THE JOY OF CHRISTIANITY

by

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April 18, 2021 (New Life MCC)

Old Testament Scripture: Psalm 4

What is joy?

I remember as a child, when Advent came, I became filed with joy. Mom would put all the Christmas decorations in the house. It would be filled with little animals in Christmas scenes, little Santa Clauses on the end tables and my most favorite thing - the Christmas window calendar.

I couldn't wait every morning till Mom would let me open the next window on the calendar. Even though I had done it every year that I could remember, it was as if I had never done it before. The excitement of opening each window to see what was behind it overshadowed any foreknowledge I might have from previous Christmases. Opening those windows on the calendar gave me almost as much joy as opening my Christmas presents on Christmas morning.

One of the best recollections I have of my childhood is going fishing with my Grandma. My Grandma and Grandpa lived in a trailer park on a canal off a lake in Michigan. I remember going to visit Grandma for a weekend and we would go out in her boat to the lake and fish all day for bream. We made an agreement - I would do the rowing if she would bait the hooks with the worms. I just couldn't stand to run that hook thru their squirming bodies! But we would sit, by the hours, in the boat and talk about everything under the sun. Oh, we'd catch enough bream for dinner Friday and Saturday for me, her and Grandpa. But the best part was the time together and the joy it brought me.

Do you have a fond childhood remembrance that brought you joy? I'm sure you have. And yours is probably similar to mine. It was a time when you keenly felt the love of someone special to you and the closeness that you felt.

I believe, you see, that our Creator intended it that way. God wants us to feel joy when we are with those close to us. I believe God wants us to be happy and love life. I believe God wants us to look forward to today and tomorrow because our life is precious to our Creator. God created us out of love and desires the best for us and that includes feeling joy with life.

Today I want us to look at why we can be joyful about our life as a Christian.

First of all, I want to ask you, are you joyful to be a Christian? I mean, do you tell God every morning 'Thank you that you love me. Thank you that I am a Christian. Thank you that you sent Jesus, the Promised One, to die for me. For me. Thank you that Jesus is coming back to take me home to live with Him and you forever more.' Do you do that? You should you know. You need to tell God how thankful and joyful you are to belong to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

We are God’s family. Just as we felt joy from the love those close to us, we should be feeling God's eternal joy as we feel a part of the heavenly family. As believers in Jesus, we are 'Children of the King'. What a joy!

I submit to you today that there are many, many, reasons to be joyful that we are a Christian. I want to share with you the three reasons that I am joyful to be a Christian.

I am joyful to be a Christian because:

1. Jesus has died for my sins.

2. I don't have to fear death. And

3. God's Holy Spirit is always with me.

First of all, I am joyful because Jesus has died for my sins.

Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man [that is Adam] and death through sin, and so death spread to all people because all humankind sinned." Sin came into the world through Adam. And all humankind has sinned. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

So, because of my sin, I am lost. But God loved me so much that Jesus, the Promised One, came to earth to die for me and save me, and you, from our sins.

Romans 5:6-8 says, "While we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly [that’s you and me]. He shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

Wow! If that's not exciting and enough to fill you with joy, I don't know what will! While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. We are no longer without hope. Oh, what joy it is to be a Christian!

Secondly, I am joyful because I don't have to fear death.

The Gospel of John is full of verses where Jesus talks about death and resurrection.

Jesus said to Martha before He raised Lazarus from the dead in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, though they die, yet shall they live and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

Jesus says whoever believes in Him shall never die.

Most of us fear death to some degree. No one really wants to die. Scientists tell us the strongest drive in the human being is that of self-preservation. I think most of us wouldn't deny that. But even if we may not fear 'what’s on the other side' from a spiritual sense, we may still fear the means to which we will die. All of us hope that we will die in our sleep and go peacefully. But, unfortunately, not all of us will die that way. Some of us will die a painful death. But Jesus says whosoever believes in Him shall never die. Even though death takes the breath of life from us, we need not fear it. Even if death may be painful physically, we need not fear it. Jesus says if we believe in Him, we will truly never die. In our text today in Psalm 4, the Psalmist says in verses 7-8, “You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound. I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.” That means, I can sleep in peace knowing I am in my Creator’s hands. I remember as I child saying the prayer – “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray thee Lord my soul to take.” Do you remember saying that prayer as a child? I do. I said it every night when I went to bed. As a child, I was taught that my Creator was looking over me and I need not fear death as God would keep my soul safe in heaven.

John 3:16, the most beloved verse in all of Scripture, says, "For God so loved the world that the Creator gave the Promised One that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 6:47 says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life." And the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, quoting the Old Testament Prophet Hosea, writes in I Corinthians 5:54b-55, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy victory? O death where is thy sting?"

There is no need to fear death because Jesus died for you and for me. Oh, what a joy that is! I can live my life in service to Him and know that when the time comes that my body ceases to function anymore, that physical death is only a doorway to spiritual eternity. Jesus promised me that and I know that Jesus never lies.

Thirdly and lastly, I am joyful because God's Holy Spirit is always with me.

In John 16:4b-7, Jesus tells the disciples, "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to the Creator who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."

In Luke 24:49, Jesus tells the disciples, "And behold, I send the promise of our Creator [the Holy Spirit, the Counselor] upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high."

We know, from the book of Acts, Chapter 2, that the disciples did receive that gift of the Holy Spirit while they were in that Upper Room. The Scripture says it came to them as 'tongues of fire' and they did many miracles and signs in Jesus’ name.

Now, is that gift for the disciples only? No. That gift is ours too. In the great commission Jesus told the disciples, in Matt 28:18-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Creator and of the Promised One and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Jesus said He is with us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to the close of the age. That means until He comes again. Wow! That brings joy to me. Doesn't that bring joy to you?

We, as Christians, have so much to be joyful about including knowing that Jesus died for our sins, that we don't have to fear death, and that the Holy Spirit is with us always.

Do you feel that same joy today that I have just talked about?

Are you joyful to be a Christian? Or have you let the troubles of this world, including the pains and fears of the Covid pandemic, get you down?

Do you go to sleep in peace, knowing that God is in control of your life or are you fearful of what tomorrow will bring?

If you are not joyful to be a Christian, you need to talk to God about it today. Don’t let another day go by without feeling the joy God intended for you to have.

In Jesus Name. Amen.