

WHERE IS THE LOVE AND REJOICING?

When we wake up in the morning where do our minds go? When we bow our heads in prayer before breakfast where does our mind go? When we look at the world around us where does our mind go? Are we looking at a glass that is half full or half empty? Do we give God our love and rejoice or do we turn red with anger? When we wake up, bow our heads, or look at the world around us do we even think of God, do we thank Him for saving us from such chaos and pandemonium? Do we think of those out there and pray for them and their salvation or do we curse them and look down on them for their views concerning culture, politics or whatever else there may be? As we go through our day, where is the love and rejoicing. Granted, there are the select few that we may come across that seem to exude joy and gratitude at every turn but is that how it should be? Should there only be a handful of saints that spread love, compassion and energy with their presence or should that be the characteristics of us all?

Seeing a Christian in public feeling uplifted, vibrant, and approachable should not be a rarity. All too often we can be seen walking around bitter, sad, and disgruntled as if our dog died (how many days in a row can our dog die?). We can barely greet one another with a smile when we see one another because we are so consumed with worldly strife. Please be aware that while I write this with a pointy finger I am well aware of the four fingers pointing back at me. Days go by that I am consumed with anxiety and stress to the point of bitterness so thank God for an understanding and relatable spouse to reel me back in, not to mention a kind and patient Savior.

I have heard the phrase spoken many times and said it myself "the struggle is real". Usually when I say it, it is out of jest and sarcasm is involved but make no mistake about it, struggle is real. Struggle is real regardless of your race, gender, political affiliation or status of salvation. We have daily struggles with anxiety, housework, work, expectations from within and from others, trivial dilemma's, pain, suffering, the list goes on and on. Since the days of Adam and Eve being evicted from the garden and having to deal with thistles, thorns, labor pains and the struggles of daily living we have had struggle. We cling to the freedoms of this world and forget where our true freedom lies. Somewhere along the line we have morphed into such a spoiled society to believe that struggle, unfairness, discomfort and the like aren't allowed to be applied to us. Along that same line we have decided that it is the proper response to badger those whom we disagree with or don't share a common thread with. Whatever happened to "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"? It has been replaced by a refusal to speak, hateful remarks, badgering, egotism, arrogance, and a down right unpleasant attitude by those who claim to have a relationship with Christ (often times to brothers and sisters in Christ). Is that why the number of people identifying as Christians in America is dropping at a staggering rate? Because that is what the

world sees, and do we display what the world wants? The truth is, salvation and amazing grace aren't without stipulation. When our hearts become so hardened that we look down on those around us, have contempt in our hearts and dismiss the promise of eternal love and salvation from our Creator in favor of a focus on worldly ideas like politics (which we insisted upon, God tried to warn us about setting up a government) then we are in imminent danger of losing that salvation and amazing grace. Eventually time will run out and we will have to answer for the status of our hearts.

I think of 1John 4:7-11 "Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He love us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." This tells me that if I do not show love then I am separated from God, that is a dangerous place to be, especially for the sake of my own foolish pride. We had nothing to do with the love that came from God or Christ, there is nothing we can do to impress Him. He is God for crying out loud. We certainly aren't going to impress Him with our staunch world views that refuse to budge. Truth be told, if we are led by our world views then we will certainly be separated from Christ and we will have denied His sacrifice and resurrection. It also tells me that God has sent His only begotten Son to be a propitiation for our sins that we might live through Him. That is worth rejoicing over above all else. The job is done and there is no amount of work that can put me in His good graces. It is now a matter of keeping my heart where it needs to be and seeking Him which will result in joy, rejoicing and an attitude that those around me will want to emulate causing others to seek the Lord.

Ephesians 4:1-4 reads "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." What is our calling? We are to spread the love of Christ to those around us, building one another up with empathy. We are to walk worthy of someone who has been chosen by a holy Father to accomplish a task, a task of unity, love and peace. We cannot do that while being sorrowful and discontent. In this passage lowliness does not mean keeping your head down and sulking, it means humility and a freedom from pride. Longsuffering does not mean putting yourself through misery and struggle, it means patience and slow to wrath, akin to our Father. We are to avoid arrogance, pride and wrath while supporting and encouraging one another with patience and love.

Meanwhile, we must rejoice that our Father has gone through such great lengths for the sake of our redemption. There is a life past this that we have to look forward to and it is all because of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who have created, saved and guided us into His

presence. Like I said before, the work has been done and there is nothing I can do to impress Him or earn His love, His love for us is natural and that should cause us to rejoice.