

Joy in the Camp! 5-1-16

Lord God, You have moved in our behalf! You know our needs & You answer b/4 we have time to ask. It w/amazement, joy, peace, & more joy that we approach Your throne this morning. Thank You for Your goodness toward us! Thank You for this place! Come by Your Holy Spirit & speak to our hearts. A.

“Our God is an Awesome God! He Reigns from heaven above with Wisdom power & love! Our God is an Awesome God!” Can you believe this yet? Three weeks ago we had just a hint of an idea changes were going to be made at our place of meeting! Here we are, 3 weeks later, in a church that we own! W/o a mortgage!! Who in their wildest dreams would have thought this was possible? Truly our God has blessed us – & we are glad! Oh that we’d never stop being grateful! Every detail of how this has all come together is an inspiration – it causes us & others to marvel! We have a kitchen! A top notch sound system! Room! Matching chairs! People who have already worked numerous hours to prepare for today! The list goes on! Oh, God, You have been sooo good to us!

A couple scriptures come to mind. 1st, Psalm 126, “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled w/laughter, & our tongue w/shouts of joy! Then they said among the nations, “the Lord has done great things for them.” The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.” The Psalmist was talking about the Israelites return from captivity – they had

been exiled in Babylon for 70 years. When they were finally able to return to their beloved Holy City, Jerusalem, they were like men who dream. They couldn't comprehend it – like it was too good to be true! Do you relate? How did this happen? Oh, the joy! The joy of the blessing of our God! Yes, we are filled with laughter! We don't quite get it! We shout for joy! I doubt the nations will speak of the way God has blessed us – but you know other people will marvel! Don't you want to shout so loud.....

The 2nd scripture is the story of the Exodus. The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. They had no way to free themselves – no money to buy their freedom, no weapons to fight their way out. God made a way! God raised up Moses to lead them. God sent plagues to convince Pharaoh to let the people go. Finally, after water being turned to blood, frogs everywhere (in their beds, ovens, even mixing bowls), gnats, flies (swarms of them), death of cattle, hail & fire, locusts, & 3 days of darkness, & the death of the 1st born, Pharaoh let the Israelites go! God's people had been spared the plagues. They put blood of a spotless lamb on the doorframes of their homes, & their 1st born were not slain. Their homes were passed over – celebrated today by practicing Jews everywhere – Passover! Remembering the goodness of God – His strong hand had delivered them.

However, the Israelites had another severe trial. They were stuck at the Red Sea – the Egyptian army bearing down on them. Pharaoh had had a change of heart –

Egypt had lost its slaves! He wanted them back. Moses' word to the people? “Fear not, stand firm, & see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be still.”

You know the story. God parted the waters; the Israelites passed thru on dry ground. Moses stretched out his hand again; the waters covered the Egyptians! God had truly fought for them! The people sang the song of Moses & still sing it today. “I will sing unto the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse & rider thrown into the sea. The Lord my God, my strength, my song, has now become my victory. The Lord is God & I will praise Him! My father's god and I will exalt Him.” The people of Israel remember the goodness of God! They told the story over & over – to their children, to their children's children! Yes, when God moves in your behalf, there is joy in the camp! (Ex. 5-15)

So what about us? God has given us a building! (And great joy!) Do we just become a regular church? Guess that depends on your definition of “regular church.” Do we hope to have more people come? Yes. Would young people be nice? Yes. Would we like a Sunday School? Yes. Would we like to do more fun things together? Yes. Are there more good ideas floating around? Yes. Do we want to perpetuate the institution just to perpetuate it? NO! The solution? Do everything we do w/Jesus in mind – looking for opportunities to share His love & joy & peace. As we look around, the

world is on a landslide that seems to be going faster all the time. (If I were to mention specifics, we'd be focusing on the negative – but who would have guessed that our nation, the world, could be so far from godly?) Yes, there is an onslaught of evil. But if we try to fight the landslide, I'm afraid we'd go right down with it. Our focus has to be Jesus.

There is a world of hurting people out there – people w/o hope. We are called to love them and share our hope! Like Lydia, the Lord has opened our hearts to hear His Word. When we meet the hopeless, we can pray that God will open their hearts to hear truth. **No one can save themselves.** Just like the Israelites trapped in Egypt, we were trapped in sin. There is no way we could have **bought** our way out. God moved in our behalf – He sent Jesus who paid the price for our sin. Jesus triumphed gloriously over sin, death, & the enemy.

What is our strategy toward others? Martin Luther asked: "Can a rock that has been in the sunlight all day not fail to give off warmth & heat at night?" In other words, our modus operandi is to bask in God's love. Be strengthened by His Word. We Christians have received Jesus – it is Christ in us our hope of glory. As we live drinking in God's love, how can we fail to give off warmth & love? It is a natural consequence. It's not about trying to be good & kind & nice. No. First, we need **let** God love us **just** the way we are – feeling unhappy with our selves, grouchy, restless. Like, "Really, God, You love me just the way I am? You know my thoughts. You

know my selfish desires. You know how much I like to be in control.” Yes, it’s true
Jesus loves you just the way you are!

Life’s not easy – it’s difficult. Jesus said, “In the world you’ll have tribulation, but
be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” We have trials, temptations, pain,
tears, stress, anxiety. The good news is Jesus meets us right in the middle of our crisis.
That’s why we have hope. But our hope is not limited to life in this world – we have
hope of life eternal in heaven! Heaven where God is the light! Exquisite beauty!
Purity! Satisfaction – our heart’s desires totally satisfied.

If nothing impure can enter heaven, how can we ever get in? You know the
answer! Jesus died in our place. We are washed in His blood. It doesn’t matter how
much good a person has done, it’s not enough to buy a pass to heaven. It doesn’t
matter how much bad a person has done, it’s not enough to keep one out of heaven –
there is forgiveness of sin! By the shed blood of Jesus we are made pure! Holy!
Righteous! Our names are written in the Lamb’s book of life because we believe in
Jesus & His atoning work on the cross! He did it for you. He comes to you in the
Holy Supper – His body & blood strengthen you, cause you to be able to walk in His
ways.

Wherever you are in your journey w/God, His Word to you is, “Fear not, stand
firm, and see the salvation of the Lord the Jesus has worked for you. Jesus fights for

you. He will never let you go!

"The most important part of our task will be to tell everyone who will listen that Jesus is the only answer to the problems that are disturbing the hearts of men and nations. We shall have the right to speak because we can tell from our experience that His Light is more powerful than the deepest darkness. . . How wonderful that the reality of His Presence is greater than the reality of the hell about us." - Betsie ten Boom died in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. We can add, "And He is Good. He has blessed us." Amen.