

Speaker: Pastor Hurmon Hamilton

LIVING A LIFE OF JOY: WHAT IS CHRISTMAS REALLY ABOUT ANYWAY?

Scripture used: Luke 2:8-12, 17-18 (NIV)

OVERVIEW

Christmas is a time when we find many different celebrations occurring. Some are focused on the birth of Christ and some focused on general themes that history and culture introduced over the centuries. And, while the general themes that people focus on may be happiness and joy, many of us find ourselves in a very dark and depressing place. The problem that was identified in this week's message is the often prevalent yet misunderstood point of Christmas.

The Apostle Paul understood. Paul was initially known as the greatest of persecutors of Christians. Yet somewhere along the road to Damascus, he had a "Christmas moment". This was the moment when Jesus became a reality to him that transformed his life. Phil 4:4 (KJV) was his testimony while he was serving a sentence in prison, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice!" Paul understood the true meaning of Christmas, which is quite contradictory to the way that the world perceives it. Have you had your Christmas moment?

KEY POINTS

- 1) *We celebrate 2 different types of Christmas.*
 - a. *The Christmas focused on Jesus.* - This Christmas places baby Jesus in a time of fragile humanity. This is a time where the Lord appeared to the world to bring good news and hope to the world in the midst of a very difficult time. We identify it with songs like, "Silent Night, Holy Night" and "Joy to the world, the Lord is come". God showed His love in the form of His Son.
 - b. *The Christmas that is focused around themes of Christmas.* - This one excludes Jesus. It is more defined as a civic holiday. It is a time for massive spending. It focuses on superficial things like a festival of lights, the gathering of families and generosity in gift giving to family and to those in need around us. We hear songs like "White Christmas" or "Blue, Blue Christmas". But these civic values speak nothing to us in the midst of hardship. It promises a superficial happiness that many of us do not experience.
- 2) *What is happiness? Happiness is a feeling of well being and contentment.* There are 3 fundamental questions that the Apostle Paul was able to answer "yes" to, even in one of his darkest hours in Phil 4:4:
 - a. *Is there really such thing as happiness?*
 - b. *If it is real, can I acquire it?*
 - c. *If I can access it, can I keep it?*
- 3) The difference between the 2 Christmas experiences:
 - a. *The meaning of lights:* The world views the Christmas lights as an opportunity to decorate trees and houses with colorful ornaments. However, Matt 2:10 defines the light as the star that led the world to their Savior. John 1:4-5 defines the light as being Jesus, the true light which is able to shine through the darkness. He was born into a world of darkness to bring light and hope!
 - b. *Reversed Values:* Shepherds were dirty by nature, yet it was these whom the angels invited to encounter Jesus. God doesn't want just the influential to approach Jesus. Jesus wanted to dwell among the dirty. Jesus Himself was born in a filthy manger. Finally, the shepherds didn't have gifts to give Jesus, they just brought themselves. This is all Jesus desires... YOU.
 - c. *A note of joy always:* John 1:4 says, "In Him was life." When you are in a relationship with Jesus, you will never experience death. You simply move from life into life! This is the joy that living with Jesus brings!

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - What is happiness to you? Describe a moment where you found true happiness and reflect on whether it passes the 3 fundamental questions of happiness? What makes this happiness unique to you?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Describe your "Christmas moment". Reflect and share about what led you to experiencing the reality of Christ and recall the joy that outshines any darkness.
- 3) **DO** - Look for 1 person who may feel like they are in the darkness and be the reflection of Christ's light to them. Share hope with them through your TCM (The Christmas moment). Pray for their TCM and invite them to the NBCC Christmas Celebration