

## Joy

Pastor Ken

December 7, 2025

**The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December.**

*<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

*<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1-NIV)*

Take your message notes; I want to talk to you today about the **barriers, thieves and enemies** that want to steal your JOY this Christmas. All these barriers, thieves and enemies are found in the Christmas story.

**Barrier**, Magi had to travel a far distance to discover their joy. Herod was the **enemy** of Joy, tried to kill baby Jesus. The **thief** of religion and piety almost kept Joseph from taking Mary to be his wife.

The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December. Joy is on billboards and signs. Joy is displayed in the front yards with inflatable snowmen. Joy is seen in stores. Joy wooden signs are displayed on your neighbors' lawn next to the reindeer and Santa.

How many of you have bought a car recently, then noticed how that Make, and Model of your car is being driven by many really, really smart people from Kansas?

Maybe, even a Texan or two has a clue.

This past week Bethel leadership team held their annual staff, deacons, and elders Christmas party.

There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

Now, let me illustrate how the word JOY provided a lot of JOY that night. No Christmas party is complete without the famous Christmas white elephant gift exchange. Anybody ever played that game before? Gail Starnes added a joyful element that if you desired to steal someone's gift, you could only do that by playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot! Say it with me, rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

Now, young people be patient with us old types, the whole shoot'en match of rock, paper scissors, is a new feature. It took a while for a few of our friends to catch on. Rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

The premier gift of the night was a set of handcrafted Christmas towels with the word JOY embroidered on them. Everybody wanted them. I am still not sure who took the Joy towels home.

The word JOY puts a premium value on a set of Christmas towels.

What is JOY and why is it important? Christianity is a joyful faith. So many western and world religions are filled with, "unjoy" and "nonjoy" like beliefs and practices.

**Take for example....** Ladies, who wants to be pregnant for all of eternity? Mormonism offers that to you. Waters that break. Backs that ache. Stomachs that stretch. Emotions that make you feel like a wretch.

Who wants to be reincarnated 547 times as in Buddhism? You come back as a cow. You come back as cow patty. Better get your Karma act together.

Who wants to drum God and Christmas out of December like the atheist? All an atheist has to offer is a Scarry Christmas, not a Merry Christmas. Again...

### **Christianity is a joyful faith. (John 15:11)**

Did you know this Christmas, you can experience Christ's Joy, and it will take up residence in your heart? If you are facing fear, depression, anger, or anxiety why not receive a fresh impartation of Joy, from the giver of JOY. Jesus Christ, himself.

Bet some of you didn't know that, bet some of you want that.

*<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)*

Christianity is a **Joy-filled faith**, but it is also **singing faith**.

Christianity has many more Christmas songs than any other faith, religion, or ideology. We have 1000's of songs about JOY and Jesus. In fact, no other holiday in America or any other country in the world has as many songs as Christianity does about the birth of Jesus and Christmas related themes.

Maybe you know people who love Christmas so much, they start playing Christmas songs in their car or house in August, and many have the urge to decorate in September. Anybody want to receive a Christmas gift right now? Since we are talking about JOY, might as well have a little fun in church.

**Question:** Let's identify who decorates their house the earliest at Bethel? Who starts before December? The winner's gift is back at the Welcome Center. Who starts decorating in April, May, June, July, August, Sept, no takers. How about this, who leaves their lights up all year. There is our winner.

In the Bible we read about the story of the first Christmas. The word JOY is used 8 different times. It is the major theme of Christmas.

**In the first Christmas, the word JOY is used eight times.**

This is why we say Merry Christmas and not Scary Christmas. Christmas is a party. It is a celebration. It is a birthday party. Who has ever had a birthday party for Jesus? Ok, I have gifts for you, until they run out.

Christmas is a festival, not a funeral.

Christmas is a celebration, not a desperation.

Christmas is a birthday, not a workday. (hopefully)

Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

Many thieves out there stealing joy. Like someone who steals your identity, thieves want to steal your joy filled identity. Christ-servant your identity is JOY. Joyfulness. Joyousness. Cheerfulness. Not fearfulness.

In this teaching I plan to focus on **how fear** steals our Joy. In the days ahead we will also see how worry steals our Joy and how unresolved hurt that turns to resentment and bitterness steals our Joy.

I am going to suggest to you that Joy is both a character quality and an emotion. Joy is a feel-good emotion. And an enjoyable emotion at that. Joy is far more than an emotion. Joy is a character quality. You see this character quality identified in Galatians 5, in the list of the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace. Again...

**What is JOY? It is a character quality and an emotion.**

Now, I want to provide a definition for Joy. Joy is a noun. Have you ever heard of the phrase, **these are tears of joy?** The dictionary tells us Joy is a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

Pretty simple. Pretty straight forward. Pretty wrong.

Happiness and Joy are two completely different animals. They are not the same song, played by two different genres of music.

**Joy is a God given emotion and feeling that Christians experience when you accept the truth...**

**...God is in control of every detail, disaster, and delight in your life.**

It includes the idea that God's Joy given to you activates a confidence and courage that everything in your life has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny.

When you praise God at all times, Joy will flood your soul. Joy will win out over fear. Joy will win out over worry and anxiety. Joy will help you with your hurt.

Do you know the difference between happiness and Joy? What is the difference between happiness and JOY?

Happiness happens when you experience the right kind of happenings. **What?** Happiness is based on happenings. What happens to you? That is happiness. Happenstance. Circumstance.

Joy is a choice. Joy is an inside job. Joy is not based on your circumstances. Happiness is external. Joy is internal. You are happy as long as your circumstances keep you happy.

You can experience Joy, regardless of the circumstances.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing grief.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing suffering, pain and even hurt. Paul tells us this in 1 Thes 1:6,

*<sup>6</sup>So you became our followers and the Lord's; for you received our message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the trials and sorrows it brought you. (1 Thes 1:6-TLB)*

You can experience Joy in the midst of discouragement, depression and even death.

When I go to Disneyland the Happiest Place on Earth,

...and I take my kids, I am happy at the Happiest Place on Earth, but when I walk out and realize what it just cost, now I am depressed, I am not happy anymore. I've got to go back into Disneyland to get some of my happiness back.

Joy is inside. Joy internal. Joy is instructional. **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, it is not based on circumstances and happenstances.

You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Ok, that was good, I need to say that again.... **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, don't base it on your circumstances and happenstances. You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Happiness is temporary and it is good while you have it. Joy is eternal. In fact, the Bible tells us that you will experience Joy in heaven **without limit and without end**.

*<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful and trustworthy over a little, I will put you in charge of many things; share in the joy of your master.' (Matt 25:21-AMP)*

Heaven is going to be a place of unending Joy. Again, let me remind you of the barriers, destroyers, and enemies of joy... Barriers, destroyers and enemies of JOY are fear, worry and unresolved hurt.

What I love to be reminded of each Christmas is a first-century family and friends, who faced the same fears I face. All of us have the same 5 fears they dealt with in Bible times.

It is not God's will that you walk around being afraid of anything. Let me review again the fears that hold you back. The fears that keep you from being all you can be for Christ.

Mary: Fear of inadequacy

Joseph: Fear of people's opinions (fear of disapproval)

Shepherds: Fear of surprising changes

Herod: Fear of losing control.

Zacharias and Elizabeth: Fear of being disappointed again.

Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary. When Mary faces the fear of an unwed pregnancy, she does what so many do, head out of town so she wouldn't have to deal with embarrassment and shame.

This way she could avoid the stigma and gossip for 9 months. Mary goes to live with her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah. Elizabeth and Zachariah are now up in there in age, and they have prayed their entire life for a child. They wanted a child so badly, so they prayed. Prayed. And prayed even more. Their prayers were never answered. They finally give up hope because they are up there in years. Way beyond childbearing years.

Zachariah's fear when he gets the news from the angel of an old-age miracle pregnancy is that of being disappointed again. Zachariah faced the fear of being disappointed.

*<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1)*

On that day, an angel of the Lord shows up and says, "hey Zach, do you remember the prayer you have been praying?" It has now come to pass. Heaven tells me your long-awaited child is coming. Your prayers have been heard, and they are coming true. You know the one where you have been praying all those years for a baby?

Well, it is going to happen now. It is going to be a miracle boy, and you are to name him John. We know this child as John the Baptist. Late in life your wife is going to be pregnant.

*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. (Luke 1)*

We all face fear. Let's see if we can find some relief from whatever fear you are facing. **When you live in fear, you are not in God's will at that moment.**

Zachariah's long-awaited son is none other than John the Baptist. John was the announcer of Jesus arrival. God's coming. God's landing on earth. The greatest invasion. God is coming in human form with the name Jesus Christ.

Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

*<sup>18</sup> Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." <sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." (Luke 1)*

Let's transition from Zachariah's fear to the fear faced by a young Christ follower in the New Testament. Here is what we will learn about Paul's protégée Timothy- **Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than you will ever face at Christmas 2025. Or even on into 2026.**

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2Timothy 1:7-NKJV)*

In first century, times, the apostle Paul, near the end of his life, writes his final letter to a young man he loves like a son. His name is Timothy. Paul sees huge potential in his life.

Timothy has one little problem. Timothy is prone to fear. Prone to Timidity. Prone to Cowardice.

His sincere faith in God stumbles when he faces a storm or trouble. He is strong in the storms of life for a while, until doubt and fear set in and then he starts to spiral down into a virtual slump.

And then he has a hard time getting out of the **Timidity** hole. Timothy has unbelievable potential, but he often spirals out of control because of fear.

Paul calls out Timothy and says, “this is your Achilles heel. If you want to live for God, do great things for God, enjoy God’s favor and blessing, Timothy you must resolve the timidity and fear issue.

So, Paul writes these words to Timothy-<sup>7</sup> *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (1 Tim 1-NIV)*

If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

*...but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has **destroyed death** and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim 1:10-NIV)*

Jesus Christ has destroyed death. The operative word is destroyed. Paul’s helping of Timothy is also available to you today. Paul says to timid Timothy, “think of the most intimidating enemy you have known in 2025.”

