

Joy in the King

Psalm 95-96

When you see a box like this how do you feel? The smile on the box is no accident, right? **Amazon is selling happiness** – at least that’s what they want us to believe! Here is the message of materialism in a subtly curved black line: buy something from us and you will be happy. The key to happiness is flashing before your eyes – **JUST CLICK HERE**.

Just for fun – how many of us ordered something from Amazon this week?

Now – I’m not saying Amazon is evil or ordering Christmas presents is wicked. As you can see, we’ve had packages coming all week. What I am saying is that we should all ***be wary of letting our hearts get attached to THINGS*** or get led astray into believing that anything other than God can give us true and lasting happiness.

Imagine this box as anything you are tempted to **love and trust in for your happiness**.

- Possessions – toys – technology – those are the obvious ones;
- Bigger things like houses, cars, boats, trips;
- People might be in your box – if all of your hope is wrapped up in a husband or wife, children you have or want to have, grandchildren...
- Work goals are often in the box – a certain title, that next promotion, another raise, a Christmas bonus...

Anything we love or trust or obey above God... is an IDOL. It is something we place ahead of God – something we worship and give ourselves to.

Where are you looking for happiness, meaning and fulfillment? ***What is in your box?*** Be honest. Don’t kid yourself. All of us have a couple of things we are drawn to, apart from God – and the Holy Spirit is reminding you what yours are right now.

Now consider the **strength and reliability** of those things in your box. How much happiness can they deliver? For how long? How consistently?

- Imagine a young woman who has ***romantic love*** in her box. She is convinced that she can’t be happy without a man. But once she has a guy – a really good, affectionate guy who will love her and take care of her – then she’ll be happy. Can any guy live up to these expectations? For how long? How consistently?
- Think of a young man who has ***career achievement*** in his box. He wants to make partner or VP by age 30, make his first million by 35. What if he reaches these goals? Will it be enough? How much happiness will his career provide? For how long? What will happen to him if he doesn’t succeed?
- Think of an older couple who lives by the phone waiting for kids or grandkids to call. ***Family relationships*** are in their box – and any day the phone doesn’t ring or the iPad doesn’t warble, it’s a sad day.
- Consider the man who develops ***an addiction*** to pornography. We don’t want to visualize what’s in his box but he believes that it will give him happiness like nothing else can.

- Someone else might have alcohol or some kind of drug in the box. They believe that happiness (or at least escape) can be found there and get trapped in a pattern they can't escape.

What is in your box? What are you tempted to love other than God? What do you tend to trust instead of God? Where do you go for happiness, fulfillment and meaning besides God?

If you build your life on anything but God it's like trying to build a house on this box, or just trying to stand on it. ***Can that thing bear the weight of your needs?*** Jesus said if you build your life on anything but Him and His Words you are building on SAND. Today I want to translate that CARDBOARD.

*"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on **cardboard**. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."* Matthew 7:26-27

In Psalm 95 the writer calls us to sing for joy in the ROCK OF OUR SALVATION. Jesus alone is a firm foundation – a solid rock of refuge.

<i>"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on cardboard." Matt. 7:26</i>	<i>"Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation... For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols." Psalm 95:1, 96:5</i>
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He alone can bear the weight of our need. He alone can give us the happiness, joy and life our souls truly long for. Everything else is a cardboard box – an empty promise.

Psalm 96 expresses that point – that **all other gods are worthless, lifeless idols**. Anything in your box is just that – a worthless, lifeless idol. If you love, trust and obey anything but God that thing is an idol for you – and it is utterly incapable of saving you, protecting you or giving you life and happiness. ***It is an empty box*** – cardboard that will collapse under the weight of your worship.

Psalm 95 & 96 call us to ***abandon our idolatry and unbelief and give ourselves fully to the worship of the Lord.***

How to Worship the LORD:

- Find your Joy in the King – *"Let us sing to the Lord"*
- Fight for Faith in the King – *"Do not harden your hearts"*
- Fill the World with News of the King – *"Declare his glory"*

This section of the Psalms rings with the music of worship. The people of God exhort each other to lift their hearts and voices to the Lord – their Creator and Covenant making God. They remember lessons from their past failures and look ahead to future triumph when the Lord comes to judge the world in righteousness.

First – these two Psalms are connected in their call to worship the Lord – by finding our joy in Him alone.

