

The Angels' Song

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[0 : 0 0] In the run-up to Christmas, we are doing a short series called Four Songs for Christmas, and all of them are found in Luke chapter 1 and Luke chapter 2. We've looked already at Mary's song and Zachariah's song from chapter 1. Tonight, we're coming to the Angel's song in chapter 2, and next Sunday morning, we'll be looking at Simeon's song in 2, 29 to 32. These are all short sections set out as poetry that capture many of the key truths that lie at the heart of why Jesus came. And if you were here last week, you'll remember that we're summarizing each song under these headings. Mary's song is teaching us that Jesus is born to cause disruption. Zachariah's song that Jesus is born to bring deliverance. The Angel's song that Jesus is born to give us delight.

And Simeon's song that Jesus is born to transform our departure. If I'll just do a very quick recap of what we saw last week. Last Sunday morning, we looked at Mary's song, Jesus was born to cause disruption. And we saw that that was definitely true in Mary's life. Everything was turned upside down when the angel appeared from her. But more importantly, Jesus' birth disrupts the whole of history because this is the moment when God intervenes. The Son of God has come into the world to be Savior and King. And so redemptive history goes from saying He is coming to saying He is here.

And that disrupts our lives too, not to ruin things, but to fix things. Jesus has come to rescue us from sin and give us new life in Him. Then Sunday night last week, we looked at Zachariah's song, Jesus is born to bring deliverance. And we saw that that song was teaching us that in the gospel, we are delivered from something and we are delivered into something. And that from to dynamic shapes the whole of what God is accomplishing through the coming of Jesus. We're delivered from spiritual disaster. We're delivered into eternal security. We're delivered from slavery to sin.

We're delivered into freedom in the gospel. We're delivered from alienation with God. We're delivered into His family where we are loved as His children forever. Tonight, we come to the angel song, Jesus is born to give us delight. And that's captured in verse 10. We'll be coming back to verses 13 and 14.

But in verse 10, the angels come and say, the angel first of all comes and says, fear not, behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. And that's a very basic but absolutely crucial point. That Christianity is an announcement of joy. It's a message that brings joy. And a lifetime following Jesus is a lifetime of knowing joy. And that's why, incidentally, when we start our week together at church, our time together should be full of joy. We're starting a new week and we're starting a new week reminding ourselves of the best news that the world has ever heard. And that should shape everything that we do as we worship together at the start of each new week. And it also means that as we go into our new week, our witness as Christians should never be gloomy or miserable or negative because there is so much to be joyful about. Christians will often feel that they have to make a trade-off between being serious and being joyful. So some Christians will hold their faith with the utmost seriousness. They are absolutely committed and they are never casual about anything, but they are often somber and sad in the way that they'll then go through their lives. And then other Christians are desperate to experience and feel joy and to express that, but often they risk being superficial and they're not really that interested in all the seriousness and importance of the gospel. So often you'll get Christians who are either solid but sad or cheerful but casual. And I want us to start tonight by remembering that the Bible never, ever wants you to make that trade-off. In the gospel we find the most serious, urgent, important, penetrating news that the world has ever heard.

[5 : 05] And in the gospel we discover the news that will give us the most magnificent, energizing, life-transforming joy. And it's all because Jesus is born to give you delight. But how does that work? How is it that the coming of Jesus and the gospel is going to give us delight? Well, there's loads that we could say about that. What I want us to see tonight is that the angel's song captures two very simple but two very magnificent truths that lie at the heart of the gospel. And the more we understand these, what I hope we'll see is that our joy, our delight will increase more and more and more. What are the two things that the angel's song teaches us? Well, they're teaching us that in the gospel, God gets glory and we get peace.