Is it cancer? Is it divorce? Is it an economic collapse? Is it a dictator or disease? Is it a plague or a person?

What force in this world eventually defeats every human being? What enemy ultimately wins every time it puts its target on the back of a human being?

**The answer is death.**

Death defeats everyone sooner or later. It always has and always will. It defeats the rich and poor. It defeats world leaders and obscure lovers. Death has been on a winning streak since rebellion entered the human race, back in the garden. No one defeats it.

Paul tells us and Timothy...the one you follow, the one who died on a cross and rose again...the one who knows you, loves you, the one who redeemed you and adopted you, the one whose strong hand is holding your hand, every day, all day, that one, Jesus Christ, God's son, destroyed death.

He didn't just land a good punch on its chin.

He didn't just knock it down for an 8-count.

He destroyed it. The translation is that he abolished it. He annihilated it. Paul says to Timothy, on resurrection day when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he demonstrated a supernatural and sovereign transcendent power which has never been witnessed before in all of history.

And that same person, Jesus Christ is holding your hand, so wake up Timothy, enough timidity. Face your daily storms and trials with the help of the one that has destroyed a far bigger foe, than whatever you are dealing with.

The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

Throughout the year insert the name of that foe - fear, depression, addiction, loneliness, cancer, bitterness, etc. into that statement:

Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe (addiction, financial, cancer) than I am facing today.

Father,

Today it has been revealed to me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection He has cancelled my pile of sins. So, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who has brought life and immortality to me through my repentance and Jesus' resurrection.

From this day forward I accept Jesus Joy that activates courage because my Father has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny for my one and only life.

Father, Your Joy will win out over my fear. Your Joy will win out over my worry. Your Joy will win out over my hurts.

As a Christ-follower I am no longer imagining a life without fear, I am living a life without fear because Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than I will ever face.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

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Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

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We all face fear. Let's see if we can find some relief from whatever fear you are facing. **When you live in fear, you are not in God's will at that moment.**

Zachariah's long-awaited son is none other than John the Baptist. John was the announcer of Jesus arrival. God's coming. God's landing on earth. The greatest invasion. God is coming in human form with the name Jesus Christ.

Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

*<sup>18</sup> Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." <sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." (Luke 1)*

Let's transition from Zachariah's fear to the fear faced by a young Christ follower in the New Testament. Here is what we will learn about Paul's protégée Timothy- **Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than you will ever face at Christmas 2025. Or even on into 2026.**

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2Timothy 1:7-NKJV)*

In first century, times, the apostle Paul, near the end of his life, writes his final letter to a young man he loves like a son. His name is Timothy. Paul sees huge potential in his life.

Timothy has one little problem. Timothy is prone to fear. Prone to Timidity. Prone to Cowardice.

His sincere faith in God stumbles when he faces a storm or trouble. He is strong in the storms of life for a while, until doubt and fear set in and then he starts to spiral down into a virtual slump.

And then he has a hard time getting out of the **Timidity** hole. Timothy has unbelievable potential, but he often spirals out of control because of fear.

Paul calls out Timothy and says, “this is your Achilles heel. If you want to live for God, do great things for God, enjoy God’s favor and blessing, Timothy you must resolve the timidity and fear issue.

So, Paul writes these words to Timothy-<sup>7</sup> *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (1 Tim 1-NIV)*

If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

*...but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has **destroyed death** and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim 1:10-NIV)*

Jesus Christ has destroyed death. The operative word is destroyed. Paul’s helping of Timothy is also available to you today. Paul says to timid Timothy, “think of the most intimidating enemy you have known in 2025.”

Is it cancer? Is it divorce? Is it an economic collapse? Is it a dictator or disease? Is it a plague or a person?

What force in this world eventually defeats every human being? What enemy ultimately wins every time it puts its target on the back of a human being?

**The answer is death.**

Death defeats everyone sooner or later. It always has and always will. It defeats the rich and poor. It defeats world leaders and obscure lovers. Death has been on a winning streak since rebellion entered the human race, back in the garden. No one defeats it.

Paul tells us and Timothy...the one you follow, the one who died on a cross and rose again...the one who knows you, loves you, the one who redeemed you and adopted you, the one whose strong hand is holding your hand, every day, all day, that one, Jesus Christ, God's son, destroyed death.

He didn't just land a good punch on its chin.

He didn't just knock it down for an 8-count.

He destroyed it. The translation is that he abolished it. He annihilated it. Paul says to Timothy, on resurrection day when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he demonstrated a supernatural and sovereign transcendent power which has never been witnessed before in all of history.

And that same person, Jesus Christ is holding your hand, so wake up Timothy, enough timidity. Face your daily storms and trials with the help of the one that has destroyed a far bigger foe, than whatever you are dealing with.

The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

Throughout the year insert the name of that foe - fear, depression, addiction, loneliness, cancer, bitterness, etc. into that statement:

Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe (addiction, financial, cancer) than I am facing today.

Father,

Today it has been revealed to me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection He has cancelled my pile of sins. So, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who has brought life and immortality to me through my repentance and Jesus' resurrection.

From this day forward I accept Jesus Joy that activates courage because my Father has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny for my one and only life.

Father, Your Joy will win out over my fear. Your Joy will win out over my worry. Your Joy will win out over my hurts.

As a Christ-follower I am no longer imagining a life without fear, I am living a life without fear because Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than I will ever face.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Joy

Pastor Ken

December 7, 2025

**The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December.**

*<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

*<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1-NIV)*

Take your message notes; I want to talk to you today about the **barriers, thieves and enemies** that want to steal your JOY this Christmas. All these barriers, thieves and enemies are found in the Christmas story.

**Barrier**, Magi had to travel a far distance to discover their joy. Herod was the **enemy** of Joy, tried to kill baby Jesus. The **thief** of religion and piety almost kept Joseph from taking Mary to be his wife.

The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December. Joy is on billboards and signs. Joy is displayed in the front yards with inflatable snowmen. Joy is seen in stores. Joy wooden signs are displayed on your neighbors' lawn next to the reindeer and Santa.

How many of you have bought a car recently, then noticed how that Make, and Model of your car is being driven by many really, really smart people from Kansas?

Maybe, even a Texan or two has a clue.

This past week Bethel leadership team held their annual staff, deacons, and elders Christmas party.

There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

Now, let me illustrate how the word JOY provided a lot of JOY that night. No Christmas party is complete without the famous Christmas white elephant gift exchange. Anybody ever played that game before? Gail Starnes added a joyful element that if you desired to steal someone's gift, you could only do that by playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot! Say it with me, rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

Now, young people be patient with us old types, the whole shoot'en match of rock, paper scissors, is a new feature. It took a while for a few of our friends to catch on. Rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

The premier gift of the night was a set of handcrafted Christmas towels with the word JOY embroidered on them. Everybody wanted them. I am still not sure who took the Joy towels home.

The word JOY puts a premium value on a set of Christmas towels.

What is JOY and why is it important? Christianity is a joyful faith. So many western and world religions are filled with, "unjoy" and "nonjoy" like beliefs and practices.

**Take for example....** Ladies, who wants to be pregnant for all of eternity? Mormonism offers that to you. Waters that break. Backs that ache. Stomachs that stretch. Emotions that make you feel like a wretch.

Who wants to be reincarnated 547 times as in Buddhism? You come back as a cow. You come back as cow patty. Better get your Karma act together.

Who wants to drum God and Christmas out of December like the atheist? All an atheist has to offer is a Scarry Christmas, not a Merry Christmas. Again...

### **Christianity is a joyful faith. (John 15:11)**

Did you know this Christmas, you can experience Christ's Joy, and it will take up residence in your heart? If you are facing fear, depression, anger, or anxiety why not receive a fresh impartation of Joy, from the giver of JOY. Jesus Christ, himself.

Bet some of you didn't know that, bet some of you want that.

*<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)*

Christianity is a **Joy-filled faith**, but it is also **singing faith**.

Christianity has many more Christmas songs than any other faith, religion, or ideology. We have 1000's of songs about JOY and Jesus. In fact, no other holiday in America or any other country in the world has as many songs as Christianity does about the birth of Jesus and Christmas related themes.

Maybe you know people who love Christmas so much, they start playing Christmas songs in their car or house in August, and many have the urge to decorate in September. Anybody want to receive a Christmas gift right now? Since we are talking about JOY, might as well have a little fun in church.

**Question:** Let's identify who decorates their house the earliest at Bethel? Who starts before December? The winner's gift is back at the Welcome Center. Who starts decorating in April, May, June, July, August, Sept, no takers. How about this, who leaves their lights up all year. There is our winner.

In the Bible we read about the story of the first Christmas. The word JOY is used 8 different times. It is the major theme of Christmas.

**In the first Christmas, the word JOY is used eight times.**

This is why we say Merry Christmas and not Scary Christmas. Christmas is a party. It is a celebration. It is a birthday party. Who has ever had a birthday party for Jesus? Ok, I have gifts for you, until they run out.

Christmas is a festival, not a funeral.

Christmas is a celebration, not a desperation.

Christmas is a birthday, not a workday. (hopefully)

Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

Many thieves out there stealing joy. Like someone who steals your identity, thieves want to steal your joy filled identity. Christ-servant your identity is JOY. Joyfulness. Joyousness. Cheerfulness. Not fearfulness.

In this teaching I plan to focus on **how fear** steals our Joy. In the days ahead we will also see how worry steals our Joy and how unresolved hurt that turns to resentment and bitterness steals our Joy.

I am going to suggest to you that Joy is both a character quality and an emotion. Joy is a feel-good emotion. And an enjoyable emotion at that. Joy is far more than an emotion. Joy is a character quality. You see this character quality identified in Galatians 5, in the list of the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace. Again...

**What is JOY? It is a character quality and an emotion.**

Now, I want to provide a definition for Joy. Joy is a noun. Have you ever heard of the phrase, **these are tears of joy?** The dictionary tells us Joy is a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

Pretty simple. Pretty straight forward. Pretty wrong.

Happiness and Joy are two completely different animals. They are not the same song, played by two different genres of music.

