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JULY 2015
MIDNIGHT IN MACEDONIA

Greetings dearly beloved!

Our sincere prayer is that you are all seeking first the kingdom of God and also delighting yourself in Him!

Well, I am extremely excited to announce that in the beginning of July, I finally entered into full-time ministry! Praise the Lord!

Many of you, who are familiar with us, know that our road to full-time ministry has been a long one. I have been ministering in various capacities for around a decade now and have been doing so while maintaining my full-time secular employment. So you can imagine how excited I am to be entering into this new season where I can dedicate myself full-time to God's work.

One member of the church I pastor told me that the Lord showed her that when I was able to commit myself fully to the church, that God was going to do some amazing things. And this is really a true principle because as my father in the faith, Andrew Wommack, has been known to say, **"The quickest way to kill a man's vision is to give him two."** And why is this? Because like a laser- when we concentrate all of our focus onto one thing- we have the capability to do so much more- but, on the contrary, when our focus is divided, it can absolutely nullify our effectiveness. So I truly believe as I will be able to give myself more to the Word of God and prayer, we are going to see what God has called us to do take off!

Many of you know that I have a couple of books that the Lord put on my heart to write some time back and I have basically had to put them on hold because of the combination of duties between pastoring and banking. But now, praise God, I can begin to pick these projects back up and put into print the truths God has shown me and send them all around the world! Glory to God!

Regarding this, I just received notification that the translation of my first book- The Believer's Battle-Plan- into Tamil (one of the many languages of India) is complete! What does this mean? It means that now we are ready to let the truth spread throughout South India that God will fight our battles for us and give us victory over all our trials and tribulations as we follow His blueprint contained in 2 Chronicles chapter 20! Amen and glory!

On top of this, our plan is to print and distribute thousands of copies in the English language through a line of Christian bookstores there as well. You see, in India, English is actually the primary language amongst the educated, but as you go outside the cities and into the villages, other Indian languages are predominant. So this way, we will be distributing this book containing God's blue print for victory to both educated and uneducated alike! Glory to God!

Well, my next book entitled The Epistle of Joy- which reveals to us the keys to unlocking the joy of the Lord in our life- is one I am extremely excited about! And, lo and behold, this is along the subject lines that I felt led to minister to you this month. So enjoy this month's teaching which I will call "Midnight in Macedonia"...

THE MISSING PIECE TO JOY

You know, if there was one thing we could all agree on that everyone is looking for in life, it would definitely have to be joy. I would have a hard time believing that there is anything else that would top the list of man's deepest longings and desires than possessing joy.

There are multitudes of people in the world today who turn to all kinds of vain things just to experience the counterfeit joy that the world has to offer. Some people turn to drugs and alcohol in order to give themselves an escape from the pains of reality. Others turn to less-destructive things like their careers, hobbies, or relationships in order to feel fulfilled and reach some level of happiness and contentment. But the bottom line with either of these types of people is that they are all looking for just one thing. They are both seeking what only the Lord Jesus Christ can give them, which is genuine and perpetual joy.

Some time ago, the Lord gave me an analogy concerning this... He showed me that every person's life is made up of a puzzle. Some people have all the pieces put together in their life. They have a good marriage, they are comfortable financially, and they are fulfilling their career goals. But although they may have it all together on the outside, there is still one piece of the puzzle that is missing right in the center of their heart. The problem is these people think that if they obtain more money, greater fame, or better relationships that they will be happy. But the truth is that none of these things can fill that void they have in their heart.

Now, of course, this is referring to the few people who actually have all the pieces of life in place. What about the majority of people who actually lack one if not more of these things? Well, what they do is they spend all of their time and energy trying to find those pieces that they lack. They search for the money, fame, relationships, etc. thinking that if they just find what they consider to be "the missing link" that they will be satisfied and happy.

The problem with both of these types of people I just described is that they are looking for that missing piece, but they are looking in all the wrong places. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is that missing piece and only He can fit into that empty area of our hearts! Friends, **Jesus is the piece of the puzzle that will complete the puzzle of our life!** In other words, He is the only piece that will ever make us feel complete and content. Everything else will simply be us trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

JOY EVERLASTING!

Many of us who have already received Jesus as our Lord and Savior know this very well. For many of us, when we were born again, there was a joy that immediately flooded our soul. It felt as though we were baptized in joy and peace which caused a complete change in our attitude towards life.

But, as is the case with many legitimately born again believers, this initial joy of our salvation is oftentimes not consistently maintained throughout our walk with God. The reason being is because experiencing the joy of the Lord is not only applicable to our initially receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior; it is also applicable to letting Jesus reign in our hearts on a daily basis after we have received Him into our lives.

You see, as I am sure most of us who have been saved for some time have experienced, there is a tendency for that joy that we felt in the beginning of our walk to lessen in our hearts as we progress in our walk. Some have

attributed the joy we experience in the beginning of our relationship with Christ to a “special grace” that we are given when we are baby Christians. These also believe that when we begin to grow up out of that infant stage, God takes that special grace away from us and requires us to walk in joy on our own. I could not disagree with this Christian philosophy any more emphatically!

