

## **CHRISTMAS: IT'S NOT YOUR BIRTHDAY 2**

### **"It's the birth of Joy!"**

Last week we discussed how Christmas was the birth of Hope. We explored the various illegitimate sources of hope, and found in the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb the real source of our human Hope. Today we will discover that in the midst of pain, difficulty, and even suffering...there is still Joy for those who know and love Jesus, because Jesus was born in a manger, died on a cross, rose from the dead, and is one day coming again in glory, there is joy. Christmas is not your BD: It's the birth of Joy!

Joy is a much needed commodity in our world, as it was in the times of Jesus; since and before! There is so much media-inspired gloom and doom, there is so much economic desperation, there is so many world and national wars, there is so much insane political posturing, there is so much sickness and disease, there is so much sorrow and sadness, there is so much...well...despair; and the church of Jesus Christ is not immune! We've been infected with this despair, and we need the anti-dote, we need the vaccine, give me the shot – it is JOY! Maybe now more than ever there is a great need for us followers of Jesus to realize our joy, receive our joy, stand in our joy, broadcast our joy...live our joy!

We all know the definitions and differences between joy and happiness: happiness is dependent on circumstances, and comes and goes almost as often as the NW wind with which we are so well acquainted. Joy, in contrast, abides at our center, at the depth of our being, in the inner spaces of our souls; because, not unlike our hope, it has a source that is not human in its origin, nor natural in its experiences. Joy comes from God, and was made most evident through the experience of Jesus begin born.

Christmas: it's not your birthday...it's the birth of Joy. I get that from one little word in our first text today:

*The angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior – yes, the Messiah, the Lord has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! Luke 2:10-11*

The Greek word that is translated “great” here is *megas* which is literally our English word: Mega, and is often used as the prefix “million”, as in mega-ton, or a million tons...of joy! The good news of Jesus’ birth will bring mega-joy to All People, great joy, much joy, magnificent joy, mucho joy, immeasurable joy! There are only two things I want to say about this Joy this morning.

### **1. JOY IS OUR BIRTHRITE**

I’ve been told, by my wife and others, that there is no greater physical pain known to mothers, than the pain of childbirth. Any argument with any mom’s here today? And it’s not just the hours of dilation and delivery, its 9 months of changing hormones, changing bodies, of morning sickness and stretch pants. Susan’s eye prescriptions changed while pregnant with Adam. And I’ve been told by my wife, and many other moms, that the greatest joy of being a woman is what? Yes, Childbirth. Do you find that odd? Something that causes so much change and pain is still considered such JOY?

A surprise Thanksgiving gift arrived in the Dave and Barb Nash family early a week ago Thursday. In a hospital in Minneapolis their daughter Laura, gave birth to a 2lb, 12 oz little girl named Caitlyn Celeste...but they called her a “bundle of \_\_\_\_\_ JOY!”

I don’t know what it is about us crazy humans that we’ll endure weeks and months of tortuous pain, and then go through the dramatic trauma of childbirth, and in those first exhausted, sweaty breathes while holding this bloody, screaming, squirming mass of potential we almost immediately begin to describe this event as...JOY??? Well, in fact, I do know...it’s our birth-right! Joy is our birthright! Jesus gave it to us! It may not be our birthday, but Joy is our birth-right!

Consider this scripture, and see if it makes any sense to what we've been discussing:

*When a woman gives birth, she has a hard time, there's no getting around it. But when the baby is born, there is joy in the birth. This new life in the world wipes out memory of the pain. The sadness you have right now is similar to that pain, but the coming joy is also similar. When I see you again, you'll be full of joy, and it will be a joy no one can rob from you. You'll no longer be so full of questions. John 16:21 (Message)*

My friends, it might do us well to remember in the midst of the turmoil in which we live and move and have our being today...that, that joy is still our birthright...Jesus gave it to us, through his marvelous birth, death, resurrection, and it will be fully realized in his eventual return.

