

Rejoicing When We're Weary

2 Corinthians 6:3-10 on December 18, 2022

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Today's 8:30 cantata is titled "A Weary World Rejoices." It repeats that refrain multiple times, "A Weary World Rejoices." Our 10:45 worship team just lead us in the classic Christmas carol, "O Holy Night." One of the most memorable lines is: "A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." We don't normally talk that way, "For yonder breaks." I think it's safe to assume that not too many of us woke up this morning and announced, "it's time to go to church, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." And yet, who wouldn't be excited about "A thrill of hope"!? Hope is thrilling; it's invigorating. Hope is a wonderful gift from God! But what about those other four words: "The weary world rejoices"? This begs the question:

Why is the world weary? And if it's weary, why is it rejoicing? Shouldn't it be resting? Shouldn't it be trying to find a quiet place to take a nap? Rejoicing sounds noisy! Rejoicing takes energy; energy that weary people just don't have! Most of us probably already know the answer to this question: **The world is weary because, over time, life tires us out.**

Anybody reading this transcript tired?

- > If you've got little ones at home, I'm guessing you're tired!
- > If you just finished finals week at school, you're probably pretty tired.¹
- > If your workplace is shorthanded on employees, and everyone's been picking up extra shifts, I'm guessing you're tired.
- > If you're right in the middle of Christmas busyness, with all of the decorating and shopping and baking, I'm guessing you're tired.
- > If you spent this past week doing snow removal, I KNOW you're tired!

If you're feeling tired for any of these reasons, or for some other reason, then I really hope you get a good nap today! Here's the thing though, there's a big difference between being tired, and being WEARY. Being tired can be fixed relatively easily, by taking a good, long nap. But being weary, is something that seeps deep down into our bones. It's not so easily fixed. That's what we're really getting at with this statement: "The world is weary because, over time, life tires us out." When life "tires us out," to the point of weariness, we need a much better, much bigger solution, than just a little more sleep.

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:12 says, "Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body."

So what are some things that have made you weary? (Things that have seeped deep down into your bones?)

> Some of us have grown weary because of this ongoing pandemic. Not just the virus itself, but all of the residual collateral drama that has come with it.

> Some of us have grown weary over financial challenges.

They seem to be around every corner. If it's not inflation, then it's job loss. If it's not job loss, then it's job frustration. If it's not that, it's a car repair or a medical bill or something else.

> Some of us have grown weary with the wickedness in our world.

The moral collapse of our society has caused some of us to feel a weariness, not just in our bones, but in our very souls. Sin seems to be running rampant with no end in sight; just a continuing downward spiral.

> Some of us are weary over politics.

> Others are weary over all of the racial hostility.

Over the endless fighting over whose life really matters. Or, whether the lives of the unborn matter.

> Some of us are weary over sickness and suffering.

The ongoing struggle of being in pain all the time. Or, even worse, of watching the ones we love in pain, or suffering memory loss, or personality changes. Or going through the difficult journey of less and less mobility, and being less and less able to do for ourselves.

> Some of us are weary from grief.

We keep losing so many of our precious friends and family, many of whom seem to be dying far too young.

I could go on, but I think you get the point: there's a big difference between just being a little tired, and being weary. **So if the world is weary, then WHY is the world rejoicing?** Christmas answers this question: the weary world is rejoicing... **Because the birth of Christ is a visible sign of God's gospel rescue plan.** And it also serves as an annual reminder, each and every Christmas, of God's gospel rescue plan. The gospel is the bigger and better solution for this world's weariness! The gospel is worth celebrating all year long. And yet, during the season of advent, it's worth highlighting this key step that God took to rescue this weary world. Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, miraculously took on flesh. This triggered a series of key events in human history. Leading to His death and resurrection, leading to the gospel's fulfillment in real time and history. Leading this world to its salvation from sin! So, at Christmas, we rejoice – Christ is born! And people have been rejoicing in this gospel rescue ever since. And not just rejoicing in salvation, but also in the gospel's sufficiency to strengthen us while we continue living in this weary world.

We rejoice when we're weary in order to demonstrate the gospel's sufficiency to a watching world.

