## November 30, 2014 - 11:00 a.m. Pastor Jonathan Falwell

## The Great Exchange: Not Sadness, But Joy

## **Scripture: Various**

Summary: In the first of a four-part series, Pastor Jonathan Falwell examines how the Christmas story is actually a story of exchange. This week he talks about how Christ's coming brought joy in exchange for sadness.

The story of Christmas is that God sent His Son Jesus to come to this Earth as that little baby, and that He came for a reason. He came for a purpose. And that is to bring joy, to bring life, to bring hope, to bring salvation to each and every one of us. That is the purpose of Christmas.

And have you ever thought about that the greatest message of Christmas, the greatest result of Christmas is something that has not yet come? And that is why Jesus returns again to gather us up, to take us to that place that He has prepared for you and for me. The greatest thing about Christmas we haven't even experienced yet. Listen, we've had some great Christmases, I know. But to think that the greatest is yet to come.

Let's have a word of prayer together today. Father, we thank you for who you are. We thank you for your love for us. We thank you for the hope that we find in you. God, now as we open your Word, I pray that you would speak to our hearts. I pray that we would get a glimpse into who you are, to your heart, to your passion for us, and that we would all have the opportunity here today to realize once again, to recognize the awesomeness of our God.

God, we thank you that you did send Your Son Jesus to die for us. We thank you that He rose again for us, and we just pray that if there is someone here today, someone listening, someone watching right now in this moment, that if they have never accepted you as Lord and Savior, I pray that this would be the day, this would be the hour, this would be the moment when they would see, maybe for the very first time, what an awesome God, and awesome Savior your are, and that this would be the moment that they come to know you. And God, for that we'll give you the praise in advance. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

I want you to turn in your Bibles with me to the book of Luke. We're going to begin today in Luke 11. We'll drop back to Matthew and then come back to Luke. But I want to start in Luke 11 today as we begin moving towards our Christmas Eve service, a series that we'll begin today but will be concluded that night, on Christmas Eve, that we are entitling this series *The Great* 

*Exchange*. And that really is a picture of what Christmas is. The great exchange. That what took place when Jesus came to this Earth as that little baby is that He came to replace sorrow with joy. That He came to replace pain with encouragement. He came to replace fear with hope. Jesus came to exchange all of the junk and all of the problems and all of the pain, all the suffering, all the things that we experience day in and day out without hope, our God came to exchange all of that with incredible, incredible joy through the gift of salvation. That's what Jesus came to do.

And so that's why we titled this series *The Great Exchange*, because that's really the message of Christmas—exchanging bad with good, exchanging hopelessness with hope. And today, exchanging sadness with joy.

Now we're going to begin this series, begin our time together today in Luke 11, where we're going to find the message of the great exchange, the message of the not sadness but joy. And we read these words, these are actually the words of Christ. These are actually words that He spoke, and they are found in verse 9 of Luke 11, where we're going to begin.

Normally this passage is one I know that is familiar to you. It's a passage that usually is used when it comes to stewardship or giving and those types of things. But I think it's a perfect passage today to begin talking about this important message of what Christ came to do at Christmas.

So let's read from Luke 11, beginning with verse 9. It says this (Jesus is speaking),

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil [in our sinful nature], know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

This is an incredible passage where Jesus is telling us what it is that God wants to do; what God's heart is; what God's desire is. And He uses some great illustrations in this passage. Now He uses a couple, and I was thinking through a couple of the statements that He used. He said, "Would you, if you knew that your son was hungry and came to you and asked for a fish, would you give him a snake?" He said, "If he asked for an egg, would you give him a scorpion?"

I was thinking Jesus used those illustrations; I ought to bring a snake or scorpion up on stage today. Now if I did that, I wouldn't be on the stage, because I can't stand snakes or scorpions. I was in Guatemala a few weeks ago, and we were down there dedicating that building. Matt Wilmington was with me and Jason Schoenfelder was with me. And the day we were leaving, we got on the bus and were driving out, heading back to the airport, and Jason reached into his backpack and pulled out this little Ziploc bag. Now this might be illegal, but I'm going to tell it anyway. It's Jason if it is; it's not me.

And Jason pulled this little Ziploc bag out of his backpack that he had for liquids and those kinds of things, but inside that Ziploc bag, he and Matt, the day before, had found in their room two scorpions. So they gathered the scorpions together—which, by the way, is absolutely nuts—but they scooped them up and put them inside the Ziploc bag and Jason was bringing them home to his kid.

