

1 Thess 5:16-25
"Blue Christmas"

Are you familiar with the term "Blue Christmas"? According to Wikipedia, Blue Christmas (also called the Longest Night) in the Western Christian tradition, is a day in the Advent season marking the longest night of the year. On this day, some churches in Western Christian denominations hold a church service that honors people that have lost loved ones and are experiencing grief. It is an acknowledgment that Christmas isn't a merry time for all. Unfortunately, grief is a reality of this life and grief seems to be especially hard during the Holiday Season, which culminates on Christmas. So, the words made most famous by Elvis, "I'll have a blue Christmas without you", reign true for many. It is this fact that makes our text this morning especially hard. For those of us wrestling with grief this time of year, Paul's words sting. They may even feel offensive or only frustrate our Blue Christmas. But I believe Paul's words, properly understood, can turn a Blue Christmas into a Merry Christmas. To help us properly understand Paul's instruction this morning it is necessary that we identify the situation that prompted him to write these words. We find that in **1 Thess 4:13-14**. It reads as follows: *"¹³ And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died."* It is in this truth that our text couched. So, having set the groundwork for our text today let's dig in. In doing so, I

want to share three things from the text that can turn a Blue Christmas into a Merry Christmas.

First, even in our sorrow, God's will be at work in our lives. V16-18 “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.” What is God's will? Not just our rejoicing. Not just our praying or our thankfulness but even our grief, our anguish, our suffering. All circumstances. If you happen to be dealing with grief, or suffering in any way, God is still there, working it out for you. This is why we can rejoice, pray, and give thanks always, even during the most challenging circumstances, because we know God will's is good and perfect, even if we don't understand how. We rejoice, we pray, we give thanks because we believe in the end everything will be made right. Church, when we believe this a Blue Christmas morphs into a Merry Christmas.

Jeremiah 29:10-11 “¹⁰ This is what the Lord says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Romans 8:27-28 “²⁷ And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. ²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together¹ for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.”

Rev 21:3-4 “³ I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴ He will

wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

Second, hold to what is good. V19-22 “⁹ Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Do not scoff at prophecies, ²¹ but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.²² Stay away from every kind of evil.” What makes Christmas merry? Is it the gifts? Is it the lights or the beautiful decorations? Is it the prime rib, the turkey, or the ham? Is it having everyone we love healthy and present? If these things are what makes Christmas merry then we all will face a number of Blue Christmases. Why? All these things come and go. These things are transient. So, they cannot alone or exclusively be what makes Christmas merry. So, what is it? The good. The good is why believers don’t grieve like nonbelievers? Christmas can be merry in the face of grief brought on by the loss of a loved one, or by sickness or some disappointment because of the good. The good being Jesus the Christ. Christmas is merry because of Jesus! Because of the promise of eternal life given to all who trust in him, whether they are asleep or alive. Hold to the good and our Christmas will indeed be merry and bright!

John 10:11, 14-15 “¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. ¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, ¹⁵ just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.”

John 16:33 “³³ I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But be of good cheer, because I have overcome the world.”

Finally, trust that God will finish what God has started. V23-24 “²³ Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and

may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. ²⁴ God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.” The greatest threat to the gospel message is the teaching that our salvation is not sure. That is to say, we not only have a part in being saved, but it is up to us to stay saved. Dangerous! This teaching will never produce what those who teach it hope for (obedience, sanctification, holiness) and it is a hinderance to true peace in Christ Jesus. Believe this and you are sure to have many Blue Christmases. Paul is clear here; God will finish what he has started. If God needs our help, then God is not God at all. God does not need our help. What God requires is our belief in his Son. It is belief in Jesus that leads to our obedience and complete trust in God. This is faith and this makes Christmas merry.

Romans 8:29-31 “²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. ³¹ What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?”

1 Cor 1:7-9 “⁷ Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸ He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. ⁹ God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Phil 1:6 “And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.”

Sisters and brothers, I recognize that grief is hard and can become overwhelming, but I also believe that trusting that God’s will is still at work in our sorrow, holding to what’s good and knowing that God will finish what God has started can shield us from the blues. Merry Christmas in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.