

## Get the Tree

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas is the highest holiday season for most Americans. And rightly so. We remember the great God who gave us this free country in which to worship Him. At Thanksgiving it is appropriate to express our thankfulness for the bountiful goodness of our Lord to us. Christmas is a wonderful time to publicly, as well as privately, express our praise to God for the coming of our Lord Jesus. It is also a fine time to exchange gifts with one another in the theme of giving which was initiated in God giving His sinless Son to a sinful world.

This season is also marked by a high rise of depression. In fact, it is the time of the year when the suicide rate increases. One of the main reasons is that people are remembering this time of the year when they were gathered together with loved ones and friends who are no longer in their company. For many, the pain is almost unbearable.

Just this week I was talking to one of our fine ladies who was remorseful over the loss of her beloved husband who departed the earth and is now with our Lord. I was also talking to another church member who is about to go through her first Thanksgiving and Christmas without the company of her husband. Whether by death or desertion, the happiest time of our year yields the equal possibility of becoming the loneliest time of the year. I need to point out, it does not have to be the loneliest time of the year, even for those hurting over the loss of earthly love. As I stood in the back of the auditorium this week greeting our people, one of our finest church members seemed a little confused but intent with going on in the spirit of Christmas. She asked me in the light of recent heart-breaking events, "I am not sure if I am going to get a tree this year, since..." I interrupted and quickly enjoined, "Yes, by all means, get a tree." So I say to all the hurting out there, get a tree! *"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you"* (I Thessalonians 5:18). Now some despondent soul may be asking, "Why get a tree?" If you will lend me a few more minutes of your time, I shall, with God's help, give your three good reasons:

### **1. Do it for you.**

This is not the time to break tradition. I am thinking about Mrs. Cliff Frink who has just said good-bye to her beloved forty-year-old husband. We all had hopes that God was going to spare this fantastic young preacher; God had other plans. She now faces the future with a ten-year-old, seven-year-old, and a sixteen-month-old. Three little boys loved dearly by their dad now face their first Christmas without him. I gave their mom a call a few days ago, and asked, "Yvonna, how are you doing?" She answered with a clear voice, "Well, I'm out of bed, both of my shoes are on and I've brushed my teeth," then she added with a brightness to her voice, "I'm having a good day today!"

Do you hear what this pastor's wife is saying? She is not able to bring him back, but she must go on. It is always a good day when we can go on in spite of our pain. Sometimes it is the ordinary things we do in the course of our day-to-day life that encourage us. We cannot change the events that break our hearts, but with God's help we do what we need to do today. The pre-occupying of our mind with the task on hand can become cathartic. King David lost his precious little baby and his servants were surprised when he went on with the ordinary requirements of life. *"Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me"* (II Samuel 12:21). How touching - David was rejoicing that although he will not see his little son on this earthly scene, he will see him again in heaven. He was also saying it is out of his hands and he must go on. So I say to you, get the tree for you!

### **2. Do it for those who remain.**

There was an interesting phrase that came right after David expressed his determination to go on beyond the death of his son, "*And David comforted Bathsheba his wife...*" (II Samuel 12:24). When a child sees a parent go through uninterrupted and constant grieving of a lost child, they many times develop a complex that the parent had been better off had they been the one who died rather than the other. I have never known the case where this was in fact on the parents mind. But when the child cannot see his mom and dad going on, they, too, have a difficult time going on and will be tempted to draw the wrong conclusions. Although it may not be real to you, it is their reality.

Don't turn your house into a museum of mourning of what shall never be again. It is time to take off the dark crepe and pull out the garland! Go ahead; get the tree for those who are still here. Celebrate their existence and, in some cases, their faithfulness. Say to those who remain, "*O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together*" (Psalm 34:3).

### **3. Do it for Jesus!**

It is not a mere cliché to say, "Jesus is the reason for the season." Christmas really and truly is first of all about Jesus who came to take away our sins. How can we not be celebratory in recognizing the coming of Christ as the main event of this season? The first Christmas was full of miracles. A virgin gives birth to the King of Kings. The angels appear overhead. Shepherds come and later the wise men from over five hundred miles come to see the Christ-child who was born in the manger. Christ escapes the slaughter of the innocents. Even as we approach our Christmas season, 2006, may I remind you that the God who performed miracles in the past is still able to perform miracles today. As we come out of our present miseries to the celebration of Christmas, maybe God will perform a Christmas miracle for you. Observe our literature, our plays and our movies that surround this time of the year. In Dickens' A Christmas Carol, Ebenezer Scrooge totally transformed after the visitation of the spirits of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet-To-Come. O'Henry gives us a time honored treat in his Gift of the Magi as love conquers all in the spirit of giving. We can never forget George Bailey who is given a second chance on Christmas Eve. His life is saved, Clarence the angel wins his wings, and his family and friends become more precious than ever as he re-discovers It's a Wonderful Life. And the greatest original Christmas story has the capacity to still become the seed-bed for a fresh new Christmas miracle that you may need.

So turn on the Christmas music, make some hot chocolate, light the candles, put up the tree and turn on the Christmas lights. And in the soft haze, remember that God placed His only begotten Son upon a tree to give us the greatest gift of all, eternal life. Keep Christ in Christmas. One way to do this is maintain your traditions. Get the tree!

- Pastor Pope -

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