**Joy is a God given emotion and feeling that Christians experience when you accept the truth...**

**...God is in control of every detail, disaster, and delight in your life.**

It includes the idea that God's Joy given to you activates a confidence and courage that everything in your life has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny.

When you praise God at all times, Joy will flood your soul. Joy will win out over fear. Joy will win out over worry and anxiety. Joy will help you with your hurt.

Do you know the difference between happiness and Joy? What is the difference between happiness and JOY?

Happiness happens when you experience the right kind of happenings. **What?** Happiness is based on happenings. What happens to you? That is happiness. Happenstance. Circumstance.

Joy is a choice. Joy is an inside job. Joy is not based on your circumstances. Happiness is external. Joy is internal. You are happy as long as your circumstances keep you happy.

You can experience Joy, regardless of the circumstances.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing grief.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing suffering, pain and even hurt. Paul tells us this in 1 Thes 1:6,

*<sup>6</sup>So you became our followers and the Lord's; for you received our message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the trials and sorrows it brought you. (1 Thes 1:6-TLB)*

You can experience Joy in the midst of discouragement, depression and even death.

When I go to Disneyland the Happiest Place on Earth,

...and I take my kids, I am happy at the Happiest Place on Earth, but when I walk out and realize what it just cost, now I am depressed, I am not happy anymore. I've got to go back into Disneyland to get some of my happiness back.

Joy is inside. Joy internal. Joy is instructional. **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, it is not based circumstances and happenstances.

You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Ok, that was good, I need to say that again.... **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, don't base it on your circumstances and happenstances. You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Happiness is temporary and it is good while you have it. Joy is eternal. In fact, the Bible tells us that you will experience Joy in heaven **without limit and without end**.

*<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful and trustworthy over a little, I will put you in charge of many things; share in the joy of your master.' (Matt 25:21-AMP)*

Heaven is going to be a place of unending Joy. Again, let me remind you of the barriers, destroyers, and enemies of joy... Barriers, destroyers and enemies of JOY are fear, worry and unresolved hurt.

What I love to be reminded of each Christmas is a first-century family and friends, who faced the same fears I face. All of us have the same 5 fears they dealt with in Bible times.

It is not God's will that you walk around being afraid of anything. Let me review again the fears that hold you back. The fears that keep you from being all you can be for Christ.

Mary: Fear of inadequacy

Joseph: Fear of people's opinions (fear of disapproval)

Shepherds: Fear of surprising changes

Herod: Fear of losing control.

Zacharias and Elizabeth: Fear of being disappointed again.

Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary. When Mary faces the fear of an unwed pregnancy, she does what so many do, head out of town so she wouldn't have to deal with embarrassment and shame.

This way she could avoid the stigma and gossip for 9 months. Mary goes to live with her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah. Elizabeth and Zachariah are now up in there in age, and they have prayed their entire life for a child. They wanted a child so badly, so they prayed. Prayed. And prayed even more. Their prayers were never answered. They finally give up hope because they are up there in years. Way beyond childbearing years.

Zachariah's fear when he gets the news from the angel of an old-age miracle pregnancy is that of being disappointed again. Zachariah faced the fear of being disappointed.

*<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1)*

On that day, an angel of the Lord shows up and says, "hey Zach, do you remember the prayer you have been praying?" It has now come to pass. Heaven tells me your long-awaited child is coming. Your prayers have been heard, and they are coming true. You know the one where you have been praying all those years for a baby?

Well, it is going to happen now. It is going to be a miracle boy, and you are to name him John. We know this child as John the Baptist. Late in life your wife is going to be pregnant.

*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. (Luke 1)*

We all face fear. Let's see if we can find some relief from whatever fear you are facing. **When you live in fear, you are not in God's will at that moment.**

Zachariah's long-awaited son is none other than John the Baptist. John was the announcer of Jesus arrival. God's coming. God's landing on earth. The greatest invasion. God is coming in human form with the name Jesus Christ.

Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

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Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

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The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

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In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Joy

Pastor Ken

December 7, 2025

**The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December.**

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There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

Now, let me illustrate how the word JOY provided a lot of JOY that night. No Christmas party is complete without the famous Christmas white elephant gift exchange. Anybody ever played that game before? Gail Starnes added a joyful element that if you desired to steal someone's gift, you could only do that by playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot! Say it with me, rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

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Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

Many thieves out there stealing joy. Like someone who steals your identity, thieves want to steal your joy filled identity. Christ-servant your identity is JOY. Joyfulness. Joyousness. Cheerfulness. Not fearfulness.

In this teaching I plan to focus on **how fear** steals our Joy. In the days ahead we will also see how worry steals our Joy and how unresolved hurt that turns to resentment and bitterness steals our Joy.

I am going to suggest to you that Joy is both a character quality and an emotion. Joy is a feel-good emotion. And an enjoyable emotion at that. Joy is far more than an emotion. Joy is a character quality. You see this character quality identified in Galatians 5, in the list of the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace. Again...

**What is JOY? It is a character quality and an emotion.**

Now, I want to provide a definition for Joy. Joy is a noun. Have you ever heard of the phrase, **these are tears of joy?** The dictionary tells us Joy is a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

Pretty simple. Pretty straight forward. Pretty wrong.

Happiness and Joy are two completely different animals. They are not the same song, played by two different genres of music.

**Joy is a God given emotion and feeling that Christians experience when you accept the truth...**

**...God is in control of every detail, disaster, and delight in your life.**

It includes the idea that God's Joy given to you activates a confidence and courage that everything in your life has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny.

When you praise God at all times, Joy will flood your soul. Joy will win out over fear. Joy will win out over worry and anxiety. Joy will help you with your hurt.

Do you know the difference between happiness and Joy? What is the difference between happiness and JOY?

Happiness happens when you experience the right kind of happenings. **What?** Happiness is based on happenings. What happens to you? That is happiness. Happenstance. Circumstance.

Joy is a choice. Joy is an inside job. Joy is not based on your circumstances. Happiness is external. Joy is internal. You are happy as long as your circumstances keep you happy.

You can experience Joy, regardless of the circumstances.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing grief.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing suffering, pain and even hurt. Paul tells us this in 1 Thes 1:6,

*<sup>6</sup>So you became our followers and the Lord's; for you received our message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the trials and sorrows it brought you. (1 Thes 1:6-TLB)*

You can experience Joy in the midst of discouragement, depression and even death.

When I go to Disneyland the Happiest Place on Earth,

...and I take my kids, I am happy at the Happiest Place on Earth, but when I walk out and realize what it just cost, now I am depressed, I am not happy anymore. I've got to go back into Disneyland to get some of my happiness back.

Joy is inside. Joy internal. Joy is instructional. **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, it is not based on circumstances and happenstances.

You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Ok, that was good, I need to say that again.... **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, don't base it on your circumstances and happenstances. You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Happiness is temporary and it is good while you have it. Joy is eternal. In fact, the Bible tells us that you will experience Joy in heaven **without limit and without end**.

*<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful and trustworthy over a little, I will put you in charge of many things; share in the joy of your master.' (Matt 25:21-AMP)*

Heaven is going to be a place of unending Joy. Again, let me remind you of the barriers, destroyers, and enemies of joy... Barriers, destroyers and enemies of JOY are fear, worry and unresolved hurt.

What I love to be reminded of each Christmas is a first-century family and friends, who faced the same fears I face. All of us have the same 5 fears they dealt with in Bible times.

It is not God's will that you walk around being afraid of anything. Let me review again the fears that hold you back. The fears that keep you from being all you can be for Christ.

Mary: Fear of inadequacy

Joseph: Fear of people's opinions (fear of disapproval)

Shepherds: Fear of surprising changes

Herod: Fear of losing control.

Zacharias and Elizabeth: Fear of being disappointed again.

Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary. When Mary faces the fear of an unwed pregnancy, she does what so many do, head out of town so she wouldn't have to deal with embarrassment and shame.

This way she could avoid the stigma and gossip for 9 months. Mary goes to live with her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah. Elizabeth and Zachariah are now up in there in age, and they have prayed their entire life for a child. They wanted a child so badly, so they prayed. Prayed. And prayed even more. Their prayers were never answered. They finally give up hope because they are up there in years. Way beyond childbearing years.

Zachariah's fear when he gets the news from the angel of an old-age miracle pregnancy is that of being disappointed again. Zachariah faced the fear of being disappointed.

*<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1)*

On that day, an angel of the Lord shows up and says, "hey Zach, do you remember the prayer you have been praying?" It has now come to pass. Heaven tells me your long-awaited child is coming. Your prayers have been heard, and they are coming true. You know the one where you have been praying all those years for a baby?

Well, it is going to happen now. It is going to be a miracle boy, and you are to name him John. We know this child as John the Baptist. Late in life your wife is going to be pregnant.

*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. (Luke 1)*

We all face fear. Let's see if we can find some relief from whatever fear you are facing. **When you live in fear, you are not in God's will at that moment.**

Zachariah's long-awaited son is none other than John the Baptist. John was the announcer of Jesus arrival. God's coming. God's landing on earth. The greatest invasion. God is coming in human form with the name Jesus Christ.

Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

*<sup>18</sup> Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." <sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." (Luke 1)*

Let's transition from Zachariah's fear to the fear faced by a young Christ follower in the New Testament. Here is what we will learn about Paul's protégée Timothy- **Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than you will ever face at Christmas 2025. Or even on into 2026.**

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2Timothy 1:7-NKJV)*

In first century, times, the apostle Paul, near the end of his life, writes his final letter to a young man he loves like a son. His name is Timothy. Paul sees huge potential in his life.

Timothy has one little problem. Timothy is prone to fear. Prone to Timidity. Prone to Cowardice.

His sincere faith in God stumbles when he faces a storm or trouble. He is strong in the storms of life for a while, until doubt and fear set in and then he starts to spiral down into a virtual slump.

And then he has a hard time getting out of the **Timidity** hole. Timothy has unbelievable potential, but he often spirals out of control because of fear.

Paul calls out Timothy and says, “this is your Achilles heel. If you want to live for God, do great things for God, enjoy God’s favor and blessing, Timothy you must resolve the timidity and fear issue.

