

June 29, 2014

Joy's Focus Philippians 1:3-11

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

The theme of this book from Paul to the Philippians is joy. Although he is in prison, he did not dwell on the circumstances of his life. Instead he knew the true **JOY** that came from being a **bond-servant** of Christ.

God has an incredible love for us, in that He had one son and His son was willing to accept His invitation to go to the cross to suffer and die for sinners like you and me. That is why we come and worship Him. His perfect work on Calvary is what gives us salvation.

When we accept Christ, we are "set apart" or sanctified for the use intended by our creator. A pen is "sanctified" when used to write. Eyeglasses are "sanctified" when used to improve sight. A human is sanctified, therefore, when he or she lives according to God's design and purpose.

Our change should show in our lives. So the people who know us should be so surprised, they would ask "What is going on in your life to make you so joyful?" You would say, "I don't know, but the Lord is working in my heart and He is changing me." And God is glorified through that change.

You may ask what kind of changes should be happening?

Last week we looked at Philippians 1:1-2. This morning we will be looking at verses 3-11. We are focusing on this one word; this word JOY.

It should be true that people who know us are completely blown away when they see that we have so much joy. You may ask, do you really think people will notice? Yes, people will notice.

ILLUSTRATION:

I was at Broken Arrow Electric this last week pricing motion lights and made a comment that I needed to call my wife and let her help decide which light to get. He said something like, "you put a positive light on everything don't you?" I commented "A happy wife is a happy life". He said, "that is a lesson, I need to learn. I suspect you consider your glass half full. I wish I could do that."

Remember, we are not talking about happiness. Let me review a couple of definitions from last week.

We tend to want spend our lives trying to do things that we think will make us **HAPPY**. We pursue happiness. But, what happens when things don't go your way? What happens when you lose your job and you can no longer pay the house payments on the house that you are so proud of? You are no longer happy.

Christ offers us something much better than happiness.

Christ offers us **JOY!**

The definition of **joy** is *“A persistent confidence in the character of God that transcends circumstances and leads to a sense of well-being”*.

That is why Paul could be unjustly in prison, chained to a Roman guard and still have joy.

Paul learned to be content in whatever circumstance he was in. **He learned it by trusting in God!**

Paul viewed his circumstances as coming from God and that is how he could be content.

My fear is that if I was put in prison unjustly, and I was allowed to write a letter to you, my focus would be to start a prayer vigil, start an email describing my situation, or contact a congressman to get me out. It would be a very WAYNE focused letter. I also fear that many of you would have the same reaction to the situation. But, not Paul!

OK. So where do we go from here? Let's let Paul answer this as we read from this morning's scripture.

Philippians 1:3-11

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, ⁵ in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷ For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

If I am to have a life that is filled with joy, I must have the right **focus!** I have entitled today's message **Joy's Focus**.

I would like to consider two things this morning

BODY:

I. Joyfully give Thanks to God for What He is Doing.

There is always a reason to be thankful. Look at verse 3. Here is a guy in prison, and what does he begin with after the salutation?

³ I thank my God

We normally do not pray immediately when face tough circumstances. When we finally think enough about it that we pray, what do we pray? "Lord, please change my circumstances.

We might wake up in the morning and have a cold or illness. Our prayer might be, "Make me feel better, so I can get my work done today."

Paul does not think in that way. Not only does he NOT forget to pray, he also does not pray for himself. He prays

³ I thank my God

There is always an opportunity for us to thank God, if we choose to do so. We are selfish people and selfish people struggle with joy. Selfish people always look at circumstances and consider how they relate to me. But, Paul has his eyes on Christ. He writes, ³ I thank my God

What was he thankful for?

For most us, if we did attempt to thank God, we would say

- At least, I thank you that I had a good night's sleep
- That I had a good breakfast
- That my headache is gone from last night.
- Etc.

I am not saying that asking God for health or thanking God for personal comfort is wrong.

But, Paul is so selfless that he is not even thanking God for stuff. He is thanking God for something bigger. Notice the end of **verse 3**. He was thanking God

in all my remembrance of you,

Paul had a mind that immediately went to God. Who does he thank God for? He was thanking God for his brothers and sisters in Philippi.

There are two reasons why. The first one is found in **verse 5**.

⁵ in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

1. Your Participation in the Gospel.

Paul was thankful for participation or fellowship that the Philippians had with Paul in sharing the Gospel since the beginning. They had maintained a close mutual relationship with each other.