That's our two main headings. And we'll keep coming back to this twofold truth. God gets glory, we get peace. But rather than go through the two headings like I normally do, I'm actually going to have, I'm going to, I want to sort of say, I want to say five things about both of them. So I don't really know if this is a two-point sermon or a five-point sermon or a ten-point sermon. But anyway, we're just going to go through it together. And if you walk out of here knowing that, that God gets glory and we get peace, then it's mission accomplished. And what I hope we're going to discover is that these angels are actually excellent theologians. So the first thing I want to say in regard to this is that these words are reminding us that the gospel operates in a God word and a human word direction. The gospel operates in a God word and a human word direction. And that's captured beautifully by the angels. And this verse speak of glory for God and peace for us. And this verse is actually a very good example of what you call parallelism, which is a very common poetic structure that you see in the Bible, especially in the Psalms. So parallelism. And basically what that parallelism refers to is where you get two lines of poetry and you get elements of each line correspond to each other. So to give you some examples, here in verse 14, you have God and you have us in parallel. You have, let me change my color so you can see it more clearly. You have glory in parallel with peace. And if I change my color again, what will I do? I'll do red. You've got the highest, which is heaven, and you've got earth, which is here. And so you have this parallelism, glory and peace, God and us, heaven and earth. And you see those things are being placed in parallel alongside each other. And it's all teaching us, this verse is captured very powerfully, that the gospel works in a God word and a human word direction. And the original intention for humanity was that this bi-directional connection would thrive. And so we were made by God to worship, honor and love him, to recognize him as our creator and our king. And as we do that, as we worship and honor, send worship and honor towards him, we were to enjoy the extraordinary blessings of knowing him, of receiving his kindness, of having access to his presence, of resting in his love. And that bi-directional connection is actually captured so brilliantly in the first question of the shorter catechism, what's man's chief end? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And that two-fold direction lies at the heart of the gospel. All of that is just another way of saying that we were made for a relationship with God. That's really what we are made for, to enjoy an amazing relationship with him. And this is why the Bible's explanation of humanity is the best that you will ever find.

And that's something that's so important. And every person here, and especially maybe the younger people here growing up in a world that's increasingly hostile to the biblical worldview, so important to remember this, that the Bible's explanation for humanity is the best that you will ever find. Because the Bible is telling you that humanity is not primarily mechanical. We're not made just to follow the impulses of our genetic makeup in order to survive at all costs. And nor is humanity primarily functional, just a puppet in the hands of fate. And nor is humanity primarily mystical, as though to discover our true purpose, we have to kind of block out everything around us. Humanity is none of these things primarily. The Bible tells you that humanity, first and foremost, is relational.

We're made to know one another, to relate to one another, to enjoy one another. And it's in those relationships with friends, with family, with community, it's in those relationships that we find delight. And that's why everybody here knows that who you see at Christmas is far more important than what you get. And whoever is missing is far more painful than whatever you don't get.

And if that's true in regard to one another, it's definitely true with God. We are made for a relationship with Him, a relationship of intimacy, involvement, connection, and delight. There's a God word and a human word aspect to the gospel. But number two out of five, second thing out of five we want to say is that sin has damaged things in both directions. And so what we were created to be is not what we've turned out to be. And instead of that beautiful two-way relationship that we're intended to have, we have sinned against God, we've ruined our relationship with Him, and the result is that we don't give Him glory at all. And so instead of glory going towards God as it should, we've turned away from Him and sinned against Him. And this is captured very, very powerfully in Romans chapter 1. And so I'll just read this because Paul says it better than I ever could. Although they knew God, so this is talking about humanity, although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him. And so that's what should be there, that God word honoring and thanksgiving. But they didn't do that. Instead, they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and keeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies amongst themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever. In other words, instead of giving that glory God word, God has been discarded. And we pour our energy into giving glory and honor to a thousand things that are not God, a thousand things that we have turned into idols.

[13 : 06] And because of that, we are now desperately struggling to find peace. And these are the aspects of our theology that are so easy to prove. This is not hard to prove at all, because the evidence is all around us. We see all around us a world full of people that worships celebrities that are so easy to do. And we see all around us. And we see all around us. And we see all behind the angel song is actually a very, very penetrating diagnosis of the human condition.

We don't glorify God. And we don't have peace. And so the two-way relationship that we were made to have with God has been doubly broken. And that has a massive impact in terms of both glory and peace.

So the third thing we're saying is that we now send glory in the wrong direction. So glory is meant to go towards God, but we send that glory in the wrong direction.

What I want you to think about just now under this heading is that one of the principles behind what we're saying here is that delight comes from delighting. Delight comes from delighting.