The Apostle Paul talks about his own weariness and hardships in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10. He begins in verse 3, "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited."² That's an interesting lead-in to rejoicing; before he goes through his own long list troubles and hardships in this world, he begins by framing them in a gospel context. The immediately preceding context is 2 Corinthians 5, which tells us that we are Christ's ambassadors, that God is making His gospel appeal through us. Then chapter 6 begins by urging us "not to receive God's grace in vain.... Now is the day of salvation."³ So Paul clearly has a gospel context in mind! That's why he'll then go on to talk about his struggles. He's teaching us that how we navigate our struggles, and our weariness in this world, is a vital means by which we declare the gospel! Paul's recounting of his journey through this weary world is a demonstration of the gospel's sufficiency; not only its sufficiency to save us, but also its sufficiency to sustain us through the hardships and trials that we face in this world. Paul's ministry was a gospel ministry, so he sees his suffering in light of the gospel, specifically the gospel's reputation. He refuses to allow his circumstances to rob his gospel witness. But it's not just because he wants to save face, it's because Paul is convinced of the gospel's sufficiency to meet any trial or any struggle.

Let's take a look at verses 4 and following. "Rather, [*rather than our gospel ministry being discredited*] as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments⁴ and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

² Paul was concerned that no minister of reconciliation (5:18) be guilty of dishonest or inconsistent conduct and that no evidence be given to adversaries who wished to discredit the gospel. On the contrary, every Christian's life should be the gospel's most eloquent advertisement." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2369 footnote on 2 Corinthians 6:3.

³ "Paul exhorts the Corinthians NOT to show by their lives that they received God's grace to no purpose." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2369 footnote on 2 Corinthians 6:1.

⁴ In Acts 16:22-25, after being stripped and severely beaten, and then being thrown into prison with their feet fastened in stocks, Paul and Silas must have been weary. And yet, they are found praying and singing hymns to God. Now, it doesn't necessarily say that they were "rejoicing," but clearly they were declaring and demonstrating the gospel to the other prisoners who were listening.

Right near the end of this list of incredible difficulties and hardships, we find an echo of “the weary world rejoices.” Paul says that they were “sorrowful⁵, yet always rejoicing.” Paul isn’t pretending that he’s happy all the time, nor is He denying how difficult this world can be. He openly admits that he and his fellow believers are sorrowful, with plenty of reasons to be weary. But rather than allowing the gospel to appear empty, powerless, or in vain, Paul strives to demonstrate the gospel’s fullness; its complete sufficiency to sustain us even through the very worst of circumstances.

Directly related to this, we also rejoice when we’re weary in order to display the gospel’s power to strengthen us! Earlier, in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, Paul says it this way, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”⁶ Paul’s endurance through the midst of his struggles displays how he and his fellow believers are pressing on. They press on for the sake of the gospel, even as they are carried along, empowered by the gospel. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 encourages us, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” So we rejoice today, in the midst of our weariness. We rejoice in faith, in confidence that our weariness is only temporary; it will not last forever. This morning we proclaim to all the world, “Jesus Christ is born!” His gospel renews us day by day. We declare the gospel’s sufficiency! The gospel’s power is being displayed as it strengthens His people! Jesus’ birth points us to the gospel, and brings us “a thrill of hope!” The Good News of Jesus’ birth fills us with rejoicing!

Now, I realize that some of you may be thinking, “Pastor Jerry, I’m not feeling any ‘thrill of hope’ right now. Christmas may cause great rejoicing for other people, but my heart just isn’t in it this year. Frankly, rejoicing just feels like a lot of work.” Let’s be clear, we’re not here this morning to pressure anyone into rejoicing. This isn’t a “fake it ‘til you feel it” kind of thing. There are always reasons to rejoice but that doesn’t mean that we should guilt trip others into putting on a happy face. If someone doesn’t feel like rejoicing this morning, let’s all respect that. Most of us can relate to

⁵ Sorrowful is λυπέω in the Greek, meaning “② to experience sadness or distress... ③ be sad, be distressed, grieve... 2 Cor 6:10. (William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, et al., A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 604.)

