

Joy in the Church

Philippians 2:1-5

Preface

We have all known someone who lacked joy in their life? Usually such a person is easy to spot. They are usually grumpy and constantly complaining about something. It is difficult to be around someone like that because they are emotionally draining.

Sometimes churches can be like this as well. Some churches lack joy and enthusiasm. Usually a church without joy is focused on some past event or on things that really do no matter much.

I have been in churches where the thing that mattered the most was the quality of the food served. Still others were obsessed with maintaining an impeccable facility. This is not our purpose as a church. This is not the joy of the church.

In Galatians 4:15, Paul asks a very direct question to the Galatians, *“What has happened to your joy?”*

In the case of the Philippians, the answer was conflict. The church was facing the danger of disunity. In our text today Paul tells us how to experience and maintain joy both in our personal lives and in our church fellowship.

Scripture

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:” Philippians 2:1-5
NIV

Introduction

Illus: When my son was in High School, I went with the church youth group on a foreign mission trip to Venezuela. We stayed at a camp ran by Baptist missionaries. The camp was situated on a beautiful piece of property. There were fruit trees everywhere. Mangos were in season and very plentiful. The sleeping quarters for the guys was divided into two large rooms separated by a wall that did not go all the way to the ceiling. Our group bunked on one side of the wall and a group from a Methodist church in Valdosta, GA bunked on the other side of the wall. The first night, we could hear them talking on the other side of the wall. They were making smart comments about the bunch of rednecks from the Baptist church in Mississippi. The second night when they started saying similar things, we did what any good Baptist man or boy would do; we began throwing mangos over the wall at them. It was all in fun and it struck up a great relationship. As the week preceded Christian unity was formed between the two groups and our work was blessed.

We don't have to throw mangos at one another to experience Christian unity in the church. But there are some things we need to do in order to maintain joy in the church and it would serve us well to keep them in mind.

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1. We must share the same purpose (v2)

² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

In the case of the Philippians, the conflict stemmed from their disunity in purpose. They each had their own purpose for the church and each looked out for their own personal interest.

The quickest way to have conflict in the church is for the members to have different purposes for the church. When this happens each

group is fighting against others in an effort to see their purpose fulfilled and the result is always conflict.

Having a common purpose focuses our energy and gives us power, but having different purposes diffuses our power and leaves us unproductive.

Paul tells us that rather than being divided, we are to be “one in spirit.” The literal Greek translation would be “sharing the same soul.” We are to work together as if we share one soul.

If each of us is pulling in our own direction we will literally pull the church apart. But if we will come together as one body we will discover the power to accomplish our purpose -- the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

How do we discover God’s purpose and plan for our church? We look for it rather than looking for our own desires.

Illus: Both the hummingbird and the buzzard fly over Alabama. All the buzzard sees is rotting meat, because that is what he looks for. They thrive on a diet of the dead. But hummingbirds ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead they look for the colorful blossoms of plants. The buzzards live on what was; the past. They fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But hummingbirds thrive on what is alive and fresh. They seek new life. They fill themselves with freshness and life. **Each bird finds what it is looking for.**

The same is true of each member in the church. If we earnestly and jointly seek God’s purpose and plan we will find it. But if it is conflict and strife we seek, we will easily find these as well.

The prophet Jeremiah said it this way: *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).*

If in unity, we look and thirst for God we will find what we seek. We must seek God’s purpose and mission for our church.

If we are to have joy in the church, we must have the same purpose.

2. We must look to the interest of others (v3-4)

³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* ⁴ *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Christianity is not self-centered, it is others-centered. Jesus taught this plainly when He said, *“Whoever wants to become great among you must be the servant, and whoever wants to be first must be last.”*

Too often the church is hindered by self-preoccupation. If there is to be true joy in the church, we must not fight for our own rights. Instead, we must look out for the interest of others.

Everyone is willing to be served but few are willing to serve. In the church, there is no room for self-exaltation. We are a part of the family of God because of God’s grace alone.

As a church, everything we do must be with the objective of reaching and touching others with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This always requires sacrifice and commitment.

Illus: There is an area of our church just outside the kitchen that gets stained often. Between the various children & youth ministries and family suppers, the carpet always seems to get spills that appear quite ugly. We find ourselves having the carpet cleaned at least once a year if not more often. But when you think about it, those stains are not so ugly after all. When we reflect on the people we have baptized in recent years, those stains become completely insignificant. May God give us more carpet stains.

Illus: Years ago the Salvation Army was holding an international convention and their founder, General William Booth could not attend because of physical weakness. He sent his message by cable to them. It was only one word: **“Others.”**

If we are to have joy in the church, we must look to the interest of others.

3. We must develop the attitude of Christ (v5)

⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

Our churches have too many people who consider themselves Christians but live completely free from any Christian responsibilities. They seek out churches where they are entertained and inspired but never become personally responsible for anything. This is not the attitude of Christ.

It is as if Christians today want to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ but we don't want to get any of His blood stains on our hands. The church is people marked with the blood of Christ and changed by the experience. We become a new creation in Christ.

¹ *So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 1 Corinthians 4:1 NIV*

The church is alive; it breathes, it walks, it works, it ministers and it speaks of the things of God. The church is alive because we are God's church and we must have the attitude of Christ.

Illus: We've all seen the Beverly Hillbillies show and the introduction which tells how the family got to Beverly Hills, California. The family was living in the hills of Tennessee where Jed could barely keep his family fed. *"Then one day he was shootin for some food and up from the ground come bubbling crude – oil that is, black gold."*

I sometimes feel we as a church are like Jed. *We are sitting on so many gifts and blessings and we just don't know it.* I often look at the potential we have as a church and ponder how wonderful it would be if everyone would use their gifts for Christ. We have a church full of people with many talents and gifts; some even not yet discovered.

Through Christ, we are enriched with gifts from God. God sets us apart to do His work. He enriches and equips us with the talents, gifts and resources to do the things He plans for us. **But we must be willing to have the attitude of Christ.**

Illus: Imagine a piano technician taking a tuning fork and going around to tune 100 different pianos. All 100 pianos would be perfectly tuned

to the fork. More importantly, all 100 pianos would be perfectly in tune with each other. If each of us will have the attitude of Christ, as a church, collectively we will be in tune with one another.

Conclusion

ILLUS: Ignace Jan Paderewski, the famous Polish composer-pianist, was once scheduled to perform at a great American concert hall for a high-society extravaganza. In the audience was a mother with her fidgety nine-year-old son. Weary of waiting, the boy slipped away from her side, strangely drawn to the Steinway on the stage. Without much notice from the audience, he sat down at the stool and began playing "chopsticks." The roar of the crowd turned to shouts as hundreds yelled, "Get that boy away from there!"

When Paderewski heard the uproar backstage, he grabbed his coat and rushed over behind the boy. Reaching around him from behind, the master began to improvise a countermelody to "Chopsticks." As the two of them played together, Paderewski kept whispering in the boy's ear, "Keep going. Don't quit, son, don't stop, don't stop." *(Today in the Word, Moody Bible Institute, Jan., 1992, p.8)*

This is how God is at work helping us serve Him. Although God is behind it all He requires our effort as well. We must keep going and we must not stop.

I ran across a verse this week that had never registered with me before. It is from Job 42:5 and it reads, *"⁵My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."*

As a church, may we experience the joy of Christ so fully that we say, *"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."*

May God do great things in our church. But for that to happen we must have the same purpose, care about others and have the attitude of Jesus Christ.