

December 24, 2023 - Matthew 2:7-12 - "Christmas, a time of Joy"

### **Introduction:**

The Christmas season is rooted into the consciousness and traditions of Americans. It changes people's schedules, spending and family experiences, but it may not have as dramatic an effect on lives as it once did.

A new Pew Research Center survey finds that most U.S. adults believe the religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized less now than in the past – even as fairly few Americans are troubled by this trend. Only a small percentage believes religious displays such a nativity display should be allowed on government property. Today, 55% of U.S. adults say they celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, including 46% who see it as more of a religious holiday than a cultural holiday and 9% who celebrate Christmas as both a religious and a cultural occasion. What ever happen to the true joy of Christmas?

When I speak of the JOY of Christmas, some if not every one of us had some circumstance in our life even now that can make or break our Christmas spirit. So then, what is this Christmas Joy?

### **I Christmas Joy should permeate our spirits**

1. We tend to equate "happiness" with joy but they are two totally different concepts because they each emanate from a different source. One comes from the world around us. The other originates directly from the Spirit of the Living God in us. Happiness is conditioned by and often dependent upon what is "happening" to me. If people treat me good and if things are going well in my life, then I'm happy. If my circumstances aren't favorable then we can be unhappy yet we can still have joy. Christmas should be a time of Joy.

Joy pulses throughout the Scripture as a profound, compelling quality of life that transcends the events and disasters which may plague God's people. Joy is a divine dimension of living that is not shackled by circumstances. The Hebrew word mean "to leap or spin around with pleasure." In the New Testament the word refers to "gladness, bliss and celebration." Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit given as the gift of God

I think some who lack Christmas joy are discouraged at Christmas because their circumstances are unhappy. Christmas is not about our happiness it about the joy of the Christ and what Christ did to bring us everlasting joy.

A survey a few years ago asked people if they were looking forward to Christmas. While most answered "Yes," far too many said "No." When asked why, they gave a variety of answers, "Christmas reminds us of things that ought to be, but are not. 80% of the families interviewed (80 families in all) experienced stress at Christmas. 83% of those

interviewed experienced difficulties meeting the extra expenditures. Over 50% of the mothers interviewed felt overwhelmed to make sure everyone has a good time. This is not what our father intended from the incarnation of His Son.

Christmas is to be a time of joy, a joy in celebrating the birth of Christ. If there is anything that ought to characterize Christmas, it is joy! Christmas is God's gift to all mankind and the secret to finding this joy is in its very meaning. Christ came into the world to save sinners. The angel announced in Luke 2:10-11 this was great joy!

The JOY spoken of here is a divine blessing – not a human feeling! Luke is telling us that the promise made to Abraham - that through his seed all the world would be blessed - has been fulfilled. Luke is telling us that God's eternal love has been revealed in human history – in the person of Jesus Christ, God's Son and our Savior.

The angel said to the shepherds, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people." The angel might just as well have said, "I bring you good news of a great gift of love that will be for all people." Let us not deny ourselves this joy of Christmas by making a conscious effort to...

## II Acknowledge the Joy in the gift Christ

Jn 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and [that] your joy might be full.

1. This gift is free. Salvation is a gift from God. It is unmerited favor of God that you do not deserve. Though we don't do it on purpose, we have a tendency to put God in the same category as those department stores that offer a "free gift" if you come in and buy something...but there is always a catch. The gift generally is not free. God's gift is... have you received it? God offers the gift of forgiveness to you absolutely free. It is not a trick--it is not a lure--it is a free gift.

(Ephesians 2:8, 9) For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.

### Illustration:

A Pastor tried to illustrate this truth by giving away a free poinsettia. After a long time a lady finally came forward but when the service had ended "Here!" she held out her hand. "This flower is too pretty to take home for free. I couldn't do that with a clear conscience. "I looked down at the crumpled paper she stuffed into my hand. It was a ten-dollar bill.

2. This gift is eternal. God has given every believer the gift of eternal life. Hebrews 5: [9] And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. John 3:15,16 / 6:54

Now, what does that illustration tell us? It tells us that people have trouble believing anybody, least of all God, would give them something for nothing. It's a Gift. It's free!

And they have trouble understanding heavenly things, because they have trouble grasping earthly things (like poinsettias).

That's what grace is: God's free gift to us. We have a hard time believing this, though. Certainly there must be a catch, right? There is not!

3. This gift is assured! Assurance is our guarantee from God that he will keep this promise. You can have confidence in what God said, try that with a purchased item. Titus 1:2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

1Jo 2:25 And this is the promise that he hath promised us, [even] eternal life.

A Christian's assurance is based on what is written in God's Word (I John 5:13. That ye may know grk, = eido {i'-do} or oida {oy'-da} to see / to know / to perceive with the eyes / to perceive by any of the senses.

The perfect tense in Greek corresponds to the perfect tense in English, and describes an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated. Note Matthew 2:2 “we have seen”

4. The gift is secure! Security in one's investment is important. If we have learned anything from the Enron type scandals is that peoples investments are not secure. Stores cannot promise they won't go out of business. Once a person is saved God is able to keep him from losing that salvation. It is an eternal gift. One you cannot lose, he will never de-gift you.

John 6 &: [37] All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. ["Unto him that is able to keep you from falling, & to present you faultless before the presence of his glory" Jude verse 24

Christ promised that His sheep would never perish but have eternal life (John 10:27, 28). "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the utter-most [forever] that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

5. This Gift is indwelling with potential power. God gives the gift of the indwelling thru the Holy Spirit. That is what makes us Christians. If the Spirit of God is not there, we are not Christians at all. As Paul says to the Romans, {Rom 8: 9,26}. Everything you need to live a joyful, abundant, peaceful, loving, and good life is found in the Holy Spirit within every believer ( Grace is free.

So, the good news of JOY was “great” because the time had finally come for God to send His “Deliverer” - one who would save the people from their sins once and for all – by His

presence among us and, after all had been said and done – from the cradle to the cross - by His taking our punishment for us!

Great JOY – because the Savior has been born.

Great JOY – because God's promise of a Deliverer has been fulfilled.

Great JOY – because the Lord himself has come to dwell among us.

**Conclusion:**

It is appropriate that we speak of the cross of Christ for he is God's unspeakable gift. I Co. 9:15 God wants you to experience this joy that you can only find in Him.