⁶ Verse 10 goes on to say, “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” In other words, they are navigating life’s difficulties in the light of Jesus’s life and death; the gospel is what sustains them and THAT is their reason for REJOICING!

feeling this way, from time to time, in our own lives. More importantly, God understands those of us who came here today with heavy hearts. That said, I do want to encourage each one of us to prayerfully consider rejoicing as an act of faith today; to “faith it ‘til you feel it.” Here’s what I mean, let’s consider another part of the lyrics from “O Holy Night”: “A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.” “A new and glorious morn.” Psalm 30:5 says that “...weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.” Rejoicing comes in the morning. So even though there’s always a reason for rejoicing in the Christian life, there are also times of weeping. The book of Psalms often addresses these mixed emotions of weeping and rejoicing, and often rejoicing even while we’re weeping.

Two Psalms in particular come to mind today: Psalm 42 and Psalm 126. Let me read through Psalm 42 first, and then we’ll examine Psalm 126 a bit more closely. As we read through Psalm 42, let’s pay careful attention to the honesty and intimacy of this weary, but heartfelt, prayer. Psalm 42:1-11 says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me — a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?” My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?” Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

Clearly the writer of Psalm 42 is going through an incredibly heavy season of grief and weariness. They’re wrestling with feeling far from God. In verse 11, they’re challenging their own downcast soul, “Put your hope in God.” They have determined in their own will, “for I will yet praise him.” Partway through they recall, how in the past, they used to be among those who

⁷ (MY czar) “MIGH zahr” W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 117.

came to God's house "with shouts of joy and praise." But right now, in their present situation, that's not so easy.

This leads right into Psalm 126. If you turn your Bible there, you may notice it's in two sections, verses 1-3 and verses 4-6.⁸

> The first 3 verses reflect back on the FORMER joy of God's people.

> The last 3 verses are a prayer, pleading with the Lord to restore their joy in the future.⁹

In other words, the current situation, in Psalm 126, is one in which rejoicing was lacking.¹⁰ Rather than expressing their current joy, God's people were reflecting back on their former joy, and then also calling out for God to restore their rejoicing.

So we also rejoice when we're weary in order to declare our confidence that our future joy will be restored. Psalm 126:1-3 begins, "When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.' The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." Reflecting back on our former days of joy in our Christian faith can serve to remind us of God's goodness and faithfulness. This Christmas, some of us may need to ask God to remind us of all the former joy that we've experienced in Him. To remember all of the times that He has blessed us over and over again, and faithfully provided for us.¹¹ After reflecting back on their former joy, the psalmist then switches to prayer in verses 4-6, "Restore our fortunes,¹² LORD, like streams in the Negev.¹³ Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them."

This metaphor from nature is a vivid picture of joy being restored. The first part begins by referring to the Negev, which means dry or parched.¹⁴ The Negev is an arid region on the south end of the Israelite territory.¹⁵ When

⁸ See discussion in Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008 reprint, pp. 474-476.

⁹ Psalm 126 is called a "Psalm of Ascent." This means that it was one of the songs that God's people would sing as they were traveling to Jerusalem which stood on top of a hill. They were on their journey up, up, up to the temple where they would worship God. So it's very appropriate for us to read Psalm 126 in our worship service although Bemidji isn't Jerusalem, and our church isn't really on much of a hill. Even so, many of us travel to church in order to worship God. So worship Him as you read Psalm 126.

¹⁰ Scholars aren't certain whether this current situation in Psalm 126 was connected with famine, siege, captivity and release, plague, or something else. See discussion in Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008 reprint, pp. 474-475.

¹¹ The opposite of this is to have an attitude toward God that asks, "what have You done for me lately?"

¹² Consider Job 42:10.

¹³ "NEH gehv" W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 121.

¹⁴ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008 reprint, p. 475.

¹⁵ "Dry stream beds, caused by periods of drought, would become flowing streams again after a substantial rain shower." *The Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1161.

the winter rains would come, these dry stream beds would swell with water and there was a resurgence of new life all around. Flowers would pop up and the animals would drink deeply. One might even say that JOY was restored to these dry areas. This kind of transformation is sudden and intense, even startling! This lifegiving, nurturing overflow of water turns the dry desert wasteland into an abundant oasis. It's not a mirage, it's the real thing. God's blessing is quickly and suddenly restored.

