

The Joy of Unburdening

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[0 : 00] I want you to think for a moment about some of the heaviest weight that any person or family can carry.

! Some of the heaviest weight is financial strain and often medical problems and the debt that comes with them.

We're talking about medical debt. You may not be aware there's a non-profit called Undue Medical Debt, formerly RIP, Rest in Peace Medical Debt. What they do is they buy huge portfolios of debt for pennies on the dollar and then they do something different than anybody else.

They forgive it. They don't call to ask for money. They send a simple envelope and when it comes and you open it, it says two words, debt relieved.

In that moment, the weight that's been crushing you for however long you've been dealing with this strain often years evaporates.

[1 : 04] It's undeserved, unexpected, and just at the right time. That feeling, that explosive exhale of relief, freedom, and overflowing grace results in one thing, joy.

It results in pure, unadulterated joy. Not the thin happiness of circumstances being okay, but in that moment when debt is forgiven, you experience joy from absolute undeserved release and favor.

This need for unburdening isn't just regarding medical debt. It's not individual. We all share it.

Entire nations feel it. Back in the late 1990s, a global movement called Jubilee 2000 erupted across the world.

Faith leaders and activists called for wealthy nations to cancel the entire suffocating debt owed by some of the world's poorest countries. Debt that was choking health care, education, development, and it worked.

[2 : 22] And without diving into the politics of all that or debating it, we don't need to spend time on that today. But we can see that over \$100 billion of the world's debt was erased for dozens of the poorest countries across the globe.

Imagine the joy of an entire nation able to breathe in that way again. And what they did was they used the name Jubilee and they used it for a reason. They were drawing from a very powerful old idea that came from God himself revealed in the Old Testament.

Where did this idea come from? Straight out of God's law in Leviticus. That book when you're reading the Bible and you skip over it, Leviticus, because it's hard to understand, hidden in there is this idea of Jubilee.

Every 50th year, Israel was commanded to celebrate the year of Jubilee. Let's say it, the year of Jubilee. Just got to make sure you're all with me here.

A divine reset, a holy economic restart button, and not just economic but also legal. Here's what God built into Jubilee.

[3 : 34] All debts would be canceled. All land would be returned to original owners. All slaves would be set free, even crimes forgiven.

How did Jubilee begin? It began with the blowing of a shofar, a ram's horn. It began with sound. With a sound that would shake the nation.

With a sound that would bring joy to people all across the land of Israel. A priest would take the shofar, and at the day of atonement, the 49th year, he would blow it over the land.

A blast that told every household, your burdens are lifted. Your life is restored. Freedom has come to your home. All in the name of God.

This was God's way, Jubilee, of preventing generational poverty and generational power. It kept society from calcifying or hardening against itself.

[4 : 37] It kept the strong from crushing the weak. It was the great unburdening. The first picture. One of the first pictures. Of the joy God intended for his people.

Would you go with me over to Luke chapter 3? We're going to look at one of the most famous Christmas passages, which is called the Magnificat.

This is Mary's prayer of pure joy. Mary's prayer of joy. Did I say Luke 3? I meant Luke 1. I'm sorry for that.

Luke 1 is where we are. If you're in Luke 3, you won't find it. So go back two chapters. Luke chapter 1. We see Mary. Just after she has received the word she's been to visit Elizabeth, she has received this news that God has shown favor to her.

Let's read it in her words. She said, Mary said, verse 46 of Luke chapter 1. My soul magnifies the Lord.

[5 : 45] My spirit rejoices in God my Savior because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed or blessed.

Because the mighty one, God himself, has done great things for me and his name is holy. His mercy from generation to generation on those who fear him.

He has done a mighty deed with his arm. He has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts. He has toppled the mighty from their thrones and he has exalted the lowly.

He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel remembering his mercy to Abraham and his descendants forever just as he spoke to our ancestors.

Do you understand what she is talking about here? She is hearkening back or invoking or bringing us back to this idea, this ancient idea of jubilee. God looking down on the oppressed, God looking down on the downtrodden and relieving their debt.

[6 : 58] Forgiving their debt. Bringing joy in the place of sorrow. This is the theme of Mary's prayer that we love to read at Christmastime.

We love to think back to and it's all about joy. Why is she joyful? She sings this prayer because the book of debts has been ripped in half.

The Magnificat's first half. Verses 46 through 50. It's all past. It's all in the past. What has God done before? He has looked. He has done. He has scattered.

He has brought down. Joy begins when we stop trying to pay a bill that God has already marked paid. And that's the first idea I want you to take away from this passage this morning is joy is being unburdened from something.

You know what that is? It's released debt. That's what joy is unburdening you from. The debt that you owe. Think about that envelope.

[8 : 03] That the undue medical debt people would send to those whose medical debt is being forgiven. They would receive it in the mail. Can you hold your hand up and just picture an envelope in that hand?

You can grab one from the seat back in front of you if you'd like to. If that will help you. Can you just hold your hand up in the air like this? And then hold your hand up in the other like this. Everybody's hands up like this.

This hand has your envelope debt forgiven. This hand has a checkbook that you have to write a check to pay your own debt. You can put your hands down.

You can only take one of those. In God's kingdom. In God's economy. Either he pays your debt or you pay it yourself.

I don't know about you. But the price to pay the debt I owe God is too high for me to pay. It's too great. I can't afford it.

[9 : 01] Do you know what it is? It's eternal punishment. It's eternal separation from God because of the debt that we owe him. We have broken his laws time and time again.

I love seeing the little kids come up here. I love seeing the sheep crawling down the hallway. That was amazing. The aisle here. That was incredible. Whichever idea that was. That was gold. I hope y'all got some good pictures.

