

Minister's Message – January 2010

A Joyous New Year

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year! You must have read or heard these words a lot recently – and maybe said them a lot. What do we mean in saying these words? I try to say **happy** Christmas because of the association of merry with drinking and getting drunk – which is what some think this season is all about. I prefer to say happy Christmas and happy New Year. But what do I mean by these words?

Among the text messages I got was one wishing me a 'joyous New Year'. Why the word 'joyous' and not 'happy'? In the dictionary I found the word 'happy' comes directly after 'happen'. To my surprise the words are related: they both come from the same root meaning 'chance'. Wishing someone happiness is wishing good things will happen to them, which is like wishing them good luck. Life is a bit of a gamble. Is this what you believe? Are you making plans, maybe some resolutions, and hoping for the best in this New Year? What if bad things happen? Your happiness will be out the door!

We do not find the word 'luck' in the Bible. The word 'chance' is found only a few times where it expresses a man's point of view. The word 'happy' is found only a few times. The original Greek word is mostly translated as 'blessed'. 'Luck', 'chance' and even 'happy' are rarely found in the Bible. What we do find is this word 'blessed' and another word 'joy'. 'Blessed' carries the sense of someone blessing us. 'Joy', according to the dictionary, means 'source of gladness or delight'. 'Joy' comes from the mind and heart, not from our senses and feelings. It is an attitude not a reaction to circumstances. 'Joy' is a way of life.

A builder called Nehemiah said to his workers *do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength* (Nehemiah 8:10). The preacher called Paul said from his prison cell *Rejoice in the Lord always* (Philippians 4:4). Was he happy being in chains? He does not say, but he was rejoicing. What is this rejoicing all about?

Paul believed in God and in Jesus Christ the son of God who took away his sin. Now there is cause for rejoicing! He believed that God was sovereign over the universe, i.e. that he made all things and rules over all. God knows the past, and he also knows the future. That is why he is God. The year 2010 will not be a case of 'whatever will be, will be', but a case of 'whatever God plans and purposes will be'! Knowing this does not make us fatalistic because God says he loves his people and that he works all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

If God is in control of the future, as he is, and if he loves us, as he does if we believe in his son Jesus, then we have peace in our hearts and have the joy of the Lord. Our life is not ruled by chance happenings, by other people, and not even by ourselves. Everything is under the sovereign control of God – some call this the providence of God. Rather than our 'happiness' being dependent on what 'happens' to us this year, our 'joy' is in the Lord and is therefore unchanging because God does not change. It is not our circumstances but our Lord that determines our joy. May you know the joy of the Lord in 2010 and always!

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