The second part of this metaphor then turns to sowing and reaping. While the first picture restores quickly, with a torrential downpour from heaven itself, the next picture is much slower.¹⁶ In fact, it's not only slow, it's tearful. As the farmers are faithfully carrying out their seed to sow, they go out with weeping. They sow with tears. The contrast between these two word pictures, illustrates the fact that although we may prefer to have it rush in like a flood, restoration doesn't always work that way. In fact, oftentimes our joy is restored slowly, over time. After faithful, patient, hard work, and a long period of waiting.¹⁷ So as we remain faithful and continue to trust God, we are declaring our confidence that, one day, our joy will return!^{18 19 20} Even through our tears, there's an anticipation of the joy that will eventually come. For some of us, this former joy has been a long time coming. We feel like we've been sowing in tears for far too long already. We've got the weeping covered; we're ready for the return of songs of joy!

Here's some good news: our God is a god of restoration. God has a steady track record of restoring joy to His people. He's done it many times before, and He's certainly more than capable of restoring joy again.²¹ In fact, God is not only capable of restoring our joy, He wants to! He's a God who wants

¹⁶ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008 reprint, p. 475.

¹⁷ So, let's allow our memories of past joy, to help us hang in there if we feel like we are currently in a drought. Let's keep waiting on God and keep sowing seeds of faith, in anticipation of our joy being renewed.

¹⁸ They'll be carrying sheaves with them. Sheaves are bundles of grain. The fruit of their labors, blessed by God with steady sunshine and rain. Some of you who are farmers can imagine the smell of the fresh cut grain. You can picture its bright golden yellow color. The rest of us may be better served by picturing large bags of groceries, overflowing with food. Although we go out weeping, we return with the trunk of our car filled with supplies and groceries. These sheaves demonstrate the Lord's kindness and provision. In answer to their prayer in verse 4, "Restore our fortunes, LORD," we see Him answer according to His perfectly sovereign timing.

¹⁹ Read about God's gracious restoration in Psalm 107. It highlights how God rescues us from our folly. How He restores us and reverses our fortunes, even after we have rebelled or gone astray.

²⁰ Here's a good reason to keep trusting God, even when our joy seems far away. Earlier I mentioned that when those torrential rains flood down the dry streambeds, it causes flowers to bloom. Think about this: the flowers were already there. The seeds had been planted long ago. Even though they'd grown dormant and gone underground, they were never actually gone. Sometimes our joy is that way, just under the surface. Just waiting for God to send His refreshing, restorative rains. It isn't that our faith has died, but it may have dried up a little. We are just one good rain shower away from new growth and life-nurturing connection with our God.

²¹ This was clear at the very first Christmas. After waiting in silence for 400 years, the Jewish people finally had their joy restored when their Messiah, Jesus Christ came to earth.

His people to have joy. Christmas is a great reminder of this. In fact, God sent Jesus to earth on that first Christmas to bring us joy.²² Luke 2:10 declares, “But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” We serve a God who gives every one of us a reason to find great joy in Christmas!²³ So let’s declare the joy of the gospel today! This Christmas let’s not fail to rejoice in the Good News of the gospel! In fact, let’s rejoice so enthusiastically, that the watching world takes notice, and asks the question, “what’s all the commotion about!?” Brother or Sister in Christ, let’s REJOICE!

²² Here is why we can be certain of this. Take a look at Elizabeth’s words to Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Luke 1:44, “As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb (John the Baptist) leaped for **joy**.” The Greek word for “joy” here can be defined as “a piercing exclamation.” (ἀγαλλίασις, Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 4). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.) In other words, even though John the Baptist was still in his mother’s womb, he wanted to SHOUT for joy. Only, for obvious reasons, he couldn’t. All he could do was leap! John the Baptist was literally jumping for joy! John’s response leads right into Mary’s response in Luke 1:46-47, “And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit **rejoices** in God my Savior.” (Consider 1 Samuel 1:1-10) That word “rejoice” is directly tied to joy. To rejoice means “to be exceedingly joyful, exult, be glad, overjoyed.” (ἀγαλλιάω, Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 4). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.) Luke 1:58 goes on to tell us, “Her (Mary’s) neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her **joy**.”

²³ And even when the realities of life or our own poor choices begin to drain away our feelings of joy, God comes along and restores our joy, again and again.