

REJOICE – BE JOY-FILLED

THIS IS THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT WHEN RITA AND JIM AND KYANA HAVE LIT **THE JOY CANDLE**. IT IS A DAY TO CELEBRATE, BECAUSE WE **KNOW** THE SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN! PAUL TOLD THE PHILIPPIANS, FROM HIS PRISON CELL, TO *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!”* **JOY IS A FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT. GOD'S DESIRE IS FOR US TO BE JOY-FILLED. WHY? BECAUSE GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD HE SENT HIS ONLY SON AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.** IS THERE ANY BETTER REASON TO BE JOY-FILLED AND REJOICE, I DON'T THINK SO!!! THIS IS THE FOCUS OF ADVENT, YEAR AFTER YEAR AFTER YEAR. WE PREPARE TO RECEIVE THIS GREATEST GIFT EVER GIVEN TO US SO THAT ARE JOY MAY BE COMPLETE!

DURING ADVENT WE CAN READY OURSELVES BY USING THE “TOOLS” OF ADVENT. THE FIRST “TOOL” BEING FAITH OR HOPE, LAST WEEK WE PULLED OUT THE “TOOL” OF PREPARATION. NOW THIS WEEK OUR THIRD “TOOL” IS JOY. WE CAN USE THESE “TOOLS” VERY EFFECTIVELY NOT ONLY FOR OURSELVES, BUT FOR THOSE AROUND US. JESUS' COMING CHANGED THE WORLD FOREVER. HE IS THE “LIVING CHRIST”, WHICH MEANS FOR US, IF WE ARE WILLING, THAT IN EACH SEASON OF ADVENT HE WILL COME TO US IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

JESUS IS NOT LIKE THAT ARTIFICIAL TREE WE PUT UP YEAR AFTER YEAR WITH THE SAME ORNAMENTS AND LIGHTS. **JESUS IS LIKE THAT FRESH CHRISTMAS TREE, NEW, DIFFERENT, AND MOST OF ALL REAL! ADVENT ALLOWS THE TIME TO SEEK JESUS ANEW, NO MATTER HOW MANY ADVENTS WE HAVE EXPERIENCED.** WHEN WE SEEK JESUS, THEN JUST LIKE THE SHEPHERDS CAN GO AWAY WITH JOY REALIZING WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN EACH ONE OF US.

HOWEVER, THE QUESTION BECOMES “WHAT THINGS CAN “STEAL” OUR JOY” OR BE AN OBSTACLE TO JOY? ANOTHER QUESTION IS WHERE CAN WE SEEK AND FIND JOY?” FIRST LETS LOOK AT THOSE THINGS IN OUR DAILY LIVING THAT CAN DISRUPT OR STEAL OUR JOY.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST THINGS THAT CAN ROB US OF JOY IS FEAR. FEAR CAN DOMINATE OUR HABITS AND SOMETIMES WE MAY NOT EVEN REALIZE IT. FEAR OF WHAT OTHERS THINK CAN AFFECT THE WAY WE LIVE AND THAT IS NOT JOY-FILLED LIVING. THERE IS A LOT OF TALK THESE DAYS ABOUT “SAFE PLACES” ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES AND ELSEWHERE, BUT **THE ORIGINAL “SAFE PLACE” SHOULD BE CHURCH.** NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, WHEN YOU COME IN THAT DOOR FOR A SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE, A COMMITTEE MEETING, AN EVENT OR ANYTHING WITHIN THESE WALLS WE SHOULD FEEL WE ARE IN A SAFE PLACE. WE WILL NOT BE PICKED APART, PUT DOWN OR GOSSIPED ABOUT. THERE IS JOY IN KNOWING THAT. HOW CAN WE BE JOY-FILLED WHEN WE ARE ATTACKED FOR WHO WE ARE?

IT MAY SEEM LIKE A “LITTLE THING, BUT IT IS THE “LITTLE THINGS” WE DO IN LIFE THAT MATTER. IF WE ACCEPT SOMEONE AND THEIR FAULTS THEN WE ARE MORE THAT CHRIST-LIKE INDIVIDUAL THE WORLD NEEDS TO SEE INSTEAD OF ALL THE NEGATIVE.

THERE ARE SEVERAL OTHER "FEARS" THAT CAN STEAL OUR JOY. THE FEAR OF NOT BEING GOOD ENOUGH. GOD ACCEPTS US SO WE NEED TO ACCEPT OURSELVES. WE ALL, AS SCRIPTURE TELLS US, HAVE UNIQUE GIFTS, GIVEN TO US BY GOD. HOWEVER, WE HAVE TO FIND THEM AND THEN USE THEM. THIS IS WHEN REAL JOY ENTERS OUR LIVES. WHEN WE USE WHAT GOD HAVE BLESSED US WITH FOR OTHERS, THEN I BELIEVE GOD SMILES ON US AND OUR BLESSINGS MULTIPLY.

ANOTHER THING IN OUR LIVES THAT CAN ROB OF US OUR JOY IS THE **TYPE OF PEOPLE WE SPEND TIME WITH.** PEOPLE WHO BLAME, JUDGE, AND CRITICIZE. DON'T YOU TEND TO FEEL DRAINED AND ALMOST HOPELESS BEING AROUND SUCH PEOPLE? HOWEVER, WHEN WE ASSOCIATE WITH POSITIVE, KIND PEOPLE ISN'T YOUR SPIRIT LIFTED AND YOU SENSE AN ENERGIZING OF IT? THERE IS HOPE IN OUR LIFE AND OUR DESIRE IS TO WANT TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS.

