

Christmas can be quite stressful, planning parties, buying just the right gifts and preparing elaborate meals. Instead of bringing joy, it can bring frustration. Instead of joy it brings exhaustion and instead of peace it brings upheaval into our lives.

A woman was in the mall doing her Christmas shopping. She was tired of walking through every aisle of every store to find just the right present. She was stressed out by the mounting debt on her credit card. She was tired of fighting the crowds and standing in lines for the registers. Her hands were full and when the elevator door opened, it was full. "Great!" she muttered and the occupants of the elevator, feeling her pain, graciously tightened ranks to allow a small space for her and her load. As the doors closed she blurted out, "I think whoever came up with this Christmas junk ought to be found, strung up and shot!" A few others shook their head or grunted in agreement. Then, from somewhere in the back of the elevator came a single voice that said, "Don't worry. They already crucified him."

Christmas is not about us -- It's about how God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him might have eternal life. Christmas is about joy in Christ!

Almost 300 years ago Isaac Watts wrote the hymn titled, "Joy to the World." You might be very surprised to learn that although it has only one veiled reference to the birth of Jesus it is considered a Christmas carol. It was actually written about the second coming of Christ not the first! The song was based on Psalm 98.

Sing a new song to the LORD, for he has done wonderful deeds. His right hand has won a mighty victory; His holy arm has shown His saving power! The ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. . .

⁴ Shout to the LORD, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy! ⁵ Sing your praise to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and melodious song, ⁶ with trumpets and the sound of the ram's horn. Make a joyful symphony before the LORD, the King!

⁷ Let the sea and everything in it shout His praise! Let the earth and all living things join in.

⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands in glee! Let the hills sing out their songs of joy ⁹ before the LORD. For the LORD is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with justice, and the nations with fairness. Psalm 98:1-2,4-9 NLT

1. There is joy when we receive the King!

"Joy to the world! The Lord is come! Let earth receive her king; let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing."

Not everyone was joyful when Jesus was born. King Herod was not happy. Herod was troubled. He was paranoid, so much so that he had already murdered three of his own sons. He was not going to tolerate a rival king even if he was an infant.

There are still many who reject Jesus as king because they see Him as a threat to their selfish desires, individual freedom, insatiable greed, and intellectual pride.

If you receive Christ as King of your life, He brings a spiritual joy that you cannot find any place else. Just as our body craves food and exercise or it will become weak and frail so to our inner spirit craves a relationship with God and if not nurtured will cause the soul to become famished and restless. It's been said that there is a God-shaped hole in each of our lives.

There's a Christmas card that says:

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness, so he sent us a Savior."

2. There is joy when we allow the Savior to reign in our lives!

"Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ; while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains, repeat the sounding Joy."

There is a difference between receiving Christ and allowing Christ to reign. Jesus encountered a number of people who wanted to receive Him but did not exactly want Him to reign over them.

There are people today who want to receive all the good things Christ offers, but they really don't want to let Him reign over their business ethics, New Year's Entertainment, or the language they use under pressure or their public image. It's a tired old cliché but so true; If He's not Lord of everything He is not Lord at all!

People who receive Christ but do not let Him rule are usually not very joyful. Their duplicity wears them out and causes them to lose self-respect. Indecisiveness and hypocrisy sap the joy out of life. -- There comes a time when you realize your not fooling anybody.

When Jesus reigns over all your life He brings joy. *"Joy is the byproduct of obedience . . . "*

3. There is joy when a sinner repents!

"No more let sins and sorrow grow. Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found."

Sin promises happiness but ultimately delivers sorrow. Satan told Adam and Eve that if they eat off the tree it will be good and it will make you wise. But in the end that luscious looking fruit brought a horrible curse and unending sorrow. Sin still brings a bitter curse and painful sorrow today.

But there is a wonderful experience of joy when the sinner repents. Repentance is a word of freedom. It's coming clean and laying aside the stuff that makes us feel unclean.

