

Are You Ready For Christmas?

I don't know about you but the year flew by so fast and 2019 is just around the corner. These days are going by so fast, you better not blink or you'll miss it! The problem that causes a lot of people is that on top of a very busy life, December usually brings a lot more "busy" ness with it. At a time when most people have no time to spare suddenly there are parties to attend, gifts to purchase, lights to hang, decorations to arrange, cookies to bake, eggnog to drink and preparations for travel or for hosting family from out of town. Did I cover everything?

I know it's a crazier time than it should be, but what can we do? I've got some ideas if you've got just a few minutes to read about a way to get through this "most insane time of the year" with more peace and a heart that is truly "ready for Christmas".

I know that the generally accepted definition among the secular populace and even Christians of being "ready for Christmas" is "Are all the gifts purchased?", "Is the house decorated?", or maybe "Are the travel arrangements in order?" or it could mean all the above.

What's wrong with this picture?

It seems that everything but the birth of the Savior of mankind is given thought.

Isn't it ironic that one of the many titles of our risen Savior is "Prince of peace" and most of us celebrate His birth during a time when there is anything but peace?

Isaiah 9

*⁶ For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.*

The government will rest on his shoulders.

And he will be called:

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*⁷ His government and its peace
will never end.*

*He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his
ancestor David
for all eternity.*

*The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!*

Everyone but Christ's true disciples won't understand the peace He has to offer, but we believers should. My great concern is that most Christians, or those that identify themselves as a Christian, do not know what real peace means. Have you ever stopped to wonder why the divorce rate among those who claim to be "born again believers" is not significantly lower than the other religions as well as the secular? The statistics of the divorce rate can be skewed in any number of ways mostly due to those being surveyed, the questions asked and how they are asked. But those even within the mainstream Christian community believe that the divorce rate is much higher than what should be expected.

Did he just bring the divorce rate into this?

Yes, I am relating the behaviors and customs of mainstream Christians at Christmas time to their divorce rate.

But here's the point...

The point I am making is that for most of those that check off "Christian" on the list of religious groups are not really born again and do not truly worship the Lord of heaven in their heart. They might not even go to church at all, and if they do, they just attend once a week simply for social reasons. You know these people; they sit next to you in the

pews and say all the right stuff or they work with you and might mention being a Christian but never discuss it. Jesus or the Bible is not on their mind much, but “American Idol” (or any other popular show) is. They might even talk about how they went to church on Sunday to one colleague and turn around and tell a course joke to some other colleague.

Matthew 7: ¹⁶ You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. ¹⁹ So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

Is it any wonder “they” think we’re hypocrites?

Is it any wonder why those that are “non-religious” are so outspoken about Christians being hypocrites? I suspect that we not only have many individuals like this, but entire churches could be categorized as such. Take the letter to Laodicea as an example:

Revelation 3: ¹⁴ “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation:

¹⁵ “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! ¹⁶ But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth! ¹⁷ You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and

blind and naked.

Did he just call the church of America lukewarm?

Do you see the correlation between the people Jesus talks about in Matthew 7 and His message in Revelation 3? These “Christians” always claim to be believers in Christ (by the very label itself), they might even always attend on Sunday, “yep, I can do that at least, no one will have any doubts about my beliefs”. So they are not cold in that regard. But do they show up early to praise God in song or dance? Will he join the prayer team on Monday morning before work? Does she share with others their conviction about why they believe in God and that Jesus is the Way? Will they devote time each day to get to know God more through His Word and talk to God in prayer giving Him all their burdens? Do they congregate with other believers regularly, talking about what God is doing in their lives? So they are not hot, are they?

Malachi 3: ¹⁶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name.

¹⁷ “They will be my people,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “On the day when I act in judgment, they will be my own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient child. ¹⁸ Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”

It’s time to get practical

OK, now it’s time for the practical advice of giving this season true meaning and finding the peace that Jesus spoke of.

Matthew 11: ²⁸ Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

The key phrase I see here is "Let me teach you". What do you think this means? Being a disciple of Jesus is not a passive activity, it is being deliberate and intentional with our time and attention. For me, letting Him teach me is reading the Word of God daily and expecting to learn something new each time. I will hover over the confusing passages long enough for them to soak in or at least put them before someone else that has followed God longer than I have and have them teach me via the Spirit of Jesus.

Are you letting Jesus teach you?

It also means attending regular meetings with others that have a similar zeal for following Him and sharing this joy with them as well as the trials. This "training" that I speak of, which is all about learning how to love Him and others (remember the 2 greatest commandments?), is simply being obedient to His commands. This is not going "above and beyond" as some might think. The Scriptures make it clear that this is the work He's given to us all. It may start out as an obligation, but when it starts to soak in (assuming your heart is soft), you will enjoy it more and more.

To put it clearly and so that there is no misunderstanding...

In order to have the peace that Jesus promises, do this:

Follow Jesus with all your heart and allow nothing to distract you from doing these things.

1. Diligently read His Word daily.

1. **Joshua 1:** ⁸ Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

2. Never stop praying and be thankful. You'll become more and more effective over time and with practice.

1. **1 Thessalonians 5:** ¹⁶ Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

2. **Philippians 4:** ⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

3. Fellowship regularly with other believers that love God at least the same or more than you do.

1. **Hebrews 10:** ²³ Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. ²⁴ Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. ²⁵ And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

I can only speak from experience and this is what I know to be

true. I am convinced that if you follow these activities in earnest and with persistence, you will be transformed and certainly become more and more like Him.

By doing these things you will find His wonderful peace and will be all the more eager to discuss how great God is with those that are willing to listen and desperately need to hear it!

I guarantee that you will find His peace if you follow Him closely

My friends, I am far from perfect and in fact, I am the greatest sinner I know. And yet, in spite of my sin, I do know this: Jesus has changed my heart and ever since I have determined in my mind to follow Him by reading His Word daily and taking His instructions of Loving Him and others seriously, I have a much greater peace than I've ever realized I could have.

I am ruined for all other work. ESPN no longer satisfies me and I get bored of it now when at one time I could never get enough of it! I am not the same man that I was when I committed in my heart and started to diligently follow Him. I am not someone special, but I made a very special commitment. While there are some that commit to physical training or financial training, I've decided to train in His ways and I plan on graduating with honors someday, God willing.

2 Timothy 2: ³ Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. ⁵ And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules.

1 Corinthians 9: ²⁴ Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to

win! ²⁵ All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. ²⁶So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. ²⁷ I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

Will you train with me?

“Dear Lord, thank you for the wisdom you have given me, the Godly wisdom that only you can give. Thank you for making it clear to me what I should be doing regularly and the impact it has made on my life. You’ve greatly simplified things for me and although I have trials in my life you’ve given me a peace to endure them. I want all to know you more and experience your peace. Help me to get the word out that you are the Living God just as your Word states and that you have not changed since the days of Moses and are still in the reconciliation and transformation business. You are great and mighty and I will commit my life to you. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

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