

Tears & Rejoicing



Christmas time in this culture tends to revolve around “Nostalgic Sleigh Bells”, “Evergreen Decoration”, “Food Indulgences”, “Family Reunion” and “Shopping Obsessions”. All of these events are presumably leading to a joyful holiday season but sorrow knows no season and even during the most joyous occasion misery can raise its’ ugly head.

The people of Honduras celebrate el dia de los inocentes ("Day of the Innocents") and on December 28 they "commemorate" the children who were slaughtered in Bethlehem after Jesus was born. While this event doesn't actually acknowledge the tragedy of the death of those Bethlehemites, it does recognize the occurrence, because there isn't any extra-biblical confirmation of the event it suddenly becomes a nonoccurrence and besides it only represented the death of perhaps a dozen children. What is referenced here is the slaughter ordered by Herod of the young boys of Bethlehem in an effort to exterminate the threat of Jesus's Kingship. While Matthew 28:16-18 compares the grief of these mothers to Jeremiah's 31:15 portrayal of the ghost of Rachel's anguish at the extradition of the whole country of Israel to Babylon. We are all aware that death, especially of a loved one is never easy or without pain.

Mothers all over the globe agonize, struggle and even risk their lives in search of their wayward offspring or in an effort to redeem their enslaved children but sometimes death comes suddenly, it could be the result of a physical or even genetic disorder or an accident. When these kinds of calamities happen especially to young people, how do we reconcile them, others get healing, why didn't healing come here, why were we sorted out for this grief.

Jesus pointed that out in Luke 4:23-27 where He said, *"Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well."* And he said, *"Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."* As one would have expected this message was not comforting for those who heard it and in fact angered the people so that they were prepared to kill Jesus. The reality here though is that God is a Sovereign God and because as Isaiah 55:8-9 points out, God doesn't think or act as we humans do, even in our grief we need to trust that God is doing the right thing.

Is that easy? Absolutely not!! Many have fallen away from the faith simply because God didn't perform as they wanted Him to. If, however we look at the current affairs we see Christians in other parts of the world being slaughtered for their faith when they could have easily just renounced it and accepted the religion of those who would relent for their recanting.

The Kurds are generally Christian professing Arabs but they are an island in a sea of Islam, Turkey and Russia have flexed their muscle to force the Kurds back from the Turkey border but the conflict isn't over yet. Israel is the only one defining this effort as “Ethnic Cleansing”, but the Turks, the Syrians and the Palestinians would love to see the Israelis out of the picture as well. It is not my intent to get into a

battle of politics or foreign relations but simply to point out the resilience of these people even in the face of genocide.

Affliction and disappointment can come in many forms and it can run the gambit from “Death of a Loved One” to “I Didn’t Get the Christmas Present I Wanted” but when these things happen it can change your perspective of who God is. Instead we should perceive the fact that non-believers suffer from the same afflictions that believers do, in the same measure, spend the time to itemize the blessings we have received and thank God that He is in your life, providing you with the strength, compassion, resolution, endurance and confidence to overcome what ever obstacle is interfering with your well-being.

Jesus was in prayer so much of the time that the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. He gave them a template for prayer, we don’t treat it as a template but the example that Jesus set should inspire us to spend more time in prayer so that we can work more closely with God and He with us. Being in prayer provides us with a bond with God that then delivers the above mentioned attributes and insures that as Paul put it in Romans 8:35-39, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Can Paul convince you that the “Power of Prayer” brings “Power From on High”?

Perhaps 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 might help you to understand. This is Paul’s “Short List” of afflictions suffered in service to his “Lord and Savior”. This is not a complete list by any means but Paul sets an example for us, that even when in prison (Acts 16:22-28) he is in prayer and rejoicing. You should also remember that if it weren’t for Paul’s stays in prison the New Testament would be quite a bit smaller, since much of Paul’s writings were from a prison cell.

In John 16:33 Jesus promises us “Trouble” but in the same breath He reassures us that in Him there is conquest and peace. So if you believe Him, then no matter what suffering, grief, or disappointment comes your way you will be able to spend this “Christmas Season” rejoicing in the birth of the One who made your life worth the “Live”.