

Advent: Joy

_____ Christmas is a time when this word seems to permeate our culture. It is fun. It feels good.

Have you ever noticed how people modify their behavior this time of year?

Families work to get along. Why? "Because it is Christmas."

Friends work to connect and communicate love and joy. Why? "Because it is Christmas."

All because it's Christmas...

_____ Consider with me for a moment what that phrase actually means?

Because - For the cause

it's Christmas - It is the time of Christ.

For the cause of Christ.

So...throughout the world, people are working to align with joy because of Christ. That is a powerful thought.

It is what the Scriptures declared in Luke 2v10

...tidings of great joy...

His coming brought great joy to the Earth.

What is joy?

Then we have Buddy the Elf, who reminds us that the best way to spread Christmas cheer is
_____.

If we consider what dictionary.com says, Joy is:

'a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.'

If this is joy, then it is a reaction. It is an emotion. It is something we come into and out of. It just happens.

If that is the case, then Jesus coming to the Earth brought a feeling of Joy...but that was over 2000 years ago...and that feeling has, without a doubt, faded.

But what if Joy isn't actually a feeling?

What if Joy is more than that?

What if the Joy that Jesus brought was very different from the emotion of Joy?

Galatians 5 declares:

...the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...

According to Paul, Joy is a byproduct of the Holy Spirit in us. He is creating and releasing joy in us.

So, is joy a feeling?

If it is, then I am challenged with a problem. If I am living in a healthy relationship with the Holy Spirit and I am not feeling joy, then I am at a crossroads where the King of Glory knows what I need and isn't releasing it to me, because the Scriptures very clearly declare that it comes as a product of Him in me.

So, again I ask, "is joy a feeling?"

In Hebrew 12v1-2, the writer will make a declaration about Jesus that is worth our study in answering this question, "Is Joy a feeling?"

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In English there are words that don't exist in the actual Greek. They are these words:

-Who for the

-set

If we remove these words, because they are not tied to the meaning of the actual verse, something different comes into view.

"joy before him, endured..."

The word here for joy is, "khara," and it means, "calm delight, cheerfulness."

With calm delight and cheerfulness, Jesus endured the cross.

Cheerfulness? Calm delight? Those are not feelings. Those are choices.

We choose to be cheerful.

We choose to remain calm.

We choose what we delight in.

So Jesus made a choice for Joy.

So Jesus made a choice for Joy.

I would love to highlight that Joy was perspective Jesus chose.

I would love to highlight that His choice led him through his life.

In Nehemiah 8, we find a passage where the leaders of Israel were teaching a supernatural truth the people. It is a moment in the lives of the Hebrew people when they were incredibly saddened by the state of events in their day. The Temple is being re-established, but what it reminds them of is how good it was before. The memory is overwhelming and the begin to weep.

The leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah, see this, and respond with a very clear edict:

"Don't weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the Lord your God." All the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law. And Nehemiah continued, "Go and celebrate with a feast of choice foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!"

I want to highlight a few moments in this passage-

Do not weep - to bemoan

(express discontent or sorrow)

Don't be sad- to carve or fashion.

It is the idea of creating an idol

Go and celebrate - Festival terminology, move into the actions of celebrating

It was a call to focus on the Lord's goodness and provision.

Share with others - The word is about generosity.

It was a call to get outside of themselves and focus on others

Joy of the Lord is your strength- There are two words here:

Strength - is literally rendered, "a fortified place, or place of protection." It points to the idea of being secure, protected, and away from harm.

Joy - word in the Hebrew is, "chadah." It means to rejoice or to be glad.

This is where the Hebrew language becomes amazing. Remember, I told you that Nehemiah was teaching the people a spiritual principle.

Hebrew is a pictorial language. The pictograph for this word, 'joy,' (chadah) is comprised of two symbols. The first is a picture of a wall. The second a picture of a door. Combined these symbols give the meaning "wall door".

A wall separates the inside of one area from another. A door is an access point. A door in a wall creates an access from the outside to the inside.

In this passage, Nehemiah teaches an incredible principle. He is teaching them to make a, "joy choice." Why? Because joy is the access point to supernatural strength.

Joy is the doorway to supernatural strength.

To understand this we need to reconsider what Nehemiah said to do, because it defines how we choose joy.

He challenged them to:

1. Refuse to complain. Do not allow it to come out of your mouth.
2. Refuse to focus on and obsess over the circumstance. That becomes idolatry.
3. Set your focus on His goodness. Actively celebrate His goodness.
4. Set your attention on others. Refuse to fixate on self.

We considered Jesus and highlighted that He made the joy choice before he faced His circumstances.

Can I highlight that we NEVER see Jesus complain. Not once.

Can I highlight that He stayed in His circumstance but focused on His own obedience.

Can I highlight that Jesus declared His Father's goodness in his circumstance.
"Into your hands I am committed..."

Can I submit that Jesus set his focus on the world and the needs of others?

How do we do this when life is pressing in?
How do I choose joy?

Go back with me to Hebrews 12v1-2

*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, **despising the shame**, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The word phrase, 'despising the shame,'

shame - 'disfigurement / shame / difficulty,'

despised it - to, "think little or nothing of"

It does not mean to look down upon it. It means to give it little consideration.

Jesus was able to look at it and say, "that doesn't even matter. It doesn't define me."

If we look at the word here for "joy," again, there is a secondary usage that is very interesting.

The secondary definition in the Greek for, 'chara,' means to 'stay connected'

It was used as a science term for the way planets stay in alignment.

Could I submit that the key to Jesus' joy choice was His alignment to the Father?

By drawing His life from a regular encounter with the Father, he was able to trust His process...regardless of what it brought.

In John 15v4, Jesus will communicate this same principle to us:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

Could we consider that we have two choices in life?
Joy or Fear

Fear looks like complaint, it looks like bemoaning. Why? Because fear is rooted in lack of trust.

Joy looks like worship. It looks like a choice to celebrate. It looks like generosity. It looks like cheer. Why? Because joy is rooted trust. **He is in control, so I can choose Joy.**

Because of Jesus, I can choose joy.