



The Christmas season is full of advertisements promising JOY and HAPPY and CELEBRATION. As believers, we most assuredly have SO MUCH to celebrate in light of the birth of our Savior, but the reality of this world is that there is also sorrow, in some cases great sorrow. It weighs on us like a dark winter's day, and my heart is heavy for those of my friends who are experiencing Christmas for the first time without their dear loved one, and for others who are in the hospital dealing with terrible disease and illness. Not to mention those who for one reason or another cannot be with family during this time.

Quite often the circumstances of our lives can overshadow the joy that we remember has been gifted during this season of winter. God is fully aware of that (Psalms 147:5 - "**Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.**") In His omniscience He knows each of us intimately from the inside out (Psalm 139:3 - "**You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and You are intimately acquainted with all my ways.**") He knows our hearts and struggles. Fully aware of the sorrows of this world, He had King Solomon pen these :

***Sorrow is better than laughter
For when a face is sad the heart may be happy
Ecclesiastes 7:3***

A strange verse in a strange book where King Solomon was trying to figure life out. He became wiser than others, learning much from the school of hard knocks (or in his case, hard choices. Come on, 1000 wives? 700 concubines? what was he thinking? uh, yeah, I get it, "the more the merrier" - and don't we also tend to have the same philosophy as we approach this season of gifting, it is the world's way.) But the fact these words were divinely inspired seem odd coming from a God who offers such hope and joy, that is, until we look past the words to understand that in the winter of our souls there is a blanket of comfort to wrap in.

Jesus said, "**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**" That is, in fact, what we celebrate this season. He came to earth to provide a grace we could never earn. The verse in Ecclesiastes is not encouraging us to be down-hearted and depressed. But God did want to say He knows in this world there is sorrow, and it is better to be sorrowful (and look toward Him) than to live a life of laughter and merriment at the sake of missing a relationship with Him.

He continues to teach me that when I place my joy in my surroundings, in my "stuff", or in anything other than Him, that there is something greater missing. I miss out on the Great Comfort of my soul. When I'm struck with the fallibility of what this world offers and the many unmet expectations I might have, I must once again humbly surrender myself to Him in the situation. It is then that He provides an underlying joy and warmth that can be found nowhere else. Money cannot buy that kind of peace. It is peace beyond comprehension, it is joy that blankets the soul and lifts the spirit.

As we approach these days of remembering the birth of our Savior, may our hearts be open to receive Him and the comfort that He provides. May our season be blanketed with the knowledge that He loves us enough to send a Sacrifice in our place, and may we readily bow before Him as our King.

Father God, Lord of all, One who is intimately acquainted with all of our ways, and still loves us. You, our God, are amazing and so gracious to us. Help us during this season and beyond, to be ones who are sensitive to lift another up and point them to You so that they can know the fullness of Your joy even in the depths of their great sorrow. Father, there is no greater sorrow than to have the gift of Jesus be ignored or denied, so I pray for our loved ones who have not yet accepted that gift, and ask Your Spirit to remind them of Your great love for them today. We may not know the exact day Christ was born, but we do know You sent Him to pay the price for our sins and for that I glorify You, praise You, give myself to You. May it be so for each one today. To Your praise and glory, and in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.