Wild west author Bret Harte wrote a story entitled "The Luck of Roaring Camp". The story goes that Roaring Camp was supposed to be the meanest, toughest mining town in all of the West. It was reported that there were more murders and thefts than any other place around. It

was a terrible place inhabited entirely by men, except for one woman who made her living in the only way she knew how. Her name was Cherokee Sal.

She became pregnant by who knows whom and died while giving birth to a baby. The men took the baby and put her in a box with some old rags under her. Somehow that just didn't seem right, so one of the men rode eighty miles to buy a rosewood cradle. He brought it back, and they put the rags and the baby in the beautiful new rosewood cradle. But the rags didn't look very nice in the beautiful new cradle, so they had another man ride to Sacramento where he bought some beautiful silk and lace blankets. Now they put the baby in the cradle lined with silk and put the new blanket over her. It looked fine until someone happened to notice that the floor was so filthy.

So these hardened, tough men got down on their hands and knees, and with their callused hands scrubbed the floor until it was spotless. Of course, now the walls and the ceiling and the dirty windows without curtains looked absolutely terrible. So they washed down the walls and the ceiling, and they put curtains at the windows. Things were beginning to look a lot better. But of course, they had to give up a lot of their fighting, because the baby slept a lot, and babies can't sleep during a brawl. So the whole temperature of Roaring Camp seemed to go down.

They would take the baby out and set her by the entrance to the mine in her rosewood cradle, with one of the men staying next to her, so the others could see her when they came out of the mine. Then somebody noticed what a dirty place the mine entrance was, so they planted flowers, and they made a garden there. It really looked quite beautiful. The men would bring her shiny little stones that they would find in the mine. But when they would put their hands down next to hers, their hands looked so dirty. Pretty soon the general store was all sold out of soap and shaving gear. The baby was changing everything.

Has the Bethlehem baby made a difference in your life? Jesus changes everything about us!

4. There is joy when truth rules with grace!

"He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love."

Jesus is coming back. It's the message of Christmas that often gets lost. For those that use the word Advent it may not be lost for a few weeks around December but we are to never forget that Jesus is coming back. And when he returns He will rule the world. Right now humans have been given the opportunity to lead and wield power but on that day all humans including the leaders will bow their knees to the One who rules with grace and truth.

What a grand and glorious day that will be when Jesus Christ comes back to earth as a conquering King, and sin and sorrow cease to grow or exist!

A pastor's family had started putting up a nativity scene in their front yard. All of them were carrying out the little statues to put in the nativity scene. Finally everything was in place - Mary & Joseph & the manger & the baby, & angels & shepherds & all the barnyard animals.

Then little Scott came out carrying one of his favorite toys, the figure of the fierce Tyrannosaurus Rex, king of the dinosaurs. It was one of those plastic figures that you inflate, and in comparison to the other figures it was an enormous thing, towering over them all, and certainly not something to have in a nativity scene.

The dad said, "I tried to tell him, 'Scott, you have to take that back because it doesn't belong there. Dinosaurs existed thousands of years before the baby Jesus, and it just doesn't belong in a nativity scene.'"

But little Scott insisted, so they finally put it there behind all the other figures - a fierce dinosaur hovering over the manger & everything else.

Then the dad said, "As we stood back & looked at it, we realized that maybe that dinosaur says more than we realized. For over each of us there is this menacing character that threatens to rob us of all our joy and peace and cheer." "But Christmas reminds us that the baby in the manger is stronger than all the dinosaurs in your life or mine. And God has given us the victory through the gift of His Son."

True joy comes to those who receive Christ, repent of sin, and allow Him to reign in their lives. When Christ rules with grace and truth there is an inner joy that overrides difficult circumstances. What an invitation!

"Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." C.S. Lewis

I invite you today to lay aside the fickle things of this world that may bring temporary happiness and accept the gift of eternal joy offered by Christ! Let us pray.