So, Paul writes these words to Timothy-<sup>7</sup> *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (1 Tim 1-NIV)*

If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

*...but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has **destroyed death** and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim 1:10-NIV)*

Jesus Christ has destroyed death. The operative word is destroyed. Paul’s helping of Timothy is also available to you today. Paul says to timid Timothy, “think of the most intimidating enemy you have known in 2025.”

Is it cancer? Is it divorce? Is it an economic collapse? Is it a dictator or disease? Is it a plague or a person?

What force in this world eventually defeats every human being? What enemy ultimately wins every time it puts its target on the back of a human being?

**The answer is death.**

Death defeats everyone sooner or later. It always has and always will. It defeats the rich and poor. It defeats world leaders and obscure lovers. Death has been on a winning streak since rebellion entered the human race, back in the garden. No one defeats it.

Paul tells us and Timothy...the one you follow, the one who died on a cross and rose again...the one who knows you, loves you, the one who redeemed you and adopted you, the one whose strong hand is holding your hand, every day, all day, that one, Jesus Christ, God's son, destroyed death.

He didn't just land a good punch on its chin.

He didn't just knock it down for an 8-count.

He destroyed it. The translation is that he abolished it. He annihilated it. Paul says to Timothy, on resurrection day when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he demonstrated a supernatural and sovereign transcendent power which has never been witnessed before in all of history.

And that same person, Jesus Christ is holding your hand, so wake up Timothy, enough timidity. Face your daily storms and trials with the help of the one that has destroyed a far bigger foe, than whatever you are dealing with.

The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

Throughout the year insert the name of that foe - fear, depression, addiction, loneliness, cancer, bitterness, etc. into that statement:

Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe (addiction, financial, cancer) than I am facing today.

Father,

Today it has been revealed to me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection He has cancelled my pile of sins. So, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who has brought life and immortality to me through my repentance and Jesus' resurrection.

From this day forward I accept Jesus Joy that activates courage because my Father has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny for my one and only life.

Father, Your Joy will win out over my fear. Your Joy will win out over my worry. Your Joy will win out over my hurts.

As a Christ-follower I am no longer imagining a life without fear, I am living a life without fear because Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than I will ever face.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Joy

Pastor Ken

December 7, 2025

**The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December.**

*<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

*<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1-NIV)*

Take your message notes; I want to talk to you today about the **barriers, thieves and enemies** that want to steal your JOY this Christmas. All these barriers, thieves and enemies are found in the Christmas story.

**Barrier**, Magi had to travel a far distance to discover their joy. Herod was the **enemy** of Joy, tried to kill baby Jesus. The **thief** of religion and piety almost kept Joseph from taking Mary to be his wife.

The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December. Joy is on billboards and signs. Joy is displayed in the front yards with inflatable snowmen. Joy is seen in stores. Joy wooden signs are displayed on your neighbors' lawn next to the reindeer and Santa.

How many of you have bought a car recently, then noticed how that Make, and Model of your car is being driven by many really, really smart people from Kansas?

Maybe, even a Texan or two has a clue.

This past week Bethel leadership team held their annual staff, deacons, and elders Christmas party.

There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

Now, let me illustrate how the word JOY provided a lot of JOY that night. No Christmas party is complete without the famous Christmas white elephant gift exchange. Anybody ever played that game before? Gail Starnes added a joyful element that if you desired to steal someone's gift, you could only do that by playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot! Say it with me, rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

Now, young people be patient with us old types, the whole shoot'en match of rock, paper scissors, is a new feature. It took a while for a few of our friends to catch on. Rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

The premier gift of the night was a set of handcrafted Christmas towels with the word JOY embroidered on them. Everybody wanted them. I am still not sure who took the Joy towels home.

The word JOY puts a premium value on a set of Christmas towels.

What is JOY and why is it important? Christianity is a joyful faith. So many western and world religions are filled with, "unjoy" and "nonjoy" like beliefs and practices.

**Take for example....** Ladies, who wants to be pregnant for all of eternity? Mormonism offers that to you. Waters that break. Backs that ache. Stomachs that stretch. Emotions that make you feel like a wretch.

Who wants to be reincarnated 547 times as in Buddhism? You come back as a cow. You come back as cow patty. Better get your Karma act together.

Who wants to drum God and Christmas out of December like the atheist? All an atheist has to offer is a Scarry Christmas, not a Merry Christmas. Again...

### **Christianity is a joyful faith. (John 15:11)**

Did you know this Christmas, you can experience Christ's Joy, and it will take up residence in your heart? If you are facing fear, depression, anger, or anxiety why not receive a fresh impartation of Joy, from the giver of JOY. Jesus Christ, himself.

Bet some of you didn't know that, bet some of you want that.

*<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)*

Christianity is a **Joy-filled faith**, but it is also **singing faith**.

Christianity has many more Christmas songs than any other faith, religion, or ideology. We have 1000's of songs about JOY and Jesus. In fact, no other holiday in America or any other country in the world has as many songs as Christianity does about the birth of Jesus and Christmas related themes.

Maybe you know people who love Christmas so much, they start playing Christmas songs in their car or house in August, and many have the urge to decorate in September. Anybody want to receive a Christmas gift right now? Since we are talking about JOY, might as well have a little fun in church.

**Question:** Let's identify who decorates their house the earliest at Bethel? Who starts before December? The winner's gift is back at the Welcome Center. Who starts decorating in April, May, June, July, August, Sept, no takers. How about this, who leaves their lights up all year. There is our winner.

In the Bible we read about the story of the first Christmas. The word JOY is used 8 different times. It is the major theme of Christmas.

**In the first Christmas, the word JOY is used eight times.**

This is why we say Merry Christmas and not Scary Christmas. Christmas is a party. It is a celebration. It is a birthday party. Who has ever had a birthday party for Jesus? Ok, I have gifts for you, until they run out.

Christmas is a festival, not a funeral.

Christmas is a celebration, not a desperation.

Christmas is a birthday, not a workday. (hopefully)

Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

Many thieves out there stealing joy. Like someone who steals your identity, thieves want to steal your joy filled identity. Christ-servant your identity is JOY. Joyfulness. Joyousness. Cheerfulness. Not fearfulness.

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What I love to be reminded of each Christmas is a first-century family and friends, who faced the same fears I face. All of us have the same 5 fears they dealt with in Bible times.

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Joseph: Fear of people's opinions (fear of disapproval)

Shepherds: Fear of surprising changes

Herod: Fear of losing control.

Zacharias and Elizabeth: Fear of being disappointed again.

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*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. (Luke 1)*

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Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

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If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

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The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

Throughout the year insert the name of that foe - fear, depression, addiction, loneliness, cancer, bitterness, etc. into that statement:

Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe (addiction, financial, cancer) than I am facing today.

Father,

Today it has been revealed to me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection He has cancelled my pile of sins. So, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who has brought life and immortality to me through my repentance and Jesus' resurrection.

From this day forward I accept Jesus Joy that activates courage because my Father has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny for my one and only life.

Father, Your Joy will win out over my fear. Your Joy will win out over my worry. Your Joy will win out over my hurts.

As a Christ-follower I am no longer imagining a life without fear, I am living a life without fear because Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than I will ever face.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Joy

Pastor Ken

December 7, 2025

**The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December.**

*<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

*<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1-NIV)*

Take your message notes; I want to talk to you today about the **barriers, thieves and enemies** that want to steal your JOY this Christmas. All these barriers, thieves and enemies are found in the Christmas story.

**Barrier**, Magi had to travel a far distance to discover their joy. Herod was the **enemy** of Joy, tried to kill baby Jesus. The **thief** of religion and piety almost kept Joseph from taking Mary to be his wife.

The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December. Joy is on billboards and signs. Joy is displayed in the front yards with inflatable snowmen. Joy is seen in stores. Joy wooden signs are displayed on your neighbors' lawn next to the reindeer and Santa.

How many of you have bought a car recently, then noticed how that Make, and Model of your car is being driven by many really, really smart people from Kansas?

Maybe, even a Texan or two has a clue.

This past week Bethel leadership team held their annual staff, deacons, and elders Christmas party.

There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

Now, let me illustrate how the word JOY provided a lot of JOY that night. No Christmas party is complete without the famous Christmas white elephant gift exchange. Anybody ever played that game before? Gail Starnes added a joyful element that if you desired to steal someone's gift, you could only do that by playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot! Say it with me, rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

Now, young people be patient with us old types, the whole shoot'en match of rock, paper scissors, is a new feature. It took a while for a few of our friends to catch on. Rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

The premier gift of the night was a set of handcrafted Christmas towels with the word JOY embroidered on them. Everybody wanted them. I am still not sure who took the Joy towels home.

The word JOY puts a premium value on a set of Christmas towels.

What is JOY and why is it important? Christianity is a joyful faith. So many western and world religions are filled with, "unjoy" and "nonjoy" like beliefs and practices.

**Take for example....** Ladies, who wants to be pregnant for all of eternity? Mormonism offers that to you. Waters that break. Backs that ache. Stomachs that stretch. Emotions that make you feel like a wretch.

Who wants to be reincarnated 547 times as in Buddhism? You come back as a cow. You come back as cow patty. Better get your Karma act together.

Who wants to drum God and Christmas out of December like the atheist? All an atheist has to offer is a Scarry Christmas, not a Merry Christmas. Again...

### **Christianity is a joyful faith. (John 15:11)**

Did you know this Christmas, you can experience Christ's Joy, and it will take up residence in your heart? If you are facing fear, depression, anger, or anxiety why not receive a fresh impartation of Joy, from the giver of JOY. Jesus Christ, himself.

Bet some of you didn't know that, bet some of you want that.

*<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)*

Christianity is a **Joy-filled faith**, but it is also **singing faith**.

Christianity has many more Christmas songs than any other faith, religion, or ideology. We have 1000's of songs about JOY and Jesus. In fact, no other holiday in America or any other country in the world has as many songs as Christianity does about the birth of Jesus and Christmas related themes.

