**Better than Happiness**

**Philippians 3:1-3 (Sermon 17)**

**December 15th, 2024**

**READING THE TEXT**

**Philippians 3:1-3**

**Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! To write this again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.**

**2Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! 3For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials.**

**INTRODUCTION**

Vs 1-3 Overview

Joy is founded on sound doctrine, theology, and a call to worship. In this passage we see them in the same context. It is interesting that Paul begins this message with the word “finally.” After all his instruction, warnings and guidance he reminds them to rejoice. It is possible to take life so seriously that we neglect to rejoice. I think of the apostles after being released from prison by the hand of God. Life was serious for them, but they did not forget to rejoice.

**Acts 5:41**

**The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.**

In good times and bad, in poverty and riches, and even persecution we can rejoice in the Lord. It is a hallmark of believers. The challenge for us is whether we are coming back to joy and rejoicing after facing things that make us tired?

**PREACHING THE TEXT**

REJOICE IN THE LORD

**Rejoice in the Lord** (Not circumstances)

People tend to rejoice only when things go well. I know I can get preoccupied with challenges and problems and sometimes it threatens to steal my joy. However, my inner joy comes from knowing Christ. And that joy returns as my mind and heart refocus on Jesus Christ. Joy comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit available to each believer. Why is “re” in front of joy or joice? We “re” joice. That is, we do it again. We come back to joy again and again. It is a result of God continually brining us back to hope and faith and internal happiness through Jesus.

Putting on a happy face or thinking positive or pretending to be happy is not what God wants for us. The joy God offers is real and comes as a gift that wells up in the hearts of those who worship him in spirit and truth.

**Joy:** The root word of rejoice is joy. Let’s look at the term joy.

**Joy** = supernatural delight in The Lord. The primary purpose of all people is to (Glorify God and **enjoy** Him forever). Are you enjoying God forever? Are you delighting in God and enjoying him.

*Happiness* = comes from the Greek word “fortuna” --- which is good luck --- and good luck is circumstantial

*Joy* = is the internal dynamic of delighting in the Lord. It is what happens when we turn our inner eyes and heart toward the Lord and enjoy his presence. It is what happens when creature meet Creator, like an infant locating his mother or father’s face. God calls to our hearts and we turn our face to his.

God’s Remedy (To lack of joy)

Let’s put this pursuit of joy in a brief outline. What is God’s remedy for lack of joy? How do we find supernatural happiness?

1. Become a Christian – joy is supernatural
   1. Some think they are believers but are not and have no fruit (joy = fruit). The unbeliever looks for things to go right, while the believer anchors to their relationship with God.
2. Righteousness, joy, and peace are pursued and known
   1. **Romans 14:17 “Kingdom of God is not about eating or drinking but righteousness, joy and peace**
   2. Note: Sin and anxiety keep us from joy (peace of God **Phil 4:6-7**)
3. Joy is connected to Sound Doctrine

**Psalm 19:8 The precepts of the Lord are right,  
    giving joy to the heart.  
The commands of the Lord are radiant,  
    giving light to the eyes.**

**John 15:10-11 10If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.**

Sound doctrine reminds us that joy is not pretending to be happy. Joy is based on the sure foundation that God has revealed himself to mankind, and his plans are good and certain. Good doctrine tells us that Jesus rose and so will all who follow Him. The promise of God’s forgiveness and resurrection brings joy.

**2Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!**

BEWARE OF THE DOGS (mutilate flesh)

Paul speaks forcefully and even uses pejoratives to describe those who fought him at every turn. Jewish religious leaders plotted constantly against Paul and those who preached Christ as the Messiah.

Christians use crosses to show people they belong to Christ. Jews of Paul’s day used circumcision to show they belonged to God. But they were so focused on the technical requirements of the law that they neglected the most important things, like love, justice, mercy, and true holiness.

What does it look like in our culture to have religious dogma while ignoring the heart of the faith? I’ve seen some communities that are so enamored by the King James Bible that anyone who reads another version is not welcome in their church. There are others who have long lists of rules about who can come to their church. No tattoos and wear the right clothes and read from the right bible version and worship on the right day and you can come here. But those are external things to take pride in just like circumcision.

Circumcision and Saturday worship and tattoos and clothing standards are set by some as a litmus test. We can focus on these things, which are external, and neglect to focus on the gospel and the amazing grace of God. Our focus must be the gospel of Jesus Christ, which brings life and hope and aligns us with the will and heart of God.

**3For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials.**

CIRCUMCISION OF GOD

When Paul stated, ***“we are the circumcision,”*** he had something specific in mind. Many Jews thought they were God’s children and special to God because they were circumcised as a sign that they were people related to Abraham. Abraham and King David were promised a holy nation that would always hold power. But God noticed that his people were getting circumcised but then not acting at all like they represented Him. They forgot about the poor and about justice and were filled with pride.

What God wanted were people with circumcised hearts. God wants to change the hearts of his people as a sign of his blessing and his presence. So, when Paul claimed, **“we are the circumcision,”** he was putting the thumb in the eye of those who claimed God ‘s blessing because they were from the right blood line or had the right markings on their bodies. No, Paul claimed that the new sign of God’s blessing is the presence of the Holy Spirit on those who trust Jesus with saving faith.

EXHALT CHRIST, NOT HUMAN CREDENTIALS

What does it mean to “exalt human credentials?” It means that we rely on status and get our life and okay-ness and take pride in that status. Some think our social status impresses God and as they try to impress themselves and others.

This could be church membership, or leadership positions or being a founding member. It could be degrees or being from a powerful family. It could be mental acuity. We can find ways to rely on human credentials and hide behind them. If we do not have these credentials to hide behind it exposes us. If God is not impressed with human credentials all we have is the quality of our faith in Christ and our love for God and others.

I recall one time attending a day conference put on by a counseling ministry that I co-founded. I was no longer involved in that ministry and had moved on to pastoral ministry. But I had to raise my hand often and inject comments that made it clear that I had founded the ministry, and I knew best. It is embarrassing to think about how I relied on credentials and trying to impress others. God was not impressed and neither was anyone who attended.

It is amazing what happens when you begin to rely on Christ for everything, even the way you feel about yourself. I am adopted and loved by God, and Jesus thought it was worth his time to pay for my sin on the cross. I am included and invited and that is all that matters. We are no longer a slave to the opinions of others. Now I am okay if people disagree with me or don’t see my value like Jesus does.

***Westminster Catechism***:

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: to glorify God and EN**JOY** Him forever.

Are we delighting in God and enjoying him?

**SUMMARY / APPLICATION**

Today we learned that Paul instructs us to rejoice in the Lord. We learned that there is a difference between worldly happiness which is circumstantial and joy which is focused on delighting in God. One will last, and the other will come and go with good or bad fortune.

We also leaned that we can not rely on credentials to impress God. And it is not healthy to live our lives trying to impress ourselves and others. That grows a root of pride and turns into self-obsession and harms our relationship with and reliance on God. Get real with God and others and get you life from Jesus. Find joy as you delight in Him.

**TAKING IT HOME**

1. What are ways you try to impress God, yourself, or others?
2. How are you living your life to God’s glory?
3. What does it look like in your life to enjoy God? What do you want it to look like?