

Bible Studies for Life: December 20

Embracing Joy – Psalm 95:1-3; Luke 2:4-14

By Bobby McKay



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Recently, my four-year-old nephew asked me if I would buy him a Happy Meal. I was happy to oblige. It has been quite a while since my daughters were Happy Meal age, so it allowed me to briefly reminisce when meal planning was a bit simpler (not to mention less expensive).

There have been a few upgrades to the Happy Meal selections and experience since I last frequented the friendly confines of the golden arches. They have added different kinds of milk and even fruit to pair with the cheeseburger or chicken nuggets. These days, you must ask for French fries specifically if you want them. All these alterations are an attempt for a child to make healthier food choices.

I placed my nephew's order, and the total came to \$5.10. I thought to myself, "Wouldn't it be great if deep, eternal happiness could be purchased with a few dollars?" Even if someone were low on cash, five dollars is inexpensive enough that benefactors and churches everywhere could provide the financial means for everyone to be happy.

Of course, we know that is not possible. We do, however, have

in our possession something more substantial and real than happiness. We have joy. We must not confuse happiness with joy. On a certain level, the fleeting sense of happiness can be bought, created, or even manipulated. Joy, on the other hand, is not for sale and can only be found in God.

Situations that may determine our happiness will certainly change if given enough time. There are many areas in my life where sources of happiness were removed from me, but joy still lingered. Those are the things that bear the fingerprint of God. Joy is from the Divine Creator; happiness is dictated by our circumstances. In Psalm 95, the words seem to leap from the page as we read them.

Two things are readily apparent in these opening verses of the Psalm. One is the focus of the text, and the other is the fellowship of the people. The focus of our joy is the Lord who provides the salvation we need. Even if we are faithful church members, serve Him, and love others, we can forget the "Who" we are doing all those things for.

God and God alone is the source of our salvation, security, hope, and purpose. When my happiness depends on others or their approval, I am setting myself up for disappointment. However, if I establish my focus on God, I will never be let down. The difference is in the performance. God will never break a promise to me or lie to me. Humans can do both.

Secondly, we read about the fellowship and unity of the people. Four times in the first two verses of Psalm 95 the expression, "let us," is used. God is the source of our joy, and when we are with our church family we should be a force of joy! I often tell our church family, "It is better when you are here." I express that because it is true.

The more inviting and warm the local church is, the more the joy will permeate our communities. The Psalmist is stating the importance of sharing our stories together. One thing this

pandemic has taught us is the importance of being together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Speaking of Christ, there is no joy without Him! The second half of our lesson today takes us directly to the birth of Joy like no other; it is the account of the birth of Jesus. With so many things to consider concerning the birth of Christ, do not lose sight of the joy this Christmas holiday represents. It means light to the shepherds in their dark and lonesome fields. It means hope for the wise men. It means peace to those who seek Him. It means faith rewarded for Mary and Joseph.

Each of our stories about Jesus is different, and yet they share the common thread of joy. How bright is your thread shining? Christmas is a time to remember the joy Christ can bring. For some, they may be going through this season without a loved one for the first time or even the fiftieth time. That is hard stuff and where joy will ultimately prevail.

After all this time, one thing has not changed about the Happy Meal – they still put a toy in the box. It is the little extra trinket for a child that makes even a McDonalds hamburger taste better. Among a countless number of other blessings, perhaps joy is what you need to be reminded of today.

Joy can make any situation better. Seek it, share it, and show it!

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