They had participated in many ways.

- Financially.
- Opening up their homes.
 - Remember in Acts 16, Lydia, who was a seller of purple, and her household were converted, she asked Paul to stay at her house. Her home is where the Christians were hanging out.
 - The Philippian jailer was at the prison when an earthquake came. He started to kill himself thinking the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out and told him that they were all they. He preached the Gospel to him and he and his household were baptized. The Philippian jailer took him to his house and bandaged his wounds.

Verse 7 reads

⁷ For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

Paul was thankful that for the **last ten years**, they have been participating in the forward thrust of the Gospel. Paul was SO excited about the Gospel that, although he was **in prison**, he was **excited** that the Philippians were still **proclaiming the Gospel. He praised God for it!**

Paul's focus was on the Gospel. He lived and breathed the Gospel. That happened because he was a **bond-servant** of Christ. Because he was committed to serve God, he **cared about what God cared about.**

I would like to ask you:

What do you focus on?

What do you get excited about?

What kind of things do you talk about?

ILLUSTRATION:

You might say, "I have not seen your daughter in some time, how is she doing." What is the typical response of a Christian? I am not talking about an unsaved person here; I am talking about a Christian.

- My daughter is doing well.
- She is now a partner of the law firm.
- She is moving up the corporate ladder.
- She and her husband have built a new house.
- The oldest daughter is making straight "A's".
- The son excels in sports.

- The other daughter is doing well in music.

I am so excited about my daughter.

What do we tend to focus on? Material things, material things, material things. Those are temporary circumstances. When we stay focused on temporary circumstances, so we can stay happy, we will remain happy as long as

- The daughter job continues to go well.
- They keep their house.
- The daughter continues to make good grades.
- The son wins in sports.
- The music contest is won.

But, people, sooner or later that all ends and then we crash. We become discouraged and even depressed.

Why?

Because we are focusing on circumstances.

Paul did not focus on material circumstances, Paul focused on the spread of the Gospel. **That why he could be SO filled with joy.**

I don't know about you, but that is what I want for me; that is what I want for my family; that is what I want for my church family.

I would like for this church to have so much joy that when a visitor would come to worship with us they would see so much joy that they will say, **"I want to become a part of this!"**

Through that joy we can share with them that we are thankful that Christ died for us and we are here to worship and praise his name. It is just naturally a joyful thing.

The second reason Paul was thankful for these believers is found in verse 6.

6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

2. Their Continued Participation in the Gospel

Paul was confident (take it to the bank) that He (that is God) who began a good work in you (that is their salvation) will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul had seen their participation in the Gospel. Paul is saying, "I have seen you guys be a blessing to me and God using you." It is all God, verse 6 says **He who began a good work**, right? Although the Philippians are doing the work, the thanks in verse 3 all goes to God.

God is confident of their salvation, because one of the key marks of a Christian, is that you are passionate about the Gospel going forth. We have a passion for the Gospel to go forth.

It is because we are saved. That is not natural.

- It is not natural to put checks in the offering.
- It is not natural to get out of bed in the morning and go to church to worship God.
- It is not natural to donate items to charitable organizations.
- It is not natural to take time out of your weekend to help with a garage sale at the church.
- It is not natural to take time out of your week to help with VBS.
- It is not natural to work at a snow cone stand without compensation.
- It is not natural to preach the Gospel.

We do it because we want to spread the Gospel. As we share the Gospel, by God's grace we will grow. As long as we **focus on spiritual realities** instead of **material circumstances of life**, we not only will we see growth in the church, but we also will be a people who REJOICE.

What is the focus for rejoicing?

It is number 1, **Joyfully giving Thanks to God for What He is Doing.**
There is always a reason to give thanks to God.

A second focus is found in verse 9-11. I call this...

II. Specifically Praying for the Spiritual Benefit of Others.

Paul has praised God and now he is focusing on prayer. What Paul asks for is incredible.

What does he pray for? It is not for himself, it is for the believers.

Philippians 1:9-11

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

What does Paul pray for?

1. Increasing Love. (verse 9)

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more.

The church was struggling with **unity**. The lack of unity came from **selfishness and the lack of humility**.

What we need as a church is LOVE. What we need to pray for is that people would have more love. The end of verse 9 suggests that the love we pray for should not only be **Increasing Love**, but also...

