

## **TOPIC: DO YOU HAVE THE GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY?**

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Date: 27 Dec 2009

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### **SUMMARY OF MESSAGE**

Looking at 2009, we know the news – from the weather to terrorists and to the pestilences. Looking at Europe, it is in a post-Christianity era and is in need of evangelization. Christians there are under severe persecution. Law has been imposed that makes it illegal to pray in public institutions. The freedom of believers is slowly removed.

In Singapore, we are blessed to the extent we can become immune to a sense of false security. The larger reality is out there. Isaiah says darkness in the world would increase and so would the light. We ask, “Why are there calamities, changes in the weather, etc.?” They are due to the fallenness of man. At heart of issue is the element of choice. We have a volition and eventually it means we have a will and having that choice, we could reap goodness and rewards or otherwise the reverse. Our capacity for choice is important. Galatians 6:7 says we will reap what we sow.

Bringing it down to a personal level, let’s read 2 Cor 13:5.

2 Cor 13:5

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless of course, you fail the test?”

The verse calls upon us to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith. There are many ‘Ezy’ believers. Do we just pray and gain passport to heaven? Is it so simple? No. Test ourselves. We need to present the gospel in fullness. Be a church free of the guilt of someone else’s blood. We preach about the goodness, love and mercy of God. We also need to preach about consequences and hell as well. Beyond our 80, 90 years, there is a destiny. Our choice comes with consequences. It is needful for us to examine our spiritual life.

If we understand the Parable of the Sower and the Seeds, we would be able to understand all parables. In this parable, there is only one ground, i.e. the ground that produces 100-fold should read as that produces 30, 60 and 100 fold. It’s good ground. In accordance to capacity and revelation, we will be judged. For the seeds that fell amongst thorns and are choked, there is no fruit, no salvation. That’s why there is only one ground. This parable will help us in our approach of presenting the gospel. We need to examine our fruits to see whether we are saved. The law came by Moses but grace and truth come by Jesus. We need both grace and truth. Many who received Christ in their teenage years are no longer in the church. They have not known the full light of the gospel.

If we do not know that we have committed an offence and someone comes to us, saying, “We have paid the fine for you,” we wouldn’t be able to appreciate the good news. We might even be receiving that as an insult. Someone might see himself as a good man. He is not a murderer or an adulterer. He doesn’t even see his own depravity. So to him, what’s the good news? However for one who had committed a traffic offence unknowingly, it would be good news to him if he was shown the photos, alerted of the consequences but was informed that someone had paid the full penalty for him.

We have all sinned and will be damned if the Lord had not paid the penalty for us. We need to see sin for what sin is. Have we taken stationery from the office? Have we made personal overseas calls at the expense of the company? Have we taken God's name in vain? Have we ever coveted for things not our own? Have we ever lusted in our heart after someone not our spouse? Romans 3:10 tells us that there is none righteous, not one. We cannot appropriate grace and mercy of God until we realize the depravity and corruption of our human condition.

Isaiah 57:15 tells us that God dwells with him who has a contrite and humble spirit. He gives grace to the humble.

A man asked his friend the reason that was cause for him to be in jail. He got this story. His friend had been trivializing sins. He had received notices of parking fines but had ignored them and had thrown them away, thinking it was no big deal to be fined for such offences. He thought he could have them compounded anyway. He was trivializing sins. However, one day, he was arrested and jailed. His offences had caught up with him. The Bible says that our sins will find us out. Have we been trivializing with sins?

We need to be reconciled with God. The Bible calls this having right standing with God. This is righteousness. How? We need to be justified and have peace with God. Having right standing is to realize we are corrupt and need God's peace and mercy and by faith in the redemptive works of Jesus, acknowledge our sins and receive His forgiveness. It is then that we are justified and reconciled with God. God has made the initiative to reconcile us with Him and we are given this work of reconciliation. Blessed are the peace-makers.

Romans 5:1

"Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Next, our righteousness cannot save us on the day of wrath. This we see in Isaiah.