So Jesus obviously wasn't thinking about Jason when He was talking. "Would you give them a scorpion?" So I'm not going to bring a snake or a scorpion up on the stage today, but I do have right here this with me today, talking about the statement that Jesus said, "If your son came to you and he was hungry and asked for food, if he was starving, would you, as a dad, would you pull out a rock and say, 'Here, take a bite out of this'?" The answer would obviously be no.

With me and my kids, I'm sure you with your children and even if you don't have kids if you had the opportunity to travel to some places around the world where children are starving to death and that child came to you and said, "Give me something to eat. Would you please feed me," and you had food in your pocket, you're not going to reach down and pick up a rock and hand it to that starving kid. No. Every single one of us would take whatever food we have and give it to those children.

There have been many times (and my kids certainly aren't starving) when we have been in a restaurant or driving down the road and the kids would say they were hungry and if I had just a little bit of food left, if I had that one French fry that you're saving—you know how you're eating your French fries and you're saving the biggest French fry, the best French fry for last and you're looking forward to that one French fry? I don't know if you do that, but I do that. But if my kid said, "Dad, could I have that last French fry," it's not a discussion; it's not an argument; it's not a compromise. I'm going to give my kid that French fry. I'm going to take care of my children. My kids ask for something and I'm going to give it to them because I want to take care of them, I want to minister to them, I want to help them, I want to do everything I can to bless them.

Jesus is saying here that if that's true, and obviously it is, then if they came to you and said, "I'm hungry. Would you feed me" you're not going to give them rocks to eat. You're going to give them food. You're going to find a piece of bread. You're going to find something that you can take care of the children.

I've got here on-stage I went out to Lion & Lamb today and I got a bagel. Anybody want this? It's been up here for a while. But you're going to give them something to eat. You're going to give them the food. You're going to take care of them because you love them that much, you care about them. You do not want them to be in need.

And Jesus says if that's true, which it certainly is, then how much more so is your heavenly Father going to take care of you and your needs? How much more so is God going to take care of your needs, to take care of you, to minister to you, and that really is the message of Christmas completely? God saw our need. He saw how desperate we all are. He saw the great need in our lives for something that would bring hope and bring help and bring light. And Jesus came to give us all of those things. That's the reason that Jesus came. So Jesus is making it very clear, "I came, I am here to meet your need. To replace your sadness with joy. To replace your hopelessness with hope. To replace your fear with encouragement. That is why I have come."

So over the next couple of weeks, leading up to Christmas Eve, we're going to talk about this great exchange of all the things that God, through Christmas, came to give to each of us, to replace what is reality in our lives, to replace it with something that can only be reality in the presence of a holy God.

Today we're talking about joy. Not sadness, but joy. Now I want you to flip back in your Bibles to the book of Matthew. We're going to go back to Matthew 2 and we're going to begin talking about this idea of not sadness but joy. The first thing we get from this exchange, the first thing that we understand about what Jesus did through Christmas, the purpose of Christmas, is this statement: Jesus came so that those who are far from Him will be drawn to Him and will find the joy that we all so desperately need. Those who are far from God will find Him, and that by finding Him they will find joy.

And we will read this passage in Matthew 2. It's a familiar passage. It's a Christmas passage. But it illustrates this point; it makes this point better than probably many other passages in all of Scripture. It says this, beginning in verse 1,

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'" Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

Now we know that was a ploy, a scheme. Herod was trying to figure out a way to find where Jesus was because he sought to destroy Him. That's not the purpose of what we're talking about today, but you know what that scheme is. But in verse 9 it says this, "When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was." And listen to these words in verse 10, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy."

They rejoiced with exceedingly great joy when they found the presence of God on Earth.

Now this statement that we've read here this morning, that those who are far from God will be drawn to Him and will find joy, this passage is an illustration of that. These wise men who came

from afar, they came from a great distance, a long way away, but they saw the star. They knew that God had arrived. They knew that this great exchange was taking place, and they wanted to experience it and they knew that the only way to truly find it was to find Him.

Could that not be more true today? You see the only reason that Jesus was born, the only reason Christmas exists, the only reason that it happened is that so that God, through His Son Jesus, could bring those who are far from Him into the presence of God so they can find the salvation that we all so desperately need, to find that joy. That's the message of the wise men, that they traveled a great distance because they knew that they were drawn to Him, and that is where they find the presence of God, and that is where they will find hope.

But it doesn't stop there. We read that passage in Matthew 2. I want you to turn back over to Luke 1, and in Luke 1 we talk about this idea about not sadness but joy, and here we find the statement, we find the truth that those who will listen to His voice, those who will hear Him, those who will see our God, those who will listen to His voice, they will be filled with joy.

