

This morning... I begin with two questions... as I am asking God's Holy Spirit to call attention... to each of us personally... about the need each of us has... for this new sermon series... that we launch this morning.

HERE WE GO:

- 1) Is it **really** true that... as a believer in Christ... you can face anything in life — **anything** — (triumph or trial) ... and have the *same* inner peace and joy...? And when you do... your joy is **contagious**...? (It lifts up everyone else around you.)
- 2) Isn't this the type of person... you **want** to be? Isn't it what **you** want AND **God** wants...? Instead of joining over and over again in the whining about how bad things are... you want your life to be a message to others... that says: "*Hey... life is still a wonderful gift... that being **IN**-Christ makes it all worthwhile*"...?

I have used this quote by CS Lewis before (maybe you have seen it) ... but it eloquently speaks to the issue at hand, here.

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

So I guess that I should ask a third question. ... Are we seeking joy from the wrong sources... and allowing ourselves to be content with FAR less than what God wants for us to experience...? What have been the sources of your joy this past week...? Your football team winning the big game...?

A delicious meal that you savored for an evening...? Something that entertained you in a book... a magazine... at the movie theater or on television...? Esteem that someone gave to you by recognizing your intelligence or a skill or an effort you showed to them...?

And what dampened your joy this past week...? ... A lack of respect...? Criticism from an authority figure...? Your finances...? A lack of friends...? fears about the future...? or your bulging waistline?

I love what Jonathan Edwards (a long time ago) said about this:

"The enjoyment of [God] is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied.... Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean."

—Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

It should be obvious by now what our new sermon series is about – “Finding the Fullness of God’s Joy.” Today we open a new Book of the Bible... where we will be... over the course of the next few months... the Book of Philippians. ... The Apostle Paul will center our thoughts on finding our joy in Christian community.

Philippians is a unique Book of all the letters that Paul wrote. The relationship that Paul had with the believers in Philippi seems much closer than the relationship he had with the believers in all the other places where Paul ministered. He shows this... even in the way he opens his letter. You see... in all of Paul’s letters to the other churches... except this one... Paul establishes his credentials by referring to his authority as an apostle.

Look how he does this in each of his other letters...

Romans 1:1 (ESV)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

1 Corinthians 1:1 (ESV)

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

2 Corinthians 1:1 (ESV)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother...

Galatians 1:1 (ESV)

Paul, an apostle— not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

Ephesians 1:1 (ESV)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...

Colossians 1:1 (ESV)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

You get the idea... He also does this similarly in 1 and 2

Thessalonians... 1 and 2 Timothy... and Titus. Only his letter to Philemon and to the church at Philippi... does Paul **not** feel the need to establish his authority. ... Strikingly it is absent in his letter to the Philippians... and the reason I would suggest... is that Paul had a special closeness to them... there was a **particular** joy-filled relationship with them... as 2nd Corinthians 8 makes very clear.

Paul writes to the Corinthians and holds them up as an example... specifically mentioning their joy-centered relationship. (He calls them

Macedonians because that is where Philippi was. It was the leading church of Macedonia.)

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (ESV)

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

So Paul and the Philippian church enjoyed a special joy-filled relationship with each other... BUT... joy among the Philippians themselves... in their relationship with one another... had developed a **kink**. ... Paul was made aware of a problem... a church struggle... really a fight between two ladies... Euodia and Syntyche... by which the whole church had divided in support of one or the other lady. ... This was not good!

Paul directly addresses this problem in chapter four of Philippians... but nearly everything else that Paul writes in this letter sets the groundwork for them to settle their difference. Paul wants them to experience God's full joy. If they were allowing God's joy to flow through them – whatever was causing the rift between Euodia and Syntyche wouldn't have mattered.

James 4:1-3 (ESV)

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Can you see that if you were to experience MORE of God's joy... that there would be less strife and quarreling swirling around your life...? ... Let's launch into our new study...

Philippians 1:1-2

IN PAUL'S TIME... letters typically began with the name of the sender... followed by the name of the recipient(s)... and then a brief salutation. This is what Paul does in all of his letters... though as we have already seen there are some differences with this letter.

