

Rejoice in Your Advent Lord!

- I. Rejoice in His call to repentance.
- II. Rejoice with the fruits of repentance.
- III. Rejoice in His coming again.

Dear Christian friends,

It's pretty hard to miss the POINT in the first two readings. ***"Sing – shout aloud – be glad and rejoice with all your heart!"*** Zephaniah wrote. Zephaniah even showed us the LORD REJOICING in us – ***"He will rejoice over you with singing."*** WOW! God is that happy and excited to have us as His children – that is something to "rejoice and be glad" in!

Then we heard Paul in the epistle reading. ***"Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice!"*** Paul admits life isn't ALL ROSY. The key is NOT REJOICING in how things are going for us but rejoicing ***"in the Lord"*** – in God's love – His **presence** – **power** – **promises** – **peace**.

Then we have this gospel reading. Did you catch the joy BUBBLING OVER in it or did this seem instead to be a STARK CONTRAST **to the joy** in the other readings? There IS real joy in these verses – the same joy that's in the other readings – joy found in our God. So let's look at these verses guided by this thought – REJOICE IN YOUR ADVENT LORD! 1) **rejoice in His call** to repentance, 2) **rejoice with the fruits** of repentance and 3) **rejoice in His coming again**.

I. Rejoice in His call to repentance.

At first glance John the Baptist **doesn't seem to offer** ANY REASONS to rejoice. John used blunt – IN YOUR FACE language. He didn't worry about STEPPING ON anyone's toes. If people didn't like what he **had to say** that was THEIR PROBLEM not his. John wasn't going to change his message JUST TO MAKE some people happy.

John didn't win any POPULARITY CONTESTS when he called the people ***"offspring of vipers"*** – **sneaky** – **deceitful** – **devilish**. John SHOVED judgment and hell in their faces – ***"Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"*** He preached of worthless trees ***"cut down and thrown into the fire"*** and of worthless ***"chaff burned up with unquenchable fire."*** John basically told them, "KEEP LIVING the way you are and you're going to hell – period!"

There's NOT MUCH JOY to such preaching of God's law and yet there IS REAL JOY behind it. God is "holy" and He fully expects us to live lives holy IN EVERY WAY. God will not "be mocked" – IGNORED – **defied**. People can try but they won't GET AWAY with it. **God** is judgmental and He WILL JUDGE **each one** of us. Hell is REAL and God really will send **real people** to hell's eternal "unquenchable fire." BUT the **holy God** is also our gracious God who ***"takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked"*** – who ***"does not want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance."*** SO REJOICE in your Lord's Advent call to repentance! That call is God REACHING OUT to us and calling us back to Him. **Rather** than fleeing from God we NEED TO FLEE from our **sinful ways** and run back to **God** and His **grace**.

Advent is God calling all people – YOU/me included! – **to repent** of our sins. John flatly rules out ANY EXEMPTIONS to this call. ***"Do not even think of saying to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father!'"*** The Pharisees could understand God calling OTHER people to repent but they didn't need to. They weren't THAT BAD. They were GOOD, DECENT **church-going** people. They were Abraham's children! They may have had Abraham's BLOOD in their veins but they didn't have Abraham's FAITH in their hearts. NOBODY can repent for **anybody** else. **Nobody can believe** for anybody else. I can only repent and believe FOR MYSELF – NOT for my wife – children – grandchildren – friends, etc.

When we personally TAKE THE HEART **Advent's call** to FACE UP to our **sin** and **guilt** Christmas takes on a WHOLE NEW meaning – its REAL meaning. The lights and **decorations** – the presents and **parties** – the cards and **cookies** – they're NICE – but OH, WOW! – that Baby in the manger – God's own Son born our PERSONAL Savior! Jesus is the PERFECT Christmas present. He is **"our Righteousness"** – Jesus lived for us that holy, sinless life we **never could** live. Jesus is **"the Lamb of God"** whose innocent death on the cross HAS **"taken away the sin of the world."** Jesus is **"the Resurrection and the Life"** – trusting in Jesus as our Savior we are going straight to heaven when we die – we will live forever with a **glorified body** and soul in that **"new heaven and new earth"** where everything will be perfect in every way. BEING HONEST about our **sin** and **guilt** we see JUST HOW GRACIOUS and good God is to us in Jesus.

So rejoice in your Lord's **Advent call** to repent -

II. Rejoice with fruits of repentance.

Repentance is literally a CHANGE OF MIND that results in a CHANGE OF LIFE. **Repentance** is no longer seeing sin as something GOOD or FUN but as deadly and **damning**. Repentance is a TURNING FROM servicing sin and Satan TO following God. John warns against any HYPOCRITICAL repentance – pretending to repent when we really aren't – SPEAKING **words of repentance** but NOT BACKING them up with actions of repentance.