Maybe you know people who love Christmas so much, they start playing Christmas songs in their car or house in August, and many have the urge to decorate in September. Anybody want to receive a Christmas gift right now? Since we are talking about JOY, might as well have a little fun in church.

**Question:** Let's identify who decorates their house the earliest at Bethel? Who starts before December? The winner's gift is back at the Welcome Center. Who starts decorating in April, May, June, July, August, Sept, no takers. How about this, who leaves their lights up all year. There is our winner.

In the Bible we read about the story of the first Christmas. The word JOY is used 8 different times. It is the major theme of Christmas.

**In the first Christmas, the word JOY is used eight times.**

This is why we say Merry Christmas and not Scary Christmas. Christmas is a party. It is a celebration. It is a birthday party. Who has ever had a birthday party for Jesus? Ok, I have gifts for you, until they run out.

Christmas is a festival, not a funeral.

Christmas is a celebration, not a desperation.

Christmas is a birthday, not a workday. (hopefully)

Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

Many thieves out there stealing joy. Like someone who steals your identity, thieves want to steal your joy filled identity. Christ-servant your identity is JOY. Joyfulness. Joyousness. Cheerfulness. Not fearfulness.

In this teaching I plan to focus on **how fear** steals our Joy. In the days ahead we will also see how worry steals our Joy and how unresolved hurt that turns to resentment and bitterness steals our Joy.

I am going to suggest to you that Joy is both a character quality and an emotion. Joy is a feel-good emotion. And an enjoyable emotion at that. Joy is far more than an emotion. Joy is a character quality. You see this character quality identified in Galatians 5, in the list of the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace. Again...

**What is JOY? It is a character quality and an emotion.**

Now, I want to provide a definition for Joy. Joy is a noun. Have you ever heard of the phrase, **these are tears of joy?** The dictionary tells us Joy is a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

Pretty simple. Pretty straight forward. Pretty wrong.

Happiness and Joy are two completely different animals. They are not the same song, played by two different genres of music.

**Joy is a God given emotion and feeling that Christians experience when you accept the truth...**

**...God is in control of every detail, disaster, and delight in your life.**

It includes the idea that God's Joy given to you activates a confidence and courage that everything in your life has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny.

When you praise God at all times, Joy will flood your soul. Joy will win out over fear. Joy will win out over worry and anxiety. Joy will help you with your hurt.

Do you know the difference between happiness and Joy? What is the difference between happiness and JOY?

Happiness happens when you experience the right kind of happenings. **What?** Happiness is based on happenings. What happens to you? That is happiness. Happenstance. Circumstance.

Joy is a choice. Joy is an inside job. Joy is not based on your circumstances. Happiness is external. Joy is internal. You are happy as long as your circumstances keep you happy.

You can experience Joy, regardless of the circumstances.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing grief.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing suffering, pain and even hurt. Paul tells us this in 1 Thes 1:6,

*<sup>6</sup>So you became our followers and the Lord's; for you received our message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the trials and sorrows it brought you. (1 Thes 1:6-TLB)*

You can experience Joy in the midst of discouragement, depression and even death.

When I go to Disneyland the Happiest Place on Earth,

...and I take my kids, I am happy at the Happiest Place on Earth, but when I walk out and realize what it just cost, now I am depressed, I am not happy anymore. I've got to go back into Disneyland to get some of my happiness back.

Joy is inside. Joy internal. Joy is instructional. **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, it is not based on circumstances and happenstances.

You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Ok, that was good, I need to say that again.... **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, don't base it on your circumstances and happenstances. You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Happiness is temporary and it is good while you have it. Joy is eternal. In fact, the Bible tells us that you will experience Joy in heaven **without limit and without end**.

*<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful and trustworthy over a little, I will put you in charge of many things; share in the joy of your master.' (Matt 25:21-AMP)*

Heaven is going to be a place of unending Joy. Again, let me remind you of the barriers, destroyers, and enemies of joy... Barriers, destroyers and enemies of JOY are fear, worry and unresolved hurt.

What I love to be reminded of each Christmas is a first-century family and friends, who faced the same fears I face. All of us have the same 5 fears they dealt with in Bible times.

It is not God's will that you walk around being afraid of anything. Let me review again the fears that hold you back. The fears that keep you from being all you can be for Christ.

Mary: Fear of inadequacy

Joseph: Fear of people's opinions (fear of disapproval)

Shepherds: Fear of surprising changes

Herod: Fear of losing control.

Zacharias and Elizabeth: Fear of being disappointed again.

Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary. When Mary faces the fear of an unwed pregnancy, she does what so many do, head out of town so she wouldn't have to deal with embarrassment and shame.

This way she could avoid the stigma and gossip for 9 months. Mary goes to live with her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah. Elizabeth and Zachariah are now up in there in age, and they have prayed their entire life for a child. They wanted a child so badly, so they prayed. Prayed. And prayed even more. Their prayers were never answered. They finally give up hope because they are up there in years. Way beyond childbearing years.

Zachariah's fear when he gets the news from the angel of an old-age miracle pregnancy is that of being disappointed again. Zachariah faced the fear of being disappointed.

*<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1)*

On that day, an angel of the Lord shows up and says, "hey Zach, do you remember the prayer you have been praying?" It has now come to pass. Heaven tells me your long-awaited child is coming. Your prayers have been heard, and they are coming true. You know the one where you have been praying all those years for a baby?

Well, it is going to happen now. It is going to be a miracle boy, and you are to name him John. We know this child as John the Baptist. Late in life your wife is going to be pregnant.

*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. (Luke 1)*

We all face fear. Let's see if we can find some relief from whatever fear you are facing. **When you live in fear, you are not in God's will at that moment.**

Zachariah's long-awaited son is none other than John the Baptist. John was the announcer of Jesus arrival. God's coming. God's landing on earth. The greatest invasion. God is coming in human form with the name Jesus Christ.

Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

*<sup>18</sup> Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." <sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." (Luke 1)*

Let's transition from Zachariah's fear to the fear faced by a young Christ follower in the New Testament. Here is what we will learn about Paul's protégée Timothy- **Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than you will ever face at Christmas 2025. Or even on into 2026.**

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2Timothy 1:7-NKJV)*

In first century, times, the apostle Paul, near the end of his life, writes his final letter to a young man he loves like a son. His name is Timothy. Paul sees huge potential in his life.

Timothy has one little problem. Timothy is prone to fear. Prone to Timidity. Prone to Cowardice.

His sincere faith in God stumbles when he faces a storm or trouble. He is strong in the storms of life for a while, until doubt and fear set in and then he starts to spiral down into a virtual slump.

And then he has a hard time getting out of the **Timidity** hole. Timothy has unbelievable potential, but he often spirals out of control because of fear.

Paul calls out Timothy and says, “this is your Achilles heel. If you want to live for God, do great things for God, enjoy God’s favor and blessing, Timothy you must resolve the timidity and fear issue.

So, Paul writes these words to Timothy-<sup>7</sup> *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (1 Tim 1-NIV)*

If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

*...but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has **destroyed death** and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim 1:10-NIV)*

Jesus Christ has destroyed death. The operative word is destroyed. Paul’s helping of Timothy is also available to you today. Paul says to timid Timothy, “think of the most intimidating enemy you have known in 2025.”

Is it cancer? Is it divorce? Is it an economic collapse? Is it a dictator or disease? Is it a plague or a person?

What force in this world eventually defeats every human being? What enemy ultimately wins every time it puts its target on the back of a human being?

**The answer is death.**

Death defeats everyone sooner or later. It always has and always will. It defeats the rich and poor. It defeats world leaders and obscure lovers. Death has been on a winning streak since rebellion entered the human race, back in the garden. No one defeats it.

Paul tells us and Timothy...the one you follow, the one who died on a cross and rose again...the one who knows you, loves you, the one who redeemed you and adopted you, the one whose strong hand is holding your hand, every day, all day, that one, Jesus Christ, God's son, destroyed death.

He didn't just land a good punch on its chin.

He didn't just knock it down for an 8-count.

He destroyed it. The translation is that he abolished it. He annihilated it. Paul says to Timothy, on resurrection day when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he demonstrated a supernatural and sovereign transcendent power which has never been witnessed before in all of history.

And that same person, Jesus Christ is holding your hand, so wake up Timothy, enough timidity. Face your daily storms and trials with the help of the one that has destroyed a far bigger foe, than whatever you are dealing with.

The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

Throughout the year insert the name of that foe - fear, depression, addiction, loneliness, cancer, bitterness, etc. into that statement:

Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe (addiction, financial, cancer) than I am facing today.

Father,

Today it has been revealed to me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection He has cancelled my pile of sins. So, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who has brought life and immortality to me through my repentance and Jesus' resurrection.

From this day forward I accept Jesus Joy that activates courage because my Father has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny for my one and only life.

Father, Your Joy will win out over my fear. Your Joy will win out over my worry. Your Joy will win out over my hurts.

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In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Joy

Pastor Ken

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Take your message notes; I want to talk to you today about the **barriers, thieves and enemies** that want to steal your JOY this Christmas. All these barriers, thieves and enemies are found in the Christmas story.

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There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

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Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

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On that day, an angel of the Lord shows up and says, "hey Zach, do you remember the prayer you have been praying?" It has now come to pass. Heaven tells me your long-awaited child is coming. Your prayers have been heard, and they are coming true. You know the one where you have been praying all those years for a baby?

Well, it is going to happen now. It is going to be a miracle boy, and you are to name him John. We know this child as John the Baptist. Late in life your wife is going to be pregnant.

*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. (Luke 1)*

We all face fear. Let's see if we can find some relief from whatever fear you are facing. **When you live in fear, you are not in God's will at that moment.**

Zachariah's long-awaited son is none other than John the Baptist. John was the announcer of Jesus arrival. God's coming. God's landing on earth. The greatest invasion. God is coming in human form with the name Jesus Christ.

Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

*<sup>18</sup> Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." <sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." (Luke 1)*

Let's transition from Zachariah's fear to the fear faced by a young Christ follower in the New Testament. Here is what we will learn about Paul's protégée Timothy- **Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than you will ever face at Christmas 2025. Or even on into 2026.**

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2Timothy 1:7-NKJV)*

In first century, times, the apostle Paul, near the end of his life, writes his final letter to a young man he loves like a son. His name is Timothy. Paul sees huge potential in his life.

