

I've got the Joy, Joy . .
Philippians 3:1-4:1
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Launch of Build the Future Fundraiser
FBC Waynesboro

Do you know that God wants the fullness of His joy flowing in and through you? The Bible teaches us that when we give our lives to Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us and one of His tasks is to produce in us and through us the fruit of the Spirit. Notice that the word “fruit” is singular. Paul lists nine items here or three groups of three. The center one in each group is the focus of each group so that in the first grouping: love, joy, and peace; it is joy that God desires and develops in us as among the first and finest expressions of His presence and power at work in us. He wants to experience and to express His joy. Jesus would remind us that He came so that His joy would be in us and that our joy would be complete. This section in Philippians shows us what is required if we are going to experience and express the joy that is ours as believers.

An eighteenth century scholar was the first to refer to Philippians as the joy letter. Some form of the word for “joy” is found at least twelve times in this letter. Let me just show you a few of them. Paul knows that this church that he loves so much is struggling. False prophets have come to town and have been preaching another gospel. We know that this “other” gospel was the promise that the real Jesus delivered people from suffering and pain and into prosperity and good health. In fact, they were attacking Paul as a false prophet saying that a true preacher would never be put in prison since a powerful God would keep him out of prison. So, some in the church in Philippi are being swayed by the slick, seductive sentences of these servants of Satan. And there were problems inside the church as conflict had arisen over an issue so small that Paul does not even mention it, even though it had caused lines of division to develop in the church. But listen to how he prays for this church, 1:3-6. Go over to 4:10-13 as Paul rejoices over the way they had come to his aid even though it was his pain in prison that produced for him what he most needed as a preacher of the Gospel that he could do all things through Christ who gave him strength. And between these two are many other occasions where Paul speaks to their joy in Jesus and his joy in them. But this passage is pivotal because it points us clearly to what must be in place if we are going to know the fullness of the joy of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives.

The focus on joy frames this passage in the first verse and the last verse. And the key is at the very center, 12-16. When we are clear about what is being

communicated here, we can more clearly hear what is being communicated on either side of this central core. One word in various forms found four times in these verses forms the focus. The word in its passive form means to receive or to be seized by that which God brings to us and in its active form it means to seize or to lay hold of that which God has brought to us. We see this in verse 12. Paul says that he is pressing on and the word here is filled with intense emotion—stretching, straining, agonizing, desiring—to take hold of that fully and faithfully that has taken hold of Him. Paul confesses as must we that he is not there; he is growing and being changed by God but he has not arrived. But what he is after is so much the focus of his life that he calls it “one thing.” It requires him to let go of what is behind him, to lay hold of what is in front of him and look forward toward that day when he will receive the victor’s wreath having faithfully fulfilled the commitment of his life to Jesus that came as a result of his having been converted by Jesus. Paul knows that right here is the key to joy. Letting go of what has been, laying hold of what is and looking forward to what will be. And the key to it all is Jesus. Gerald Hawthorne says that this passage makes it plain that the key to joy is our commitment to Jesus. Then he says, “Paul is obsessed with Jesus. Noting else matters but Jesus. He can afford to lose everything, but Jesus. For Paul to gain the whole world and to lose Jesus is to have lost everything. But to gain Jesus and have nothing of this world is to have everything. The total focus of his life was to be known by Jesus, to know Jesus and to make him known.” He was filled with Joy. No wonder he could sing praises to God at midnight in a prison cell. No wonder he could say to the Philippian believers about those preachers who were putting him down, “it doesn’t matter so long as Christ is being preached.” No wonder that when they beat him in one town, he just went to the next and did there the same thing that got him beaten in the previous place. He was obsessed with Jesus and was filled with joy. Do you want that kind of joy in your life? God wants you to have it? He wants us to have it as His people in this place?

Joy comes when we focus our lives fully and faithfully on Jesus, 2-11. Paul reminds us at the beginning and the end of this passage that joy robbers abound among every people of God. Caustic critics, constant complainers, tradition loving legalists, self proclaimed do gooders who have to boast about what they do because they have nothing to boast of in the Lord Jesus etc. They are in every place. They were in Philippi. Paul calls them dogs. This was no poodle punch or collie coddling, this was in that day a dirty word. But so we can be clear, it makes it clear: those who are in the church but they are evil workers. He uses a graphic image to describe what they do; if circumcision is “cutting around” then the word for “mutilate the flesh” in Greek is one word that means to “cut off.” What Paul says is that these people are those who don’t cut around the organ of circumcision

they cut it off; that which represents reproduction is cut off by them because their focus is not on Jesus but on themselves. They want what they want; they desire what they desire and it kills the life of the Spirit of God in the church and thus the joy of the Lord among the people.

