



"THIS JOY . . ." - I THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

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Background

Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* meaning coming. Advent is a season of celebrating the birth of Jesus and anticipating His second coming. It is a time filled with different traditions that build the memories of younger people. Whether it is the faith tradition, preparation of the food, or the decorations. The questions are, "should we put decorations outside or is it enough to turn on our Christmas tree at night" while some are wondering "will we have any money for gifts this year". Regardless of the experience it is a time that people build a lot of "extra" into the environment. There is snow in the windows, parades, hot chocolate, carols, Santa's elves, and tons of people giving things away to those in need and loved ones.

This third week of Advent Is about Joy. The Joy that we have in anticipation of the birth and arrival of Jesus. This joy that we have was not given to us by the world and this joy can not be destroyed. We must see the good and praise it. We must rejoice in the Lord always and we must anticipate with great joy that the Lord was born and the Lord is coming again. So we reset and say to our souls, this joy that I have the world did not give it to me and the world cannot take it away. The chosen scripture is I Thessalonians 5:16-18 as noted here: Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus

Introduction

A typical pregnancy is forty weeks. Inside of this forty weeks parents can be filled with anxiousness.

The concerns could be the pregnancy, the birth, the life of the child, the political climate, the financial climate, the educational climate and the list goes on. For parents who anticipate the arrival of their child they begin planning the minute they find out. They start looking into the safest crib on the market or the best alternative, the safest car seat and stroller. They begin planning things for the baby like the baby's education, or the baby's room, the baby's clothes, and the changes necessary to accommodate the baby.

Over the gestation period there are so many things that can occur. Some days the pregnant mother may feel tired. Some days she may feel like she is carrying another person, imagine that! When it is time to deliver a baby the pain is said to be similar to many broken bones. Yet, time and time again women deliver babies, many of them multiple times. In spite of how painful the delivery may be many mothers tend to forget the pain and shift their energy to their new baby as soon as he or she is born.

In this same way that parents stay the course as they anticipate the birth of their babies, we must anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus and His second coming. The text advises three ways to maintain This Joy.

Point 1: Remain Positive

In I Thessalonians 5:16 it states: Rejoice always. In order to embrace the joy of the Lord we have to remain positive. There may be trials and tribulations. Some days things may seem like we just can't go any further but we must generate the strength to endure and remain positive along the way. Our faith may be tested. Our world may shift but in the midst of it all we must remain positive. Positive in our hopes, positive in our dreams, positive in our goals, positive in our language, positive in our outlook, and positive in our thoughts. God does not expect us to be perfect in all that we do. We are not expected to be divine as was Jesus. His coming to save the world is past tense. His Suffering was past tense. We are living in a world that he has already saved from sin. That is why we must continuously seek to hear God's voice and ask for a positive attitude and demeanor.

Point 2: Stay in Constant Prayer

In I Thessalonians 5:17 it states: pray continually. We can ask God for a positive attitude by going

to God in prayer. We must pray to God and ask for what we are seeking. In times of prayer we fully submit ourselves before the Lord. We must decide to pray without ceasing. We have to pray when we want to pray and when we don't want to pray. We must pray when we feel hopeless and when we are full of hope. We must seek the voice of the Lord as we journey on our path. We must seek Gods responses to our deepest and most concerning questions. We must seek God's direction as we are choosing directions in our lives. God will reveal to us what direction we should take. Even when we get off track it is God that brings us back. Once we get on track it is imperative that we show gratitude by sharing This Joy.

Point 3: This Joy

In I Thessalonians 5:18 it states: give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. In this age of social media it is a common misconception that if you don't post it then it didn't happen. In my parents generation it was, if I didn't touch you then you weren't there. God wants us to show our appreciation for the blessings bestowed. God has shown us by numerous biblical examples and everyday people that we can go from zero to one hundred in seconds. In the way that God saves us and gives us new life in turn we are expected to show appreciation by allowing God to use us for good. We must do good unto others. When God blesses us we aren't expected to post it on social media. However we are required to do good to others. When God blesses us it should propel us to want to share This Joy by being a blessing to someone else.

Conclusion

In order to maintain This Joy we must align our desires with Gods desires. We must be prepared to joyfully travel through spaces where we are not comfortable. Jesus was not comfortable born in a manger but He came to save the sins of the world. He was not comfortable enduring the speculations surrounding His birth, life, and death. Jesus was not comfortable when He was chosen to die over a murderer. Jesus was not comfortable when they put nails on His head and pierced His side with a sword. In spite of the discomfort He came and saved the sins of the world. Yet no grave could hold His body down because He arose on the third day with all power, dominion, and control in His hands. Jesus maintained This Joy. The world would have us believe that we are undeserving of grace. The world would make us feel as though we owe something we cannot repay but we know that Jesus paid it all.

There may be challenges but we can maintain This Joy for we know that all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord. In spite of all your challengers you can say, this joy, in spite of setbacks, this joy, in spite of health issues, this joy, in spite of marital woes, this joy, in spite of parental challenges on either side, this joy that I have the world did not give it to us and the world cannot take it away. This Joy . . .