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Philippians: the Blueprint for Joy #1

Today we begin a study of the book of Philippians, sometimes called the Blueprint for Joy. I wonder if many of us recognize the difference between happiness and joy. The words are almost always interchangeable but there is a big difference. Will you do me a favor. Will you pause for a moment and bring to the absolute forefront of your mind the happiest moment of your life. Maybe it was a birthday party, opening a Christmas gift or being on vacation in some exotic country. Now let me ask you, was it happiness or was it joy? Perhaps all those that we thought about are great things but when the music fades and the party is over, happiness often becomes despair. But joy, on the other hand, runs deeper than happiness. Joy is the quiet confident assurance of God's love, knowing He will be there no matter what. The difference between happiness and joy is this. Happiness is often based on circumstances. Joy is based on our relationship with Jesus. Don't get me wrong. Happiness is a good thing. And so is joy but they are different. Paul's letter to the church at Philippi sets a plan for experiencing the joy of being a Christian. This is amongst the most joyful letters Paul ever wrote. Although the letter is short, only 104 verses, it covers almost every Christian doctrine, including the person and work of Jesus, justification by faith, the second coming, and the many aspects of sanctification. This letter is also amongst the most personal of all of Paul's letters. Just for your own personal study, count the number of times Paul uses the word "I" or 'my'. This letter also shows us the importance of unity in the body of Christ. Something we all can learn from this book is the fact that it will show us how to find joy in the midst of suffering. Some more background about the letter.... It was written by Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome to a church he had started, in about AD 62. Why do we concern ourselves with the exact date? It shows us it was approximately 30 years after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus so we are beginning to address a second generation of Christians with letters like this. Our support text today is Philippians 1:1-8.

Philippians 1:1-8

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

Verses 3 to 8 are really one paragraph and as we study these verses today let me show you three things that brought joy to Paul and let's see if we can find through Paul's writing the difference between happiness and joy and let that be the application for our lives. Let's begin.

#1 Paul found joy in his partnership and friendship with the church at Philippi

Philippians 1:3-5

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.

Verse 3...Everyone of us has an inventory of memories. Paul chose to remember only those that brought him the most joy from his time at Philippi. Paul had founded this church on his second missionary journey. We all know that life is full of good and bad but Paul chooses to recall only the best and fondest memories of his time with the church there.

In verse 4, we learn we have a choice when we pray. We can focus on how we want things and people to change and forget that God can give us a positive sense of grace for others people's lives. to pray for them also. In verse 5 Paul reminds them and us that he had a great partnership with these people and it began on his first day when he met Lydia by the river, shared the Gospel and saw her become the first European convert to Christ. Let me remind you what happened that first day.

Acts 16:13-15

13 And on the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.¹⁴ A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.¹⁵ And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us

First impressions are so important and Paul was so positive because he knew what he was doing would further the cause of Christ. His partnership was also of a financial nature. The church had supported him and now may even be paying his rent while he stays in a small cottage at the prison in Rome. So Paul really expresses his joy with the partnership which he began with them and the friendships which he continues to enjoy with the church at Philippi. You see Paul discovered joy not in that shortlived happiness he had while with them, but in the deeper scope of things when he realized that the church at Philippi was basking in the glory of God and that brought Paul real joy.

#2 Paul had joy because he had confidence in God

Philippians 1:6

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

Verse 6 is one of the greatest verses in the entire Bible. Let's read it again. What God starts, He will finish. I'm not sure what work God has started in you, but we can all be assured that God will continue it throughout our lifetime. 40 years ago God allowed OIC to begin and we continue with the assurance that God is with us. How is God with us as individuals? From the beginning we remember that Jesus died and forgave us and when we received Him as Lord, He gave us purpose for living. This is where God's work began for each of us. Now the Holy Spirit indwells us and is allowing us to be more like Jesus every day. God will help us grow in grace until He has completed it. He allowed the church at Philippi to get started and Paul had confidence to know that God would continue to help that church prosper. What work has God began in you after your salvation experience? For those of us who are Christians, He has saved us. For those of you who have not yet taken that step, His Holy Spirit is bringing you a sense of conviction and a need for a Savior. After we are saved, our new life as we have learned last week should result in works and deeds. Each of us are given different capacities. One thing I know for sure from verse 6. He guarantees He will see it through to completion. I remember before I was saved I was morally and spiritually in left field. I was destined to die in my own sins. But the Holy Spirit of God brought me conviction and literally picked me up from the muck and mire of my life. I can assure you without any hesitation that 36 years ago when I asked Jesus to be the lord of my life, I could never have said that 36 years later I would be standing in this pulpit today, telling you about my Lord and Savior. I stand before you recognizing that I would be but filthy rags were it not for the righteousness that God gave me. You know God has a plan for all of us. If you don't believe it, take a look at this verse.

Jeremiah 29:11

¹¹ For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

So thus far we have seen that Paul found joy in his partnership and friendship with the church at Philippi and he also had joy because he had confidence in God. Now, reason #3 why Paul had joy.

#3 Paul found joy in his affection for the church at Philippi

Philippians 1:7-8

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.

Paul writes this letter like a love letter to the church. He says I feel this affection for you because I have you in my heart. Paul's love and joy did not change because he was in chains. Remember he even led some of the guards to Christ while he was in prison. He wanted the church to know that even though they weren't with him in person they could still share in his ministry and they did so by their prayers, by sending gifts of support and by sending Epaphroditus, one of their own, to be with Paul. If you don't believe me, look at verse 8. he says, God will testify on my behalf. Paul loved the church at Philippi just as Jesus loved the church unconditionally. I know that the apostle Paul had a pastor's heart. God has given me the capacity to share what Paul shared... a pastor's heart. I can stand before you today and say I truly love this congregation and each of you in a way that the apostle Paul loved the church at Philippi. I've only been here 9 months but I have accumulated so many wonderful memories of the joy I am having with you now. I often tell Nancy... we're having the time of our lives. Isn't it wonderful to be serving our Lord in this capacity. I remember in my first church planting experience in Tokyo. We had no contacts. We didn't know who might come to our first worship service. Nancy and I went door to door and apartment building to apartment building placing flyers about our first worship service. We probably placed information in about 5,000 mailboxes. The big day came Sunday morning. We waited and prayed and prayed and waited. Finally about 5 minutes before the beginning of our service, one lady came. It was a beginning. God honored us. That church is now celebrating its 30th anniversary. I still can fondly remember that lady. Her name was Mrs. Hokao and she became a vital part of that new church and I remember how Nancy and I looked upon her as the months went by, with Christian love and affection. But now, I know she's in eternity with God and I'll see her again. When I look back, that one lady brought me great joy.

Conclusion

Let's let Christ's love motivate us to love other Christians the way Paul loved the church at Philippi. Have you ever written a love letter? Were you joyful at the time of writing? We are all part of God's family and we should all be transformed by God's love. I think if you look carefully Jesus has written a love letter on our hearts. The love letter says "I care. I love you enough to die for you". If you had to write a letter to OIC, what would it read like? This letter that Paul sent to the church at Philippi was read from the pulpit. Would your letter bubble over with joy and confidence and affection? Can Paul make it any more obvious where his joy came from? It came from Jesus Christ. Jesus was working in the lives of Paul and the church at Philippi. I know from this letter that the church at Philippi was Christ centered. I can only assume the joy that Paul had because of his relationship with the church at Philippi was a reciprocal one and the church would also have expressed this same joy when they thought of the memories they had of Paul working with them. Let's begin today to make new memories of our relationship with each other and within the church as we honor Christ by BEing a church that is Christ centered and Bible based.