Paul reminds them that if anybody has any reason to be confident the things of the flesh from birth to birthright to being blameless by the standards of the law, he does more than any. BUT, v. 7. And he shifts in the next verses into accounting terms. Those things which from the perspective of the flesh and the world that were profitable to me, I marked them on the ledger sheet of my life as losses and the reason for doing that was Jesus, 7. Then he goes further. He shifts into the present in verse 8. Now he is not just talking about what has been but what is and he includes ALL THINGS. And the reason is Jesus. But to make his point plain, he punctuates it with penetrating pungency at the end of verse 8. He uses a word that is best translated “human excrement,” and the word he uses is the slang for that term. Everything in my life is nothing and it is a stench in my nostrils because whatever I focus on rather than Jesus keeps me from focusing on Him. I want Him. I want to know Him. I want to love Him. Jesus and Jesus alone. You can have all this world, just give me Jesus. There is the first installment in your investment in joy: focus on Jesus alone.

Here is the second one: joy comes when we focus on Jesus alone and are faithful to Jesus alone, 9. Paul says when you find me, I want you to have found Him. When you look at me, I want you to seek Him. I don't want you talking about me, I want you to talking about what He has done and is doing in me and through me. I don't have any righteousness, it is from Him. He has made me right with God. I deserve condemnation and He has forever changed me. I want to know Him in the fullness of the power of His resurrection. Are you sure? Certain?

Here is where it will take you: into His suffering and death. Total separation from everything that is in this world and of this world so that you have died to them. As Paul puts it elsewhere: we are crucified with Christ but we live, not us really, but Christ living through us. Our lives are hidden in Christ by God. So we do not live to gratify the desires of the flesh. We are not captured and controlled by the values of this world. We are not after the things the world says that we should be after. Let me make you a promise: if you are trying to be after what the world wants you to be after and after Jesus at the same time, Jesus will lose and what you will lose is your joy. Jesus alone must be our focus. It is to Jesus alone that we desire to be faithful.

Paul is there at this point in his life. So is Timothy so that Paul can set himself and his son in the ministry as examples for the Philippian faithful, 17. Did they get there because they are greater than you and me? No. They got there by going through troubles and trials and maintaining their focus on Jesus and their faithfulness to Jesus during those terrible times. They had seen that Jesus never failed. And they were not going to fail in their focus and their faithfulness. But they knew what these believers were up against, 18-19. Paul says that these people are enemies of the cross of Christ because they have believed and are bearing witness to a false gospel and their end is destruction because they neither see or believe that what they are doing is against either the Word of God or the way of God. So what are they doing? They are pursuing a path in life that brings them pleasure as they seek to live life directed by their desires while at the same time professing to be people who are pleasing to God. The belly is a reference to the navel; they can see no further than themselves. Their shame refers to the pursuit of sexual and relational gratification that causes them to live contrary to the Word of God while saying that they are right with God. Their lives are consumed by the ways of the world and the ways of the flesh but they still believe in God and believe that they are right with God so blinded are they by the devil.

Such are not believers, 20. The “but” represents a real and radical contrast. We are citizens of heaven. Our home is already there. We are just pilgrims passing through this land below. And because we belong to heaven our focus is on Jesus alone, we want to be faithful to Jesus alone, and our future is shaped for Jesus alone. We look for His coming. We long for His coming. He will change us then completely and perfect us as His. He will bring everything and everyone in subjection to Him. He will do that. That is His work. Ours as Paul tells us is to stand firm in maintaining focus and in being faithful to Him by shaping our future for Him until He comes. That means simply that we are to be about His business here until He comes. We are to bear witness to Him. We are to bring people to Him. We are to praise Him in worship and proclaim Him in the world. We are to pray and to work for His Kingdom to come, for His church to grow, for sinners to be saved and the saved to become all that God wants us to be and all for His glory. And all with great joy.

Whether it is you as an individual or us as a church, joy is a precious gift from God that He wants to give you. And I believe with every fiber of my being that it is found when Jesus alone is our focus, when being faithful to Him alone is our foundation, and when our future is all about what we are going to do to reach people for Him. When you give your life to Jesus and Jesus comes into your life, Joy comes; it can come to you today.