The opening words of first-century letters followed almost unfailingly the pattern "[Name] to [Name]: then the Greek word for "Greetings"... which was (*charein*). ("Charein" is the Greek word that **means** "greetings.") ...If we all lived in the first century and I wrote a letter to this church... it would go something like... Jim to the believers of Living Water... "charein." ... Now the reason I am purposely using this Greek word here... is for you to hear the sound of it. ... "charein" ... In just a moment... I want to show you how Paul does a little word play with this common letter opening... by adjusting this word... "charein" ... or "Greetings!"

From his opening words... Paul presents some unique characteristics... that serve a purpose to his message... (Remember) this letter is an attempt to elicit a full sense of joy from them.

Now... Paul did not use for himself the title that he used in a typical letter to the other churches... "Apostle." ... That is a title of his high authority... and he uncharacteristically leaves it out of **this** letter's opening. ... **But**... (now get this...) in naming those to whom he is writing this letter... he **adds** titles... to his readers... that he does **not** add in any of his other letters. He

leaves **his** title of authority off... but he **adds** the titles of authority which belonged to some of those who were the recipients of this letter. ... He specifically mentions the titles of authority – “overseers” and “deacons.” ... This is the only letter where we see Paul do this.

Paul does not simply mention his and Timothy's names but includes a descriptive phrase: They are "servants of Christ Jesus." Paul's word for "servants" (*douloi*) does not refer to hired household help but is the term commonly used in ancient times for "slaves." It has the unmistakable overtone of submission... of being completely owned by someone else.

By the way... four times in chapter one... he refers to his "bonds"... including his being in bondage in a Roman prison... without a trace of bitter complaint. He treats his bondage as a blessing. We find no trace of despair... instead he displays joy.

A look at the slave market of Paul's day... shows more clearly what Paul meant when he said he was a "slave of Jesus Christ." ... 1. The slave was totally possessed by his master. ... This is what Paul meant. ... 2. The slave existed for his master and he had no other reason for existence. ... The same was true with Paul... he existed only for Christ. ...3. The slave was at the master's disposal any hour of the day. So it was with Paul. ...4. The slave was allowed no will and no ambition other than the will and ambition of the master.

Would you agree with me that there is a great need today... for men and women to become **slaves** of the Lord Jesus Christ...? ... Just how far are

you and I... from being more like His slaves... in terms of what Paul expresses here...?

Let's consider... now... all this as we account for these distinctive features in Paul's opening description of the Philippian church... particularly... Paul's unique reference to the church's "overseers and deacons" ... And his own description of himself and Timothy... as slaves?

Paul is providing an example of what he is about to ask them to do as one of the means for discovering God's full joy. He is modeling humility... and a thinking more highly of others than himself... which he will specifically prescribe for them in chapter 2. ... Although Paul is God's apostle... set apart and called by Him... Paul refuses to mention his high qualifications in **this** letter's opening. ... He prefers instead to emphasize his and Timothy's common role as slaves of Christ Jesus. ... But he is careful... on the other hand... to ascribe the leaders of the Philippian church... **their** appropriate titles of dignity. ... By constructing his greeting in this manner he has... in a small way... showed concern **not** for his own interests... but for the interests of others.

Philippians 2:4 (ESV)

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

From start to finish of this letter... we will see that it has been carefully crafted by Paul... to have the Philippians live in God's full joy... and to adopt this attitude of humble service to others... especially because of the church fight that was taking place between Euodia and Syntyche... and those who had lined up behind them in taking sides in the issue.

“Paul and Timothy, servants (actually “slaves”) of Jesus Christ, to all the SAINTS in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi...”

Any healthy church is full of *true saints*. ...The Bible never uses the word *saint* ...to refer to a few people in the church... who have achieved unusual spiritual maturity. ...The word saints refers to the sanctified... or holy ones. It simply means to be set apart... and to be separated. ...Therefore... every believer... who has truly trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior... is separated from the world... and set apart to live for God. ...Every true believer is a "saint" ... a person set apart unto God. And God takes us through a process of making us “holy”... He transforms us to look more and more like Jesus... a process that doesn't end until we leave this earth. ... We are the property of the Lord Jesus... set apart as His holy possession. .. and for His special use.

J. Vernon McGee used to say it this way:

“...Every believer is a saint. The human family is divided into two groups: the saints and the ain'ts. Saints are believers in Christ. They are saints, not because of their conduct, but because of their position in Christ. Saint means "holy," set apart for God. Anything that is holy is separated for the use of God. Even the old pots and pans in the tabernacle were called "holy vessels," and they were probably beaten and battered after forty years in the wilderness. They may not have looked holy, but they were. Why? Because they had been set aside for the use of God. Now that should be the position of every child of God. We are set aside for the use of God. Now, friend, if you ain't a saint, then you are an ain't.”