Look what it says in Luke 1, another familiar passage. Verse 39 it says,

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, [when she heard Mary's voice] that the babe leaped in her womb [this is John the Baptist]; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb [listen to these words] for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Those who will listen, those who will seek out, those who want to hear from God, they will be filled with joy that goes beyond anything that you can imagine.

Last week we used that passage, we used that verse, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift." For that gift that goes beyond comprehension, that gift that goes beyond understanding. What is that gift? It's a gift that only God can give that goes beyond anything that we could possibly script or write out or come up with or imagine. Our God came to give us something that is overwhelming in the sense of humanity that goes beyond what humanity could even comprehend. That gift is the gift of salvation.

And so when we read this passage in Luke 1, we hear the statement that even when that unborn child was in the presence of God, that baby was filled with joy. I don't know about you, but I think that's pretty important; that's pretty amazing. Now I know there are some people gathered in this room today and you've walked in here and you've heard this Christmas stuff, this Christmas story. You've maybe even heard the gospel many times. Maybe you've been in this church for a long time, but rather than filled with joy, you're sitting here today and you find yourself overwhelmingly sad. You find yourself today in a situation where your heart is empty,

where you sense that there's loneliness. You sense that you're all by yourself. You sense that no one cares. I know that there are people in this room just like that today.

And I read this passage today and I share this with you today to give you an understanding, to give you a picture of what only Christ can do, that when you listen to the words, to the voice of Christ, when you hear what He has to say, it is—whether you like it or not—you are going to be filled with an overwhelming sense of joy. The emptiness will leave. The loneliness will disappear. But you will be filled by the presence of God.

I know this is true. Every time you pick up the Word of God and spend time reading the Word of God, that's how we listen to God. That's how we hear the voice of God today. When we pick up the Word of God and we begin reading these words, when we spend time doing that, I promise you, whether you plan on it, whether you're thinking about it, whether this is your purpose or not, when you read God's Word, it's going to change you for the better. It's going to change you in ways that you don't understand.

When you spend time in prayer, it's going to make a difference in your life. It is going to do things in your life that you didn't expect. Hebrews 4:12 says the Word of God is living, it's powerful. It does something that doesn't make sense when we spend time in God's Word.

I got a letter this week from a young man who is in prison. Gary Sims sent me the letter that he had promised this guy he would deliver to me. A guy who is in prison. He's in prison down in South Carolina. He wrote me this letter and wanted to tell me his story. This guy is in 1975 he wrote as he began the letter, he told me that in 1975 he stole a Bible from our bookstore here. He says he got caught. He got caught and got in trouble. He got mad. He got bitter. He got angry.

And what took place after that occurrence in 1975, after he stole the Bible, is that he began a life that went down a totally wrong path and a totally different direction than God certainly would have intended, a life of crime. And he ended up in jail after jail and arrested time and time again, to the point where finally because of the things that he did, because of the actions that he had taken, he was sentenced to 639 years in prison. 639 years in prison. You talk about a picture of hopelessness, that's it, don't you think?

He told me in the letter that after he was sentenced to that 639 years he was moved from prison to prison. He eventually found himself in prison in South Carolina, where he is serving out his sentence. He said that he got involved with the wrong people. He got involved with a cult. He actually got involved with some Wiccan people there, and ended up eventually got to the point where he became the Wiccan prisest in that prison.

So he was leading the Wiccan groups there and recruiting people and trying to get people into the Wiccan faith is I guess the right word. I don't know. Trying to get people into it and he was doing all these things, and he said, "I actually picked up the Bible, and I figured because I was so entrenched in the occult and so entrenched in my wiccan beliefs, I believed there was nothing in that book that could do anything to me." And so he said, "I decided I was going to read through the Bible in one year to prove how powerful this Wiccan belief was."

So he started reading through the Bible. And he said in the letter, "Not only did I read it once; I ended up reading it twice." He read through the Bible twice. He said as he read through that Bible twice he started to question things and wonder about things. It made him start thinking about things that he had never thought of before. He started thinking about his family.

He said, "After reading the Bible, I picked up the phone and called my dad and said, 'Dad, I have dishonored you. I have defamed you and your family, our family. I've dragged our family's name through the mud so many times. I know you're so embarrassed by me. Will you forgive me?" He said, "My dad instantly said, 'Man, I forgive you. Absolutely I forgive you. I do it because of Christ in me, because of who God is." He said, "I was overwhelmed my dad would forgive me of all the things that I've done."

