**THE REAL JOY GIVER**

My friend Bob once received a free ticket to the Super Bowl from his company. Unfortunately, when Bob arrived at the stadium he discovered it was in the last row at the very top in the end zone. He was closer to the Goodyear Blimp than he was the action on the field. Ugh. But, with his binoculars he scanned the stadium and noticed an empty seat right on the 50 yard line just behind the players bench! He thought, “What do I have to lose?”

So, he took a chance and made his way to that section, avoiding the security guards and getting to the seat. As he approaches the seat he asks the man next to it, “Excuse me, is anyone sitting here?” The man shakes his head and says no. Very excited to learn this good news he says to the man, “This is incredible! Who in their right mind would have such an expensive ticket and not use it on the biggest event of the year?” The man replies, “Well, actually, the seat belongs to my wife, but she passed away. This is the first Super Bowl we have missed since we married in 1967, the year of the first big game.” Bob said to him, “Oh, that’s really sad, but couldn’t you find someone to take the seat, maybe a relative or close friend?”

The man turned and said to him, “No, they’re all at the funeral.”

I hope I made you laugh. At least giggle? Or maybe smile? Ok, at least grin? If not, you were probably weaned on a sour pickle and sat there like a bump on a log. If you didn’t at least get a twinkle in your eye or raise your eyebrows and go “hee hee” then I’m fearful you have been struck with a bad case of Stick-in-the-Mud and been officially labeled Party-Pooper. Oh how I wish I could somehow make you loosen up some, let down your hair (I’m thinking here of Nate Wiley and Richard Jones), and relax a little in these days of “present distress.”

Yes, it’s true, Solomon wrote these words in Ecclesiastes 7:2-4.

*Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart.
Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.*

But, Solomon also wrote these words in Proverbs 15:13,15

*A* ***merry heart*** *makes a cheerful countenance,
But by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.
All the days of the afflicted are evil,
But he who is of a* ***merry heart*** *has a continual feast.*

The New Life Version translates this:

**13** *A glad heart makes a happy face, but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken*.

**15***All the days of the suffering are hard, but a glad heart has a special supper all the time*.

Solomon also wrote these words in Proverbs 17:22

22 *A merry heart does good, like medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones*.”

And these words in the famous text of Ecclesiastes 3 (can you gray-hairs not hear Pete Seeger’s words that *The Byrds* sang as the #1 hit of 1965?)

​1 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:
2 A time to be born, And a time to die;
A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;
3 A time to kill, And a time to heal;
A time to break down, And a time to build up;
4 A *time to weep*, And a *time to laugh*;
A *time to mourn*, And a *time to dance*…”

David’s Psalms fill the pages of our Bible with both a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. Psalm 32 and 51 finds him weeping over his guilt of sins. But can you not also see and hear the ecstasy in his heart and in his face as he writes Psalm 5:

11 *But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name be joyful in You.”*

Or Psalm 16:

9 *Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope…
11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Remember David dancing for joy as the Ark of God returned to Jerusalem? His wife Michal rebuked him for his undignified display of “*leaping and whirling before the Lord*” (2 Samuel 6:16). To her that was so unbecoming a king to act “*shamelessly*” (vs. 20). The text says “*she despised him in her heart*.” David was a real joy-giver, Michal was a real joy-killer. Friends, there is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.

The apostle Paul knew how to be both serious and joyful. Sitting in a prison cell he wrote the most uplifting, joyful letter penned in the entire Bible. Read Philippians. The words “*joy*” (1:4, 25; 2:2; 4:1) – “*rejoice*” (1:18; 2:16,17,18,28; 3:1,3; 4:4)– “*rejoicing*” (1:26) – “*glad*” (2:17,18) – “*gladness*” (2:29) dominate the epistle. No, he was not cracking jokes and throwing out one-liners to his cell mates causing side-splitting laughter, but he was impacting men like that Philippian Jailer who saw his peace and joy as he sang hymns in the midst of pain and asked, “*Sir, what must I do to be saved*?” (Acts 16:30). Paul was a real joy-giver.

Today is April Fools Day. It’s intended to be a day of catching your friends or family in a prank or unexpected joke. The media and the internet is scolding anyone who plays April Fools on someone in this time of a pandemic. To which I reply, circumstances should dictate whether it is time to weep or time to laugh. Everyone’s situation is different. Some need to be consoled, while others need a pick-me-up smile. Choose wisely.

But I wanted you to sing with me this song today. Why? I need it, and I’m thinking you do too. I’ll blow the pitch-pipe in the key of D for doe-a-deer, attempt to raise it to Me-a-name-I-call-myself, and then lead you in these uplifting words:

“As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after You.
 You alone are my heart’s desire, and I long to worship You.
 You alone are my strength, my shield, to You alone may my spirit yield.
 You alone are my heart’s desire, and I long to worship You.

 I want You more than gold or silver, only You can satisfy.
 You alone are the real JOY GIVER, and the apple of my eye.
 You alone are my strength, my shield, to You alone may my spirit yield.
 You alone are my heart’s desire, and I long to worship You.”

Until tomorrow, SMILE ☺ - God, the real Joy Giver, loves you.

So do I.

Rick