I believe that the reason we experience the joy of the Lord so much more in the beginning of our walks is because we choose to experience it more! What I mean by this is that the joy that filled our hearts when we were saved did not fill our hearts because God chose to give us more joy, but it was because we made certain decisions at that time which positioned us to obtain the joy that had already been given!

Just take a moment to consider your walk with God in the beginning of your faith. In those days, no one could keep you from being involved in your church or being active in other bible study's or prayer groups. You were not involved in these things because you felt like you had to either. You actually loved being involved because your heart was inclined towards the things of God. You also loved to read and study the Scriptures because the truth was so fresh and exciting to you. Your prayer times were Spirit-filled and non-laborious. Most of your conversations seemed to revolve around the Lord too- what He had done for you, what He had shown you, etc.

But something seemed to happen as time elapsed. Life began to get in the way. You started to come back down to the real world (so to speak). Perhaps, a more seasoned Christian even told you that you would come back down to reality one day. Whatever the cause was, the truth is that it was when your focus began to be on yourself and your own life and off of God and His kingdom that the joy that you once felt in your heart began to wane.

Now this is not something we should condemn ourselves over. It is a natural progression that can easily take place because of the weakness of our flesh and because of the world we live in. But the truth I want to instill in you this month is that it does not have to be this way! It is possible to maintain the same level of joy that we possessed in the beginning of our walk with Christ all the way to the end of our walk! This is what the Bible teaches us! We can have joy unspeakable and full of glory all the way from the beginning of our faith to the end of our faith (see 1 Peter 1:8&9)! Jesus provided us with joy everlasting! Hallelujah!

JOY VERSUS HAPPINESS

Now it is also important to understand what the Word of God is referring to when it speaks of joy. It is not just referring to feeling happy (although true joy will oftentimes produce happy emotions). People living in the world can certainly experience happiness from time to time because happiness is based upon having good experiences and favorable circumstances. Everyone, whether saved or not, will have these feelings of happiness from time to time in their life. **But the difference between the happiness that the world can bring you and the joy that the Lord already brought you is that one is inconsistent and the other is constant!**

You see, happiness is based upon the circumstances that the world will throw at us. The problem with this is that the world will maybe offer us pleasurable circumstances one day, and then the next, will offer us very dissatisfying circumstances. Therefore, these inconsistent situations and circumstances will create inconsistent emotions and feelings.

But here lies the difference in the joy of the Lord: Joy is not based on our natural circumstances! The joy that

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the Lord gave us is based on spiritual realities that never change. So that means that your joy never has to change! Yes, joy can remain constantly and perpetually experienced in our hearts because it is based on a God who never changes and His Word that will never pass away!

On top of that, joy is a product of the part of us that is not based on our feelings- our spirit. This perpetual joy is a fruit of our recreated and regenerated human spirit. So as children of God, we have this everlasting joy within us all of the time and it is available to us all of the time! As Jesus said, our joy no one will take away from us (see John 16:22). So it can and it should be experienced by us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Amen!

So then the question that begs to be answered is this- If we have this everlasting joy of the Lord on the inside of us, then why are we so inconsistently walking in it? If we were honest about it, we would have to admit that we have not experienced the level of joy that we should have consistently experienced in our hearts. But why? Why do we not constantly experience the joy of the Lord as we should?

Well, the Bible gives us some specific reasons that explain this to us. And this is what my upcoming book is going to do... It is going to take you through the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Philippians where he gives us several keys to how we can consistently walk in this joy of the Lord.

Why would I choose this letter to the Philippians to expound on the joy of the Lord, you ask? It is because the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church of Philippi contains around seventeen references to joy and rejoicing. That is seventeen references to joy in four chapters which average out to be over four references per chapter! That is amazing! It is for this reason that the Book of Philippians has been affectionately deemed as "The Epistle of Joy."

But what the Lord has revealed to me is how Philippians is more than just an epistle that contains many references to joy; it is also a Holy Spirit inspired book that contains the keys to unlocking a life of joy. This is why I am so excited to put this book into print!

PAUL'S PULPIT

But one of the greatest lessons that the Book of Philippians teaches us regarding joy is not what is contained in the four chapters; it is the background and setting that it was written in.

You see, by understanding the situation Paul was in when he wrote his Epistle of Joy, we can see how our circumstances do not have to dictate our joy. Paul's situation was incredibly difficult. At the time that he penned this letter, he was enduring a far more difficult situation than the majority of us have ever dreamed of experiencing. Yet, in the midst of what he deemed as one of his "light afflictions" (see 2 Corinthians 4:17), Paul preached the importance of maintaining a joy-filled attitude while expressing joy himself throughout the four chapters of his letter to this Church of Philippi.