## **2. JOY IS OUR MISSION**

I have no great Biblical or Theological rationale to undergird this statement...it is being driven by the need. We who claim to be followers or disciples of Jesus ought to be marked or 'branded' by many of his transformational character traits, but maybe none more than this one is essential at this time. In the middle of the despair at this time in history; maybe a dose of joy, mega joy is what the world needs right now! We can bring it!

I'd never advocate we be anything but honest, and I'm not appealing for us to portray some false sense of sentimental security to a hurting and despairing world. No, we need to be real in our empathetic identification with people who have lost jobs, with people struggling with addictions, with people who are hungry, people who have no homes, people who are grieving, people who are lonely, people who are dying of AIDS, and cancer! I'm not a pie in the sky, I've got Jesus so everything's honky dory kind of guy! I'm a realist, and though my reality includes the pain I've just named, it also includes this overarching, and undergirding, and internal, eternal sense of Joy, Great Joy.

It was delivered to us on Christmas morning, and we are now called, empowered and commissioned to deliver it to the world in which we live. It does us little good to share our joy, only inside these safe sanctuary walls, it seems wrong, to limit our joy to here, to Sunday, to those we already know! I'm advocating that part of your acceptance of the 09 Christmas Challenge is to spread the joy not just to the residents and recipients of Ruth Meiers Hospitality House, as a result of our Miracle of Generosity; but to your family, friends, and holiday party partners. I want you to be a beacon of Joy in the dark corners of your office building, your company, your school, your cubicle and the hallways and mall-ways of your life! If we who say we love the Jesus whose Birthday we celebrate, are not willing to share the joy he brought...then I'm afraid He just might take our Joy away and give it to another! And who could blame him?

There was a time in my life when I was hurting, not for someone else, but for me. I wasn't able to find much relief, even in the scriptures, so I turned to our hymnal, and stumbled on a hymn I'd never remembered singing. It changed me, it reminded me, it centered me, it helped me begin to heal, and I'd like to share it with you. I'll spare you the singing, but here are the words to George Matheson's Hymn, O Love that wilt not let me go.

*Vs 1: O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depth its flow may richer, fuller be.*

I know some of you are that weary right now. Give back to God the life you owe, and draw from HIS ocean depths the strength to find your life, richer, and fuller.

*Vs. 2: O Light that followest all my way, I yield my flickering torch to thee; my heart restores its borrowed ray, that in thy sunshine's blaze its day may brighter, fairer be.*

God's light follows, even in the darkest places. Our despair-filled light flickers and threatens to go out, until we yield its borrowed ray, back to God, and find in that yielding that our light can reflect God's.

Here is the verse that really got to me...and started my healing:

*Vs. 3: O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee; I trace the rainbow thru the rain, and feel the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be.*

Joy seeks us, joy finds us, joy is birthed in us...through the pain. And we dare not; we dare not close our hearts to this pain! I know we want the joy, but seldom welcome the pain necessary to discover it! I understand the rainbow analogy, and I share your hope for tearless tomorrows; but I can't get by this truth. Joy comes through pain, whether the pain of childbirth or natural occurrences or national tragedies, or despair or whatever suffering you might think you are in right now...it is the womb of joy, and we dare not close our hearts to it!

*Vs. 4: O Cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee; I lay in dust life's glory dead, and from the ground there blossoms red life that shall endless be.*

I know its part of the twisted way my mind sometimes works, but I believe that the manger and the cross were made from the same wood/tree! Maybe not literally, but spiritual I believe it is so. And we dare not ask to be delivered from whatever cross we might be bearing at this moment. Even if it kills us we must, we must remember that from the ashes of our existence bloom red blossoms...that shall forever be. Because Jesus was born, because he died, because he was resurrected, and because he is coming again, we have joy, and that joy brings life even beyond our death. It is our birthright, and it is our mission to live that joy. AMEN

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