it's stretched. So the idea is that in order to live your purpose, you need to be stretched and learn to live in the tension of anticipation with peace, love, and joy. It is not comfortable but there is purpose and hope in it.

Real-life Example:

A few years ago, a friend of ours from college lost her husband in a car accident. They had 3 young kids (the youngest not even 1). Though she is now remarried to a wonderful man who has accepted the children as his own - grief is a permanent part of their family.

A few days ago, she made a post on FB that embodies choosing joy despite circumstances. Her youngest - now 4 - drew a picture of her family but her biological dad was not in the picture. It was a reminder that she never spent a Christmas with her dad before he passed. It would be easy to focus on the pain and heartache of the moment, but her response was to turn her grief into encouragement to others. She wrote: *"This year, through the tears if you must, find joy in the "what is" instead of fixating on the "what isn't." Perhaps this is another year you didn't get all you wanted in your personal or professional lives. Perhaps this is your first year without a spouse due to death or divorce. Perhaps you're chronically sick and not improving. Perhaps your kids are estranged. Whatever the deficiencies in life, there is always joy to be found. Emmanuel, God with us, is near. He came to take on the human condition and teach us to live with the deep understanding that all things will be made right in eternity. In the "what is," let us surrender all of the pain to the One who is working on the "what will be forever."*

Joy:

Joy is not the absence of pain. It is the presence of God. Joy and peace come as we trust in the tension...not after circumstances improve...not after grief resolves. Joy is not mere happiness. Joy is not emotional denial. Joy is choosing to trust that God is still good, still near, and still faithful.

We have to learn to choose joy in the 'what is'. Read James 1:2-3. Joy is not automatic. It is a posture of faith.

The loss didn't disappear for our friend. The ache still comes every day in different ways. However, joy was found in God's provision, nearness, and faithfulness for today. Joy looks like gratitude for what God has given, even while mourning what He has not yet restored.

Read Lamentations 3:19-26. This was written from a place of deep sorrow yet still declares hope. God's mercy is not theoretical - it's daily. It's mercy like manna.

Read Romans 8:22-39. Suffering is real, but Glory is coming. Nothing - not even death - can separate us from God's love. Joy lives not in denial of the present but in confidence about the future. Joy in suffering doesn't make sense to those who have not encountered the love and peace of God.

When Paul and Silas were in prison they could have succumbed to the darkness and fear, but instead they worshipped. Their worship was their freedom even before their chains fell and the doors opened. Joy became their testimony.

Joy is often the loudest in the darkest places, not because circumstances are good, but because God is faithful. Joy, Love, Peace, and Hope are not emotions that we feel when all the right things in our life align to make it possible. They are active choices we have to make continually despite all the things in our lives that feel completely misaligned.

Hope is trusting that God will finish what He started. **Peace** is knowing that His Spirit is with us no matter what. **Love** is pursuing selfless relationships with God and others. **Joy** is believing that He is good even though the world is not.

Conclusion:

The season of Advent and Christmas is a time of remembering what God did but it has never just been a time of looking to the past. We are still in a season of Advent with anticipation, expectation, and longing of finding joy, peace, and love in the 'what is' while we trust in the God of hope for the 'what will be forever'. It is time to look forward to understanding that the birth of Jesus brought God's love to earth to us all. While we can experience Him now in part, there is a future promise of total restoration where we will experience God's love in full. The Advent season is a sacred rhythm that reminds us that we are experiencing only a foretaste of what is still to come.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

Reflection Questions:

- What does James 1:2-3 mean to you? How can you be joyful in trials?
- How does Lamentations 3:19-26 challenge your thoughts and approach to joy?