Find your Joy in the King

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise...” Ps. 95:1

“Oh sing to the Lord a new song...” Ps. 96:1

“Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy” Ps. 96:12

Both Psalms are invitations to the people of God to sing praise to the Lord together. Psalm 95 ends with a stern warning but Psalm 96 ends with a radiant vision of the whole world being united in worship – the heavens and earth rejoicing, even the chaos of the sea supporting the universal chorus of joyful praise.

These Psalms *invite us* to worship and, more than that, *they exhort us to worship God alone* – to find our joy in Him. Many reasons are listed, but they all revolve around the character of God. We can find our joy in the King because of who HE IS. God is...

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Savior
- The Lord
- The Creator
- The Shepherd
- The Judge

As we’ve seen the last few weeks in other Psalms and as the New Testament makes very clear – *all of these titles apply directly to Jesus* – the Savior, Lord, Creator, Shepherd and Judge. So these two are also Royal Psalms illustrating the Jewish expectation of a coming King who would fulfill all of the promises of God to bless His people – which is exactly what Jesus did.

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Savior

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation... Sing to the Lord... tell of his salvation from day to day.” Psalm 95:1; 96:2

The Jews knew God was their Savior. He delivered them from slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand and many acts of power. He led them into the promised land and helped them drive out many nations more powerful than they. During the exile He saved them from extinction and then brought them back to their land.

They knew God as a rock of refuge and strength, a fortress they could run to and trust in completely – and He delivered them over and over, from countless enemies. But Jesus came as the ultimate Savior – defeating the ultimate enemies – sin and death. So He is the rock of our salvation and we should tell of His salvation from day to day. That is the beginning of joy – the awe and wonder of being forgiven and saved from your sins!

We find our joy in Jesus the Savior and He is also the LORD!

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Lord

“For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods... For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised... Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.” Psalm 95:3; 96:4,6

This is why it is so significant to proclaim: **“Jesus Christ is LORD.” 14 times** in these two Psalms we see **the covenant name of God** – Yahweh – the LORD in all capital letters. The name of God was too sacred to pronounce so the priests and scribes would always read it as Adonai, which appears in our bibles as “lord” in all lowercase letters and is the more common term for a ruler.

The Almighty, All Sovereign King, the God who repeatedly proved His supremacy over all other gods – showed up on earth and His name is Jesus. This is why we can and must find our joy in Him – for He is the One True God and there is no other beside Him!

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Creator

“In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land... the LORD made the heavens.” Psalm 95:5; 96:5

Why would we seek our joy in ANY CREATED THING when the CREATOR HIMSELF invites us to find our joy in Him?!? This is the folly the prophets consistently pointed out – why would you worship something your own hands made? Why would you think that thing could help you when it can’t even stand itself up if it topples over? If you have to feed that idol why would you think it could feed you?

One time a young Jewish man named **Gideon** pulled down the statue of Baal, a local Canaanite deity. The townspeople freaked out and wanted to kill Gideon, but his dad stopped them saying, **“If Baal is a god let him contend for himself**, because his altar has been broken down” (Judges 6:31). So they left retribution up to Baal and, of course, nothing happened and Gideon went on to rescue the Jews from the Midianite army that was threatening them.

Listen to what Paul writes about Jesus, the Creator:

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Creator

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together.” Colossians 1:16

Sing for joy in Jesus Christ – the Creator and Sustainer of all things – the Savior and Lord before whom we must worship and bow down!

We saw last week that He is our Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Shepherd

"For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." Psalm 95:7

Jesus prepares a table before us. He anoints our heads with the oil of His Spirit and promises that His love and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives. Finally, Jesus is the Judge of all people:

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Judge

*"I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest'... he comes to **judge the world in righteousness** and the peoples in faithfulness." Psalm 95:11; 96:13*

God's people expected a Day of Judgment when the Lord Himself would come down from Heaven and vindicate them before all nations. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus will be that judge:

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Judge

*"He has fixed a day on which he will **judge the world in righteousness** by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:31*

Brothers and sisters – may we find our joy in the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ. God proved once and for all the authority and glory of Jesus by raising Him from the dead.

Find your Joy in the King:

- The Savior
- The Lord
- The Creator
- The Shepherd
- The Judge

He is the only Savior for sinners. He is the Lord over all things. He is the Creator and Shepherd and He is the coming Judge. Why would we look anywhere else? Everything else we go after is a cardboard box. Only Jesus can bear the weight of our worship! Find your joy in Him – the King!