Isaiah 64:6

"But we are all like an unclean thing and all our righteousness are like filthy rags. We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

In the parable of the rich young ruler, notice what he said in Luke 18:18-23, "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" This is the pagan mentality – thinking we can do something to inherit eternal life. We think that as we do, the scales will be tilted to our favor. There is nothing we can do to ever earn His grace and mercy.

The issue with the rich young ruler is not that he was rich but that he was trying to obey God by the laws. He obeyed them but he violated the first two commandments, namely, not loving the Lord with his heart, soul and might. Next he had made his riches his god. He was rich but went away sorrowful. There was not a cent given to the Kingdom. Why did this man fail?

James 2:10

"For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."

We are in the same boat. The danger is we may slide into Pharisee-ism, into self-righteousness. We cannot depend on our works, our voices, our logistics and our sanctuary. Our confidence should be

on the Holy Spirit. We need to know the secondary from the fundamental which is all about Jesus. He must have the supremacy. The day we allow the superficial to rule, we are doomed. We must produce disciples – men and followers of God.

This church has grown but some have also left. The crux of coming to God is the line we cross, the line called commitment and consecration. We need to re-examine by end December that we are committed to serve God. We want to change the culture and philosophy of serving. If there are no musicians, then we sing without them. It is about God.

In rededication, we are rebuilding the altar before God. We are asking leaders to do that, first to God and then to the local body in BBTC. We love God, we also love the brother. Hence, let's commit to serve and be God's instrument. For those who take sabbatical, there is no condemnation. Those who serve serve by the strength of God, not of the flesh. Romans 3 20 says that by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified.

Philippians 3:9

“and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is from the law but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”

This is something to guard against. We think we serve by our works – that is like the Pharisee. Paul said that righteousness is by faith. At all times we are to depend totally by the grace and mercy of God.

Next, we need the grace of the righteousness of God by faith. What is this? It is realizing our helplessness and hopelessness and relying totally on the mercy and grace of God to save us.

In Luke 19:1-10, we are told the story of Zacchaeus. The approach of Zaachaeus is completely different from that of the rich young ruler who thought he had something to prove. Zaachaeus came across as one who realized his sin. He said that he would pay back four times and would donate half of his goods to the poor. Did the Lord ask him to do that? No.

Remember the story of the woman who washed Jesus' feet? Jesus told Simon that he failed to do what was expected of him. Simon got the message. He who is forgiven more will love more. We have been forgiven much but we don't realize so and fail to respond so in love. We fail to see the depravity of ourselves. Unless we allow God to touch us, we cannot respond so to God. The believer who realizes he is forgiven much will love much.

Isaiah said, “Woe am I.” The closer we draw near to God, we will realize how much God loves us. Paul said that he was the chief sinner. Why? That's because in the light of God's goodness, we see His mercy.

In 2009, Senior Pastor's father came to salvation. Last year, he was in the hospital. Last year, the market was in the doldrums. Many had incurred losses. This year, many have recovered. Last year, the health of some was not good but this year, the goodness of the Lord might have been more felt. Our self-righteousness cannot do that. Do we want to produce disciples in this church – men and women who understand the corruption of the flesh and how to live lives in the word and Spirit of the Lord?

The Israelites were ignorant of their own righteousness and had not submitted to the righteousness of God. The Father God is only pleased only with Jesus and want to see Jesus in you and me. On the Mount of Transfiguration, he told Peter, James and John regarding Jesus, "This is My Beloved Son, listen to Him." After saying that, Moses and Elijah disappeared and Jesus was left alone. We see that the Law (represented by Moses) and the Prophet (represented by Elijah) disappeared. Jesus alone must be magnified. In the old covenant, we see the law. In the new covenant, we see Christ.

Romans 10:4

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

To believe means to be committed. Before King Agrippa, Paul said that he was called to be a minister, sent to open eyes and to turn people from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that these may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those sanctified by faith in God. Conversion is commitment. It is not merely saying with a mental accent but it's crossing the line with commitment, wanting to believe and live according to the Word of God. We need to examine if we are in the faith.

Romans 3;22,24

"even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

We are justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. We need the right foundation of faith. It's about the righteousness of God, about the grace of God, not by the deeds of the law.