He said, "I started talking to some other people in the prison and ended up I knew that I needed to change some things. I needed to figure out what I was going to do and how I was going to live, so I started going to this group because I'd seen some change in them and wanted to be a part of that."

So he started hanging out with these guys, going to their group. Their group turned out to be a Bible study. And he started going to this Bible study every week, still involved in his Wiccan beliefs, still the Wiccan priest, and he started studying the Word of God. He said he was studying the Word of God and he saw some changes in the other people, saw changes in him.

And he said, "It came to a point one night where I was in my cell and I dropped to my knees in my cell and I cried out to God and said, 'God, I'm a sinner. God, you're the Savior. You're the only one who can save me. Save me now." He said, "Instantly God saved me and changed me and I have been changed every since."

He picked up that Bible, he picked up that Bible that he had stolen long ago, he picked up that Bible thinking, "There is nothing in that book that can do anything to me because of how powerful I am because of what I believe," and he quickly realized that when he listened, even inadvertently listened to God's Word, everything changed.

He sent me that letter, and along with that letter he sent that Bible. He said, "The Bible is kind of ratty and torn. I had somebody in prison, a guy who does leather, wrap it up," and it looked like it had been wrapped up in new leather. He sent me that Bible and said, "I need to send you the Bible that started my journey that got me to where I am today."

And this is a guy now in prison for 639 years. And by the way, he won't finish his sentence, in case you were wondering. Prison for the rest of his life. And every day praising God and full—in his letter, in his own words—full of joy.

I don't know about you, but I know there are some people sitting in this room right now that feel like you're hopeless and feel like you're empty and feel like there is no hope and there's nothing to look forward to. Let me just tell you something: None of you are in the same situation as this guy of 639 years in prison that you're serving. None of you are in that bad of shape. And guess what? That guy is full of joy. Why? Because he listened to God's Word.

Some of you today need to begin listening to God's Word. You need to go home today and pick up that Bible that you bought many years ago and you've kept it really nice and neat and kept it really clean because you don't want to mess it up because it's God's Word, and because you've kept it so neat, because you've kept it so clean, the problem is you've never used it. And you're wondering why life is empty. You're wondering why joy can't be found.

Those who listen to God's Word will be filled with joy. But here's the greatest message of Christmas, the greatest story, the greatest truth of Christmas, of all the stories and all the things that we will talk about today and in the weeks to come, and that story is this: This joy that we've been talking about? It is available to everybody. That's what I love. It's available to all.

Flip over in the next chapter of the book of Luke to Luke 2. In Luke 2 it says this in verse 8— and you'll recognize this chapter, too,

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to [and what is that word there?] all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

I bring you good tidings of great joy that is available to everybody, to all people, to every person who had ever lived, to every person who is alive today, to every person who will ever live. To the person sitting next to you this morning. To the Wiccan priest sitting in prison today. To the person sitting at the bar right now who is wondering if this drink is going to give him everything he's been looking for in life. To that single mom that's thinking, "How in the world am I going to raise my kids?" To that dad who has walked out on his family and thinks he's blown it so many times that nobody can ever forgive him and nobody can ever care for him again. To that person who's been told by the doctor, "There is no hope."

This joy is available to everybody. It's available to every person. And today as you sit here in this room, I want you to hear and I want you to know that the reason that this great exchange took place, the reason that a God who is holy and a God who is perfect and a God who had no reason whatsoever to leave the glory of heaven and to show up on this evil, dark, dangerous world, who showed up here, born in that manger in the humblest of ways. And He came to this Earth and walked among us and died on the cross and rose again.

There is but one reason that exchange took place: it's because my God loves you. God loves you. He cares about you more than you can ever imagine. You go back even to the Old Testament, Isaiah 61, talking about this great exchange. It was said of Jesus, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies. To all who mourn in Israel..." Let me change that to Lynchburg, to everybody today who feels empty, to everybody today who feels sad, to everyone who today feels alone, to all who mourn, "He will give a crown of beauty for

ashes[an exchange], a joyous blessing instead of mourning [an exchange], festive praise instead of despair [an exchange]."

A great exchange. Jesus came to exchange your emptiness, your loneliness, your hopelessness with all the hope in the world. Jesus came so that we wouldn't live in sadness, but that we could live in joy.