In other words, we get delight from the things that we give our delight to. So if we're thinking all about how the gospel gives us delight, I want us to recognize that basic principle that delight comes from delighting. Now, this is actually something that you see at its most beautiful in God himself. So the Christian doctrine of God is grounded in the doctrine of the Trinity.

[15 : 02] One God, three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And when you think of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, one God, you must always think of each person finding delight because they are taking delight in the other. So the Father delights in his Son. In fact, Luke will go on to talk about that. At Jesus' baptism, a voice from heaven comes over Jesus saying, you are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. And the Son delights in the Father. We sang about that in Psalm 40. Jesus delighting to do his Father's will. And the Spirit delights in both, and both delight in the Spirit. And this is one of the reasons why the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is so, so important because it's teaching us that at the heart of who God is, there is a beautiful unselfishness. And that's really important to remember because when we think about God, anybody who believes in God, it's often easy to think of God as though he's like the top of the pyramid. You think of everything else that exists, you think, well, God's at the top of the pyramid.

Of course, that's true in a sense. Well, even more than a sense, it's true. But there's a danger that belongs to God. If we think of God at the top of the pyramid and we think, well, everything belongs to God, you know, he gets all the praise and honor. It should all go in his direction because he's the one at the very top. There's a danger that we can think that ultimately God is just a taker or he's just a getter in the sense that everything should just be directed towards him as though he's the kind of like, I don't know, I can't think, the magnet. I had like a plug hole in my head. That's a terrible illustration. But everything being directed towards him as though he's just a taker.

Now, that's true in a sense, but it's actually an inadequate understanding of God. Because the Trinity tells you that God is not ultimately a taker or a getter. The Trinity tells you that God is ultimately a giver and a sharer. A beautiful fellowship of three in one where the eternal happiness of God occurs because each person finds delight by taking delight in each other. Now, the reason it's important for us to think about is because that sets the pattern for how humanity finds delight.

We don't actually get delight by always just being the taker or the getter. We find delight for ourselves by delighting in one another. And the Bible's intention for us is that we should experience that through our relationship with God. So, first and foremost, the first thing you learn about God in the Bible is that he is our creator. And recognizing that allows us to delight in him as the one from whom everything has come. And it means that we can also delight in all the beautiful things that he's provided for us in his creation. So, we enjoy all the goodness in the world around us. We give him glory for it. And it fills our hearts with delight. And that's true whether it's a sunset, a hill walk, a beautiful meal, or time together in friendship, whatever it may be. And so, that's the intention.

But the huge mistake that we make is that we want to push God out of the picture. And so, this Trinitarian pattern of delight coming from delighting still stands. But we reject the God from whom it came. And we look for delight elsewhere. And the result is that we send our glory in the wrong direction. And maybe that's maybe one of the most important diagnoses of the world that we live in just now. People are sending their glory in the wrong direction. And so, sometimes that will involve giving glory to something that's actually empty. And so, we'll give glory to celebrities who are actually just people. To possessions that's actually just stuff. To appearances that actually don't really matter that much. Or to achievements that are maybe not as important as we think they are. And we so often will give our glory, will instinctively give our glory to stuff that if we stop and think about it, we think, well, actually, that doesn't really matter that much at all. And even worse, sometimes people will misdirect their delighting so that they're giving glory to something that's actually evil. And that's taking us to what Paul described. And it's something that you see very often. So, people will chase money to the point that they'll trample over others. People will crave sex so that the boundaries of marriage are long since left behind. People will pursue power in a way that just increases inequality and that exploits people who are weak. And this is the pattern that humanity falls in. It's such an easy trap for us to fall into. You can either fall into it a little bit or you can fall into it a little bit or you can fall into it majorly. It can happen in lots of different ways.

[20 : 46] It doesn't matter whether it's a job or money or a Christmas present or another drink or a glance at pornography or a new house or a new car or a new phone. How many times in your life have you thought, if I just have this, then I'll be delighted. And then as soon as we get it, the delight we expected evaporates. All of that happens when we send our glory in the wrong direction. That's the third thing I want to say. At the same time though, at the same time as we send glory in the wrong direction, point number four is that we lack peace in every direction. We send our glory in the wrong direction and we lack peace in every direction. And this is important for us to remember, the impact of sin has disrupted our peace in four crucial ways. So first of all, we no longer have peace with God.