I'm going to steal them if you put them on Facebook. Please do that. That was wonderful. But those little children. As pure and innocent as we see them.

They have sinned. Where do you think they got the idea? From us. From their parents. From those all around. From within. They never. Nobody ever taught my kids how to sin.

They just came by it, man. They grew up in a sinful world. It was there all along. Every one of us. Young and old alike. Have broken God's commands time and time again.

[10:01] We all owe a debt that we cannot pay. God's joy. God's joy. That we sing about at Christmas time. By the way, where's joy? There she is right back there.

She's going to kill me for drawing attention to her. It's her favorite time of year because her name's joy. And we're always talking about joy. And this whole sermon, joy, is about you. All right. I had to do that.

But the enemy of joy and the enemy of release debt is pride. It is pride. You say, I'm not going to take a handout.

I'm not going to take something free that somebody's offering me to help me. I'm going to do it myself. I'm going to pay my debts myself. Anybody ever thought that or said that or heard that? I have. And we think we're big and strong because we want to pay our debts ourself. And listen, across society, that's an honorable thing to do is settle your own debts.

[11:04] But in God's economy, you can't pay it. You don't have enough. You're short because he demands perfection across the board.

And we can't do that. But you think he didn't know that? Of course he did. That's why he sent Jesus. That's why he sent the envelope that said, your debts can be forgiven.

Just accept what I am offering you. This isn't just a happy time of year where we gather around and feel warm inside and have good Christmas memories. This is a time when we think back to God's gift to us, to God sending that envelope to say, your debts can be released.

I'm unburdening you. And I'm offering you real joy. So, what are we talking about? We're talking about debt relieved, joy received.

Right here from Luke chapter 1. We've been talking the last few weeks about Christmas, about the different themes of Advent. We talked through peace and hope, and now we're talking about joy, and we're using Mary's Magnificat as an example of that.

[12:09] But joy is being unburdened from something. Psalm chapter 32 says, oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven. What joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared from guilt.

Anybody had their record cleared by Jesus? Testify. Just a few of you. Anybody had their record cleared by Jesus this morning? Praise God. Let's testify of that. Debt relieved is joy received. But that's not all it does. Joy is also being unburdened for something. Joy is being unburdened for a purpose.

Isaiah chapter 61 and verse 1. Isaiah 61 and verse 1. And you don't have to turn there. I'm going to read it to you. The spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me.

This is a prophecy about Jesus. But it's referencing the jubilee that we talked about in the Old Testament. And Isaiah writes, the spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

[13:13] That's jubilee, isn't it? He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners. That is jubilee. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That is jubilee. To comfort all who mourn. That's jubilee. To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes. The oil of joy instead of mourning.

And a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. That is good news. That is jubilee. Genesis chapter 12 says this.

I will bless you and you will be a blessing. God gave Isaiah this powerful role hearkening back to that year of jubilee to proclaim the liberty that he would bring in the picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God, to take on the debt of all of us.

So we have the opportunity now not only to be unburdened, but to unburden someone else.

[14:15] I want to share this idea with you. Freed people, free people. Freed people, free people. If you're not in the habit of unburdening someone else, maybe it's because you haven't been unburdened yourself.

Can we say this together? Ready? Freed people, free people. That's what God does with us. That's what he does through us. He unburdens us for a purpose.

And it's to go unburden someone else. That can be from the very simple idea of sharing the good news of Jesus with someone else. Blake and Julie Blevins did that with their son, Lucas.

And he took upon himself the next step of going forward before the church and saying, I want to follow Jesus with my life. He's been unburdened. And now he has the great privilege of going and unburdening someone else.

Joy is unburdening from God. And then that unburdening multiplies as God then uses you to help unburden someone else. God's joy begins when he lifts your debt.

[15 : 24] The greatest unburdening of all is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to this earth to cancel the debt that you and I owe, the debt we could never pay.

And to forgive what we could never fix. To free you. To free me. To free us from what we could never escape on our own. If you've never received that freedom.

The good news envelope from God to you, to your house. Then today is the day. Come to Jesus. And this is my final challenge to leave you with. Receive forgiveness that God is offering you. Receive the freedom that God is offering you. Receive the jubilee that God has called us into through his son and his payment for our sin debt. Receive joy.

Would you bow with me in prayer? God, I thank you so much for this wonderful gift. We've been singing about it all morning. We're going to continue as we close our service to go out with this thing.

[16 : 26] But God, I ask that you would stay with us. That this joy would stay with us. Even as circumstances change. Or the happiness that comes from getting what we want.

The happiness that comes from everything being basically okay. That's very thin. It can evaporate quickly. But the joy that takes root. From knowing that we are right with God.

That we stand forgiven. We have the freedom of lifting someone else's burdens because of that. That joy sticks. That joy doesn't go away.

I pray that you would give us that joy today. With your heads bowed and your eyes closed. As we move ahead with the conclusion of our Christmas program. I want to invite you when your heads are bowed right now in this moment of stillness.

To receive forgiveness. Receive freedom. Receive joy. And if that's you right now. As no one's looking. I'd just love for you to slip your hand up. And say I want to do that today. I want to receive the victory over the darkness that God offers me.

[17 : 31] I want to receive the life instead of death that God offers me. Would you slip your hand up right now if that's you? And I would love to pray for you. I can meet you in the back.

As we finish the service. We can step away and talk and pray quietly. Over receiving this gift that God has for you. Slip your hand up right now. Thank you. God I pray over this church.

I thank you for everyone who's here today. Our members. Our regular attenders. Our guests. We thank you. That we can gather in your name. We can lift you up. We thank you for the joy you give us. It's in Jesus name we pray.

Amen.