

## Merry Christmas?!

As we come to the close of this year of 2007 and come close to the time of celebrating Jesus' birth we may have mixed feelings. For some, you are celebrating the birth of a new life into your family, maybe your first new home, maybe the best job you've ever had. Maybe that you have a job at all! For others this year has been the worst year of your lives. Some of you have lost family members and close friends to death either thru old age, chemical abuse, war, and/or accidents. Some have broken relationships. Some have lost their pets, their jobs, their vehicles and/or their homes. So we say "Merry Christmas" as an act of faith. But it doesn't seem too merry for some.

Jesus did come to earth in the form of man that we might have hope that life is more than these temporary things that we are experiencing here and now. King James Version says 2 Cor. 4:[16] For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. [17] For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; [18] While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (its sometimes hard to grasp the real meaning of Old King James)

I like the Message Bible's version: 2 Cor. 4:16-18 (MsgB) So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. [17] These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. [18] There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.

My encouragement to you is that no matter how bad things may have been this year we have a hope. We have, by faith, (by believing in those things that we cannot see with our naked eye) a promised eternal life that is much better and much richer in every way than anything that we have ever experienced here in this realm. Yes, we do have to go thru some of the grief processes but we don't have to stay there and we can accelerate them by our attitude or we can delay them by our attitude.

Our hope and expectation of better things is always in Jesus. Jesus came to earth in the form of mankind that He might suffer all the things that we suffer and prove victorious over them by not entering into sin. He wants you to know that He knows just how hard it is to go thru this Christmas season without that loved one and without those material things that were ours. He knows how you feel. He knows your heart. He wants to encourage you. He wants you to know that He is always here for you. He promises to "never leave you or forsake you". His Holy Spirit is here to comfort you and help you along and to bring you to a higher place in every area of your life. He is just waiting for you to trust Him to help you.

God speaks to us thru the Apostle Paul when he was writing to the Philippians he told them to "rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice". Now they went thru some hard times so they needed to be encouraged and God sent Paul to do that for them. So today God is using me to encourage you. I say, "REJOICE in the Lord always and again I say REJOICE". It is a verb! It is an action! It is a choice! We can choose to either dwell on all the grief and sadness of the year or we can choose to dwell on the goodness of God and the wonderful things that we have to celebrate.

During the month of November I challenged our church to write something down every day that they were thankful for. I challenged them to thank God for their body parts working like they are supposed to (or for working at all), for the hot water in the shower, for clean water at all! For clothes to wear, heat in their homes, electricity, furniture to sit on, televisions to watch, radios to listen to,

friendships to share, families to love and on and on the list can go. I don't think that this month is any different than November or any other day of the year. We can choose to be in the mully-grubs or we can choose to be 'on purpose' thankful and happy.

How are you going to end out this year? Are you going to be down, depressed and a bummer to everyone you are around? Or are you going to focus on the joy set before you? I challenge you to start today to make note of all the things that you have to be thankful for. If you have lost loved ones then start thanking God for those wonderful memories and life experiences that you had with them and remember the life not the death and when you look in the mirror-SMILE-tell yourself "God loves me". God really does love you. God really does care. God really wants to give you life and that more abundantly. Choose to be a blessing to everyone around you. Let them leave your presence feeling better than when they came.

This all might sound like clichés but God's Word is the eternal truth and He said, "because I loved my family on earth, I am sending my one and only Son, that whoever will believe that I have sent Him and He is Mine will have life forever with me, because I don't want to lose any of my family but I want all of them to spend eternity with Me in the mansions that I have prepared for them."(Candy paraphrased John 3:16-17)

So I say to you, Merry Christmas! Because Jesus came to earth and gave His life willingly for us we have a lot to celebrate. In other words be happy to be celebrating Jesus' Christ, the Anointed One's, birthday because He is your Hope, your Future, your Provider, your Counselor, your Healer, your Rewarder, your Power, your Redeemer, your Prince of Peace, your Great Physician, your Mediator, your King, your Lord and your Savior. And if for any reason He is not those things to you He can be today. Just ask Him to come into your life and forgive you of your sins and cleanse you and He will. Ask Him to make your life new from this day forward and He will. And if you need healing from the hurts of this life then ask Him and He will heal you. We don't have things because we don't ask God. God is a good God. Choose to rejoice in Him and His goodness today.

Mark and I wish you all the Merriest of Christmas's ever!

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