

THE JOY OF LOVING GOD'S PEOPLE

Intro: The opportunity to teach from Philippians 1:3-11 in Bible class has evaded me twice. Last quarter I was out of town when we came to this text. This morning a home emergency demanded that I go back home. I appreciate Doug taking my place on short notice and enjoyed the good discussion of the text. It doesn't need re-teaching; but I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to think with you about one of the keys to joyous living.

Joy is not only something everyone wants; but it also something God wants the Christian to have. In fact it is the direct result of the Holy Spirit's work in our spiritual lives! (Gal. 5:22)

Often it seems that it is people who we think keep us from joy by what they say and what they do. But I hope we can all learn how to rejoice in people, in others who serve God like we are trying to do. Paul shows us an excellent example of this in Philippians.

In the first sentence of his letter, Paul bursts forth with a joy that he experienced because of his relationship with the Christians at Philippi. It was the great joy of knowing and loving the Lord's people. Tonight I hope we can learn from him how to find the joy of loving others. Consider with me three habits that will lead you to joyous relationships with others. Paul rejoiced in the Philippians because he...

Remembered the good things about the past!

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

It is interesting to see what dominates Paul's memories at Phillipi. Paul could have focused on the hardship of imprisonment and persecution. He could have remembered the brutal stripes he received there. But Paul remembered was the good qualities of the Philippians. In fact what Paul is saying is that every memory of the Phillipians caused him to thank God! But more specifically Paul remembered their fellowship "eis" (toward or unto) the gospel!

"Participation" comes from the word "koinonia" which means to have fellowship, to share, to be partners!

Think of how so many ways the Philippians were Paul's spiritual partners:

"From the first day" Lydia invited Paul into her house to stay while he worked there.

After departing for Thessalonica, the church had sent once and again to Paul's necessity.

"Now" in Rome they had sent again a gift for his needs.

But the partnership went far beyond financial support; the Philippians shared Paul's faith & Paul's sufferings. Paul's hopes were their hopes; Paul's Lord was their Lord!

And so Paul's joy is underscored by his words of thanks to God and praise for them for their faith in God. And from Paul's example we can learn an important principle about living joyously: Joyous people learn to focus on the good in others; they choose to remember what is praiseworthy and not what is condemnable.

It's so easy to forget about the love that others have shown for us. We can so easily focus on the negative things about others (their neglect, their failures) and forget the good things they have done. We need to remember the good things about each other.

Take time to remember the people of this congregation. Think of those who have shown their love for the truth by faithful attendance, by showing their love and concern in phone calls and cards, and maybe even reproof. Thank God for what has been done and encourage those who have shown their love by letting them know that you thank God for them. When we do we will discover the joy of loving God's people, a joy that comes through remembering the good.

Prayed with hope for the future

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The Greek word "deesis" conveys the idea of a petition for the needs another to be met. Let's take a closer look at the kinds of things Paul said in his prayers about the Philippians!

A love that abounds in real knowledge and discernment! It is a love that is not mere sentimentality, but a love tempered by the understanding that comes from the study of God's word!

This love would result in the ability to discern the things that differ or the things that are excellent, i.e. the difference between right and wrong, the difference between better and best.

And this would result in their being filled with the fruit of righteousness.

Consequently they would be sincere and blameless when Christ returned. And all this would be to the "praise and glory of God".

What great spiritual sequence of cause and effect. Each principle build upon the other!

What noble and spiritual prayers these were! I could wish that every day we could pray like that for each other and expect the best from each other!

Paul also demonstrates a great hope or optimism in the Philippians' future. Upon what grounds did Paul believe these prayers would be answered?

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.

God began a work in them through the gospel.

Find in this a comforting assurance: God doesn't start on a project only to scrap it! When you begin the Christian life you may feel you have a long way to go. ("I'm an old chunk of coal, but I'll be a diamond someday!") That's what God wants to do with you!

But this assurance is a conditional perseverance based upon our continued faithfulness to God's word not an unconditional perseverance based on God's sovereignty.

The Phillippians had demonstrated a trust in God that would cause them to continue in the faith. Give us a reason to keep believing in you!

So here we see a second key to joy! We experience joy when we trust in God to make people better.

You can give up on the world; you can give up on your family; you can give up on your loved ones! And...you will be disappointed and depressed!!

Or, you can pray and wait for God to work; and you will watch with joyful anticipation as you see how even your changed attitude encourages others to want to be better. The choice is ours to make!

Sincerely loved them in the present

For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul speaks of the love that he had for the Philippians.

This love grew out of the fact that they were partakers of grace with Paul and that their love had manifest itself in sharing with him in his imprisonment!--in his defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Paul was not ashamed to tell them that he loved them. Oh, how hard those words are for some of us to say! But Paul spoke them boldly and sincerely!

"The bowels of Christ Jesus" strikes us as a strange expression. But, the bowels here refer to the upper viscera, that is the organs such as the heart, liver, lungs, etc. not the intestines. These organs were thought to be the seat of the deepest emotions. And even in deep emotion you feel as if the emotions well up from within your upper body! But more than this Paul likens these emotions he feels as those which Christ himself would feel toward others.

This love manifested itself in a true care for them and a desire to see them and be with them and it was a great source of joy to Paul.

The third key to joy is to look for ways to express love now.

We can "meet and retreat;" or we can spend meaningful time together.

We can be strangers who come to the same church service or we can be partners who share the same goals.

A part of that confidence is cultivated by acts of helpfulness and love toward others.

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart... (1 Pet. 1:22).

Conclusion: Wiersbe offers this short outline of our text: I have you in my memory; I have you in my prayers; I have you in my heart! One of the greatest joys of life is to know godly people who love the Lord and his people. Let us remember the good about one another. Let us hope for the best for each other. And let us love each other now with the sincerest love we have. When we do, not only will it bring great joy to the receivers of this love but it will enrich your life with the greatest joy.