

THE RECOVERY OF LOST JOY - Part one

Sunday, March 19th, 2023 - 5:30 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

LOST JOY THROUGH BECOMING ACCUSTOMED TO AN INCOMPLETE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

Romans 6:15-18 - “What then? *Are we to sin* because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! [16] *Do you not know* that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, *which leads to death* [so the difference *not* knowing something can make isn't slight or marginal], or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? [17] But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the *standard of teaching to which you were committed*, [18] and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”

Don't read these verses through too quickly or lightly. Paul is saying if professing Christians - that's his audience here - don't **know** something deeply they will continue to be bound in sin - and its accompanying **guilt** - even while holding on to an evangelical confession of faith. That's the issue where opening this series with.

There is a kind of discouragement that comes when you finally settle for less than you had expected in a certain endeavor. I remember when I was putting up some rough shelving in our basement cold room. The plan called for drilling holes right into concrete walls so self-tapping screws could hold the two-by-four studs on which the shelves would rest.

My first discovery was there were such things as masonry drill bits. I learned this the hard way. I remember it like it was yesterday. After drilling the same hole for 45 minutes my then good friend Bob Luery told me on the phone that I needed a masonry drill bit. I struggled getting the present bit out of the hole I had made so I reversed the drill to dislodge the old bit and put in a masonry bit.

But this still seemed to take forever. No matter how hard I leaned on that old drill it didn't bore into that wall one bit. I called Bob again. It was then that I learned the existence of something called a hammer drill. Bob was bringing his over. I just kept drilling until he arrived - the very same hole.

Bob came down the stairs and just watched me sweating away with my old drill. After a few minutes he asked a very searching question - "Do you have that drill on **reverse?**" Immediately I flashed back to **removing** that regular bit from the hole in the wall.

There's the best picture of drudgery I can give you. Working hard yet feeling disappointed in the results. What if Bob hadn't come? Is there anything worse than just going through the same motions and getting used to something that seemed to fall so short of what you felt it should be?

The subject for this series is, for want of a better title, the recovery of lost joy. There comes to many of us the sense of drudgery - a lack of joy and development in our walk with the Lord. There are many reasons for this - and we will look at them. There are also Scriptural solutions for the humble and obedient. On Biblical terms, the power of the gospel works. People can be made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

Of course, we must have Biblically informed expectations. We don't have everything in Christ Jesus that we will one day have. But what we have is *real* and *life-producing*. In short, there is *fullness of joy* - 1 Peter 1:8 - **"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory...."**

Peter says the joy we have is a joy anchored in glory. In fact, our joy is *filled* with glory. That's because, as citizens of heaven, we anchor our minds and treasures in glory rather than here. So this joy isn't the same as this world's one-dimensional pleasures. Our *joy* is filled with glory because our *minds* are filled with a vivid understanding of the glory of Christ and the glory of eternity. So our joy is real and abiding - just like eternity is real and abiding.

Here's what I want to drill down into (no pun intended) in this first teaching. I have gradually developed the conviction that many of our troubles in the Christian life come from not *making a deep enough start*.

And the starting place in the Christian life is **conversion**. Please understand. I don't just mean that conversion is where you find forgiveness of sins. That, of course, is gloriously true. But what I mean is conversion is the starting place of **everything that will develop spiritually in your life - for the rest of your life**. If your initial understanding and digestion of conversion isn't as Biblically big as it was meant to be, nothing else will compensate for it later on down the road.

This is so important. Your understanding and investment in conversion lays the foundation everything else in Christ will be built on. You can't just beef things up a little down the road just by trying a little harder. You can't fix up a faulty conversion just by finding a better church, or listening to snappier sermons, or joining the choir, or even finding a good Christian counselor.

Because conversion is so important I'm very fond of Paul's words in **Romans 6:17 - "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed...."**

I often wonder - if you asked ten church-going people if they were Christians and they said yes, and then you asked them what made them so sure they were Christians, would you get ten **different** answers?