Romans 3:28

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."

Are we going from faith to faith? The just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:17) Our prayer of faith is the hand that reaches out to the hand of grace. Why? It's because we have right standing with God.

Romans 6:23

"For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We see here that the good news is Jesus Christ.

Eph 2:8,9

"For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift if God, not of works lest anyone should boast."

By grace we are saved through faith. There is nothing we could do to receive His mercy. God doesn't respond to need but to faith. A gift is to be received not by works but by faith.

We are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

2 Cor 5:21

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

All our sins are laid on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the divine exchange that we might become the righteousness of God. Anything outside this is inadequate. What do we do? We receive by faith and declare our standing in God.

Romans 5:17b

“...much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”

To reign means we are the head and not the tail. We are on top of situations and not below, not all the time plagued down with circumstances. There are rough edges and paths but it means we are able to overcome. In Him we are more than conquerors.

How to reign? 2 keys:

a) By the gift of righteousness.

He who holds fast will have no condemnation and guilt. Otherwise our faith will leak. With evil conscience, we are shipwrecked. How do we avoid that? It is knowing we have the Blood, the finished work at the cross and appropriating it daily and continually.

b) Learn to receive the abundant grace.

As we enter into January 2010, some may be concerned with some things. Some may be addicted to pornography, lust, outbursts of tempers and other personality traits that are not dealt with. When we appropriate His grace, He will set us free from bondage, doing so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, let's look at John 8:3-11.

Here, we have a woman caught in adultery and those who caught her were expecting Jesus to deal with her based on the law. However Jesus wrote on the ground. The place where he was standing was a ground made of stone. (The Ten Commandments were written on tablets of stone) Here it was the finger of God writing on stone again. Jesus invited those without sin to throw the stones at her. Figuratively, he was asking them to throw the law at her. Starting from the oldest, one by one left without doing so. In the absence of her accusers, Jesus told the woman to go and sin no more.

The law revealed sin. We need it but Jesus came, bringing grace.

In the story of the prodigal son, he was going back to be like one of the hired servants. He was still thinking of the law. He thought he could do something. If we come to church as a habit, if we have 5 seconds to say grace and 30 seconds to do our devotion, that's not abiding in the presence of God. Harsh measurement? Yes but that's about discipleship.

We depend on the grace of God. Don't be like the elder brother (in the parable of the prodigal son) who lives in poverty, depending on himself and having no relationship with his father. We can come as a Pharisee or in the spirit of the prodigal son. We can be pharisaical about serving, doing so in the flesh. What is permissible for 2009 may not be so for 2010. What's permissible for others may not be so for us. Why? It's because we want to be a people hot for God, people of great joy, people who serve from knowing grace and truth.

We need a strong church. The end-time church is hot for God, in love with Jesus. Our zeal has to be of the Spirit, not of the flesh. Our evangelism is to be passionate otherwise we are deceived. This church needs to come to a new level of commitment, first to His Word and Spirit. We need to stop flirting around from church to church and instead be planted in the church. We need to love

brothers who are less than perfect. There is no perfect church. We need to soil our hands because it has implications for eternity.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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1) Applying 2 Cor 13:5, how do we see ourselves with regards to the faith? Are we the soil that bear fruits?

2 Cor 13:5

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless of course, you fail the test?”

2) Paul said he was the chief sinner. As he grew in spiritual maturity, he saw the love of God is greater light and intensity. Do we see ourselves appreciating the love of God more and more? Share your journey.

3) The rich young man thought he could do something to gain eternal life. How about taking a fresh look at the motivations of our service so that we may produce works of the Spirit and not works that are zeal of the flesh? (personal application though optional for sharing)

4) What kind of disciples do you hope to become or see yourselves becoming? In the area of discipleship, what do you hope to see in the cell or ministry?

5) What are some sins we have been trivializing without realizing so?

6) What does it mean to have been made the righteousness of God? What are the implications?

2 Cor 5:21

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

7) How shall we move on that we may reign in Christ?

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No condemnation, no comparison, no competition but only encouragement...