The second exhortation is to:

Fight for Faith in the King

- Resist Delay
- Resist Doubt
- Resist Deception
- Resist Disobedience

There are four strong warnings in this passage: to resist delay, doubt, deception and disobedience. If you remember the history of Israel it is fraught with these four things. They delayed and hesitated; they doubted and questioned; they were deceived and enslaved, largely because they disobeyed the Lord.

Fight for Faith in the King

- Resist Delay

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness.” Psalm 95:7-8

One of the greatest temptations is to procrastinate. The devil is happy for us to repent as long as it happens TOMORROW. Yes, I’ll start that diet and exercise plan – next week some time... Yes, I’ll read that book when some time opens up... Yes, I’ll fix things up with my wife once things settle down at work. Yes, I’ll spend more time with my kids – right after this big project...

TODAY. Today if you hear God speaking to you – act. Take a step of obedience, even if just a small one. Talk with someone. Share your commitment with someone. Fight for faith in Jesus. Fight for joy in Him alone. Resist the danger of delay. My men’s group meets this Wednesday morning at 6:15 a.m. Join us (if you’re a man). Do something today. Email me – right now if you want to –

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Seriously. Do something to demonstrate action. Take a step. Stop making excuses. Resist delay and secondly, resist doubt – this is the key battle underneath all of our other struggles.

Fight for Faith in the King

- Resist Doubt

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness.” Psalm 95:7-8

If you read the book of Exodus it’s an epic adventure for 14 chapters, with 10 dramatic plagues leading up to God splitting the Red Sea in half so Israel could escape from slavery and move toward their destiny in the Promised Land. Massah and Meribah are Hebrew words that mean testing (Maasah) and quarreling (Meribah).

After coming out of Egypt they went three days without water and started complaining of thirst. Then they went six weeks until their food supplies were running out and started complaining of hunger. A couple of weeks after that they were again without water and started up their familiar fussing routine. That is what prompted a stern rebuke from the Lord for TESTING Him – for questioning His presence with them and plan for them.

Barely two months after the most mind-blowing sequence of miracles in history, with a pillar of cloud hovering over them by day and a pillar of fire above their camp by night, the people of Israel **DOUBTED that God was WITH THEM**. They hardened their hearts against the Lord – which was the very thing Pharaoh had just done in refusing to let them go from Egypt!

The writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament quotes this Psalm -

Fight for Faith in the King

- Resist Doubt, Deception and Disobedience

*"Take care, brothers, lest there be an evil, **unbelieving heart**, leading you to fall away from the living God... none of you be hardened by the **deceitfulness of sin**... to those who were **disobedient**. So we see that they were unable to enter **because of unbelief**." Heb. 3:12-13,18*

So this warning applies to us, right here – today. Take care, brothers and sisters. Beware of this very real danger. Do not let an evil, unbelieving heart lead you away from the living God. Resist doubt. Unbelief is what kept Israel from entering the Promised Land. They doubted the presence, power and plan of God. The Lord called this TESTING HIM. They questioned Him and complained.

A symptom of unbelief is COMPLAINING. Are you a complainer? Are you like Israel – questioning God at every turn? Are you quick to forget the long string of miracles God has done for you and at the first sign of discomfort do you begin to fuss and whine?

Testing God says, "I will not love / trust / serve you UNLESS you do _____ for me." Do you see how you can elevate yourself above God as if YOU are the teacher and HE is the student... as if YOU are the master and HE is the servant...? Do not give God an UNLESS – that is putting Him to the TEST. It comes from a hard, unbelieving heart.

Resist doubt. Fight against unbelief. Fight for faith in the Lord. We just saw that He IS the Savior, the Sovereign ruler, the Creator of all things, our Shepherd and the coming Judge. Who could be more reliable – more worthy of our trust?

Also ***resist DECEPTION.*** Notice in Hebrews 3 the warning about the deceitfulness of sin. All temptation is rooted in lies. Sin promises all kinds of things but delivers slavery, suffering and death. In the end, idols are not just empty boxes they are ***boxes filled with deadly poison.***

And the fruit of doubt and deception is disobedience – which was how it progressed with Israel. They doubted God's presence and plan; they bought into the lie that they would have been better off in Egypt (with the gods of Egypt) and that led them to disobey the clear instructions of the Lord.