GOING RIGHT ALONG WITH THE TYPE OF PEOPLE WE SPEND OUR TIME WITH IS **WHAT WE ARE FOCUSING ON OR THINK ABOUT?** DO YOU FIND YOURSELF SEEING THE DOWNSIDE OF SOME SITUATIONS? DO YOU TAKE PRIDE IN BEING A SKEPTIC OR CYNIC? DURING THIS TIME OF ADVENT WE CAN CHANGE THAT HABIT AND LOOK FOR THE GOOD IN CIRCUMSTANCES AND PEOPLE. IF WE LOOK AT PEOPLE AND CIRCUMSTANCES WITH "SPIRITUAL EYES" WE CAN DISCOVER THE JOY IN EACH. AFTER ALL GOD CREATED IT ALL! IN PHILIPPIANS 4:8 *"Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse."* **WHAT ARE YOU THIS FOCUSING ON DURING YOUR ADVENT JOURNEY?**

IT IS OUR CHOICE WHETHER OR NOT THESE THINGS I JUST MENTIONED WILL ROB US OF OUR JOY GOD INTENDS FOR US TO LIVE WITH EACH DAY. IF WE CHOOSE NOT TO LIVE WITH THESE FEARS, FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE AND SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE KIND AND POSITIVE, JOY WILL BECOME A DAILY PART OF OUR LIFE. WHEN WE STUDY THE BIBLE THERE ARE NUMEROUS VERSES ABOUT JOY AND HOW AND WHERE TO FIND IT. IN I JOHN 1:4 *"These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete."* **IT IS GOD'S DESIRE FOR US TO BE JOY-FILLED PEOPLE AND LIVE EACH DAY WITH JOY!!!**

WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT WHAT CAN PREVENT US FROM EXPERIENCING TRUE JOY, BUT THERE ARE **PLACES WE CAN FIND JOY.**

ONE OF THE FIRST PLACES WE CAN FIND **JOY IS IN OUR WORSHIP.** IN PSALM 16:11, IT TALKS OF YOUR PRESENCE, MEANING GOD'S, IS THE FULLNESS OF JOY. PSALM 32:11 HAS A SIMILAR MESSAGE. IN 1 CHRONICLES DAVID TALKS OF USING VOICE AND MUSIC TO "RAISE THE SOUNDS OF JOY."

JOY IS ALSO A GIFT FROM GOD. IT IS HIS DESIRE FOR US TO EXPERIENCE IT. IN ROMANS 14:17 IT SAYS "For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and **joy in the Holy Spirit.** "IT IS A GIFT WE CAN CHOOSE OR NOT CHOOSE. WE ARE TOLD "YOU HAVE NOT BECAUSE YOU ASK NOT" WHO WOULDN'T WANT JOY ESPECIALLY

SINCE GOD SIMPLY TELLS US TO “JUST ASK FOR IT”! IF JOY IS MISSING IN YOUR LIFE JUST ASK GOD FOR SOME!!!!

WHEN WE HELP OTHERS WITH AN ENCOURAGING WORD WE ARE PERFORMING MINISTRY AND GOD CERTAINLY SMILES ON US AND OUR JOY WILL INCREASE. THERE ARE MANY PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE ABOUT HELPING OR SERVING PEOPLE AND THE JOY WE WILL RECEIVE FROM SERVING. WHEN WE SERVE OTHERS DOESN'T SUCH A SIMPLE ACT GROW OUR FAITH AND ENCOURAGE US TO DO MORE? ISN'T THERE SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS DEEP INSIDE US THAT MAKES US “COMPLETE” AS SCRIPTURE PROMISES?

THE JOY THAT IS OURS REMAINS WITH US NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. JAMES WROTE *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”* REMEMBER JOY IS NOT A FEELING LIKE HAPPINESS, BUT SOMETHING THAT DWELLS WITHIN US.

JOY CAN BE FOUND IN PEOPLE. THERE IS A PHRASE WE USE - *“I REALLY EN-JOY THEIR COMPANY”*. GOD'S DESIRE IS FOR US TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER. WHEN WE THINK ABOUT OUR FAMILIES, ISN'T IT A LIFE-LONG RELATIONSHIP BUILDING? WE BUILD THAT RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR SPOUSE, THEN THE CHILDREN, THEN THE GRANDCHILDREN? GOD ENJOYS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS CHILDREN, YOU AND I. ADVENT IS AGAIN A SPECIAL TIME HE GIVES US EACH YEAR TO BUILD A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST.

IN CLOSING REMEMBER WHAT PAUL WROTE IN FIRST THESSALONIANS 5:16-18, *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* **THIS JOY, PRAYER, AND THANKSGIVING SHOULD CHARACTERIZE THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN. IT IS GOD'S WILL FOR THE BELIEVER. THIS IS HOW GOD WANTS US TO LIVE.** *“REJOICING ALWAYS”* DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE ARE TO PASTE A FAKE SMILE ON OUR FACES NO MATTER WHAT IS GOING ON IN OUR LIVES OR THE LIVES OF THOSE WE LOVE. IT MEANS THAT WE ARE TO REMAIN STEADFAST IN OUR KNOWLEDGE THAT GOD IS OUR STRENGTH AND COMFORT, NO MATTER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES WE FIND OURSELVES IN.

THERE IS MUCH JOY TO BE FOUND NOT ONLY IN ADVENT, BUT IN EACH AND EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES. THERE IS A GREAT DESCRIPTION OF THIS BY A.W. TOZAR, A PASTOR AND AUTHOR OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY...

*“What I am anxious to see in Christian believers is a beautiful paradox. I want to see in them the **joy** of finding God while at the same time they are blessedly pursuing Him. I want to see in them the great **joy** of having God yet always wanting Him.”*

MAY THIS BE THE LIFE WE LIVE, REJOICING AND BEING JOY-FILLED. AMEN.