

The Meaning of the Christmas

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ゴットホルド・ベック

Luke

2:8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, watching their flock during the night.

2:9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

2:10 Then the angel told them, "Stop being afraid! Listen! I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.

2:11 Today your Savior, the Lord Messiah, was born in the city of David.

[International Standard Version]

Zechariah

2:10 Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion! Take note! I am coming to live in your midst," declares the Lord.

Supposing that this last verse is, at the same time, the message for Christmas day. I would like to consider three things today.

To begin with, we actually are commanded, rather than encouraged, to rejoice, sing and be glad under any circumstances, which is not such an easy thing to do.

Secondly, in the same verse, the secret to obeying this command completely is clearly indicated. It is in this line- "See! I am coming soon!" After all, we need to look up to him.

Thirdly, that secret is to understand what the Lord wants from us. It is written, "I am coming to live in your midst." The Lord demands us to rejoice, sing and be glad. He is encouraging us to do so. This is understandable to anyone and leaves no room for misinterpretation.

In these words from the Bible, the Lord is trying to let us understand his intentions, and what he wants us to do. We are not allowed to indulge in sorrow, disappointment, or a sense of defeat. The Lord is strongly demanding us to rejoice and sing.

It is a sin to act disobediently to the Lord, and to refuse to obey these commands. Certainly, many people would argue that while it is easy enough to say it, it is practically impossible to be joyful all the time. But this

is completely wrong!

Certainly, as we look at our present status, in many cases, it may seem impossible to be joyful about ourselves. Even Paul said after he was saved these words by the grace of the Lord:

"What a wretched man I am!" And, this does not sound like a cry of joy. It is undoubtedly true that as we look deep inside, we can't help but admit to ourselves that there is nothing in there that may possibly make us rejoice.

However, not only did the Lord encourage and demand the people of Israel to rejoice, sing, and be glad through Zechariah in those days, but he is still asking the same thing today from each one of us. For we modern humans, living in this present age, what is more important than anything is to be calm.

We need to experience again the love of the Lord. We are bothered by and worry about a lot of things in our daily lives. We are faced with too many things to do, and this burden makes us feel utterly helpless at times. However, what is important for us is, as I just mentioned, just to be calm. What we need to do is to realize that we are loved by the Lord, and take that one absolute truth to heart every day. It cannot be explained logically that we are loved by the Lord; however, it is still the most wonderful yet undeniable miracle.

Isaiah

9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

9:7 Of the growth of his government and peace there will be no end. He will rule over his kingdom, sitting on the throne of David, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of the Heavenly Armies will accomplish this.

Paul expressed his feeling for this amazing fact saying: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift." There can be no Christmas without worship.

Luke

2:9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

2:10 Then the angel told them, "Stop being afraid! Listen! I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.

2:11 Today your Savior, the Lord Messiah, was born in the city of David.

He was the long-awaited God of salvation, the Messiah.

Luke

2:12 And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a feeding trough.

Paul also wrote about this unimaginable fact:

Philippians

2:6 In God's own form existed he, and shared with God equality, deemed nothing needed grasping.

2:7 Instead, poured out in emptiness, a servant's form did he possess, a mortal man becoming. In human form he chose to be,

2:8 and lived in all humility, death on a cross obeying.

Paul also wrote to his beloved disciple, Timothy:

1 Timothy

3:16 By common confession, the secret of our godly worship is great: In flesh was he revealed to sight, kept righteous by the Spirit's might, adored by angels singing. To nations was he manifest, believing souls found peace and rest, our Lord in heaven reigning.

Paul wrote again and summarized his feeling in this verse filled with joy:

Romans

8:32 The one who did not spare his own Son, but offered him as a sacrifice for all of us, surely will give us all things, along with his Son, won't he?

Jesus himself is a most wonderful gift to mankind and his existence is the revelation of the divine love God offers us. Let us look at the testimonies of some people who have experienced this salvation of God. This was the confession of David.