So our sin makes us guilty before him and our sinful state is no longer compatible with a holy God. We're alienated from him, relationship broken. Secondly, we no longer have peace with the creation around us. We experience pain and suffering and disease and strife. Thirdly, we no longer have peace with each other. We hurt others, we get hurt by them. Relationships break down, there's animosity, suspicion, conflict and cruelty between the people who are made to live in harmony. And fourthly, we no longer have peace with ourselves. We feel insecure, afraid and frustrated with ourselves.

In all of these directions, towards God, towards our environment, towards one another, towards ourselves, in all these directions, we've lost our peace. And now we're exposed to the awful realities of iniquity, adversity, hostility and anxiety. Iniquity before God, adversity in the environment that we live in. Hostility between one another and anxiety in our hearts. And I have no doubt that at least one of these will be affecting you today. So maybe you're crippled by anxiety, constantly tense and concerned about what might happen to you or to people you care about.

Maybe you're bruised by hostility. Somebody said something or done something that just left you feeling like you've been kicked in the stomach. Maybe you're battling adversity. You're just weary of chronic pain. You're worn out because of illness. You're discouraged by what you see in the world around you. Or you're gutted because things in your own life have not worked out as you hoped or expected.

Or maybe you're here conscious of your own iniquity. Maybe you feel guilty before God. You feel so conscious of your failure. And maybe you think that, you know, Thomas, when you talk about hope, yes, there's hope for everybody else, but not for me.

[24 : 08] All around us, there are people who are sending glory in the wrong direction and who are lacking peace in every direction. And what I want us to also see is that the two of these are related.

What we glory in affects our peace. And that's particularly true in relation to anxiety.

The more you give your glory to the wrong thing, the more it will increase your anxiety. Tim Keller, who's an American theologian and author who recently passed away, he made a really helpful point where he pointed out that anxiety corresponds to stability. So if you direct your hope and your confidence, your adoration and your security onto something, the more unstable that is, the more it will increase your anxiety. So for example, if you base your self-confidence and your security on your, on the way you look or on your physical fitness, then the more time goes on, the more anxious you're going to become because our physical conditioning diminishes with age.

Or if you place your confidence and security in wealth, then any threat to your income is going to fill you with anxiety. Or if your confidence comes from what the guy or girl you like thinks of you, then you're going to be terrified that they'll stop liking you. And the more that presents itself as a reality, the more your anxiety will increase. And of course, in the opposite way, the more that you know these things are secure, then the less your anxiety will be. And this is why wealth or admiration of glory is harmful. Because when we go chasing wealth or admiration or success, we are chasing something that we think will give us peace. And yet all the time, it will rob us of peace. And so an interesting thing to think about is that if you feel really anxious or tense about something, you will probably be able to trace that back to misdirected glory. And I can give you a very, very, very, very relevant example from this afternoon. I don't know the final score, but an hour ago, it was extra time and it was three all between Rangers and Celtic. And I do not feel an ounce of anxiety about that result because I don't like either of them. And I give Rangers and Celtic no glory whatsoever. And so I don't feel anxious. I bet you there's a lot of people in this room and a lot of people who didn't come to church tonight because they feel so anxious about the team that they're placing their glory in. Now that's just football. It's harmlessly enough as long as it doesn't go too far. To give you probably a more, to give you an example that I feel more ashamed about, sometimes I get very anxious writing a sermon. And if I trace that anxiety back, I am tracing it back to the fact that I worry what people will think. And that's a misplaced glory because I'm thinking what they think is what matters. How they react is what matters. And my anxiety can be traced to misplaced glory. And if you think about that, I'm sure you can see a hundred other examples in your life.

And this is where we see that the angel song is brilliant because it's teaching us that the gospel fixes all of this. And that takes us to our fifth and final point. So just to recap, we're saying that the gospel operates in a Godward and a human direction. God gets glory. We get peace. Number two, sins damage things in both directions. Number three, we send glory in the wrong direction. Number four, we lack peace in every direction. And number five, glory to God and peace to us is the news that will fill your heart with delight. Remember the angel said, this is good news of great joy. Glory to God and peace to us is the reason why the gospel will fill your heart with delight. And it can do that.

