

Echo From The Pulpit...



Abundant Living

This past month I shared with the congregation 3 sermons on my focus for PP in the new millennium. Last Sunday, I summarized these 3 foci in the lead article of the PP church bulletin (formerly called "the Vineyard", and renamed "FOCUS" since last month).

To recap, Focus #1 - as PP is united in one body, that we grow to become a congregation of tentmakers

Each member making at least one trip in his lifetime

Several members making regular visits over and over again and

Every member cultivating the tentmaker mindset - the realisation that we are on this earth to serve the Lord and our secular job keep us alive to serve Him.

What a tremendous impact we will make not only to our family and community, but to all the world over.

Focus #2 - as we relate one with another, that we learn to magnify Christ as Lord in Spirit-filled worship. This means that each member will live the spirit-filled life daily and on the Lord's day we all come together to worship God in spirit and in truth. The result of such a focus is like the NT church, we will be praising God and having favour with all people.

After delivering this sermon, a wonderful sister came up to me and confessed that although she has been a Christian for many years, she cannot remember when she had last worshipped God in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Somehow I suspect that it won't be long before she will be experiencing this on a regular basis.

Focus #3 - in our personal lives, that we all will experience joy unspeakable, full of glory. This can only take place if

1. We will restore the joy of our salvation
2. Seek the things that angels in heaven will rejoice about and
3. Look forward to entering into the joy of our reward.

Let us focus on what I Peter 1:8 describes - a kind of joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

Jesus said in John 10:10 that He came to give us life more abundantly.

I put it to you that one of the keys to this abundant life is joy. In fact the more I think about it, if there was one word to describe Christianity, that word would be "joy".

Each time I have opportunity to share Christ on a one-to-one basis, I have tried my best to communicate the joyful nature of Christianity. Put this in your faith and you will persevere to the end.

The reason why I am a Christian is joy. The reason in why I am in the ministry is joy. In I Peter 1:8, the apostle writes of joy that is both unspeakable and full of glory. I love this description. It's unspeakable because words fail to describe it as it is too marvellous for words. It is full of glory because there is nothing but goodness in it - so apt, so right, so fitting... so full of glory.

This kind of joy is like the peace that Jesus gives us in John 14:27. In like manner, this joy cannot be taken from us.

Our house could be repossessed, we may be retrenched, our family relationships on the rocks and we may be inflicted with all kinds of ill health. Still this joy abides. The fact that God is alive, that Jesus died for me and that in another twinkling of the eye, we will be home with God forever is a source of unshakable joy.

Joy is not like the fleeting happiness of the world. For example when we pass an examination, we will be happy. Then when we cannot find a job, we become sad. When we find a companion, we are happy again, but when things don't work, we are sad once more. Like a ping pong, the joy of this world has a short fuse and is so fragile.

In the epistle of I John, the apostle starts by saying that he is writing to us so that our joy may be full. The point is, God wants us to have a good time. When He sees us looking for joy in all the wrong places, He reaches out to us with His word and communicates His joy to us so that we can not only find joy but that our joy may be full. The rest of this article will help us learn how to obtain this joy.

1. Joy of Salvation

Indeed there are few things as joyful as salvation. Ephesians 2:1-4 relates a sad and pitiful description of the human race: sins of disobedience, living in the lust of our flesh, succumbed to the desires of our mind, by nature children of wrath and dead in sin and trespass.

In the next few verses, we see that in saving us, God has taken us from the dirt and mire, washed us clean and raised us up with exceeding riches, and placed us in the heavenly places! We need to go back to the beginning - the day we came to Jesus, to restore this joy.

It's like being middle of ocean, and like the Titanic, our ship is sinking with no help in sight - in the middle of the night amidst freezing waters. Then an aircraft carrier appears - what a great and

complete salvation! Warm blankets, hot Milo and peace of mind. Yet no sooner are we saved, back on dry and cozy surroundings, we forget our peril and wondrous salvation.

No wonder David cried out in Psalm 51:12 to restore to him the joy of salvation.

I love the way prophets related to God. In my mind, they were special commandos, His elite task force. Those prophets were tough and uncompromising men, uncut diamonds but always obedient to God whatever the 'mission impossible' may be.