2. Discriminating Love.

that your love may abound still more and more in **real knowledge and all discernment**

This would be knowledge of the Gospel; the knowledge that would cause us to make wise decisions. That is called discernment.

ILLUSTRATION:

How do we normally pray for people we are praying for?

- Lord, he has a need, meet that material need.
- He has a health problem, cure their health.
- A car problem, help him.
- A financial problem, help him.

Paul is not there. Paul is not even mentioning material things, because Paul knew there was so much more to the Christian life than stuff. He was not praying about stuff.

He was praying about more important things.

- That their love would increase.
- That they would love with real knowledge and all discernment.

Why would Paul pray for these things? It is answered in verse 10.

¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent

The purpose of the prayer: Paul wanted them to make the best choices possible. He did not want them to get caught up in the things that really didn't matter.

Note again that he did not pray about stuff. Not that praying for those things is wrong. But, if we continue to pray only for earthly things, we will continue to get disappointed.

Joy is getting beyond those types of material circumstances!

We need to start praying for people in ways that really matters. We should be praying that he makes them the best people possible.

The last half of verses 10 and verse 11 tells us three ways that we can be the best people possible.

1. **in order to be sincere**

A sincere person is an honest person. A person who is clean and spotless.

ILLUSTRATION:

This is like having a garment that you think is dirty, but you are not really sure. You cannot see the stain in the indoor lighting, so you take it outdoors in the full sunshine. There you can spot the dirty area.

This is the word about having a character that when someone takes out into the light and looks at us, he will not find a “spot”.

That is a sincere person. No one is accusing you of being dishonest or deceptive in any way.

2. **and blameless until the day of Christ**

The word is blameless. It literally means, “not tripping over a stumbling block. Paul does not want us to trip over a stumbling block, or be a stumbling block for others. Our lives should be so filled with Christ, that we do not hinder anyone from being saved.

3. ¹¹ **having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ,**

This is referring to our works. We cannot do righteous works on our own, but Jesus Christ can do those works through us.

The end result is **to the glory and praise of God.**

That is how we should be praying for people.

When we pray for a Christian, we should be praying that they will become the best person that they can be. When we pray for a non-Christian, we should be praying that they will repent and accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

ILLUSTRATION:

Let me use myself as an example. If I get sick, you might pray “Please heal Wayne” and he heals me.

I get sick again and you pray, “Please heal Wayne” and a second time he heals me. We praise God for the healing, and that is good. Thank you for the prayer!

I get sick a third time and it is a lot rougher and you pray, and God pulls me through again.

Sooner or later, no matter how great of a prayer you make to God, I am going to die. We all know that, right? If you are praying, heal ‘em, heal ‘em, heal ‘em, sooner or later you are going to get discouraged because God did not answer your prayer.

You can pray, “Help my car to run, help my car to run” but, sooner or later, your car is going to break down and be beyond the point of no return.

Unless you can get beyond praying for these temporal things that can bring you happiness, and I not saying that it is wrong, but unless you can start focusing on the eternal realities and praising God for what he is doing, and praying for the spiritual benefit of other believers, you are not going to have JOY.

CONCLUSION:

There are only two things that matter in life, it is God and others.

Paul was focused on God, he thanked him, and he was focused on others. He prayed for them.

A depressed person is a selfish person. He will focus on his circumstances.

- My truck doesn't run.
- My bank account is empty.
- My roof is leaking.
- My feet hurt.

Depression is me, me, me and my selfish circumstances and that doesn't praise God.

The focus of joy is

- Giving Thanks to God for What He is Doing.
- Specifically Praying for the Spiritual Benefit of Others.

God wants to change you. You get that change by reading God's Word and praying that you receive discernment to make the right choices in life to make you the best person you can be.

By God's grace, if we can get our eyes off of ourselves long enough to focus on eternal things and learn to trust God's grace, we would be a joyful people doing the very thing God made us and saved us to do.

Have you turned to God and said, "I love you so much! I want to serve you for the rest of my life". When you do you will begin to **experience true JOY in your life.**

You can have it if you want it. You start by praying to God and telling Him that you believe in Him and that you realize that you are in sin. Ask repentance from Him and be immersed with Him in baptism.

We are also here with open arms, if you would like to identify yourself as part of this family of God in the Greenwood Christian church.

The Family of God

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family, the family of God.