

## BIBLE STUDY LIVE

### Advent Bible Study Series: LESSON 2: "Great Joy"

*"Two men looked out of prison bars, one saw only the mud, the other only the stars." – Dale Carnegie*

As we continue in this short series of lessons dealing with the common elements of the Advent celebration, we will look into what the gospel writer Luke refers to as "great joy." In the wake of 2017's torrents of maladies, tragedies and mayhem it has become increasingly difficult for the world to find any lasting and consistent morsel of joy in our society. From the unprecedented floods of Hurricane Harvey, to the human carnage created from the shooting victims in Las Vegas, to entire families being massacred in the Sutherland, Texas church; at first glance, joy would appear to be in very short supply these days. Whether we are observing the dire conditions of our nation's government, insurmountable socio-economic issues in the urban areas of our nation, dysfunctional conditions in our families or the fate of the entire world poised on the brink of nuclear destruction with North Korea's leader Kim Jung-Un's finger on the launch button!; – no matter where you look, there seems to be very little that the world can find to be joyful about. But the world and the Christian have two very different views and perspectives on these matters. Like the quote from Dale Carnegie, while we both look from behind the same bars or reality, the Christians can see the stars, while the world beholds only the mud. **QUESTION:** Is being a Christian purely about being optimistic and looking at the "bright side" of things? The Christian's perspective on life is not about staying positive, being optimistic or looking on the bright side, nor is it about avoiding reality and living in some stage of denial. In fact, when it comes to "denial," the Christian never "denies" what a mighty and supremely victorious God we serve! It is never about looking on the bright side, but it is all about looking on God's side. **READ 2 Kings 6:15 – 17 QUESTION:** How do you think Elisha's servant might have felt once his eyes were spiritually opened and he could see the host from heaven poised for their defense? I would imagine he felt some joy!

### **This Joy I have – the World Can't Take It Away**

**John 15:11** These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. KJV

Here Jesus comforts his disciples by informing them of the blessed relationship they have because of their connection to him as the source of all things required for their strength and sustenance. Jesus then informs them of the purpose of the previous discussion; – saying "I spoke these things to that <sup>(1)</sup>"my joy might remain in you..." So then, the joy that the Christian experiences is a foreign joy. **QUESTION:** According to this text, where does the Christian's joy come from? This joy neither comes from us or belongs to us. It is a benefit of being connected to the Christ the true vine! Our joy is not a human invention. **READ Matt 19: 16 – 22** In this dialogue despite all of his accomplishments, he still feels some void or absence in his life. After all he had done had been enumerated, the question still arose, "what lack I yet?" Given Jesus' response, what the young man lacked with the joy that comes from truly following the Jesus Christ. Our joy is never defined by what the world is doing around us, neither is our joy defined

by how we feel. The joy of the Christian is firmly rooted within the power of person of Jesus Christ.

### **This Joy Is My Strength READ Neh. 8:10**

Everyone should own at least one hoopty (*a raggedy car*) in their lifetime. That old beat up car will teach you more about auto mechanics than any textbook. I know my hoopty taught me a lot about cars. One major lesson was, never continue to drive the car when the oil light comes on! If you do, your car will eventually end up making a lot of noise and your will soon break down all together and won't be able to go anywhere. At least that was my personal lesson about driving with my oil light on. Joy in the Christian's life is like the oil in a car engine. Without this joy, the Christian will eventually start making a lot of noise (complaining mostly) – and in the end they will completely break down and will no longer be able to go anywhere in God. Never risk trying to be a Christian with no joy in your heart. Like David, it s best that you would ask the Lord to “restore the joy of your salvation!”

### **God's Great Joy**

**READ Heb. 12:2** – in the final clauses of this verse the writer declares that Jesus was able to endure the torturous crucifixion, ignoring the shame of it all because of the “joy” that was set in front of him. In other words, while on the cross on Friday afternoon, Jesus was able to look clear through Saturday to early Sunday morning! **QUESTIONS:** How did this perspective provide Jesus with the joy he needed to endure the cross? How might such a perspective provide us with the necessary joy to sustain us during times of tests and trials? It needs to be emphasized that this joy was “set” before Christ. His Father didn't attempt to conceal it from him. The Apostle Paul writes in Col. 3:1 “if ye then be risen with Christ, set your affections (*desires*) on things above...” This joy that is set before every born again believer can only be visualized when we take our eyes off of worldly and carnal distractions of this life. **QUESTION:** What things might keep us from clearly seeing the joy that is set before us? Certainly our fleshly desires, pride and lack of faith in God can serve to cloud our vision and hinder us from seeing the bigger picture of what God desires to accomplish in our life. Years ago when my son was much younger, I took him to Chicago to visit the famous Sear's Tower. As we approached the Chicago downtown, I pointed out the soaring Sear's Tower that rose above all of the other buildings in the skyline. However, after we got closer to the Sear's Tower, we were no longer able to see it. The smaller buildings were hiding the Sear's Tower from our view. My son wanted asked “where did the Sear's Tower go?” – I replied “it's still there, but the smaller buildings won't let you see it.” We simply had to remember what we say and where we saw it and keep walking in that direction – soon we were standing in its lobby! Often times the closer you get to the will of God in your life, the more little things will try to distract you- but stay focused, remember what God showed you and never stop walking towards it! If you stop, you will soon lose your joy and be left with a gnawing of disappointment in your gut!

### **Good News! Joy Cometh! READ Psalms 30:5**

Let's established something here. Joy is not the absence of pain, sorrow, disappointment, discouragement or any other negative experience. Joy exists separately and independent from this things. So then, we can have joy "in sorrow" and joy "in pain." **QUESTION:** Why is this an important fact about God's joy? Well, if we had to wait until all of our problems were gone before we could experience joy, no one would ever get to experience joy! I few nights ago I was in the emergency room of a Children's hospital. Waiting there, I witnessed two ambulances arrived rushing sick and injured children into treatment center. Other children with various ailments were waiting in the waiting area to be seen by a physician. As I peered across the room; I noticed that in the middle of this urgent emergency center was a play area complete with toys, slides and various other playground equipment. There in the middle of all this pain and discomfort the hospital a placed an oasis of joy. That what God does - God will put an oasis of laughter and joy in my heart even in the midst of grief and sorrow.

The Psalmist writes: "weeping may endure for a night - but joy is coming!" Even while the tears are meeting beneath your chin, joy is on its way! Joy comes! Joy comes to us at the times we need it the most! So we understand what the angel meant when he said "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Praise Emanuel!