

Devotion 3
Joy Trumps All

Tuesday, Week 1

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. (2 Corinthians 8:2)

Pastor Brad Cusson tells the story of his wife's 50th birthday. It was fast approaching. Since their boys weren't home to help him think of an appropriate present, it was up to him. This was not good, he thought. Yet, one of his boys came up with, among other things, the idea that they get her 50 roses and present them to her on her birthday. They "done good." It was one of those gifts that she never expected, and the surprised look on her face was...well, you know. The gift was for his wife, but the joy it brought their sons and him will last for a lifetime. Such is the joy of giving! I can relate. Can you?

It was a tough time in the lives of the Macedonian Christians. They were experiencing "severe trial"—perhaps even the physical affliction (perhaps even to death) of Roman persecution. Extreme poverty was also their lot, probably because no one would hire them or allow them to be involved in the marketplace because they were Christians. How did they respond? It would have been easy to talk about what they could not do. It would have been easy to talk about improving their situation before they could help others. It would have been easy to give reasons—all of which would have been valid—why they could not give. Yet, our text tells us that out of these things, together with overflowing joy, came a rich generosity in giving. What was this joy? I believe it was the pure joy of salvation, of having received the overflowing love of Jesus and being able to share the love of Jesus to others in palpable ways. This joy of giving the love of Jesus in concrete ways trumped all, even severe trial and extreme poverty.

Severe trial! Extreme poverty! Each of us in some way is experiencing these things right now. Each of us can list a host of reasons why we cannot give beyond what we are giving now, whether it is a gift of time, abilities, or money. We have so many demands placed on us, so many uncertainties about what the economy and the future will bring, and so little time, energy, and resources for ourselves and our families. Some of you are unemployed. The stresses and challenges of our lives threaten to rob us of our joy and cripple our attempts to "step out in faith." Where is the power to help us?

It is in Jesus Christ, the Gift long expected, who, for the *joy* set before Him, endured the cross and won for us the gift of salvation. "*Have no anxiety about anything,*" wrote Paul, instead, "*rejoice!*" Rejoice in the promise of forgiveness and of life eternal! I think that's how the Macedonians approached their giving. They had the "*peace of God that passes all understanding*" coupled with the overflowing joy of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior! Today, right now, rejoice in all that Jesus has given you, is giving you daily, and will give you in His overflowing love. Rejoice that in Christ you have all things, so that His love might powerfully flow out of you in a life of Christian giving. Let your joy—and the living in it—be your starting point, your power source for "stepping out in faith" in our campaign.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, restore to me the joy of Your salvation. Send me Your Holy Spirit through Your Word in extra measure this day, that I might live in the overflowing joy of giving. Amen.