Psalms

118:14 The Lord is my strength and protector, for he has become my deliverer.

Isaiah said:

Isaiah

12:2 Look! God—yes God—is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid. For the Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.

Mary also made a wonderful confession:

Luke

1:45 How blessed is this woman for believing that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled!

1:46 Then Mary said, "My soul praises the greatness of the Lord!

1:47 My spirit exults in God, my Savior,

1:48 because he has looked favorably on his humble servant. From now on, all generations will call me blessed."

The Lord has come. It was to sacrifice himself. He came in order to face his own end.

I forgot how many years ago it was, but this young wife lost all hope in life of this world and decided to kill herself. She jumped off from the top of an 11-story building. But, she could not die. She miraculously survived. And consequently, she and her mother came to believe in Jesus.

Later, she could say that she was happy to be alive, that it was a blessing that she could not die. She could believe that it was good that Jesus died for her. Otherwise, she would have been left with desperation.

Jesus became a man of sorrow. Before he came down to this world, he was the Creator of the whole universe; he knew all things and could do all things. However, Jesus chose to become human. The life of Jesus was full of sorrows. Paul explained it in his letter:

2 Corinthians

8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah. Although he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

Those who become rich through Jesus will be able to rejoice. Knowing this, the Lord God is encouraging us and actually demanding us to rejoice, sing, and be glad, regardless of how we are and no matter how hard our life is.

Habakkuk

3:17 Even though the fig tree does not blossom, and there are no grapes on the vines; even if the olive harvest fails, and the fields produce nothing edible; even if the flock is snatched from the sheepfold, and there is no herd in the stalls—

3:18: as for me, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will find my joy in the God who delivers me.

It is a matter of personal decision, not a matter of whether you want it or not. Habakkuk did not do this for his own happiness.

Habakkuk

3:19 The Lord God is my strength— he will make my feet like those of a deer, equipping me to tread on my mountain heights.

Even though our efforts do not seem to bear any fruit and even when the life seems just meaningless at a glance, the Lord is telling us to rejoice, sing and be glad.

Habakkuk

3:18: as for me, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will find my joy in the God who delivers me.

Habakkuk, the prophet who lived those hardships had this determined attitude. We can clearly recognize in this verse that it is absolutely necessary for us not to only live according to our willful souls.

Needless to say, if this prophet was controlled by his emotions, his thoughts, or his desires, he would never have been able to rejoice. Because under the situation this was written, he could not bear even a single fruit and his life seemed so meaningless from a human perspective.

People in early churches seem to have had similar experiences.

Acts

5:41 They left the Council, rejoicing to have been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the Name.

It is not so easy a thing for followers of the Lord to take the persecution quietly and to keep their faith just as the apostles did, especially when it is accompanied by personal sacrifices. It is only possible when you turn your eyes aside from this world and look up to the Lord alone. This was exactly what Paul and Silas experienced.

Acts

16:23 After giving them a severe beating, they threw them in jail and ordered the jailer to keep them under tight security.

16:24 Having received these orders, he put them into the inner cell and fastened their feet in leg irons.

16:25 Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

16:26 Suddenly, there was an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken. All the doors immediately flew open, and everyone's chains were unfastened.

Paul and Silas were falsely accused and imprisoned. They were whipped, struck with sticks and were harshly tortured so they suffered from horrible pains and physical damage. Nevertheless, around midnight, when they were left in darkness and it seemed as if there was no way out and no hope, they began praying and singing hymns to God.

2 Corinthians

6:10 as sorrowful and yet always rejoicing, as poor and yet enriching many, as having nothing and yet possessing everything.

We all have to go through a lot of distress and pain in life, but still, we can always rejoice. This was the testimony of Paul, who went through many ordeals.

Hebrews

10:34 For you sympathized with the prisoners and cheerfully submitted to the violent seizure of your property, because you know that you have a better and more permanent possession.

