

Joy to the World!

Text: Luke 1:39-44

When Mary entered the company of Elizabeth, John, yet unborn, leapt for joy when Jesus, yet unborn, came into his presence. "For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:44). When the angel told the shepherds of Jesus' birth, he said, "...Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" (Luke 2:10). Later the wise men received the clarion call to find the little King of Kings and Lord of Lords and the Bible records, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Matthew 2:10). Joy surrounded the birth of our Savior.

During this time of the year more people suffer from depression and attempted suicide than at any other time of the year. I can understand why it is so easy to crash and burn at this "joyous" time of the year. When people reflect on how happy they were with family and friends, whom, for whatever reason, they are disconnected from, it sometimes overwhelms them. A maxim in God's wisdom book says, "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him" (Proverbs 23:24). A special joy comes to the heart of the parent of a godly child. The child who chooses to live an ungodly life has the opposite effect. Years ago, one of our older members told me, "A parent is never happier than their saddest child." Solomon said, "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother" (Proverbs 10:1). Part of the nativity story includes the sad occurrence of the slaughter of the innocents. All baby boys two years and younger were ordered to die, in the hopes that the wicked King Herod would eliminate the possibility of a trueborn king to de-throne him and his usurping family. The prophecy was given and sadly fulfilled: "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (Matthew 2:18). We need to remember in the early Christmas season, children's death brought much sadness. Even in this Christmas season the reminder of a loved one no longer on this side of eternity is hard to handle.

More than ever we need a strong reliance on the Lord in the face of all our heartbreak and disappointments. Here are some things to keep in mind that will help keep joy in your holidays.

I. REJOICE, BECAUSE REJOICING SUPPLANTS THE TEMPTATION TO DO OTHERWISE.

Supplant means to eradicate and supply a substitute for; uproot; to take the place of and serve as a substitute for, especially by reason of superior excellence or power. Researching the etymology, we discover supplant comes to us from the Latin root *supplantare* which means to trip up, cause to stumble, from *sub-* + *planta* sole of the foot. Allow me to use a modern example: a 160 pound running back sprinting for a touchdown is met by a 280 pound defensive tackle who uproots the firmly planted soles of his feet and ends his enthusiastic quest and the simultaneous fumble of the ball. Then with lightning speed a defensive back scoops up the ball and quickly races towards the endzone of the opposite direction for a touchdown. Rejoicing in obedience to our Lord's command has the ability to do this to a depressed spirit: Matthew 5:3-12.

II. REJOICE, BECAUSE YOU ARE PARTAKERS OF GOD'S SAVING GRACE.

The Bible tells us, "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name" (Luke 10:17). Jesus answered, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). We have a tendency to rejoice only in the dynamic events in our lives, but it would help our mental attitude to reflect on the simple fact that we are saved and on our way to heaven.

This truth excited our Lord Jesus who said, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth..." (Luke 15:7). One sinner who gets saved makes headlines in heaven!

III. REJOICE, BECAUSE REJOICING BRINGS HEAVEN TO EARTH.

Joy is the atmosphere of heaven. In the days of creation, God declared this was a time, "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). The Psalmist said, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). One of the most eloquent and provocative places in holy Scripture says, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem" (Zephaniah 3:14). Three verses later God said, "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17). God commands us to rejoice with all our hearts and then tells us that at times God Himself will "...joy over us with singing."

Since the Lord desires us to pray "...Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" (Luke 11:2), we should do what is necessary to inculcate this activity (praising the Lord) in our homes and in church, which brings heaven closer to earth.

A. Rejoicing brings Heaven to our corporate worship.

We should never neglect coming together for corporate worship. The House of God is a place where burdens are lifted. "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday" (Psalm 42:4). As he looked forward to coming to Jerusalem to worship, the psalmist said, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King" (Psalm 48:2). When Israel was taken from Jerusalem, which was the center of worship, the people of God held in captivity said, "If I forget thee O Jerusalem...If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Psalm 137:5a, 6). Jeremiah preached to the exiles, "Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still: remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind" (Jeremiah 51:50). In other words, if you cannot come to Jerusalem to worship, let Jerusalem come into your mind. This reminds me of the song that says, "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams."

God's people need each other. It pleases God when we get together in unity: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment

upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments” (Psalm 133:1, 2). Don't miss coming to church; it will bring you up out of the sadness that permeates our world and bring the joy back to your heart in abundance.

B. Rejoicing brings Heaven to those who wait on the Lord.

Jesus died, was buried, rose again and after a brief season ascended to the right hand of God, the Father. Notice the attitude of the disciples after they said good-bye to their risen Lord, “And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52). It's now been over two thousand years and those who still patiently wait for Him may have the same joy.

C. Rejoicing brings Heaven to the chastened saint who humbly receives chastening: “For His anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). If we wait for God to do what He wants to do, joy is assured!

D. Rejoicing brings Heaven to those who have a long obedience in the right direction. To those who have labored long and hard, rejoicing is promised if you do not faint. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:5, 6).

God tells the broken-hearted, yet patient followers of God in the book of Isaiah that they have an appointment with joy! “To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness...” (Isaiah 61:3). Hold on and the Lord will allow you to swap out the burden for the blessing!

Let us allow the joy of that first Christmas be ours. Don't let anything or anyone steal your joy! Merry Christmas and joy to the world!

-Pastor Pope-