I would like to get into their mindset, pick their brains and transplant that psyche into my heart. Consider for instance, what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 12:2-3, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for Jehovah, even Jehovah, is my strength and song; and He is become my salvation. 3 Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. "

What a fantastic spirit! I would to God that all of us would find this kind of joy in His service as Isaiah did.

We need to begin by understanding this knowledge - that there is no greater joy than the joy of salvation. Everything is here, where God is and nothing out there, where God is not.

What do we wish for our children? Is what we are slaving over worth sacrificing everything for?

As parents, naturally we are distressed and broken hearted when our children fail in their examinations, do not succeed in work, experience unhappy marriages and are involved in bad habits or company. But more than anything else, if our children are not in the faith; that is absolutely the only thing that really matters because there is no reason for joy anymore as it means no more hope for eternity.

"Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." The apostle John expressed this sentiment more than once in his epistles. One place that he said it is in 3 John 4.

Rejoicing with Angels

The Bible teaches that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. I put it to you that nothing is more important and precious than souls. It is in fact the only thing we can take with us to heaven. If we are like Jesus, giving our lives a ransom for many, we will seek and save those who are lost and rejoice with angels in heaven over each soul that repents (Luke 15:10).

In fact Hebrews 2:10 refers to this outreach in this way, "For it became Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

I love the phrase "bringing many sons to glory" and this is what we do when we hold every life precious, every person worthy of respect, and every soul, a son to glory.

I think of people like Adrian who brought Li Chhoan to church and how he in turn is not only living the Christian faith but reaching out to others.

Then I think of Belinda - in reaching out to Melissa, she brought KC and Irene to Christ and now KC is busy with making repeated tentmaker's trips.

I know that there is no greater joy in the hearts of Adrian and Belinda than that of bringing many sons to glory.

Take it from me - nothing beats the joy of rejoicing with angels. It is not easy reaching out. We will be rejected just as Christ was rejected but we find comfort in I Peter 4:13 in which the Bible says, "Insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of His glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy." "Rejoice with exceeding joy," wow - that's what I want and that's what I want for each of you.

Joy that is before Us

Of all the joys unspeakable - joy of our salvation, joy of saving others, the greatest and most complete joy is the joy that is before us.

We are motivated by many things. A lot of people are moved by fear. The Hebrew writer points us to a more excellent way, a way of joy.

Moreover, joy is also the motivation of our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2). It was joy that kept Jesus going, and it was joy that enabled Him to endure the cross.

Looking back on my 35 years of full-time ministry, it was joy that kept me going, especially when the going was tough and when there was the urge to give up.

And I know for sure that it is this same joy that our leaders give of their time and effort to serve the body of Christ, and this same joy that brings us all back week after week at worship.

In Hebrew 11:26 we take a look into Moses' mindset. Again, we see the sense of joy, one in which Moses when he finished his calculations, concluded that the reproaches of Christ that he received, outweighed the treasures of Egypt.

How did he arrive at this conclusion? How can Moses count that the reproaches of Christ as greater riches than the treasures of Egypt? It doesn't make sense - give me riches any time and take all these reproaches away!

What tilt the scale the other way? The last part of the verse - Hebrews 11:26 "... for he looked unto the joy of the recompense of reward."

Today Egypt is an insignificant 3rd world nation but Moses returned with Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration. What a change of fortunes!

In Hebrews 10:35 we are urged "cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward." In other words don't give up; not on yourself, not on God and not on one another because we are on the winning side - the joy of our reward is waiting for us.

May we, in our focus for our personal lives experience joy unspeakable, full of glory. If our focus is right in our personal life, one with another or as a church, the result is always good.

Focus is so important. Without this we drift, miss all the blessings and accumulate much sorrow. The Bible tells us that some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and others have pierced themselves with many grief (I Timothy 6:10).

Where is your focus today? What do you desire for your children and for one another? What is the focus for PP in this new millenium? Let's start with the three areas I shared with the church over 3 sermons this month.

- 1. United in One Body: PP to become a congregation of Tentmakers.**
- 2. One with Another: We learn to magnify Christ as Lord in Spirit-filled worship.**
- 3. In our Personal Lives: We experience Joy unspeakable, full of Glory.**

These are my personal recommendations designed as a starting point. Each one of us will champion one that is uniquely and passionately our own. Together, we will explore common areas to uplift and affirm one another.

With the right focus, we can say with Paul in Philippians 3:14, "I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."