



Reclaiming Christmas

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Introduction:

Reclaiming Christmas includes reclaiming the joy of giving and receiving. Scripture teaches us it is more blessed to give than to receive. How can I celebrate more with less this Christmas? Understand that joy is not related to the economy. Just like hope and peace, joy is one of the incredible gifts that God provided to us when He gave us Jesus.

Today, the third Sunday in Advent, we are looking at joy. One can experience joy from giving and receiving. We think of giving and receiving gifts at Christmas to and from those we love. There are things you can give that demonstrate love and will bring joy, that will not cost money, but will cost you in other ways. The cost might be in terms of time, of creativity or of yourself.

Good news should always bring us joy. When we hear good news, that someone got a job, someone had a baby, someone got engaged or someone got married, that is cause for joy. **Luke 2:10 But the angel reassured them, "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!** What great news! The gift of forgiveness, redemption, salvation, eternal life, had been wrapped in flesh and given to the world. The Messiah, our Savior had been born. Talk about bringing joy! Christ's first coming brought tremendous joy because now God's love could be seen and touched and heard.

When I choose a gift, there is such delight in the whole process. It can be stressful if you know the person you are giving to doesn't need any material things. It can be stressful if you have to guess the size, or the color, or the

pattern, but if you know the person you are giving a gift to, you probably know their tastes and usually you choose something they need, like or will bring them joy.

When God gave Christ that first Christmas, the gift was very different. The gift was one that was right for all. If you want eternal joy in your life, then first of all receive the gift God has given. Then learn to give. Give your best, give from your heart, give of yourself, give something that cannot be purchased. Christmas is all about giving and receiving. Follow God's example of giving and you will be blessed with joy. Joy comes from within, not from without. There can be joy at the news of something you had been waiting for, a gift received, a promise fulfilled, a dream realized, a prayer answered.

John 3:16 – God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. In examining this verse, we see a powerful demonstration of God's incredible love. The purpose for Jesus' coming was so we could connect with God, commit to one another and serve our community. Any time you love someone, there is cost involved with showing that love. I'm not just talking about demonstrating your love in terms of money. There are other ways of giving and demonstrating love that cost time and creativity but when you give, there should be great joy in that expression.

I was recently reading in my devotional about gifts we can give that are meaningful but don't cost money. There is the gift of listening with no interrupting, no planning your response, just listening. There is the gift of laughter. Another gift can be that of sharing funny stories and jokes. Your gift will say, "I love to laugh with you." There is the gift of affection, being generous with appropriate hugs, kisses and pats on the back. There is the gift of a written note. Expressing in a brief, handwritten note your appreciation or affection. There is the gift of a compliment. Sincerely saying, "You look great today, or you are special, you mean so much." The gift of prayer - lifting someone you care about in prayer to the Lord. In all of these ways and probably so many more that you can think of, you and I are able to send a message of love to those we care about and in that way bring joy into their lives. **John 1:14 (ASV) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth.**

Some of you are not experiencing joy this morning because there is fear in your life. Fear can rob us of joy. There is the fear of not living up to the expectations of children, of spouse, of self or of God. There is the fear of failure. There is the fear of loss, the fear of uncertainty, the fear of the future or the fear of the past.

Some of you are not experiencing joy because your expectation is misplaced. You are expecting more than you should from others and from yourself. Some of you are not experiencing joy because you are focused on things that can never bring you true joy. Some of you are not experiencing joy because you haven't learned to give and when you learn to do that, you will find joy. **Isaiah 29:19 (NLT) The humble will be filled with fresh joy from the Lord. The poor will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.** If you have ever anticipated someone coming for a visit, or coming to live with you, or starting a new job, or moving to a new community, you know there are tremendous feelings of joy that go with that anticipation. So what ways can you experience joy in your life and how can you share that joy with others?

I. One way to experience joy is to receive Jesus as your Messiah.

Most likely the best way to experience joy is to know that all the wrongs in your life, the ways you have disobeyed God, the things you have done that are selfish, are all forgiven and you have been given a new beginning. Starting over is fresh. It wipes the slate clean. It brings the opportunity to do things differently.

If any of you have ever played solitaire on a computer, you know that at times you get stuck. It seems like you can't get past where you are and there are no other moves to make. At those times the computer will ask you if you want to start a new game, save the old one or have help. Most of the time, I start over with a new game. That is what happens when we accept Jesus as our Messiah. We have the opportunity to do things differently, we

don't have to make the same choices and go the same direction we had gone. We have a fresh start.

II. Another way to experience joy is to give.

I've met people in life who have taken the approach that they give generally when there is a need and if they don't see or recognize a need, they don't give. Folks, our giving should not be solely based on need; our giving should be based on love. God gave because of love and his giving met our need. I believe that when we give with the proper motivation, the needs of those we give to will be met. Giving is but one of the many ways we let people know we thought of them. The great thing about giving is the joy that goes with it. The giver is usually more blessed than the receiver.

The story is told of a dad who decided to build a model barn for his son where he could put all of his tractor and farm implement toys that he had collected over his young life. It was to be a barn unlike any barn ever built. It would be detailed right down to the grooved floor and the pulleys on the beams. It was to be scaled large enough for the 1/18 scale tractors and implements that were to be placed in it. It was constructed in three sections, a ground floor, drive-in and loft. It took months to build as well as great secrecy to conceal it from the son.

Finally, Christmas Eve came and the barn was placed in Dan's room. Dad and Mom guided him down the hallway and ushered him into his room. When he saw the barn with all of his tractors and implements in place he literally exploded in excitement. He ran around the barn touching it, examining every detail. Words tumbled out but there were no sentences; simply exclamations of excitement and joy. As the night wore on and Danny finally began to calm down a bit, his little four-year-old heart began to displace some of that enthusiasm with thankfulness. He couldn't thank his Dad enough and felt that he just had to do something to merit such a valuable gift.

Dan was asked to pick up the Christmas wrappings and he did so with gusto. Over the course of that Christmas, little Danny became a slave to his gratitude and willingly volunteered to do many a grateful errand for his Dad and Mom. He had

reached a level of gratitude where something just had to give, so he did.

III. Another way to experience joy is to anticipate what is yet to come.

When I think about the people of Israel waiting and anticipating the arrival of the Messiah, it brought them great joy to think about it but when Jesus actually was born, there had to be tremendous joy. Joy can come from anticipating what hasn't happened yet.

Part of the Advent season is preparing for what is yet to come. We believe that Jesus was born, He died and rose again and He is coming back. We are anticipating when we shall see Him as He is and the joy of being in His presence in heaven. **Colossians 3:4 (NLT) And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.** We have joy not only because Jesus came, but because He has promised to come again. When the event actually happens, when it actually takes place, it is so exciting.

IV. So here are some ways to celebrate more with less this Christmas.

Give of yourself to one that you love.

Make a promise that will bring joy – follow through on your word.

Make a memory that will bring joy.

Take time to bless your family by giving time, a note, a compliment, a kiss or hug, laughter, prayer.

Gary Smalley the author of "the blessing" says we bless our children in five ways:

- By meaningful touch
- By a spoken message
- By attaching high value to the one being blessed
- By picturing a special future for the one being blessed
- By an active commitment to fulfill the blessing

God blesses His people in all of these ways. Let's follow His example and celebrate more with joy this Christmas, even if it is with less.

Conclusion:

As we move through this Advent season, let's prepare by expressing our joy and thanks to God for His gift. Let's give of ourselves to those we love to bring joy to their lives and let's plan to burst with joy when we see Jesus at His return. In these ways we will truly celebrate Christmas more with less this year.