

## Joy

Sermon - December 9, 2018

As Christmas is approaching, I was wondering what would be the best and most well received gift from me to my dear Lord Jesus Christ. Many ideas went through my head. Should I do this ...or that? Should I try something different?

As I prayed, God recalled one of my memories, which I will share with you.

It was December 24, 1982. I was 19 years old, when, as a young theologian, I was delegated to preach the gospel about Christmas joy to a congregation. The minister and congregation were expecting me to deliver 5 sermons in 3 days, since Christmas was celebrated for 4 days, having two services a day. It was a cold winter day with much snow as I was walking approximately 5 km from the train station towards the church, carrying my suitcase. I was very well prepared for my sermons. I memorized them by heart. I knew the church would be nicely decorated. I knew the church had a big choir and I was looking forward to the services. I knew I could expect approximately 700 to 1,000 people for every service. Everything seemed to be so perfect. But, deep in my heart, I was facing with a problem. I did not feel the joy of Christmas. From **outside** everything seemed to be awesome, but from **inside** I was missing the real joy. I had Jesus in my Bible, I had Jesus in my notes, I had Jesus in my head, I had Jesus in my Christmas songs, but I did not have Jesus in my heart. Around me, on the outside, everything was so nice and nicely prepared. I got so busy before Christmas that I did not have time to think about my inside, about my heart.

As I was carrying my suitcase in that big snow, I started to pray, saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, please come and be born in my heart... Father do not let me step on the pulpit with such an empty heart. Jesus, I don't want to say **words** about You, but I want to **show YOU** with joy and enthusiasm. I don't want to **send** people to the cradle, but I want to **bring** them with me to your cradle, Jesus. So please come and may You be born in my heart."

Then God started to talk to me through the Holy Spirit: "Frank, your heart is not ready to receive my gift. Frank, you have so many things in your heart, that there is not enough empty space for Jesus. Frank, you have to clean up your heart very quickly if you want to receive Jesus."

As I was carrying my suitcase, I remember, I stopped on the road, I sat on it, and I started to pray: "Lord Jesus, I am sorry that I am here to preach about You having You only in my head but not in my heart." As I was sitting there, watching the sky, waiting maybe for a sign, as the snow came down gently, I prayed. Then suddenly a poem came into my mind that I memorized by heart as a child for one of our Christmas pageants. I cannot translate it for you in rhythm, but I will try my best.

*As the Bethlehem star will appear, announcing, the new born is here.*

*With three wise men, I will start my journey to meet Jesus there.*

*They bring their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.*

*And I am walking in their footsteps, poor, giftless.*

*I have no kingdom, treasures, gifts to bring, but only my sinful heart.*

*I'll throw the sins out, and will clean up my heart, to make room for Jesus the Son.*

*Because I know, that to Bethlehem, a poor one like me, just as I am, can come.*

*The most holy gift for Jesus I'll bring is my emptied heart.*

As I repeated that poem in my mind, I started to analyze my heart in the presence of God. I tried to recall if I was holding anything against anybody in my heart. I asked the Lord to help me to see myself with His eyes.

I opened my heart more and more widely to the Lord to purify my heart. A few minutes later, as I confessed things to Him, His light came into my life, and I started to feel the real joy. As many things as I threw out from my heart, as much light, life and joy came into me.

Dear beloved, around Christmas most people try to make their Christmas joyous, sparkly, and shiny. They try to pump Christmas up, hoping to get the real joy of Christmas. They don't know that Christmas joy is not coming from outside, but from inside. We would be silly to say to them: "Rejoice, it is Christmas". Right now it would be silly for me to lie to you saying that, as Christmas will be closer, you will feel more joy. It does not work that way. Christmas joy is coming from above, then from inside. Jesus, your Lord Jesus, has to be born first in your heart, then you will feel the real joy.

I would like to walk with you in prayer to discover why you may not feel the joy of Christmas now, and what we should do to be ready for Christmas joy.

As we journey, I am asking you to keep this sentence in front of you and repeat it again and again: "When you are wrong, admit it; when God's Holy Spirit is right, be quiet."

Often, we all can have some indescribable irritation in our heart and we say sentences like: "I am so angry with this, I hate this, I can't believe that ..., I don't know why anyone would ever do that or say that..., people always..., they are so..., why does this always happen to me, they should apologize ..., no one ever..."

Here's what I hear often as a minister: I am disappointed and angry at some people from my church. I thought they were Jesus lovers, but they injured me. They misunderstood me. I can't get over it.

If we identify these behaviours and these feelings in our hearts, we can name them and we can start to get rid of them, making the necessary steps.

First Step - Ask yourself: what is this feeling in my heart? What caused it? What person, place or circumstance makes you hold on to it? Working through this first step is the most important step. It takes a lot of humbleness and honesty but by the end will bring us a great relief.

Second Step - Ask yourself: What happens to me now as I identify these feelings in me? What could happen in me and with me if I hold onto these feelings? Do I benefit from holding onto these feelings?

When I admit that I have these feelings, I have to realize that by holding onto these feelings I prevent God's work in me.

Ask God in prayer to show you those feelings, which you should let go.

Our own mindsets keep us from seeing God's grace and goodness in us and in other people's lives. Our feelings of hurt prohibit us from acting like Christians who know God's love and God's forgiveness.

Third Step - Imagine that, if you are right, God is on your side. In a situation like this, you can be comforted, knowing that God knows your heart. If God is with you, nobody can really be against you, no matter what other people would say against you, since God knows the truth.

Say this loudly to yourself: God knows my heart. If God is for me, no one can stand against me. I am not defined by other people's opinions. I am defined by God's love.

Dear beloved, Jesus told us that the devil will fight against us constantly. In this world, there will be trials and tribulation, but with God, we can overcome everything.

Fourth Step - Listen to Jesus, when He said: "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." (John 2:16).

Decide you don't want to carry your hurt anymore. Please turn to God and say this: "My dear Lord, take this weight. I don't want to carry this unforgiveness, bitterness and malice anymore. I fully, 100% forgive them. I let all my bitterness go and I open my heart for your peace."

Please allow Jesus to drive out all the behaviours that are against God, against our neighbours, and against yourself. At this Christmas and always, let the Lord Jesus feel at home in your life. In order to do this, allow Him to cleanse your heart and to drive out the idols, those attitudes of jealousy, envy, hatred, the habits of gossiping and tearing down others.

Fifth Step - Pray for those who were hurting you, or caused you discomfort. Ask the Lord to work in their hearts and to show them His love. Pray for them that they may open their hearts for Christ. Ask the Lord to take care of them.

We will experience the miracle that Jesus will cleanse our hearts with tenderness, with mercy, with love. Mercy is His way of cleansing.

Let us, each of us, allow the Lord to enter with His mercy to cleanse our hearts. Let us open to Him the gates so that He would make us clean and so we could prepare a clean room for Him during this Christmas. May many people encounter Jesus in us.