Timothy has one little problem. Timothy is prone to fear. Prone to Timidity. Prone to Cowardice.

His sincere faith in God stumbles when he faces a storm or trouble. He is strong in the storms of life for a while, until doubt and fear set in and then he starts to spiral down into a virtual slump.

And then he has a hard time getting out of the **Timidity** hole. Timothy has unbelievable potential, but he often spirals out of control because of fear.

Paul calls out Timothy and says, “this is your Achilles heel. If you want to live for God, do great things for God, enjoy God’s favor and blessing, Timothy you must resolve the timidity and fear issue.

So, Paul writes these words to Timothy-<sup>7</sup> *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (1 Tim 1-NIV)*

If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

*...but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has **destroyed death** and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim 1:10-NIV)*

Jesus Christ has destroyed death. The operative word is destroyed. Paul’s helping of Timothy is also available to you today. Paul says to timid Timothy, “think of the most intimidating enemy you have known in 2025.”

Is it cancer? Is it divorce? Is it an economic collapse? Is it a dictator or disease? Is it a plague or a person?

What force in this world eventually defeats every human being? What enemy ultimately wins every time it puts its target on the back of a human being?

**The answer is death.**

Death defeats everyone sooner or later. It always has and always will. It defeats the rich and poor. It defeats world leaders and obscure lovers. Death has been on a winning streak since rebellion entered the human race, back in the garden. No one defeats it.

Paul tells us and Timothy...the one you follow, the one who died on a cross and rose again...the one who knows you, loves you, the one who redeemed you and adopted you, the one whose strong hand is holding your hand, every day, all day, that one, Jesus Christ, God's son, destroyed death.

He didn't just land a good punch on its chin.

He didn't just knock it down for an 8-count.

He destroyed it. The translation is that he abolished it. He annihilated it. Paul says to Timothy, on resurrection day when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he demonstrated a supernatural and sovereign transcendent power which has never been witnessed before in all of history.

And that same person, Jesus Christ is holding your hand, so wake up Timothy, enough timidity. Face your daily storms and trials with the help of the one that has destroyed a far bigger foe, than whatever you are dealing with.

The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

Throughout the year insert the name of that foe - fear, depression, addiction, loneliness, cancer, bitterness, etc. into that statement:

Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe (addiction, financial, cancer) than I am facing today.

Father,

Today it has been revealed to me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection He has cancelled my pile of sins. So, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who has brought life and immortality to me through my repentance and Jesus' resurrection.

From this day forward I accept Jesus Joy that activates courage because my Father has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny for my one and only life.

Father, Your Joy will win out over my fear. Your Joy will win out over my worry. Your Joy will win out over my hurts.

As a Christ-follower I am no longer imagining a life without fear, I am living a life without fear because Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than I will ever face.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Joy

Pastor Ken

December 7, 2025

**The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December.**

*<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

*<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1-NIV)*

Take your message notes; I want to talk to you today about the **barriers, thieves and enemies** that want to steal your JOY this Christmas. All these barriers, thieves and enemies are found in the Christmas story.

**Barrier**, Magi had to travel a far distance to discover their joy. Herod was the **enemy** of Joy, tried to kill baby Jesus. The **thief** of religion and piety almost kept Joseph from taking Mary to be his wife.

The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December. Joy is on billboards and signs. Joy is displayed in the front yards with inflatable snowmen. Joy is seen in stores. Joy wooden signs are displayed on your neighbors' lawn next to the reindeer and Santa.

How many of you have bought a car recently, then noticed how that Make, and Model of your car is being driven by many really, really smart people from Kansas?

Maybe, even a Texan or two has a clue.

This past week Bethel leadership team held their annual staff, deacons, and elders Christmas party.

There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

Now, let me illustrate how the word JOY provided a lot of JOY that night. No Christmas party is complete without the famous Christmas white elephant gift exchange. Anybody ever played that game before? Gail Starnes added a joyful element that if you desired to steal someone's gift, you could only do that by playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot! Say it with me, rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

Now, young people be patient with us old types, the whole shoot'en match of rock, paper scissors, is a new feature. It took a while for a few of our friends to catch on. Rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

The premier gift of the night was a set of handcrafted Christmas towels with the word JOY embroidered on them. Everybody wanted them. I am still not sure who took the Joy towels home.

The word JOY puts a premium value on a set of Christmas towels.

What is JOY and why is it important? Christianity is a joyful faith. So many western and world religions are filled with, "unjoy" and "nonjoy" like beliefs and practices.

**Take for example....** Ladies, who wants to be pregnant for all of eternity? Mormonism offers that to you. Waters that break. Backs that ache. Stomachs that stretch. Emotions that make you feel like a wretch.

Who wants to be reincarnated 547 times as in Buddhism? You come back as a cow. You come back as cow patty. Better get your Karma act together.

Who wants to drum God and Christmas out of December like the atheist? All an atheist has to offer is a Scarry Christmas, not a Merry Christmas. Again...

### **Christianity is a joyful faith. (John 15:11)**

Did you know this Christmas, you can experience Christ's Joy, and it will take up residence in your heart? If you are facing fear, depression, anger, or anxiety why not receive a fresh impartation of Joy, from the giver of JOY. Jesus Christ, himself.

Bet some of you didn't know that, bet some of you want that.

*<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)*

Christianity is a **Joy-filled faith**, but it is also **singing faith**.

Christianity has many more Christmas songs than any other faith, religion, or ideology. We have 1000's of songs about JOY and Jesus. In fact, no other holiday in America or any other country in the world has as many songs as Christianity does about the birth of Jesus and Christmas related themes.

Maybe you know people who love Christmas so much, they start playing Christmas songs in their car or house in August, and many have the urge to decorate in September. Anybody want to receive a Christmas gift right now? Since we are talking about JOY, might as well have a little fun in church.

**Question:** Let's identify who decorates their house the earliest at Bethel? Who starts before December? The winner's gift is back at the Welcome Center. Who starts decorating in April, May, June, July, August, Sept, no takers. How about this, who leaves their lights up all year. There is our winner.

In the Bible we read about the story of the first Christmas. The word JOY is used 8 different times. It is the major theme of Christmas.

**In the first Christmas, the word JOY is used eight times.**

This is why we say Merry Christmas and not Scary Christmas. Christmas is a party. It is a celebration. It is a birthday party. Who has ever had a birthday party for Jesus? Ok, I have gifts for you, until they run out.

Christmas is a festival, not a funeral.

Christmas is a celebration, not a desperation.

Christmas is a birthday, not a workday. (hopefully)

Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

Many thieves out there stealing joy. Like someone who steals your identity, thieves want to steal your joy filled identity. Christ-servant your identity is JOY. Joyfulness. Joyousness. Cheerfulness. Not fearfulness.

In this teaching I plan to focus on **how fear** steals our Joy. In the days ahead we will also see how worry steals our Joy and how unresolved hurt that turns to resentment and bitterness steals our Joy.

I am going to suggest to you that Joy is both a character quality and an emotion. Joy is a feel-good emotion. And an enjoyable emotion at that. Joy is far more than an emotion. Joy is a character quality. You see this character quality identified in Galatians 5, in the list of the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace. Again...

**What is JOY? It is a character quality and an emotion.**

Now, I want to provide a definition for Joy. Joy is a noun. Have you ever heard of the phrase, **these are tears of joy?** The dictionary tells us Joy is a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

Pretty simple. Pretty straight forward. Pretty wrong.

Happiness and Joy are two completely different animals. They are not the same song, played by two different genres of music.

**Joy is a God given emotion and feeling that Christians experience when you accept the truth...**

**...God is in control of every detail, disaster, and delight in your life.**

It includes the idea that God's Joy given to you activates a confidence and courage that everything in your life has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny.

When you praise God at all times, Joy will flood your soul. Joy will win out over fear. Joy will win out over worry and anxiety. Joy will help you with your hurt.

Do you know the difference between happiness and Joy? What is the difference between happiness and JOY?

Happiness happens when you experience the right kind of happenings. **What?** Happiness is based on happenings. What happens to you? That is happiness. Happenstance. Circumstance.

Joy is a choice. Joy is an inside job. Joy is not based on your circumstances. Happiness is external. Joy is internal. You are happy as long as your circumstances keep you happy.

You can experience Joy, regardless of the circumstances.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing grief.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing suffering, pain and even hurt. Paul tells us this in 1 Thes 1:6,

*<sup>6</sup>So you became our followers and the Lord's; for you received our message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the trials and sorrows it brought you. (1 Thes 1:6-TLB)*

You can experience Joy in the midst of discouragement, depression and even death.

When I go to Disneyland the Happiest Place on Earth,

...and I take my kids, I am happy at the Happiest Place on Earth, but when I walk out and realize what it just cost, now I am depressed, I am not happy anymore. I've got to go back into Disneyland to get some of my happiness back.

Joy is inside. Joy internal. Joy is instructional. **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, it is not based on circumstances and happenstances.

You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Ok, that was good, I need to say that again.... **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, don't base it on your circumstances and happenstances. You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Happiness is temporary and it is good while you have it. Joy is eternal. In fact, the Bible tells us that you will experience Joy in heaven **without limit and without end**.

*<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful and trustworthy over a little, I will put you in charge of many things; share in the joy of your master.' (Matt 25:21-AMP)*

Heaven is going to be a place of unending Joy. Again, let me remind you of the barriers, destroyers, and enemies of joy... Barriers, destroyers and enemies of JOY are fear, worry and unresolved hurt.

What I love to be reminded of each Christmas is a first-century family and friends, who faced the same fears I face. All of us have the same 5 fears they dealt with in Bible times.

It is not God's will that you walk around being afraid of anything. Let me review again the fears that hold you back. The fears that keep you from being all you can be for Christ.

Mary: Fear of inadequacy

Joseph: Fear of people's opinions (fear of disapproval)

Shepherds: Fear of surprising changes

Herod: Fear of losing control.