[28 : 55] It can fill your heart with delight because God is immutably stable and he is unstoppably able. Immutably stable, unstoppably able. His stability means that we are giving glory to the one who can never, ever be shaken. So if anxiety comes from glorying in something that we can lose, then that can never happen with God, which is why God is the one who can take all your fears away.

Because if you're trusting in him, you are standing on an immovable rock. If you're listening to him, then you're being taught by the one who is infinitely wise. If you're following him, you're being led by the one who will never, ever leave you or forsake you. If you rest on him, you are leaning on the arms that will never let you go. Absolutely nothing can threaten him or knock him or move him or distract him. He means that you do not. If you become a Christian, his eternal stability means that you do not need to be afraid. And of course, it all makes perfect sense because the Bible tells you that God is the immutably stable, unchanging, eternal God. And what is the most common commandment that he gives in the whole Bible? He says, do not be afraid. And those things are related. His immutable stability means that you do not need to be afraid. It takes away our anxiety.

We can rest in him. Jesus is amazing because his stability as a risen Savior means that he really can tell you, do not be afraid. But not only is God immutably stable, he's also unstoppably able.

And that's why he can restore peace in every direction. He is so able and that ability is unstoppable. He restores our relationship with him. And the amazing truth of the gospel is that he carries the cost of all that reconciliation. It's our sin that broke the relationship. But God does not wait for us to fix it. He takes the initiative. He carries the cost. He sends his son. And on the cross, Jesus dies in our place and rises again so that we can have life. And that life is one where all the damage of sin is undone. And this is what the gospel is pointing us towards. The culmination of the gospel is the new creation where adversity is gone. There'll be no more pain, no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more curse. And that beautiful restoration will mean that there will be no more hostility of a broken world. And that hostility of a broken world is replaced with a kingdom grounded on love for God and love for one another, where all of us are united together as brothers and sisters in one family. God is bringing about this restoration. And he is unstoppable in his ability.

And because of that, your heart can leave anxiety behind. And instead, you can be filled with peace. And the reason that you can have peace is the reason why these angels are such good theologians.

[32 : 35] Because they're telling you that it's all because the glory goes to God. God gets the glory. And the reason he gets the glory is because he does everything.

And that means that nothing depends on you. And if nothing depends on you, then nothing can be ruined by you.

He does it all. He accomplishes everything. And there's nothing that you can do to muck it up. And this is where we see that these angels are actually excellent Calvinist theologians.

Because they are recognizing the fact that God is sovereign in salvation. Everything in the gospel rests on God taking care of everything.

And so the angels are showing you that nothing actually depends on you. And some people find that humiliating. But the truth is, that tells you just how much you mean to God.

[33 : 55] Because how far will God go for you? How much will God do for you? He'll do it all.

He'll do everything. And that's what the birth of Jesus is all about. That's what the gospel is all about. God does it all because not only is he immutably stable, not only is he unstoppably able, he is also unhesitatingly willing.

And the reason he is unhesitatingly willing is because he loves you. And that is good news of great, great joy.

In the gospel, we delight in the fact that God gets all the glory because he does absolutely everything that is needed. In the gospel, we delight from the peace that comes from resting in the utter perfection of all that Jesus has accomplished.

And in the gospel, we delight in the God who's come to save you because his willingness to be for you never flinches.

[35 : 18] His willingness to come and save you never wavers. His willingness to come and save you never hesitates.

In the gospel, God gets the glory. We get the peace. And both God and us are filled with delight.

And I hope you can see that. I hope you can see the beautiful balance of those two short statements that in the gospel, God gets glory, we get peace.

And if you're not yet a believer or not sure, well, maybe there's two categories of people in that regard. Sometimes there's people who are not believers and they're like pushing Jesus away and they're like, well, I'm not interested. Well, if that's you, who is getting your glory?

And where are you going to find peace? But I don't think that there's many people like that. I think there's more people here who are thinking, I want Jesus and I know that I need him, but I don't really know what to do.

[36 : 24] Well, what should you do? Well, you should be just like the shepherds who heard this message. They just went to Jesus as they were. And you can do that.

And say, Jesus, please save me. Please help me. I can do none of this on my own, but I need you to help me with every step. And do you know what he'll say to you?

No problem. Let's do it. Amen.