

KEEPING YOUR JOY - The Heartfelt Theology of an Isolated Prisoner - Part 13
Sunday, September 20th, 2020, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2049
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COUNTING EVERYTHING LOSS FOR KNOWING CHRIST - THE PROCESS OF FINDING LIFE'S DEEPEST JOY

Philippians 3:1-11 - "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. [2] Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— [4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— [10] that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

There is a striking feature in the first two verses of this profound text. There is nothing in verses 2 through 11 that would make you think Paul's topic was in any way related to **joy**. Yet he **starts** his whole string of thoughts by letting us know it is precisely **joy** that he's thinking and writing about - "***Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.***"

The verses following **verse one** map out the route to inner joy. This is instructive. It tells me true, Christ-centered joy doesn't come from trying to think happy thoughts. It is not

some mystically induced, trance-like state. And it is not **denial** of circumstances. It doesn't come from avoiding trouble. I can't **manufacture** or **manipulate my mental self** into some kind of joyful state of mind in my walk with Jesus, and I'm not expected to. Joy is found, in our text, at the end of a path that, on the surface of things, looks a bit uphill. You wouldn't expect to find joy at the end of it.

Because this path to joy doesn't look immediately inviting or exciting Paul feels he needs to **remind** me to stay on the path where joy will be found. Because he knows my tendency to look for joy in all the wrong places he is going to keep me **"safe"**(1) by **making sure I don't side-step the right path.**

There is something else here - another little nugget of wisdom that can easily be overlooked. Paul knows **everyone** wants joy. He knows we all want a life well lived. This hunger can drive us into searches for joy that can be reckless and desperate blindly off target. We can constantly be victims of the latest inner peace and fulfillment huckster with some new remedy for our ills. So Paul says joy will be found, **not** in discovering something we've never heard before, but in **relearning** truth we've **already** known:

"...To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you"(1b).

Paul feels we need this caution. It is easier to heed something **brand new** than something **repeated**. Paul approaches this subject knowing a **repeated message** is sometimes the least interesting - both to **deliver** and **receive**. This is why he says he's not going to be **"troubled"**(1) or **put off** from giving the most important message - **"To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you"**(3:1).

Note that little phrase. Paul is telling all of us here today we haven't drained all the benefit from what we already know quite yet. If you want to keep your life **"safe"** - **safely anchored in flavorful riches of true joy** - you need to take Paul's words deeply into your heart and memory. Make sure you are **spiritually prepared** to do that as you listen

today.

This is more than just a theological download. It's more than just Biblical interest. Paul says your **safety** is at stake. And, as he's led by the Holy Spirit in the selection of his words, he is careful, more so than usual, to **set up his message** in a way that will alert us to the fact that its importance is probably greater than we might take the time to notice at first glance.

I see **three surprising insights** in this text. And I think this is why Paul takes the time to set them up for us the way he does. There is nothing in our **cultural conditioning** to encourage us to think the way Paul is going to tell us to think in this text. These three surprising insights go against all the daily conditioning of our world. We'll study one this morning and two next Sunday morning.

1) **IF YOU WANT TO FIND DEEPEST JOY IN KNOWING CHRIST YOU MUST SET YOURSELF TO BE AGAINST WHAT IS CONTRARY TO HIM**

To follow Christ is to set yourself to be **against** certain things. You can't be **passionate** about knowing Christ and also be **mild** in your judgment of everything that is **contrary** to Christ. In Romans chapter twelve Paul says we must **hate** what is evil if we are to have any hope at all of **clinging** to what is good:

Romans 12:9 - "Let love be genuine. **Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.**" That's the same idea.

The spirit of this age is far too intelligent to attack Christian commitment by enticing you and me directly to **deny** Christ. Satan doesn't bother with this because he knows he doesn't **have** to. He knows there is a much more effective way to win the battle for your heart and mind.

The attack that has much greater success than enticing me to **deny** Christ is to press me, by the peer pressure of this age, to **accept** everything else **along with** my commitment to Christ. Here Satan shows his true genius. This is denying Christ by **casual, gradual default** rather than by explicit **statement and plan**.

To help us see this Paul launches his words with a deliberate shock to our system: **“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh”**(3:2). At first we’re a little taken back. Then, of course, we remember this was a somewhat common expression used to show the ceremonial uncleanness (not personal inferiority) of Gentiles as opposed to ceremonial purity of the Jews in the New Testament.

It’s even found on the lips of Jesus (**Matthew 7:6,15:26**). And that might help explain Paul’s use were it not for the fact that Paul **isn’t** using the term to describe **Gentiles**. The best evidence is he’s using it to describe **Jews** (Jewish members of the church) who were trying to subvert the centrality of Christ in the lives of these Philippian converts.

In other words, there was **nothing**, even in Paul’s day, that was culturally acceptable in his use of the term in this Jewish context. It was plain, outright, shocking. And this isn’t the only time Paul did this. You will find four or five times - just in the letters we have recorded in the New Testament - where Paul uses equally descriptive terms to address those who turn themselves against the cross of Christ.

This wasn’t a rare, uncontrolled outburst from Paul. This wasn’t just **name calling**. It seems to be his standard, studied, repeated response to those who set themselves in opposition against the rich grace of Jesus Christ.

I don't have time to unfold this the way it deserves. But here is the question - a very **important** question: ***How prepared are you to stand for Christ when it means, not just liking Him, or singing love songs to Him, but when it means standing against something or someone else? Are you teaching your children - who will very shortly be adults - to not be passionately against anything besides intolerance?***

This is not a plea for arrogance or lovelessness. Christians must always respond with grace when they are wronged and persecuted. Mark that sentence. We must always respond with grace and mercy when **we** are wronged **personally**. But while I have breath I will never respond with acquiescence when **Christ** is maligned and **salvation** threatened. I am passionately against belief systems that marginalize the glory of the Incarnation, sinless life, redeeming death, and resurrection of my Lord, God the Son.

My own opinion is God has allowed the uprise of strong anti-Christian voices in our own land to expose the church's entrenched **relativism**. Eventually, in His wise grace, He will force us out of our comfortable tolerance by the increasing pressure brought against His name.

Let me say it again, Paul is describing the **surprising pathway to joy**. And here's the first key point. With all the life God grants me on this earth before I die the **only** way I manifest my **devotion** to Christ Jesus is by the way I **reject** what would displease Him. **Any** other commitment to Christ is just empty love-talk. It's **flat tire** discipleship. And there will be no joy in it because I will **never** find joy in Jesus until ***I press myself to choose devotion to Him over another.*** Joy comes from planting the flag when there's a real price for doing so.

This has become increasingly hard for us because we are constantly being trained to believe it is only narrow minded, fundamentalist bigots who choose **against** anything. Tolerant people are **for** things - not **against** things. More than that, there is a high cultural cost to standing against things the culture celebrates. This has greatly flattened out meaningful Christian discipleship.

Here's the heartening close. Following Jesus today is probably the most similar it has ever been to following Jesus in the New Testament era. You are in very good company. And always remember, it is never loveless to be against what grieves the heart of Christ Jesus.

More on this next Sunday.