



## LIFE GROUP SERMON NOTES

### “THE CHRISTMAS TREE”

Ps. Jim Laffoon – December 17, 2017

#### WARM-UP (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. *No right or wrong answers.*

- What kind of Christmas tree do you usually put up, natural or artificial? Why do you prefer one over the other?
- What one word would best describe Christmas for you?
- What characteristic of Christmas would you like to keep all year around?

#### WORD (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at <http://www.bethelworld.org>

*“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.*

Even the tradition of decorating Christmas trees was introduced to Christianity probably around the fifteenth century. Evergreens have been a symbol of eternal life for a long time, both in Scripture and in secular literature. The Bible uses the life of tree to symbolize our Christian life. The Christmas tree is a symbol of joy, peace and warmth. These are not result of Christmas, they are the result of Chris life in us. These sentiments that characterize Christmas are the essential elements that we seek in life. Today we are going to see in Scripture how can we tap into peace and joy during the rest of the year, not just on Christmas. For that we will look at the Secret of *The Branched Life*. The secret of what we so eagerly look for is in our choice to stay connected to the source of life.

#### 1. The personification of a branched life

The Christmas tree is an evergreen. There is a concept on the scripture called the branch. Jesus is called the branch because he demonstrated for us what it is like to walk with God. Jesus is the personification of what a branched life means. He identified his power as being fully connected to the Father (John 5:30). He said that everything he did was guided by what the Father does. *I can do nothing on my own... I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. Just as the **Father** knows me and I know the **Father**.*

With his example, Jesus taught us how to live the Christian life by being connected to the heavenly life. Jesus was able to face the greatest challenges of life: temptation, betrayal, loneliness, death, and keep his joy, because his joy wasn't dependent on the circumstances but in his communion with the Father.

#### 2. The power of a branched life

Zechariah 4 tells us of a vision he had regarding Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zerubbabel was the leader that had brought the captives of Israel from Babylon back to the promised land. They faced innumerable

obstacles and dangers, but in the hardest of times, God showed the prophet Zechariah that Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, were like two olive trees connected to the presence of the Holy Spirit and that by his power they would accomplish God's purpose. Like Zerubbabel and Joshua, we don't have the strength or ingenuity by ourselves to accomplish the task God has given us. If we stay connected to God, we will have the power to light and fuel God's purpose for our lives, marriages, communities. If we live our lives independently, not as a branch, we will wither and won't bear fruit long. Apart from him we can do nothing.

### 3. The principles of a branched life.

When you understand the essentiality of staying connected to the God who saved you, you will seek to stay connected. John 15 paints us the picture of three types of branches that teach us vital principles of the branched life.

- The Wild Branch (John 15:1-2) is the one that grows by itself, without anybody tending or correcting it. These branches may have had a great potential, but because nobody is watching and pruning them, they grow wild. This type of branch shows us that we need people around our lives to reach our greatest potential. We need to stay in spiritual family.
- The Worthwhile Branch (John 15:3-5) teaches us that everything we need is in Christ. If we remain close to him, our prayers are answered because our desires become more like his. We experience the reality of his love. If we abide in the vine, his joy and peace will be in us. When you have the foundation of Christ's joy, you have the potential to enjoy all of human life more.
- The Withered Branch. If you don't abide in me, you might as well be taken off the vine. If we don't stay connected to the vine, our joy begins to wither, our temper gets more easily agitated, our stress level rises, anger surfaces. If we don't spend time with God, eventually nobody will want to spend time with us.

Many Christians abide in another branch instead of abiding in Christ. They replace God with the church, a life group or a leader. But the reality is we can have the best relationships and best church, but if you don't abide in Christ we will wither. This withering is really subtle; therefore, we must be watchful.

This time of the year can be very acute, it is the time of the year we expect to be happy, but a season is not supposed to make us happy. We are not more joyful in December than in February or June. The joy is determined by our choice to stay close to God. The choice is to realize that we are but branches whose whole lives are dependent upon the tree. The source of our lives centers on our Triune God who is ready to pour down his life in us if we just would abide in Him.

### **PERSONAL APPLICATION (10-15 minutes)**

**Choose an item below to discuss, or introduce another related topic for discussion.**

- What kind of branch better describes the kind of branch you are? Wild, worthwhile, or withered?
- What area of your life needs to experience the life of the trunk flowing through your branch? (Your marriage, work, health)
- What are the first indicators in your life that you are withering? (Stress, anger, impatience). How can you be more sensitive to quickly go back to abiding in God's presence?

### **PRAYER (10-15 minutes)**

**Pray for any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.**

- Repent for thinking and acting like you can do anything on your own instead of depending on him.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to produce in you a greater desire and will to spend more time with the Lord.
- Pray that you may be more aware of the signs that indicate that you are withering, and restore your dependence on God promptly.