Zacharias and Elizabeth: Fear of being disappointed again.

Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary. When Mary faces the fear of an unwed pregnancy, she does what so many do, head out of town so she wouldn't have to deal with embarrassment and shame.

This way she could avoid the stigma and gossip for 9 months. Mary goes to live with her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah. Elizabeth and Zachariah are now up in there in age, and they have prayed their entire life for a child. They wanted a child so badly, so they prayed. Prayed. And prayed even more. Their prayers were never answered. They finally give up hope because they are up there in years. Way beyond childbearing years.

Zachariah's fear when he gets the news from the angel of an old-age miracle pregnancy is that of being disappointed again. Zachariah faced the fear of being disappointed.

*<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1)*

On that day, an angel of the Lord shows up and says, "hey Zach, do you remember the prayer you have been praying?" It has now come to pass. Heaven tells me your long-awaited child is coming. Your prayers have been heard, and they are coming true. You know the one where you have been praying all those years for a baby?

Well, it is going to happen now. It is going to be a miracle boy, and you are to name him John. We know this child as John the Baptist. Late in life your wife is going to be pregnant.

*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. (Luke 1)*

We all face fear. Let's see if we can find some relief from whatever fear you are facing. **When you live in fear, you are not in God's will at that moment.**

Zachariah's long-awaited son is none other than John the Baptist. John was the announcer of Jesus arrival. God's coming. God's landing on earth. The greatest invasion. God is coming in human form with the name Jesus Christ.

Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

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And then he has a hard time getting out of the **Timidity** hole. Timothy has unbelievable potential, but he often spirals out of control because of fear.

Paul calls out Timothy and says, “this is your Achilles heel. If you want to live for God, do great things for God, enjoy God’s favor and blessing, Timothy you must resolve the timidity and fear issue.

So, Paul writes these words to Timothy-<sup>7</sup> *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (1 Tim 1-NIV)*

If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

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And that same person, Jesus Christ is holding your hand, so wake up Timothy, enough timidity. Face your daily storms and trials with the help of the one that has destroyed a far bigger foe, than whatever you are dealing with.

The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

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In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Joy

Pastor Ken

December 7, 2025

**The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December.**

*<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

*<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1-NIV)*

Take your message notes; I want to talk to you today about the **barriers, thieves and enemies** that want to steal your JOY this Christmas. All these barriers, thieves and enemies are found in the Christmas story.

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There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

Now, let me illustrate how the word JOY provided a lot of JOY that night. No Christmas party is complete without the famous Christmas white elephant gift exchange. Anybody ever played that game before? Gail Starnes added a joyful element that if you desired to steal someone's gift, you could only do that by playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot! Say it with me, rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

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Christianity has many more Christmas songs than any other faith, religion, or ideology. We have 1000's of songs about JOY and Jesus. In fact, no other holiday in America or any other country in the world has as many songs as Christianity does about the birth of Jesus and Christmas related themes.

Maybe you know people who love Christmas so much, they start playing Christmas songs in their car or house in August, and many have the urge to decorate in September. Anybody want to receive a Christmas gift right now? Since we are talking about JOY, might as well have a little fun in church.

**Question:** Let's identify who decorates their house the earliest at Bethel? Who starts before December? The winner's gift is back at the Welcome Center. Who starts decorating in April, May, June, July, August, Sept, no takers. How about this, who leaves their lights up all year. There is our winner.

In the Bible we read about the story of the first Christmas. The word JOY is used 8 different times. It is the major theme of Christmas.

**In the first Christmas, the word JOY is used eight times.**

This is why we say Merry Christmas and not Scary Christmas. Christmas is a party. It is a celebration. It is a birthday party. Who has ever had a birthday party for Jesus? Ok, I have gifts for you, until they run out.

Christmas is a festival, not a funeral.

Christmas is a celebration, not a desperation.

Christmas is a birthday, not a workday. (hopefully)

Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

Many thieves out there stealing joy. Like someone who steals your identity, thieves want to steal your joy filled identity. Christ-servant your identity is JOY. Joyfulness. Joyousness. Cheerfulness. Not fearfulness.

In this teaching I plan to focus on **how fear** steals our Joy. In the days ahead we will also see how worry steals our Joy and how unresolved hurt that turns to resentment and bitterness steals our Joy.

I am going to suggest to you that Joy is both a character quality and an emotion. Joy is a feel-good emotion. And an enjoyable emotion at that. Joy is far more than an emotion. Joy is a character quality. You see this character quality identified in Galatians 5, in the list of the fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace. Again...

**What is JOY? It is a character quality and an emotion.**

Now, I want to provide a definition for Joy. Joy is a noun. Have you ever heard of the phrase, **these are tears of joy?** The dictionary tells us Joy is a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.

Pretty simple. Pretty straight forward. Pretty wrong.

Happiness and Joy are two completely different animals. They are not the same song, played by two different genres of music.

**Joy is a God given emotion and feeling that Christians experience when you accept the truth...**

**...God is in control of every detail, disaster, and delight in your life.**

It includes the idea that God's Joy given to you activates a confidence and courage that everything in your life has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny.

When you praise God at all times, Joy will flood your soul. Joy will win out over fear. Joy will win out over worry and anxiety. Joy will help you with your hurt.

Do you know the difference between happiness and Joy? What is the difference between happiness and JOY?

Happiness happens when you experience the right kind of happenings. **What?** Happiness is based on happenings. What happens to you? That is happiness. Happenstance. Circumstance.

Joy is a choice. Joy is an inside job. Joy is not based on your circumstances. Happiness is external. Joy is internal. You are happy as long as your circumstances keep you happy.

You can experience Joy, regardless of the circumstances.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing grief.

You can experience Joy, while experiencing suffering, pain and even hurt. Paul tells us this in 1 Thes 1:6,

*<sup>6</sup>So you became our followers and the Lord's; for you received our message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the trials and sorrows it brought you. (1 Thes 1:6-TLB)*

You can experience Joy in the midst of discouragement, depression and even death.

When I go to Disneyland the Happiest Place on Earth,

...and I take my kids, I am happy at the Happiest Place on Earth, but when I walk out and realize what it just cost, now I am depressed, I am not happy anymore. I've got to go back into Disneyland to get some of my happiness back.

Joy is inside. Joy internal. Joy is instructional. **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, it is not based circumstances and happenstances.

You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Ok, that was good, I need to say that again.... **Joy is inevitable**, when you receive Christ's joy, don't base it on your circumstances and happenstances. You build joy, like you build your bicep.

Happiness is temporary and it is good while you have it. Joy is eternal. In fact, the Bible tells us that you will experience Joy in heaven **without limit and without end**.

*<sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful and trustworthy over a little, I will put you in charge of many things; share in the joy of your master.' (Matt 25:21-AMP)*

Heaven is going to be a place of unending Joy. Again, let me remind you of the barriers, destroyers, and enemies of joy... Barriers, destroyers and enemies of JOY are fear, worry and unresolved hurt.

What I love to be reminded of each Christmas is a first-century family and friends, who faced the same fears I face. All of us have the same 5 fears they dealt with in Bible times.

It is not God's will that you walk around being afraid of anything. Let me review again the fears that hold you back. The fears that keep you from being all you can be for Christ.

Mary: Fear of inadequacy

Joseph: Fear of people's opinions (fear of disapproval)

Shepherds: Fear of surprising changes

Herod: Fear of losing control.

Zacharias and Elizabeth: Fear of being disappointed again.

Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary. When Mary faces the fear of an unwed pregnancy, she does what so many do, head out of town so she wouldn't have to deal with embarrassment and shame.

This way she could avoid the stigma and gossip for 9 months. Mary goes to live with her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah. Elizabeth and Zachariah are now up in there in age, and they have prayed their entire life for a child. They wanted a child so badly, so they prayed. Prayed. And prayed even more. Their prayers were never answered. They finally give up hope because they are up there in years. Way beyond childbearing years.

Zachariah's fear when he gets the news from the angel of an old-age miracle pregnancy is that of being disappointed again. Zachariah faced the fear of being disappointed.

*<sup>8</sup> Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (Luke 1)*

On that day, an angel of the Lord shows up and says, "hey Zach, do you remember the prayer you have been praying?" It has now come to pass. Heaven tells me your long-awaited child is coming. Your prayers have been heard, and they are coming true. You know the one where you have been praying all those years for a baby?

Well, it is going to happen now. It is going to be a miracle boy, and you are to name him John. We know this child as John the Baptist. Late in life your wife is going to be pregnant.

*<sup>11</sup> Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. (Luke 1)*

We all face fear. Let's see if we can find some relief from whatever fear you are facing. **When you live in fear, you are not in God's will at that moment.**

Zachariah's long-awaited son is none other than John the Baptist. John was the announcer of Jesus arrival. God's coming. God's landing on earth. The greatest invasion. God is coming in human form with the name Jesus Christ.

Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

*<sup>18</sup> Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years." <sup>19</sup> The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time." (Luke 1)*

Let's transition from Zachariah's fear to the fear faced by a young Christ follower in the New Testament. Here is what we will learn about Paul's protégée Timothy- **Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than you will ever face at Christmas 2025. Or even on into 2026.**

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2Timothy 1:7-NKJV)*

In first century, times, the apostle Paul, near the end of his life, writes his final letter to a young man he loves like a son. His name is Timothy. Paul sees huge potential in his life.

Timothy has one little problem. Timothy is prone to fear. Prone to Timidity. Prone to Cowardice.

His sincere faith in God stumbles when he faces a storm or trouble. He is strong in the storms of life for a while, until doubt and fear set in and then he starts to spiral down into a virtual slump.

And then he has a hard time getting out of the **Timidity** hole. Timothy has unbelievable potential, but he often spirals out of control because of fear.

Paul calls out Timothy and says, “this is your Achilles heel. If you want to live for God, do great things for God, enjoy God’s favor and blessing, Timothy you must resolve the timidity and fear issue.

