

Always Christmas:
Always Rejoice
Miscellaneous Passages in Matthew and Luke

Dr. Steve Horn

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Introduction to Christmas: Always Christmas! That's the theme we want to take you through this Christmas season. We have talked about "Always prepare." We noted how Simeon and Anna's expectation for the coming of Messiah the first time parallels our preparing for the second coming of Christ. Then we began to look at the shepherds. We find our parallel in the scene of the shepherds out in the field. They teach us to "Always Proclaim."

There are going to be several texts that I reference this morning, but let's begin with the same text as last week. It sets the stage to help us to see that because of Christmas, we should "Always Rejoice!"

Text: : In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹Today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David. ¹²This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a feeding trough."

¹³Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

¹⁴Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people He favors!

¹⁵When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

¹⁶They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the feeding trough. ¹⁷After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, just as they had been told.

Introduction: I read this week that a group calling themselves, "American Atheists," are up to their annual "Christmas" tradition. They have purchased billboards in strategic cities (Shreveport is one by the way) to poke fun at us Christians for celebrating Christ. One reads, "Make Christmas Great Again, Skip Church!" Another reads in part: "Atheist Christmas—the More, the Merrier." In essence, they are proclaiming that without Christ, you can have a merrier Christmas. As Christians, we get mad at such foolishness. Just remember, the Bible says, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." We really should not be mad at the one who does not believe. Rather, we should pity the one who does not believe.

Actually, in the opening pages of the Gospels, there is a whole lot of merriment going on, a whole lot of rejoicing going on centered around the birth of Jesus.

Just follow along for a moment.

- Luke 1:28 The Angel to Mary
- Luke 1:46-55 Mary's Song
- Luke 1:64 Zechariah's first words after months of silence
- Luke 1:67-79 Zechariah's Song
- Luke 2:13 A multitude of the Heavenly host
- Luke 2:20 The Shepherds were praising God
- Luke 2:28 Simeon praises God
- Luke 2:38 Anna began to thank God
- Matthew 2:10 The Wise men were overjoyed beyond measure

Rejoicing is the proper response—the only response really—for those who discover who Jesus is and what He has come to do.

Always Rejoice because Christmas is the reminder that . . .

God keeps His promises.

God has a long record of keeping promises. Among the multitude of examples I could give, let me focus on just a few.

1. God very clearly entered into a covenant with Abraham about the promise of land in a little strip of land now called Israel. Over the scores of years that have passed, there have been numerous threats to the security of that land and at times discipline from God involving that land, but the descendants of Abraham continue to occupy that land.
2. The prophets of the Old Testament prophesied (predicted) that invaders from the North would overtake the land of Israel and send many of the inhabitants of Israel into exile.
3. Another feature that dominates the prophets of the Old Testament is the correct prophesy of the Messiah—details of Jesus' birth, life, and death are all prophesied with accuracy centuries before Jesus' coming. Isaiah, for example, a prophet 700 years or so before Christ, prophesied, as is recorded in Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel."
4. Finally, the Prophet Daniel prophesied the existence of four major kingdoms of the world that would follow from his lifetime to the time of Jesus.

To emphasize even more fully this record of God being a keeper of promises, let's isolate the life of Christ.

- The Birth of Christ is proof that God keeps His promises.

A Messiah was promised in the Old Testament. From Malachi to Jesus, four hundred years had passed. Many a generation had come and gone without seeing the prophecy realized. Maybe some had come to believe that Messiah would not come. But He did. As Paul said in Galatians 4:4, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman.” At the right time, Jesus came.

Sometimes it might not look like God is a keeper of His Word, but when I look at the manger, I am reminded that God always keeps His promises. The shepherds learned this the night of His birth. Luke’s Gospel tells us that angels appeared to them while they were out in the fields doing what shepherds do. They are told specific details about what they would find and where to find the Messiah. Then Luke adds this summary word: “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard, *just as they had been told*.”

- The Words of Christ give further proof that God keeps His promises.

Jesus prophesied that in three days He would be raised. Jesus promised that after He left, He would not leave His followers as orphans, but that the Holy Spirit would come.

