



SAFE HARBOR

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Simplicity and Joy

I watched and listened in the glowing light of Christmas Morn as little feet came into the room and eyes widened and stared at the presents scattered there. My mind was racing with a fear that the gifts laying there were not enough to match the gifts the friends would be receiving. My feeble attempt to express my love had me at the point of grieving.

The little eyes just stared and stared at the treasures of my love. A smile began to brighten the face of innocence that was there. He took a gift and opened it with joy he came besides me and with arms so tight around my neck he said to me "I love you".

The lesson of this little story is a call to stop and consider what really matters in this world. The materialism, the striving for power, the greed is not natural to the nature of humans. These come because sin has distorted and directed us away from the life of simplicity and love that God originally meant for us to live. We have replaced the joy of human love with the lust of greed.

Consider the Christmas Story where Herod is more concerned about his power and personal glory than in the coming of the Savior. He was clasp to his throne with all the strength he could muster and yet dying a slow painful death. His final days were full of remorse and guilt. He had done well in the kingdom as far as advancing his cause, thinking that it might win the affection of the people. Large building projects, including the Temple, were to be his legacy. He ignored the Temple of his heart and like the fate of his architectural creations it too crumbled in the dust.

So we are confronted by the need for simplicity in our lives. The old Shaker Hymn starts out "*Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free...and when we come around to a place just right, we'll be in the valley of love and delight*". To find joy we must find simplicity in our lives. How many marriages are torn apart by the complexities of modern living which lead further and

further away from joy? How many young lives are caught in the lie that more is better? What causes the stresses that lead to crimes against others?

When we move from the simple things of life which nurture and lead to fulfillment then the door is open for imposters to step in and bind us up in that which can never fulfill. The wisdom of the ancients is lost on modern society. A challenge for all who read this would be to read through the Book of Ecclesiastes three times and each time spend moments in reflection. For his conclusion is the entry into love and joy.

Having heard everything, I have reached this conclusion:

Fear God and keep his commandments,

because this is the whole duty of man.

For God will evaluate every deed,

including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

There are four loves which serve as the basis for a good life. The first is, of course, the love of God. This love comes from realizing the lost condition of humankind, being separated from the Creator and then surrendering to His love and grace to return into union and communion with Him. As Isaiah wrote, ***“I am the Lord and there nothing else”***. When God is the center of our existence then there is no need for the complexities of life. So our love for God must be the Supreme love of our lives.

The second love is the love of our families. In Eden God realizes that “it is not good for man to be alone” and then creates woman to complete His creation. Jesus likewise gave his endorsement of such love in Matt. 19:3-6 “Then some Pharisees came to him in order to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful to divorce a wife for any cause?”⁴ He answered, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ***made them male and female,***⁵ and said, ***‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?***⁶ ***So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.***” A man and a woman, two becoming one, in essence a new creation beginning their own creation in the conception of a new life and family.

A third love is the love that extends into the world in which we live, the love of our fellow creatures. Too often we display our prejudices against those not within our circles. We decide that either by race, social standing, appearance or a combination of factors there are those we just do not want to love or go out of our way for. The commandment from the beginning has been ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself”***. Then Jesus adds the parable of the Good Samaritan to define the term neighbor.

The fourth love is mercy. Mercy is unconditional love in action. Whether it is providing a cup of water to a thirsty person, aid to a sick person, comfort to those in grief, to bring solace to the prisoner or extending forgiveness to the ones who have wronged us, there we find love in action. John Wesley and his fellow Methodists reached out into Seventeenth Century England which was full of decay and intolerance. In fact it was very similar to today’s world with the homeless, the super-rich, the addicts inhabiting the gin mills and shops of vice and horrors. The conditions were so bad that one historian has credited the Methodist with keeping England from a revolution that would be as bloody as the French Revolution. This was accomplished by Divine love in action through God’s people.

Simplicity in life is a matter of keeping things in perspective. We need to establish the essentials for living and let love be the rule of our lives. Maybe then we will find the place of love and delight.

Reflections

Tinkling

*The season brings a sound to ear
Of joyous expectation
It reaches o'er far and near
In frenzied jubilation
From home and hearth the tinkling comes
Upon the whole of God's Creation
The sound once boomed through the air
In peaceful adoration
Of the mystery and the wonder
God's promise of salvation
While the pealing, sounding bells cried aloud
The hope of every nation
What remains is just a tinkling ever soft
Unheeded by the nations
Whose tones of harmony still waft
Above the tumult of the nations*

Words of Promise

²⁷ ***Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*** James 1:27 New English Translation

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