**REAL JOY IN A STRUGGLING WORLD, IS. 35, 51:11, LK. 2:10-14, RO. 15:13, DEC. 17/23.**

 This is the 3rd Sunday of Advent. The 1st Sunday we focused on the hope of the prophets. The prophets have given us over 300 references to Jesus’ coming—details about who, how, when & why He’d appear, that no one else can fulfil. **So our hope is assured**; our hope is real. And **hope does not disappoint us**. In Ps. 62 **David says,** “Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him. **Jeremiah**, speaking God’s words said: “For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you & not to harm you, **plans to give you hope & a future.** Then you will call on Me & come & pray to Me & I’ll listen to you. You’ll seek Me & find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.” **So we can be joyful in hope** (Ro. 12); you can have real hope in a hopeless world. Hope, you see, does not depend on us. It is a gift & a promise from God.

Last week the focus was on **how to get inner peace in an angry world.** This too is from Jesus. The Lord put His peace on David & his descendants forever (1 K. 2:33)! Isaiah calls Jesus the “**Prince of Peace”, then reveals the key to accessing this peace**: **“If only you’d paid attention to My (God’s) commands, your peace would’ve been like a river** (48:18). Imagine! Peace will flood over you just by following God’s leading! In ch. 53, “He was pierced for our transgressions …**the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him; by His wounds we’re healed.”**

In **Luke** Jesus’ birth is announced by a great company of the heavenly host praising God, saying, “**Glory to God in the highest, & on earth peace to all people** on whom His (Jesus’) favour rests.” **Jesus is the owner of peace**. “**Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you**. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don’t let your hearts be troubled & do not be afraid (Jn. 14:27).” And a little later He says, **“I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace**. In

this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (16:33).”

 **Jesus gives us peace!** Listen to **Paul** in Ro. 5: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And in ch. 8 he says, “the mind of sinful man is death but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life & peace.”

 That intro’s helpful in seeing how **Jesus has given us the blessings of Christmas**. Today’s theme is joy, & you’ll see it too is a gift from God. Joy in a struggling world. Do you see much joy in the world today? I mean real genuine joy. I see 2 things. 1st I see **a world that’s confused**. A world that thinks happiness is joy. It’s not. Happiness depends on your circumstances. I’m hap-py if I win the lottery; if I have a new girl/boyfriend. I’m happy if I get a job, get accepted to college/university, get a new car…But that euphoria doesn’t last. People find their way back to misery by misspending the lottery win. The job turns sour, the boyfriend ends up being a bummer…you get it. **Real joy is permanent. It’s not altered by circumstances**.

 But **the 2nd thing** I see is worse. I see **people not even looking for joy**, not even thinking it’s a possibility in their lives. Their life is just 1 struggle after another. Jesus came to change that picture. There are over 200 references to joy in the Bible. So it’s really difficult to narrow it down to which ones should be mentioned today. But it’s also hard to convey just how much joy comes from God. There’re so many references to **shouting for joy & falling face down** (Le. 9:24, Ez. 3:12, Job 8:21, Ps. 20:5), or of **God making your joy complete** (Dt. 16:15, Jn. 10:10), or there being **strength & joy in God’s dwelling place** (1 Ch. 16:27, Ez. 6:16) or **singing for joy before the** **Lord** (33). In Neh. the people **celebrated with great joy** (8:12) & **their joy was very great** (8:17). **God gave them great joy** (12:43). **Seeing God’s face gave Job great, even shouting joy** (33:26). **All the angels shouted for joy** (38:7) at God’s laying the cornerstone of the earth while **the stars sang**. And then there’s **my heart leaping for joy** (Ps. 28:7). There’s **the joy of the whole earth** (48:2). **The saints will ever sing for joy** (132:16). These are just a smattering of over 200 references to joy in the Bible!

 A few should be highlighted. Nehemiah was commissioned by God to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem that had been destroyed during Israel’s exile in Babylon. In spite of constant ridicule & opposition Nehemiah famously declared “**the joy of the Lord is my strength**.” Beloved, **is the joy of the Lord your strength? Is He the One who gives you unrestrained, jumping joy?**

 And **Is. 35**—wow! There’s hardly a line that doesn’t scream of joy for God! The desert will be glad, the wilderness will rejoice & blossom—rejoicing greatly & shouting for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel & Sharon—they will see the glory of the Lord & the splendor of our God. Surely your God will come to save you. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame will leap like a deer, the mute tongue shout for joy. Everything will be made new & right—water will gush in the wilderness & streams in the desert; the thirsty ground will bubble springs. And the highway to Holiness will be there—only for those who walk in the way. Only the redeemed, the ransomed of the Lord will enter Zion with singing; **everlasting joy will crown their heads**. And get this: **gladness & joy will overtake them**. Have you ever been overtaken by another car going faster than you? It’s like that. **You won’t be able to outrun God’s joy! Do you know that kind of joy?**

 And **Jesus is the reason for our joy—we, the redeemed**. An angel of the Lord addressed them: “Behold! **I bring you good news of great joy—& it’s for everyone**! Today in the town of

 David a Saviour has been born to you—born to you, born for you! He is Christ the Lord!

 Well, we know the shepherds followed up on the information the angel of the Lord gave them. They went to see Jesus, then spread the word of what they had been told. Everyone who heard what they had to say was amazed. **They returned to their world—but changed**—because they were glorifying & praising God for all they’d heard & seen. **Were they joyful? Are you joy-ful?** At the other end of life, after **the disciples** witnessed Jesus ascend into heaven they too returned to their world—**but changed**. They **returned to Jerusalem with great joy**, continually praising God. **It’s impossible to be in the presence of Jesus & not be changed. It is impossible to be in the presence of Jesus--& you are right now—without great joy**! Have you got it?

 **Jesus came that** His joy may be in you & **that your joy may be complete** (Jn. 15:11). He has come that you may have life & have it to the full (10:10). **Is your joy complete?** Do you have life to the full? You can! Let Jesus into your heart; invite Him in & know joy. For those of you who invited Jesus into your heart eons ago, do you remember that jolt of joy you felt at the time? Invite God to rekindle that same magnitude of joy into your life today. One of my great joys in life is seeing someone elderly who exudes that kind of joy—Ruth & Elizabeth are 2 perfect examples of that. Let God’s joy fill you. Then let the world see & experience it—Joy to the World—one person at a time.

 Let’s close with Ro. 15:13 as a prayer for each of you: “**May the God of hope fill you with all joy** & peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the HS. Then take it—that joy & peace & hope—to your ‘hood this week!