This verse is one of many that give a solid definition of what it actually is to become a Christian. It gives us all a firm and definable starting point. It helps us begin with Christ in such a way that we are all on the same page - a place of **certainty** - that we're all talking about exactly the same thing when we say, **"Yes, I'm a Christian."**

And what I want to say is Christian conversion is a three-part experience. It is a combination of the **mind**, the **heart**, and the **will**. All three must be solidly involved just as surely as a stool must have at least three legs. Each one is of crucial importance. Take any one away and the stool won't stand.

Now I am convinced that there are all sorts of religious people who will experience all sorts of spiritual depression, fear and weariness simply because they never made a proper start in the Christian life. I'm not saying they're not saved because it would be hard to ascertain just what **"being saved"** means to them. I'm not saying they're not going to heaven. I'm talking about a freshness, a joy, an understanding of the inward life of Christ they have here on earth. I think there are many people who live far below their provision in Christ. There is so much more than they ever appreciate and experience.

The sad thing is not only that they will miss out on so much in their own lives. The real tragedy is that they are such a poor testimony of the power and grace of God to others. People don't get to see modeled before them something solid and transforming of the beauty and power of our Lord. Their lives don't carry around that **fragrance** of Jesus that Paul talks about.

So let's take some time to examine some of these three elements of **mind**, **heart**, and **will** in the authentic conversion process. Tonight we're just going to look at the first - the **mind** and the Christian life:

1) **THE MIND MUST HAVE A FIRM GRASP OF REVEALED TRUTH.**

That's hinted at in the verses from **Romans chapter six - Romans 6:15-16** - "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! [16] **Do you not know** that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

Notice that pointed question - "**Do you not know....?**"(16). At least some people lack an understanding - a **knowing** - about what being a Christian was all about. Can you imagine a person thinking the more he sinned, the more of God's grace would be automatically manifested to his life? And you can tell this ignorance leaves Paul stunned. How could anyone who knows Christ think like that?

The truth is there are many professing Christians who **do** think like that. I talk with them week after week. There are people who want to call themselves Christians, but never go to church. There are people who call themselves Christians but want to maintain homosexual relationships. There are people who call themselves Christians but aren't faithful to their marriage partner. There are people who call themselves Christians but whose lives manifest nothing but greed and idolatry, and sexual immorality.

Now, people have always sinned against the Lord. But something has been happening more and more in the church lately - something different. People are starting to feel that it's optional whether or not they are really **good** Christians or not. And if they choose to deliberately disobey the Lord in some area, they just slip from being a nine or ten, down a few notches to a seven or six.

Here's how this attitude manifests itself. I've talked with professing Christians caught up in a marital affair. Here's how the conversation frequently goes. "Well, we aren't sleeping together. We hold hands and hug. But she understands me. Our relationship is a beautiful thing!"

Then I'll say , "Listen, you'll go to hell if you continue in that relationship!"

"What are you talking about?"

I'll say, "Read it for yourself - 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 - "***Do you not know*** (there's that question again) **that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.**"

Now, those sins are not really what I'm preaching about. My point is found in those first words of the verses - "***Do you not know?***" Those are the same words that start out our text in Romans 6:16.

People can enter the Christian life, and be way down the road in their attempts at following Jesus - finding it a terribly frustrating experience. They find themselves feeling fake and inauthentic. Yet, they also miss the joy they ***thought*** they would get by doing their own thing. But they're restless, uneasy, and fighting God in the inside. And it's all because there were certain key truths that were never firmly grasped with the mind when they first started out. And Paul would come up to them and say "***Don't you know these things?***"

And what I want to leave with you today is simply this. There are certain truths - certain absolute, non-negotiable principles, without which the Christian life simply cannot be lived. And no amount of religious activity or worship or prayer or benevolence can make up for. You don't have to know everything. But some things can't be ignored or overlooked. Make sure you've made an authentic start. It's worth the effort and the examination.

More on this point next Sunday night.