- The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are ultimate proofs that God keeps His promises.

He defeated death. The promise of eternal life is rooted in the convincing proofs that He is a God who keeps His promises. First Corinthians 15 tells us, “Death, where is your sting! Where is your victory?” We celebrate Christmas and Easter together.

God is always present.

Matthew reveals to us the name, “Immanuel” which is translated “God with us.” The verse in Matthew 1:23 is an actual quotation from Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah speaks this prophecy to King Ahaz in a very difficult time for Judah. Let me take a moment to walk you through that background. After the reign of Solomon, that great king of Israel, Israel was divided into two separate kingdoms—Israel in the North and Judah in the South. Israel turned from God and was overtaken first. It is in the Southern kingdom that Isaiah speaks and where Ahaz is king. Ahaz had reinstated worship of a pagan god. Because of his disobedience and wickedness, surrounding kings were threatening to take over that territory. Instead of depending upon the one true living God, Ahaz turns to the help of the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser. Ahaz had plundered the Temple and given the gold and silver to buy Tiglath-Pileser’s allegiance. God sent Isaiah to Ahaz for a talk. Ahaz refused to listen. It is at this point that Isaiah prophesies about the virgin born child Immanuel. God’s plan will not be thwarted. It has always been God’s desire to not leave us or forsake us—to be with us.

We just said that one truth of Christmas is that God keeps His promises. Now, we add to that a specific promise—He will be with us. He fulfilled that promise after the death and ascension of Jesus through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

So, no matter your problem today and no matter how frightened or lonely you may feel in your struggle, you are not truly alone—God is present with you. So, rejoice!

With God, All things are possible.

Specifically, this was the message of the angel to Mary. It is one of those glorious reminders at Christmas.

My greatest fear in preaching this sermon this morning is that somebody is going to misunderstand this particular message and believe God for something that is impossible and it is impossible because God said it is impossible—that is not in accordance to His will. In other words, this verse should not lead us to say that “All things are possible,” but rather all things that God promises are possible even when everyone else says that those things are impossible. There’s a difference, you know!

In fact, the literal translation here could be: “No word” is impossible. The implication is that “No word” spoken by God is impossible. Nothing is impossible if God is in it.

Maybe your impossible situation is...

- A lost person—what about the Apostle Paul.
- Your own sin—The Bible says, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Sickness—in miraculous ways, we have been eyewitnesses to God intervening time and time again.
- A family situation—Joseph was abandoned by his whole family, but God used him to restore his family.
- A financial situation—The Bible says, “God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)

We need to stop telling God what He cannot do. Stop telling God what He should do. In place, start reminding ourselves what God has already done, and start declaring that God can do whatever He wills to do.

Let me remind you of something incredibly important today. Matthew said of Jesus in Matthew 13:58, “And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.”

Don’t let unbelief be the reason that what seems like the impossible does not become possible.

Eternal relationship is God’s purpose.

I’ve been quoting this verse all Christmas season. First Timothy 1:15, “This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...”

Luke said it like this, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.”

Without Christ, we are far apart from God. We are enemies of God. We are destined to a life of sin and afterwards a life separated from God. But...God. God desiring to reconcile us to Himself emptied Himself, took on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His eternal form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:7-8)

Why? To reconcile us to Himself, so that all who would believe in Him would have life in His name.

If you are a Christian, rejoice!

So What?

In the words of the Apostle Paul, **Rejoice in the Lord Always!**

As we come to the end of the year, this year is like all others. There has been some good and some bad. This is not the basis of our joy. The basis of joy is that God has come. He is the keeper of promises. He is always present. He can do whatever He chooses to do. He has all power, even to do that which everyone around will call impossible. He has come with Divine purpose—to save us, to redeem us, to give His life a ransom for many. And for this, we always rejoice.

And one other thing, rejoicing is a great form of evangelism. The Gospel means good news. We ought to live as though we have good news. I am drawn to happy people. I want to run from unhappy people. If that is true of us who believe, how much more it is true of those who have yet to believe.

We can't argue people into faith. That doesn't mean that we don't have good evidence and good arguments. But what we can be is to be people of joy—always rejoicing!