The saints who Paul addresses here... are "in Christ Jesus." ... You know there are so many different ideas of what it means to be a Christian.

Someone can say... “I am a Christian”... and think that they are... simply

because they were born in America... or because they aren't Islamic... Jewish... or have any other religious affiliation. ... So we have come up with extra ways to describe someone who actually lives in a vital union with Jesus Christ... dedicating their life to please and serve Him. We use terms such as "born again"... and "evangelical"... or even "strong Christian." ... But what Paul uses here... is a very simple and accurate way of distinguishing a true believer... from someone who merely names themselves "Christian" without any desire to follow Him. It is "in Christ."

What does it mean to be saved? ... It means to be in Christ Jesus.

Anyone who has been to Bible college or seminary could dizzy your head trying to explain it by using words such as... "propitiation"... and "reconciliation"... and "redemption." ... These are all marvelous words... and they are all Bible words... but none of them covers the entire spectrum of salvation... as close as this simple prepositional phrase... "in Christ." Being "in Christ" is to be in union with His entire Kingdom plan of the Ages. You are in alignment and in full partnership with all that He is doing.

Let me return... now... to the wording of Paul's "greeting"... "Charein." Here... Paul deviates from the standard letter opening of a first century letter... but it is not uncommon for Paul's letters. The way he words his greeting here... is the same way he does it in all... but **two**... of his letters that we have in Scripture.

Paul does a little word play with the typical greeting... by slightly altering the Greek word for "Greetings!" (*charein*) ... Instead of saying "charein"... (in a typical 1st century letter we would be expecting to hear the word

“charein”...) instead Paul says “charis”... which means "grace"... and then he adds the Jewish common greeting “shalom” which means “peace.”

What is grace? I love Dr. Ray Stedman’s definition of grace... (Try and soak this definition in... for a moment.) “Grace is all God's wisdom and power--all of it--constantly available to someone who is utterly undeserving. All the richness, might and wisdom of the person of God continually available to us, even though we are constantly aware we don't deserve Him at all.”

Wow... what a way to greet someone! This is MUCH better than “How-ya-do’in...?” Can you imagine the blessing... in your greeting someone this way...? *“May all the richness... might and wisdom... of the person of God continually be available to you right now... although both you and I are fully aware... that we don't deserve any of it... at all.”* - What a way to help someone start their day...!

And then the second part of Paul’s greeting included the Hebrew element of “shalom”... which means peace. Note the order of the words - grace and then peace. (It is significant.) ...There can be no peace... until the sinner has been saved by divine grace. ... Grace comes **first**... and then peace. ... If you are lacking in grace... you will lack peace.

Any church that has internal struggles (and unfortunately... we have probably all known churches with a lot of fighting... or little peace among their members) ... The reason they ARE that way... is simply because they are short on grace. ... The same truth holds for homes. ... Where grace is in control... there will be JOY... and no fighting. ... Where there is joy...

the fighting stops. ... Grace means war is impossible. ... Peace means the war is over.

Just as God makes Himself completely available to us... as UNDESERVING AS WE ARE... when we make ourselves completely available to others... when we give 100% to those who are UNDESERVING of our best attention... we give them grace. ... Showing this same kind of grace to others... that God gives to us... brings peace... and it brings joy.

The way to bring peace to any of your troubled relationships... is to bring grace... to offer the kind of grace that God offered you... who doesn't deserve it.

Today... we have only looked at the first two verses of this letter. ... I hope that you will agree with me that these two verses... although they are just the opening... are far from being JUST "formal" and "theologically bland." ... Paul has compressed the elements of a profound message... that he will unpack as the letter progresses.

He has provided a model of what it means to put the interests of others ahead of one's own... and reminded us that we need to be more slave-like... having no ambition other than the will and ambition of our Master – Jesus Christ... he has reminded the Philippians of their status as "saints" ... being set aside for God's use... and... finally... he has touched on the rich topics of grace and peace. ... This opening foreshadows the primary themes of the letter... as it will continue in a more direct manner.

Instead of joining over and over again in the whining about how bad things are... in life that surrounds us... let's make our lives to be messages that

proclaim: “*Hey... life is a wonderful gift... and being **IN**-Christ makes it all worthwhile*”...?