

Advent 2024 Week 3

Walking in Christmas Joy

Philippians 4:4-9

Keeping Christmas means living our lives as if Christ has actually come in the flesh and changed everything once and for all time. When we live in the light of Christ, darkness is pushed back and joy shines through us even on our most trying days.

Introduction

John the Baptist called people to prepare the way for Christ by repenting of sin and living lives which are consistent with repentance. True repentance isn't merely speaking contrition. John understood that repentance is living a life of contrition so he called people to that.

One temptation we all face is to go through the motions of religion without actually engaging Jesus. The results of this are disastrous for us. This sort of religion often produces people who appear Christian on the surface, but who have little of the true substance of Christ within. They lack the joy that comes from backing in His light. There is often little to no change in their lives, and they tend to be miserable trying to follow the rules but without really understanding the reason for their religious practice. This is not the abundant life Christ came to form in us.

John's call was an anticipation of Christ's revelation in the world, but our call today is a response to the revealed Christ.

Discover

- I. We keep Christmas by wearing our faith openly for all to see (Phil 4:4-5)
 - A. Donner puts dirt on Rudolph's nose because he is ashamed of Rudolph's light. Some Christians have been tricked by the devil and the world into being ashamed of their light too, and as a result they keep covering it. We must stop trying to hide our light!
 - B. We choose to focus on the good we have in Christ rather than the bad we have in this world.
 1. Satan loves to get us focused on the negative, but what we have in Christ is greater than any suffering we may be going through.

- a) This doesn't discount our pain, but rather is about blazing a trail towards Christ through our pain.
 - b) Christ is the answer to all pain and suffering. He may not end it instantly, but one day He will and we know we have freedom in Him and choose to live with that vision in sight.
- C. We choose to walk reasonably towards everyone.
 - 1. The Greek work which we translate as reasonableness means to be gentle, lowly, tolerant, and kind.
 - 2. The connotation here is that we will treat others like God treats them.
 - a) He sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous alike, and so we choose to be kind and refreshing towards those who treat us well and those who mistreat us too.
 - b) We Christians, because of what Christ has done for us in spite of ourselves, ought to be the most difficult people to offend. We know that no offense done to us can come close to comparing to how greatly we have offended God and yet Christ chose to die in order to reconcile us to God.
 - (1) Nothing good that we have has even been deserved by us, and that reality shapes the way we view others.

II. We keep Christmas by responding to our anxieties with thank-filled prayer (Phil 4:6-7)

- A. Christ doesn't call us to act as if anxiety and suffering don't exist. Rather He calls us to allow those things to become triggers which push us to Him.
 - 1. Christ desires to redeem every evil thing in our lives, and to turn the evil into good just as He turned the cross into glory for Himself and salvation for the world.
 - 2. To repent and return to Christ means to return to light and joy. Only in Christ can we walk in light when it seems like everything around us is growing dark.
- B. As we learn to respond to anxiety with prayer, we learn the ultimate peace which only comes from being tethered to Christ.
 - 1. Make no mistake, the last thing Satan and your dead flesh in Adam wants to do is to turn to God when you are feeling anxious.
 - a) Satan and your human nature do not want you to be free and at rest. This is why we feel so much resistance to faith when we are feeling anxious. Our flesh is happy to work with Satan towards our destruction.
 - 2. Jesus faced many anxieties in His life, but He was never shaken to His core because He was tethered to His Father.
 - a) When you have a broken leg, you need a splint to stabilize it. As broken people, we must be tethered to God or we will never be stable. We were made for God and the reason why we are so restless is because we have been broken away from the one we

were made for. We have been split, and only Christ can make us whole.

- (1) If we want to be healed, we must go against our nature and practice moving towards Christ, His word, and His church in the midst of our anxieties.

III. We keep Christmas by practicing the good way we have learned from Jesus (Phil 4:8-9)

- A. When the crowds asked John the Baptist for an explanation of the lifestyle he was calling them to, his answer was simple: be intent on doing what is right (Luke 3:10-14).
 1. Following Jesus means a redirection of our life's aim. Rather than living solely for self gratification, we choose to live for His glory which in turn does bring us ultimate satisfaction in the long run.
 - a) It is in fact the only way of living which can truly satisfy us.
 2. The life God calls us to is a life marked by intentionality to follow Christ no matter what may come or what people may say.
 - a) In Job 2:9-10, Job refused to give up on life or God even though everything was crumbling to darkness around him. His example is important for us to remember. Though everything went wrong, Job continued to bless the Lord's name.
 - b) "Resolution One: I will live for God. Resolution Two: If no one else does, I still will." -Jonathan Edwards
- B. Paul gives us a similar call here, saying that we are to do every true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, and excellent thing which we have seen in the character of Christ and the saints who have taught us and to emulate those things in our own lives.
 1. God has marinated us in His grace and truth so that we might taste like Him to the world around us.
 2. "Is my life worth following?" This is a good question for us to be asking ourselves this Christmas season.
 - a) Am I actively seeking to be the sort of person who others can see the heart and character of Christ in?
 - b) If I find that I've been passive in my Christian walk, there's no better time to become active than today.

Nurture

Who is God? He is the Lord who has come near to us.

What has God done? He has promised that He will grant us His peace to guard our hearts and minds in Christ.

Who are we? We are God's people who have been called to be saved in Christ and to walk in His pattern.

What is God calling us to do? He is calling us to intentionally choose to keep our hearts focused on the light of Christ, and to practice walking in His ways rather than any other way which we might take.

Act

I believe we all know what God wants us to do, but if there is confusion we have a whole church family around us which is here to lift us up. We have God's word to immerse ourselves in. We have the Holy Spirit to empower us.