So John preached, **"Produce fruits in keeping with (or WORTHY OF) repentance!"** There are fruits NOT **"in keeping with"** – not worthy of repentance. If I say I'm SORRY for whatever but I keep on doing it – that's NOT REAL repentance. To say I'm sorry for ROBBING banks – and that after robbing just two more banks THEN I'LL STOP – that's not repentance. To excuse living together with we're GETTING MARRIED later on – that doesn't make the sin OK or **less damning**. The same goes for ANY OTHER **sin against any other** commandment. HONEST repentance includes dropping the excuses and fighting against the sin NOT CONTINUING to **keep on doing it**.

John gave the people PRACTICAL EXAMPLES. **Rather** than being stingy and SELF-CENTERED they were to show Christian love and concern. **"Whoever has two shirts should share with the person who has none, and whoever has food should do the same."** John didn't order the tax collectors and soldiers to STOP BEING tax collectors and soldiers. Instead they were to BE HONEST – not abuse their **power** or **position** – not be GREEDY.

Fruits "in keeping with – WORTHY of – **repentance"** are simply applying God's Word and will to your PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES. If it's LYING it's now being honest and telling the truth. If it's SKIPPING church then it's faithfully coming to church. If it's GOSSIPING and being a **"busybody"** then it's MINDING MY OWN business and taking everything in the kindest possible way."

We must be clear here. Our **"fruits of repentance"** don't earn us God's forgiveness. We don't trust in HOW WELL we've **cleaned up** our lives. We trust in Jesus' perfect life – His sacrificial death on the cross. There's always more to CLEAN UP in our lives and thank God that **"the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from ALL sin!"** Our **"fruits"** don't save us but they are SYMPTOMS – OUTWARD SIGNS – of the real condition of the faith in our hearts. **God doesn't want us** FOOLING OURSELVES here. Talk is CHEAP; actions speak louder than words. If I SAY I love and believe in Jesus but my life DOESN'T REALLY SHOW much love for or **trust in** Jesus – that should be an ALARM **going off** for me. Our eternal salvation – our personal relationship with Jesus – is WAY TOO IMPORTANT to risk losing to EMPTY WORDS.

So rejoice in your Advent Lord with fruits of repentance. That we can see SOME fruits in our lives is proof of a LIVING faith. Those less than perfect fruits REMIND us that our faith is ALWAYS IN NEED of **God's Word** and **careful nurturing**. Those fruits show GOD AT WORK in our **hearts through** His Word. if we felt no need to **repent** – if we really weren't concerned about CHANGING our ways – that

would show we're NOT REALLY Christians despite what we might **think** or **say**. Those fruits remind us to FIND OUR JOY in our Savior's love and forgiveness.

So rejoice in your Advent Lord –

III. Rejoice in His coming again.

John's ministry was drawing a LOT OF ATTENTION. It got to the point that the people "**were wondering in their hearts if John could be the Christ.**" John quickly shot that down. He basically told the people, "YOU THINK I'm something – wait till you see who's coming! I'm nothing compared to Him! I'm doing WHAT GOD TOLD me to do. He's the almighty Son of God Himself come to save and redeem us."

Learn from John's HUMILITY! Life is not ALL ABOUT me/us. The world doesn't revolve around me/us. Our sinful natures MAY THINK SO but our **sinful natures** have a real problem with PRIDE and selfishness. We are not God's EQUALS or His BOSSES. We are His redeemed children HERE TO BRING **glory to God** and help others.

John got people ready for Jesus' FIRST coming **so that** they would also be ready for His SECOND coming on **Judgment Day**. Rather than brushing it off to the FAR-DISTANT FUTURE John warned them, "**Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees. So every tree that does not produce good fruit is going to be cut down and thrown into the fire.**" Rather than shrugging off Judgment Day as an IDLE THREAT – **empty words** – John preached, "**His winnowing shovel is in His hand. He will gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**"

Pruning a tree is to make it more fruitful. Chopping it down at the roots means YOU'RE DONE with it. Farmers don't grow wheat to HARVEST THE CHAFF. **Chaff** is worthless – GOOD FOR NOTHING. The wheat is what the farmer WANTS – what he VALUES. He stores up the wheat "**in his barn**" – SAFE and secure.

Jesus' **second coming** will mean the ETERNAL BANISHMENT and **punishment** of all unbelievers. But FOR ALL who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior **it will be** the ETERNAL SAFETY and joy of heaven. NO MORE sin or **temptations** – death or **devil** – sinful nature or **sinful world**. It will be life forever AT our **Savior's side** IN ALL His glory – God having made "**everything new.**"

So rejoice in your ADVENT Lord. Jesus came the FIRST TIME at **Christmas** so we can confidently look forward to His SECOND coming on **Judgment Day**. Jesus and His comings – THAT'S OUR JOY even now as we wait for Him in this DARK world. Amen.

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