

FLIPPING OVER PHILIPPIANS 2 “JOY IN JESUS”

Today we continue our study of Philippians, the little book of Joy. 2 weeks ago we discovered that there is Joy even in Jail, as Paul, authored this book from a jail cell in Rome. We found Paul expressing unmitigated Joy at the prospects of not doing ministry alone, of rejoicing that the Gospel is preached, whatever the means or motivation, of recognizing that God’s purpose in our lives can be fulfilled whether we live or die, and that Joy rewards those dual-citizens who live balanced lives, living uniquely here on earth, but also living expectantly as heaven’s reality approaches.

Today we’ll consider the second chapter, one I’ve titled: Joy in Jesus. Here is the message in a nut shell:

Joy is found in Jesus,
the path to Jesus is humility,
entrance to the path is attitude,
attitude is a result of correct thinking.

And here is the primary text:

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.” Vs: 5

Here is a secondary text:

“As a person thinks in his heart, so is he.” Proverbs 23:7

It is important to note that;

what we think determines what we believe,
and what we believe determines how we live,
and how we live often determines how we will die,
and how we die will determine where we’ll spend eternity.

See why correct thinking is so important?

The second chapter of Philippians contains 14 specific instructions for the Philippian Christians to follow. Amidst these commands 5 verses (6-11) are inserted that describe the Attitude of Jesus. I want to look at the 14 commands, and see them exemplified in these 5 descriptive verses applied to Jesus. I've reduced them to 3 memorable commands I believe God wants us to understand. Remember: Joy in Jesus is found in Humility, and humility is an attitude that results from what we THINK!

1. WHAT WE THINK ABOUT OURSELVES: HUMILITY

"He took the humble position of a slave" vs 7

"Don't be selfish, be humble," vs 3

I read a quote this week from former President Bill Clinton that America is right now more divided and dis-unified than at any other time in our history since the conclusion of the civil war. Religious leaders have recently spouted that America is currently waging a "Moral (or cultural) Civil War". Our own United Methodist Church (among many others) is experiencing the cultural and theological tug-of-war over issues like homosexuality, style, hierarchy, and effectiveness. The foundation of most of this divisiveness is found in one place, one word, one act, one thought...SELFISHNESS! We are a country, we are a culture, we are a community, we are a church, we are a people obsessed with SELF! And Paul says that if we want to discover joy, we have to take a different attitude, a different approach; the attitude of Jesus. Let's consider...

Jesus was equal with God prior to his emergence from the virgin's womb. His coming to earth laid aside (for a time) his Divine appointment as the Son of God, as he assumed the role of Son of Man. In that role, humility defined his attitude, his life, and his example. No where is this more clearly seen than in the upper room, washing his disciple's feet. You remember the story...What were the disciples discussing on the journey to the last supper? Which of them would be the greatest, getting to sit on his right and left side when he ascended to power!

My friends, I agree with the great Augustine when asked what are the three greatest Christian virtues: He replied: “Humility, Humility, and Humility.” But I don’t want to talk about the overt and insidious ‘pride’ we so easily recognize (at least in others if not always in ourselves.) I want to address a more subtle form of pride I see in myself, and in others.

It is the pride that appears as a faked act of humility. I see many Christian people living with the misguided notion that God is impressed with their false acts of humility, that only mask (ineffectively) their real center of pride. Unfortunately most who have this won’t be able to see it, at least not in themselves. I see it when people falsely claim their inabilities, or in attempted modesty, which claims others are certainly more qualified when being asked to assume an appropriate task. This false sense of humility, in the name of Jesus Christ, is an affront to a God who deeply values honesty. It is based on improper thinking, and reveals the true character of a person.

Paul admonishes us to not be selfish, don’t try to impress others, think of others as better than ourselves. True humility is not the ability to think less of ourselves than we actually are, but the ability to not think of ourselves at all; because we are so consumed with thinking about Jesus. True humility is not thinking more of ourselves than we actually are, but to be consumed with thinking about Jesus, which ultimately reveals to the ‘honest in each us’, exactly who and what we really are!

Jesus was humble and on the road to a Joy-filled Jesus life; the first attitude we need to “think” into action is humility. The second thought is:

2. WHAT WE THINK ABOUT OTHERS: SERVICE

“He took the humble position of a slave” vs 7

“Working together with one mind and purpose” vs 2

“Don’t look out only for your own interests but take an interest in others” vs 4

What we think about others reveals our true heart, and our true faith.

We cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus, and not care about others. We cannot claim to be a Christian Church, and not care about people who don't know Jesus. We cannot attempt to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment (as Pete so ably reminded us last week) if we only selfishly care about what we want, and what we think we need, and what we want the church to do for us! We ought to apply John F. Kennedy's greatest presidential contribution to our life in the church! "Think not what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your Church! (and greater still, what you can do for the Kingdom!!)

I'm working on a new sermon series, I don't know when I'll get to preach it, but it's been fun to plan. It's titled simply: A True Christian Life. So much that passes in the name of Christianity has little or nothing to do with the Real, Biblical Jesus. And I know I certainly don't have it all figured out, but I'm working on these 3 messages in the series:

A True Christian Life:

1. Salvation: what we receive.
2. Servants: who we are.
3. Stewardship: what we do

You can conjure up all other kinds of nice job descriptions, and standard operating procedures for being a Christian, but if we want to be real followers of Jesus, then we must be, we will be servants. We'll agree, 'wholeheartedly' with one another, we'll love one another, and we'll work together with one mind (catch that thinking part again) and with one purpose.

Jesus was above all a servant. Yes, he was a great teacher, yes, he was a great prophet, yes, he was a great healer, yes, he was a great leader, yes, he was a great example, yes, he was a great inspiration; but above all, he was a great servant. He is identified as such in this great theological passage, 'taking the form of a human, becoming a servant.'

He identifies his supreme purpose when he said: 'Think not that I have come to be served...but to serve.' Sounds like Jesus quoting John F. Kennedy. Throughout the New Testament when servanthood is being described or defined; Jesus is always the model, the example, the standard!

Jesus was a servant, and on the road to a Joy-filled Jesus life, the second attitude we must "think" into action is servanthood. And number 3.

3. WHAT WE THINK ABOUT GOD: OBEDIENCE

"he humbled himself in obedience to God" vs 8

"obeying God with deep reverence and fear" vs 12

Do you suppose there was any discussion around the campfire in heaven between God the Father, and Jesus the Son, when it came time to implement God's latest plan to save His wayward creation? Do you suppose Moses and Abraham, and King David had any insight to share as young Jesus and God discussed God's last ditch effort to reach us sinful humans?

Do you suppose the son raised any objections or even rebellious rejections at the absurd lengths God was willing to go to see His beloved creation brought to salvation? I wonder.

Reminds me of a story I read long ago about A Roman Centurion who was instructed by his commanding officer to deliver a message to another officer across some hostile territory. One of his fellow Centurion soldiers approached him and said, "sir, if you try to deliver this message, you could be killed." The centurion looked at the young man and said, "Soldier, it's not necessary for me to live. It's only necessary for me to obey." I have a hunch that's where the discussion in heaven ended, and I bet the words came easily from the heart of Jesus. "It's not necessary for me to live, it's only necessary for me to obey."

They don't come so easily in our world, and our country today. Oh, for the most part, most of us obediently obey obligatory traffic laws, and community standards, but I want to talk of something different I see in this chapter this morning.

Paul is not advocating that we grudgingly agree to obey God's laws because we half-heartedly know we have to. No, he is asking; (using Jesus as the supreme example); that all true followers of Jesus will WILLFULLY CHOOSE to obey ALL God's laws, the spirit and the letter (in that order, according to Jesus)! He says that we must work hard to show the results of our salvation, that we must obey God with deep reverence and fear! And, that we must do EVERYTHING without complaining and arguing! I'm not much of an advocate of using fear to motivate people either to seek God, or avoid hell, but there is a great need today for a healthy dose of Godly reverence and Godly FEAR! We think we can continue to reject God's laws (any of them) and get away with it? I don't think we are getting away with it! I think that at least partially, the situations we have in our world, our country, our church and our individual lives is because we don't maintain a healthy reverence and Godly fear in our lives. I don't think we can continue to complain and argue and not lose the favor and blessing of God in our lives!

Jesus was obedient, and on the road to a Joy-filled Jesus life, the third attitude we must "think" into action is obedience.

Humility, service, and obedience, the three great attitudes we find in Jesus, we discover in Philippians, and we must cultivate in our own lives!

What do you think...? What will you believe...? How will you live...?
Let us pray.

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