His personal testimony was "I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice" (1:18) and his call for others was to "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice" (4:4). Yet, although he practiced as well as preached this joy-filled attitude, this perspective of his came in the midst of unfavorable circumstances.

It is commonly understood that when the Apostle Paul wrote his letters that we have the privilege of reading today, many, if not all of them, were written during his many imprisonments. But more specifically, when he penned this letter to the church of Philippi, it is commonly believed that it was written during one of his imprisonments in Rome where he was locked up in a prison which lied directly beneath the palace in Rome.

However, this prison was a far cry from the palace which was above him. Historians tell us that this prison was basically just a hole dug out beneath the palace's foundation! So get this image out of your head that the worst part of his imprisonment was just the fact that he was in chains. The bars, shackles and chains were the least of his concerns. Not only was the prison similar to a dungeon, but it was also believed to be one of the main holding areas for the sewage of the city of Rome! Are you serious? The sewage of the city was contained in the same place where Paul was being contained? So picture this: Paul was locked up in a cave with no light to speak of and possibly had human waste all around him! That sounds like a situation you would hear if someone were describing something similar to hell, doesn't it?

Now here is the point I want you to understand: It was in this horrible situation that he preached to the Philippians this message of exultation! It was in this discouraging predicament that he declared his joy and his heart to rejoice! This is remarkable, isn't it? Paul used his podium of human waste to preach joy to his children in the faith! He used his pulpit of stones and chains to testify of his own joy! This is so amazing to me!

As it was so poetically stated in a commentary I read:

"As we read the exultant stanzas of the Epistle to the Philippians, we might think that Paul was in a palace, not in a prison. He mentioned his chains again and again, but we do not hear them clanging dismally. We hear them chiming like Christmas bells."

*– The John Phillips Commentary Series /
Exploring Ephesians & Philippians*

As a matter of fact, if you look closely at the book of Philippians, you will see that Paul made references to "dung" (3:8) and "sweet smelling aromas" (4:18). Obviously, Paul had odors on his mind, and I wonder why...

You see, he was surrounded by "dung" yet he found a way to preach about it instead of complain about it. He was surrounded by what I can only imagine was the worst smell imaginable, yet he focused more on the offering they sent him that he said was a sweet smell to him.

So from this example, Paul evidently walked in something that every one of us needs to strive to attain to ourselves. He did not experience this awesome joy because he was an apostle or had some other unfair advantage than you and I do. Paul was a regular human being who was tempted, tested, and tried like all of us; yet he attained a higher walk than most of us ever even dream of attaining to.

MIDNIGHT IN MACEDONIA

Not only was the church of Philippi familiar with Paul's current situation, they were aware that Paul practiced what he preached when he first entered their province. You see, not only did he experience this particular imprisonment in Rome, he was imprisoned in Philippi when he first preached the gospel to them. We are probably all familiar with this account...

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In Acts chapter 16, we see how Paul and Silas entered into the district of Macedonia preaching and teaching the kingdom of God to them, and when they caused an uproar by casting the demon out of the slave girl, they were beaten and thrown into prison.

But what was Paul and Silas' response to this difficult situation? Acts 16:25 says that at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God! Now if this were the majority of believers today, the only reason you would have heard them singing hymns to God in this fearful situation was because they were trying to get God to deliver them. But you would have to add to the Bible to say that this was Paul and Silas' motive here. I personally believe that they were praying and singing, not because they wanted God to do something for them, but because they were genuinely focused on all that He had already done for them. In other words, they did not have to pray and sing through white knuckles and gritted teeth, but it overflowed out of a sincere heart that was full of joy.

You see, Paul and Silas had genuine joy in that Philippian jail after they were beaten for their testimony of Christ. It was at midnight- symbolic of their darkest hour- that they still experienced the joy of the Lord! This proves without a shadow of a doubt that our afflictions and tribulations do not have to dictate our joy level. Saints, we can have joy in whatever situation we find ourselves in. Not that we are happy about our current situation, but we are happy in our God. We are focused on all that He is and all that we have in Him. This should be enough to keep our joy tank filled up and overflowing all the time.

But this is the point in the message where the argument usually arises. People will hear what I just said and respond with- "But you do not know what I am going through! It's just too hard, difficult, depressing, etc."

But what those who think this way need to understand is that it does not matter how bad we have it; our afflictions will never compare to the Apostle Paul's afflictions. Just the two imprisonments that I have briefly described far surpass anything that most of us have or ever will endure.

So, saints, we can rejoice! We can have joy! It does not matter what we are going through! It doesn't matter how deep our dungeon or how dark our prison! We can rejoice in the Lord and have, not just enough joy, but joy inexpressible and full of glory!

So choose joy today! Don't let yourself live another day not experiencing the abundant life Jesus died to provide for you. Joy is your inheritance! Choose to partake of the children's fruit- the joy of the Lord- which is your strength! Amen!

Until next month... Maranatha!

Victoriously,

