

# Our Joy is in Jesus First

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During the month of December, our family received many Christmas cards bearing merry greetings, glad tidings, and blessed wishes. I noticed that many of the captions in the cards spoke of one topic:

"Wishing you JOY of the Christmas season."

"May the JOYS of the season be yours all year through."

"We pray unmeasured JOY be yours in the coming year."

What is JOY?

The World Book Encyclopedia Dictionary states that it is "a strong feeling of pleasure; gladness; happiness." I can remember a Christmas bulletin board theme depicting JOY when I was in grade school: J - Jesus first; O - Others next; Y - Yourself last.

"What, then, (we must ask ourselves personally) as a child of God makes me truly glad and happy; that is, truly JOYFUL?" One can only, confess that putting Jesus first in our lives and that alone gives us true 'joy, isn't that right? Joy comes at Christmas (Christmas is Jesus and Jesus is our joy), but Christmas is not only December 25 but all year through! Therefore, it is appropriate that we speak of joy, even after the Christmas holidays are over and we are well into another new year.

It is this confession, "our joy is in Jesus first" that I'd like to deal with.

First, joy comes through tribulation as sons and daughters of Jesus Christ. Sounds contradictory, doesn't it? We cry, "Tribulation brings sorrow to my heart and grief to my soul-not joy!" Often there are trying moments as parents rear their children. It is so difficult to say "no" when their children and their friends say "yes". They must say "no" to the attendance of plays, drama, and T.V. programs; say "no" to Sunday afternoon outings and pleasures; say "no" when their teenagers date unbelievers; to name just a few. To say "no" when their children say "yes" creates a division in the home; it makes "war in the camp". I heard one of our minister's sermons from a Christmas series about a month or so ago. He said if parents do not correct and reprimand their children, they are not bringing Christmas to them. Christmas is Jesus and Jesus is our only salvation from our sins. We, too, as young people struggle as we are called to walk in this world as a light in the midst of a dark place. The temptations and pleasures of the world encircle us every hour of the day. There is a theater in most every town; that old idiot box, the T.V.; the amusement centers and dance halls; the easy possession of alcohol and drugs; the sports craze; the popularity contests; the new "Bibles" which so easily replace our favorite King James Version (how slyly that old Devil rids the truth!); and all the other treasures and pleasures of this world.

And, whether we be young or old, the Word of God commands us all to constantly put off that old man of sin and put on the new man of righteousness. We are called to live in this world (not to synthesize with it), but to live apart from it. We are to live antithetically; that is, to say "yes" when God says "yes" and to say "no" when God says "no". Doesn't it seem to you, too, that the harder we try to put Jesus and the treasures of HIS kingdom first, the harder Satan tries to lead us on his wide and crooked road? When we do stray from that straight and narrow road which leads to heaven, we cry with the apostle Paul, "For the good that I would I do not: but the

evil which I would not that I do. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7: 19 & 24)

Tribulation brings joy? Yes! The same Word of God which speaks of our tribulation also brings us our comfort and joy. Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 instructs us that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting"; that "sorrow is better than laughter (for by sadness the heart is made better). We must count it all joy when men shall revile and persecute us and say all manner of evil against us falsely for Christ's sake, for great is our reward in heaven. (Matthew 5: 11 -12)

Now, positively and on the other hand, the knowledge of our salvation through Jesus also brings us joy. We sing, "Joy to the world, THE LORD IS COME!" and "Joy to the earth, THE SAVIOR REIGNS!" The birth and reign of the divine and only Son of God is our salvation. Christ, being divine, took on a human nature that we might be saved. Man sinned, man had to be punished. But no man could bear the horrible wrath of God! Only someone, being very God and yet very man, could bring salvation to His people through His own suffering and death. Through Him, even though our sins are as scarlet, we are made as white as snow. Someday we will inherit those mansions which Christ has prepared for us. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and JOY in the Holy Ghost." What joy! And what a comfort! Even in tribulation we know that when we put Jesus first, there is joy. (Isn't it true that J-O-Y cannot be spelled unless JESUS is put first?) The joy of the Lord is our strength. (Nehemiah 8:10) We can do all things in Christ who strengtheneth us. For with God, all things are possible. "My soul shall be joyful in the Lord: it shall rejoice in His salvation." (Psalm 35:9)

May we be blessed with the grace to put Jesus first in everything, whether in time of tribulation or prosperity. Then real JOY will be ours this entire New Year.

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