Listen to the outcome in Psalm 95...

*Your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years **I loathed that generation** and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." Therefore I swore in my wrath, "**They shall not enter my rest.**" Psalm 95:9-11*

Delay, doubt, deception leading to disobedience is LOATHSOME to God; detestable. And it keeps people out of God's place of REST. That is the condition of NON-BELIEVERS – those who never reach the Promised Land. That is not a description for us! Listen to the exhortation of Hebrews 3

Fight for Faith in the King

*“Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we **hold our original confidence firm to the end.**” Hebrews 3:13-14*

Brother, sister – do not be hardened by sin. Hold your original confidence TO THE END. Stand firm in your faith. Fight for faith in the King of Kings. Trust in His presence, power and plan. Rest in His goodness, love and mercy. Follow His instructions with joyful, courageous obedience!

And God’s clear directive to us is to fill the world with the Good News of the King who has come!

Fill the World with News of the King

- Daily conversation

*“Sing to the Lord, bless his name; **tell of his salvation from day to day.**” Psalm 96:2*

When we find our joy in the king and fight for faith in the king, **the result is sharing the joy we have found.** We naturally talk about the things we are excited about. If you don’t talk about Jesus much then get more excited about Jesus. Warm up your worship to walk out your witness. Sing to the Lord and bless his name. Sing to him a new song and you will naturally begin to tell of his salvation from day to day.

This was always God’s plan for the spread of His glory. **Deuteronomy 6** is the key command in the Jewish Law – featuring the greatest commandment to love God with all that you are and to keep His law on your heart, talking about these things when you get up, when you lie down and when you walk along your way.

It should be normal for us in our **DAILY CONVERSATION** to talk about all God has done for us.

- Do you use your testimony? Every Christian has a powerful tool – the story of how God reached you, how He saved you.
- Israel’s most powerful tool was the story of their deliverance from Egypt.
- **Your most powerful resource is YOUR STORY** of how God set you free from your slavery to sin.

It may have happened decades ago when you were younger – but it is still a dramatic and wonderful account of a soul saved, a life changed. And it is a still unfolding story – so you can also share how God is at work in your life right now. (On that note, come back in two weeks, on December 30, to share how God has been at work in your life this year!)

Our daily conversation should fill our neighborhoods with news of the King – and our mission is to bring this good news to the nations. Verse 3.

Fill the World with News of the King

- Global Proclamation

“Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples... Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength... Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns!’” Psalm 96:3,7,10

As we find our joy in the King, it is our mission to spread that joy throughout the world. What a vision we see in this Psalm of God's glory being proclaimed among all nations and peoples. Long before Jesus sent his followers out to make disciples of all nations God made known that His will was to bring His salvation to every tongue and tribe and nation. God's desires and plans were never limited to just the Jewish nation – but the plan was always to bless the whole world THROUGH the Jewish people.

And that blessing came through the long awaited King, foretold all over the Old Testament but mentioned numerous times in these two Psalms:

Fill the World with News of the King

- Global Proclamation

“The Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods... Splendor and majesty are before him... for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.” Psalm 95:3; 96:6,13

The One foretold arrived on that first Christmas morning. He didn't look like a great and powerful king but the angels who told the good news of great joy to the shepherds said it would be good news for all the people. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.”

The only hope for true and lasting joy is found in this baby who was born. It is the good news of his birth, life, death and resurrection that provides great joy for all the people. Joy cannot be found in anything or anyone else. This world is filled with SMILE BOXES that promise happiness – but in the end they are empty or often filled with poison. The gods of the nations are WORTHLESS IDOLS. The things we love, trust and obey cannot give us what our souls long for. Only Jesus can.

For HE IS THE LORD – the King of Kings, the great King above all gods. Sing for joy to the Lord, the rock of our salvation. Let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! Ascribe to Lord Jesus glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come into his courts!

The Lord reigns! ***He is coming to judge!*** Do not delay – if you hear His voice, respond to Him TODAY. Bow your knee before the King. He is coming to reign forever on David's throne. He will defeat all of his enemies when he comes from heaven in glory with all the angels of heaven.

But now is the time of his favor – today is the day of salvation. Come and worship! Worship Christ the newborn King! ***He is God With Us!***