Today I want to begin our invitation a little bit differently than normal. I want to end our service in a way that we don't normally do. Kind of, but a little bit different. As I was driving in this morning I was thinking through the sermon and started thinking through a song that I think is an old song. I don't know how many hundreds of years old it is. It's really, really old. But it's a song that I thought we could just end our service today singing together before we get to our invitation. Just sing it together. A song that really talks about everything we've been talking about here today, that kind of punctuates with an exclamation point, if you will, what we're talking about today of beauty for ashes, of joy in sorrow, of hope in hopelessness that this exchange took place.

So what I want us to do, Charles is coming, is I just want us to stand, and what we're going to do is we're going to sing through this song, and as you sing through this song, I want you to think about the words. You'll recognize the words. You've sung it before. You've heard it before. If you've ever seen the movie *Sister Act*, you've heard it before if nowhere else.

But probably every time you've ever sung it, you've never thought about the words. Any song, it seems like, any song that is hundreds of years old, we don't really sing the words; we just kind of sing the melody and the words just kind of come out. We don't really think about them. I want you to think about the words, because this song talks about what we're talking about right here.

And when we're done singing, we're going to open this altar and we're going to let people respond to the words that you are about to sing. Joyful, Joyful, we adore Him.

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love; Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, opening to the sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away; Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!

All Thy works with joy surround Thee, earth and heaven reflect Thy rays, Stars and angels sing around Thee, center of unbroken praise. Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea, Singing bird and flowing fountain call us to rejoice in Thee.

You know the words of that song, as I was thinking of them driving in this morning, we hear that song and really once you get past "Joyful, joyful we adore Thee," we really don't know the rest of the song. We don't really know the rest of the words. When we hear it, we're either thinking about a kind of symphony concert that is done in a formal setting or we think of Whoopi Goldberg jumping around on the stage. That's what goes through our mind. But I love that one phrase, that He's the one who melts away all sin and all sadness.

Think about that. He melts away our sin and our sadness. Isn't that a pretty cool—just in that one little phrase, that one little phrase we sang a moment ago, that kind of covers everything that we're talking about? It covers everything that is the gospel, that He melts away our sin because it's only through Jesus that we find our hope. It is only through Jesus that we find salvation—John 14:10 tells us that.

Talk about sadness? He melts away sadness. We read about that today. He came to give us joy. He came to give us life more abundant. He came to give us life that goes over the top. So He melts away our sin and our sadness, so right now we're just going to take a few moments, and during this time of invitation our pastors are here up front (they're coming now) and we have counselors here, men and women that would love to talk with you and pray with you.

And I just want you to think through that phrase, "melter of sin and sadness," and I want you to ask yourself the question: Which is it that He needs to do for me today? Some of you, it's sin. Some of you today have never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior. Some of you have never come to that place. I want you to know every promise that is found in the Word of God is a promise that is available to you. When it says, as Charles quoted earlier today, that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life," that was written for you, if for nobody else. If you were the only person who ever lived, it was written for you.

And today might be the day that you need to say, finally, "Okay. I want that. God, save me today." He promises He'll do it. So in a moment when we sing these words, for you let's melt away the sin. Come to this altar and ask God to save you, believing that Jesus died and He rose again, believing that He is God's Son, that there is no other one that can save you but Jesus. Do it today.

Maybe it's the second one. Melt away the sadness. Maybe today you feel empty. Maybe today you're living in sin and you've gotten away from God. Maybe today you're lonely. Maybe today you're hopeless. Maybe today you think that there is nothing left. Maybe you'd be just like that guy in prison thinking, my sentence is far worse than that guy because I've got to go through life every day thinking that there is nothing left. I want you to know: that could not be further from the truth.

I don't know your situation, but to be honest with you, I don't want this to sound callous, but it doesn't really matter how bad your situation is, because our God is greater and our God can meet you exactly where you are. And so today, maybe today you need to allow Him to melt away the sadness in life and you need to come and kneel at this altar and say, "God, okay, I'm giving it to you. God, I want you to bring the joy back. I want you to do what you promised you would do."

Maybe you want to come join our church, come and pray for maybe somebody else in your family who needs to do one of these things. So we're going to sing through, Charles, again, and sing through that verse where we hear those words again. He's the one who melts away our sin and our sadness. And as we sing this through, I'm going to ask you to respond to the voice, respond to what you hear, respond to what God is telling you right now, in this moment. The

God who came not to give sadness, but to give joy. Let's step out right now. Charles, would you lead us?

Keywords: Luke 11:9-14; Matthew 2:1-10; Luke 1:39-44; Luke 2:8-10; Isaiah 61:1-3; Christmas, joy, hope, the great exchange, Word of God, gospel, why Christ came