We know that it is not easy for us to rejoice from the heart when we are in agony, or facing misunderstanding or persecution. Still, the Lord demands us to do so. And, in actuality, the prophet called Habakkuk, the many disciples of the Lord, and Paul and Silas could always rejoice under any circumstances because of their faith.

“Sing and rejoice! Take note! I am coming to live in your midst.” It is not an easy thing to do to rejoice, to sing and be glad under any circumstances. But, this is what the Lord demands of us. How is it possible for us to obey this command faithfully? The answer to this question is clearly shown in the same verse.

That is to say, “Behold. I am coming to live in your midst.” The Lord explained in this very sentence the reason how it will be possible for us to always rejoice. It will be possible by looking at him alone. “Behold, I am coming to you.” That is to say, instead of looking at yourself, or looking at other people or society, we need to look up to the Lord alone.

When the Lord commands something of us, he always gives us the strength to fulfill that command. The Lord never ever commands us to do something impossible. The one who commands us to “look at himself” is the Creator of all things, who can do all things.

He is the perfect revelation of the true nature of his Father God, who sits on the right hand side of the throne of the Lord God; he is given all power and all judgment to come in the future is in his hands. It is unimaginably important for us to look away from this

world and look up to Jesus alone. The source of all our joy lies in nowhere but in the Lord.

The source of true joy is not in admiration from others, emotion, your affection, family, wealth, health, success and so on. It is in nothing but Jesus. It was in order to clarify this fact that Zechariah said "Take note! I am..." The angels from heaven said similar words on the night of Christmas:

Luke

2:10 Then the angel told them, "Stop being afraid! Listen! I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.

2:11 Today your Savior, the Lord Messiah, was born in the city of David."

The savior was born for you and still lives for you. There is no other source of joy for you. Jesus gave up his glory in heaven, became man, and chose to live with us- we miserable slaves of the devil. He was prepared to sacrifice himself.

Father God came down into this world through Jesus in order to take care of humans and to open the road to salvation for them. It is written, "I want to come and live in your midst." Since olden days, the desire of the Lord God has always been to live with humans. In the Old Testament, it was limited to specific occasions where the Lord God directly took care of his people. It was mostly in the tent that the glory of the Lord was revealed. It was revealed in the so-called Tent of Meeting:

Exodus

40:35 Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tent.

Afterwards, a similar incident occurred in the Temple of Solomon.

1 Kings

8:11 ...so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, since the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's Temple.

The shepherds in Bethlehem experienced a similar thing.

Luke

2:9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Jesus came down to this world, not to take care of the people of Israel alone during that specific period of

time, but to live with all humans forever. This was the message that the angel of the Lord brought. His disciples too were allowed to experience this glory together.

John

1:14 The Word became flesh and lived among us. We gazed on his glory, the kind of glory that belongs to the Father's unique Son, who is full of grace and truth.

In the Scripture, we see a lot of expressions like, "I come to live in your midst," or, "I will not forsake you." "I will be with you forever" and "I will dwell within you." These are the desires of the Lord. It is in order for us to become the temple of the Lord, and his dwelling place, that we are called by the Lord.

Only while we are the temple of the Lord God, his dwelling place, are we allowed to serve him as true witnesses and become his true servants. "I will come back. And I desire to live in your midst." These words are spoken to each one of us. The Lord desperately wants to perform the great miracle through each one of us.

The Lord wants to reveal the glory of himself using each one of us. He desires to do so, not sometime in the far future, but now on this very day. "I will come and I desire to dwell within you." It is an unimaginably wonderful promise, isn't it? Jesus has come. Jesus is still alive.

In the Bible, Jesus was often called the savior. Actually, Jesus was called "the only savior" 26 times. However, Jesus was also called "the Lord." He was called by that name 670 times. It is beyond comparison.

We should not only take to heart that Jesus has come into this world, but should keep deep in mind that Jesus will come back as the ruler of all things and that he is coming back soon. Jesus will come. It might be today. The Lord desperately desires that we never stop waiting eagerly for that day.

End