So, Paul writes these words to Timothy-<sup>7</sup> *For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. (1 Tim 1-NIV)*

If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

### **Christ rose to silence fear in your life. (Matt. 8:24; 27:54; 28:2)**

Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

So, the timidity pattern can be broken in his life, 3 verses later Paul pens one of the most impactful verses in all of the New Testament.

*...but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has **destroyed death** and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim 1:10-NIV)*

Jesus Christ has destroyed death. The operative word is destroyed. Paul’s helping of Timothy is also available to you today. Paul says to timid Timothy, “think of the most intimidating enemy you have known in 2025.”

Is it cancer? Is it divorce? Is it an economic collapse? Is it a dictator or disease? Is it a plague or a person?

What force in this world eventually defeats every human being? What enemy ultimately wins every time it puts its target on the back of a human being?

**The answer is death.**

Death defeats everyone sooner or later. It always has and always will. It defeats the rich and poor. It defeats world leaders and obscure lovers. Death has been on a winning streak since rebellion entered the human race, back in the garden. No one defeats it.

Paul tells us and Timothy...the one you follow, the one who died on a cross and rose again...the one who knows you, loves you, the one who redeemed you and adopted you, the one whose strong hand is holding your hand, every day, all day, that one, Jesus Christ, God's son, destroyed death.

He didn't just land a good punch on its chin.

He didn't just knock it down for an 8-count.

He destroyed it. The translation is that he abolished it. He annihilated it. Paul says to Timothy, on resurrection day when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he demonstrated a supernatural and sovereign transcendent power which has never been witnessed before in all of history.

And that same person, Jesus Christ is holding your hand, so wake up Timothy, enough timidity. Face your daily storms and trials with the help of the one that has destroyed a far bigger foe, than whatever you are dealing with.

The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

Throughout the year insert the name of that foe - fear, depression, addiction, loneliness, cancer, bitterness, etc. into that statement:

Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe (addiction, financial, cancer) than I am facing today.

Father,

Today it has been revealed to me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection He has cancelled my pile of sins. So, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who has brought life and immortality to me through my repentance and Jesus' resurrection.

From this day forward I accept Jesus Joy that activates courage because my Father has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny for my one and only life.

Father, Your Joy will win out over my fear. Your Joy will win out over my worry. Your Joy will win out over my hurts.

As a Christ-follower I am no longer imagining a life without fear, I am living a life without fear because Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than I will ever face.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

## Joy

Pastor Ken

December 7, 2025

**The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December.**

*<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

*<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" <sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1-NIV)*

Take your message notes; I want to talk to you today about the **barriers, thieves and enemies** that want to steal your JOY this Christmas. All these barriers, thieves and enemies are found in the Christmas story.

**Barrier**, Magi had to travel a far distance to discover their joy. Herod was the **enemy** of Joy, tried to kill baby Jesus. The **thief** of religion and piety almost kept Joseph from taking Mary to be his wife.

The word JOY is found everywhere in the month of December. Joy is on billboards and signs. Joy is displayed in the front yards with inflatable snowmen. Joy is seen in stores. Joy wooden signs are displayed on your neighbors' lawn next to the reindeer and Santa.

How many of you have bought a car recently, then noticed how that Make, and Model of your car is being driven by many really, really smart people from Kansas?

Maybe, even a Texan or two has a clue.

This past week Bethel leadership team held their annual staff, deacons, and elders Christmas party.

There they are, those who lead you, can you tell them thank you with applause.

Now, let me illustrate how the word JOY provided a lot of JOY that night. No Christmas party is complete without the famous Christmas white elephant gift exchange. Anybody ever played that game before? Gail Starnes added a joyful element that if you desired to steal someone's gift, you could only do that by playing rock, paper, scissors, shoot! Say it with me, rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

Now, young people be patient with us old types, the whole shoot'en match of rock, paper scissors, is a new feature. It took a while for a few of our friends to catch on. Rock, paper, scissors, shoot!

The premier gift of the night was a set of handcrafted Christmas towels with the word JOY embroidered on them. Everybody wanted them. I am still not sure who took the Joy towels home.

The word JOY puts a premium value on a set of Christmas towels.

What is JOY and why is it important? Christianity is a joyful faith. So many western and world religions are filled with, "unjoy" and "nonjoy" like beliefs and practices.

**Take for example....** Ladies, who wants to be pregnant for all of eternity? Mormonism offers that to you. Waters that break. Backs that ache. Stomachs that stretch. Emotions that make you feel like a wretch.

Who wants to be reincarnated 547 times as in Buddhism? You come back as a cow. You come back as cow patty. Better get your Karma act together.

Who wants to drum God and Christmas out of December like the atheist? All an atheist has to offer is a Scarry Christmas, not a Merry Christmas. Again...

### **Christianity is a joyful faith. (John 15:11)**

Did you know this Christmas, you can experience Christ's Joy, and it will take up residence in your heart? If you are facing fear, depression, anger, or anxiety why not receive a fresh impartation of Joy, from the giver of JOY. Jesus Christ, himself.

Bet some of you didn't know that, bet some of you want that.

*<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)*

Christianity is a **Joy-filled faith**, but it is also **singing faith**.

Christianity has many more Christmas songs than any other faith, religion, or ideology. We have 1000's of songs about JOY and Jesus. In fact, no other holiday in America or any other country in the world has as many songs as Christianity does about the birth of Jesus and Christmas related themes.

Maybe you know people who love Christmas so much, they start playing Christmas songs in their car or house in August, and many have the urge to decorate in September. Anybody want to receive a Christmas gift right now? Since we are talking about JOY, might as well have a little fun in church.

**Question:** Let's identify who decorates their house the earliest at Bethel? Who starts before December? The winner's gift is back at the Welcome Center. Who starts decorating in April, May, June, July, August, Sept, no takers. How about this, who leaves their lights up all year. There is our winner.

In the Bible we read about the story of the first Christmas. The word JOY is used 8 different times. It is the major theme of Christmas.

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This is why we say Merry Christmas and not Scary Christmas. Christmas is a party. It is a celebration. It is a birthday party. Who has ever had a birthday party for Jesus? Ok, I have gifts for you, until they run out.

Christmas is a festival, not a funeral.

Christmas is a celebration, not a desperation.

Christmas is a birthday, not a workday. (hopefully)

Christmas is elation. Christmas is jubilation. Christmas is rejoicing. What about the true meaning of Christmas? Jesus was born to atone for our sins. Jesus was born to die.

That makes Christmas more than rejoicing, it is rebirth. Christmas is renewal. Ultimately, Christmas is resurrection.

**For many, this Christmas is not a season of cheerfulness (JOY), but a season of fearfulness.**

Today we are going to learn **how fear steals** your joy. Now, there are many JOY robbers, Joy thieves, Joy enemies, and many barriers to JOY.

Many thieves out there stealing joy. Like someone who steals your identity, thieves want to steal your joy filled identity. Christ-servant your identity is JOY. Joyfulness. Joyousness. Cheerfulness. Not fearfulness.

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Zachariah had been disappointed so many times, he doubted God. He just could not bring himself to trust God. To believe God. I am not going to trust again.

**Ok, it would be spiritual malpractice** if I did not invite you to make the same confession Zachariah did, so you can be released from your fear.

To hope again. To believe again. Zachariah has been disappointed so many times. How many can relate to being disappointed over and over again?

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If I were to ask everyone here today, how many would say they live with a spirit of timidity? We sing songs about the love and power of God on Sunday, spend our 15 minutes in a chair, serve the poor in the community, but later in the week we hit a rough patch and our faith falters.

Fear takes over. We start that slow spiral into the same slump that Timothy found himself in. I wonder how many? Truth be told we ALL live with inordinate (some) levels of fear. Timidity? I wonder how it limits us.

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Back to Timothy. Struggling with his Timidity and yet, knowing the stories of the disciples and the resurrection of his Lord, Paul offers hope.

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**The answer is death.**

Death defeats everyone sooner or later. It always has and always will. It defeats the rich and poor. It defeats world leaders and obscure lovers. Death has been on a winning streak since rebellion entered the human race, back in the garden. No one defeats it.

Paul tells us and Timothy...the one you follow, the one who died on a cross and rose again...the one who knows you, loves you, the one who redeemed you and adopted you, the one whose strong hand is holding your hand, every day, all day, that one, Jesus Christ, God's son, destroyed death.

He didn't just land a good punch on its chin.

He didn't just knock it down for an 8-count.

He destroyed it. The translation is that he abolished it. He annihilated it. Paul says to Timothy, on resurrection day when Jesus Christ rose from the grave, he demonstrated a supernatural and sovereign transcendent power which has never been witnessed before in all of history.

And that same person, Jesus Christ is holding your hand, so wake up Timothy, enough timidity. Face your daily storms and trials with the help of the one that has destroyed a far bigger foe, than whatever you are dealing with.

The argument from Paul was a game changer for Timothy and it can be for you too. If you grab hold of God's resurrection mantra and brand today-The one I follow, has destroyed far larger foes than any opposition I am facing.

Jesus has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today. The moral of the story: Since Jesus dealt a death blow to fear, you can live in unlimited Joy this Christmas.

And on that first Christmas Mary, Joseph, Herod, Shepherds, and Zacharias all faced fear, and those same 5 fears are present today as we have seen. So, this Christmas and on into 2026 with its fears you have yet to face why not, memorize this mantra- Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe than I am facing today or will face in 2026.

Throughout the year insert the name of that foe - fear, depression, addiction, loneliness, cancer, bitterness, etc. into that statement:

Jesus Christ has destroyed a far bigger foe (addiction, financial, cancer) than I am facing today.

Father,

Today it has been revealed to me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and because of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection He has cancelled my pile of sins. So, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who has brought life and immortality to me through my repentance and Jesus' resurrection.

From this day forward I accept Jesus Joy that activates courage because my Father has a sovereign solution, a providential purpose, a divinely planned destiny for my one and only life.

Father, Your Joy will win out over my fear. Your Joy will win out over my worry. Your Joy will win out over my hurts.

As a Christ-follower I am no longer imagining a life without fear, I am living a life without fear because Jesus Christ defeated a bigger foe than I will ever face.

In Jesus Name, Amen.