

For the **JOY** set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Heb 12:2

My favorite time of year . . . . well, one of my favorite times of the year for sure. I've been having some great "grandpa-time" with Tinley, the acres between Leoti and Wichita are exploding with green growth (despite our crazy weather), and March Madness is as mad as ever. The thrill and agony of sports on full display. With the end of the basketball season schools are already preparing for the next chapter. Some coaches quit or retire, some get removed. It is just that time of year. One image plays on repeat in my mind, Jerome Tang, K-State's new basketball coach, and his J.O.Y. shirt. Video clips showing Tang coaching his old team, Baylor, with a green t-shirt the reads JOY . . . . **J**esus **O**thers **Y**ourself. That's my kind of coach!!

March Madness provides great opportunities to witness JOY, or lack thereof. There is a danger in the madness as over 3 billion dollars are wagered on teenager's abilities to make a basket or stop a fast break. Most of the bets will be "lost", and hopefully it's discretionary income that they weren't counting on to pay the bills. But sadly, we know that's not always true. Some lives will be shattered, ruined, because of a botched layup or a late bucket that moves the "spread" against them. As with ALL addictions, the search for life's answers in the habits of gambling, sex, alcohol, drugs, pride, pornography, unbalanced church life, unbalanced family life, unbalance work life, and/or greed, will ultimately lead to a realization that you can't buy or find JOY in the "things of man".

Easter is approaching and we think of the empty tomb, smiling with earthly JOY as we prepare for a weekend of egg hunts, chocolate, Peeps, and family. JOY is evident on the face of youngsters as their new Easter clothes celebrate the Son-Rise in a pageantry of colors. Our text from Hebrews tells us there was a **cost** for our JOY. **For the JOY set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame . . . .** Our JOY comes from the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Because a few days later, Jesus claimed victory over death, fulfilling prophecy, showing himself to his

disciples and followers, before ascending into Heaven. Recently I heard a sermon regarding the POWER OF THE CROSS! To those outside of a relationship with Christ the cross is foolishness. Just a tool for torture worn as a piece of jewelry. **But to us who are being saved it is the power of God** (1 Cor 1:18). As Coach Tang's shirt taught, Jesus must come first before we can experience the JOY of life. Try putting yourself, or even others, before Christ, or try to find your joy through habits or addictions, and your life will **NOT** experience the fruit of the Holy Spirit called JOY (Gal 5:22).

King David prayed these words in Psalm 51:10,12, **Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me . . . . . Restore to me the JOY of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.** Our JOY comes at the expense of Christ's salvific act, death and resurrection! Without a pure, or contrite, heart . . . without a renewed and steadfast spirit . . . in other words, without Christ in me . . . . . NO JOY!! So, Lord, I pray, **Restore to me the JOY of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.** With Jesus placed before Others and before Yourself, JOY comes in the morning.

The text of Hebrews 12:1-3 reads, **Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (Coach Tang), let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.** Let's use scripture to move us onto the path marked SPIRITUAL JOY.

**FIRST:** come before God, as King David did, humbly bow and pray, **Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting** (Ps 139:23-24).

**SECOND:** keep the main thing, the main THING. From Phil 4:8, **what-**

**ever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.** Associate with, and think about . . . . GOD things. Read the Bible, go to church and bible study, listen to worship music and Christian podcasts, and surround yourself with like-minded witnesses.

**LAST:** stand firm!! Ephesians 6:13 (the Armor of God verses), **Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then . . .** As we all can attest, evil comes every day! We are smothered in advertising and media that promotes the devil's warfare. WE MUST STAND FIRM!

A daily prayer could be: *Lord, lead me out of darkness. Place the things of Your JOY before me this day. Keep my eyes fixed on YOU. Be my foundation that I might stand firm against the devil's attacks today. In the name of Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith, and my life, AMEN.*

Grace, Mercy and Peace!

Shad

