

Joy and Peace

Last week we talked about self-control and as a continuation of the theme ‘Fruit of the Spirit’, we are going to focus on another two virtues: Joy and Peace.

To help me write this speech, like everyone else I suppose, I started googling the two words. To my surprise, “Joy and Peace” is actually a brand name for ladies’ shoes and handbags! I am pretty sure that whoever suggested this theme to me must have been thinking of having a shopping spree. The wisdom of having ‘Joy and Peace’ as a brand name for ladies’ products is of course beyond me. Perhaps the idea is that you will find joy and peace as you journey through life with their footwear and handbags. It would be rather unfortunate if it is true, because the entire male population would be deprived of any joy and peace.

The newspapers are often another source of my inspiration, but unfortunately they are not of much use this time, either. With North Korea taunting the US over missile and nuclear testing, the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar affecting neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and even Malaysia, Hurricane Irma leaving a trail of havoc and devastation in the Caribbean and Florida, there is not much joy and peace that I can find. Closer to home, with the recent row in Hong Kong over the independence posters, the confrontation, the negative sentiments, the stand-off and the ugly verbal exchanges, joy and peace seem to be just as elusive here at home, and it seems that the only “Joy” and “Peace” that I can find is on the greeting cards that I receive every Christmas.

The only thing that makes people happy, as far as I can gather from recent news in SCMP, is the suggestion by some HK parents of a concern group that the government should implement standard study hours for students, which in their opinion will make both students and parents happier. The standard that they have in mind is seven hours per day or fewer. I now begin to understand why there is an urgent need for modern technology for our survival if our younger minds can only operate for seven hours a day. And if I follow their logic, then people like me, who are three times older than they are, should not be staying at school for more than two hours per day! Next time, if you

find your Principal grumpy, unhappy or impatient, it is only because I have been staying at school for too long.

But I have digressed from the point that I wished to make. I am coming to that topic about Joy and Peace.

First of all, joy, in the Biblical sense, is different from happiness. Happiness is an emotion that is often contingent upon circumstances. When things are going well, we are happy. There are many things in life, like the beauty of the world, like winning an inter-class football match, like a good and hearty meal, can make us feel happy. Yet, this feeling of happiness is often fleeting, momentary and transient. Joy, as the Bible sees it, is different. In Chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Philippians, he said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." In other words, the Apostle told the Christians in Philippi to be joyful all the time. You may not know, however, that when the Apostle Paul wrote this letter, he was actually in prison. The Apostle Paul was in a rather difficult and tough situation and yet he kept telling people to be joyful. Where then does this joy come from? How can we be joyful even though everything seems to be against us? How can we be joyful when we are feeling confused and disillusioned?

Our joy comes from confidence in the One who is in control of all things, rather than in our circumstances at the moment. It comes from the assurance that we know who holds tomorrow and this is not a god who is high up in Heaven who has nothing to do with us. If you truly believe, He is the God who loved the world so much that He gave His only son to be sacrificed on the cross for the redemption of the world. This means we can be joyful even in difficult times, because we know that God will take care of us. True joy comes from resting in God, and trusting Him to take care of the things outside of our control. King David put it beautifully when he wrote Psalm 121:

¹ I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?

² My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;

⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

⁶ the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

⁷ The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;

⁸ the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

And the concept of peace is the same. We tend to think that peace means the absence of war and conflict, but the Biblical definition of peace goes far beyond that. In John 14:27, Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” Jesus makes it clear that His peace is different than the peace that comes from the world. It is the inner calm and freedom from anxiety that comes from trusting in God, the maker of Heaven and Earth.

The Bible says, “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22). If your bones are feeling a little dry these days, remember this:

- Focus on what you have but not what you do not have - count your blessings and practise contentment;
- Focus more on the needs of others than your own circumstances and give generously;
- Focus on God as the ultimate provider who has a plan for you rather than on external circumstances.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

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