

JOY...in brotherhood | Philippians 4.14-23

Grab your Bibles and open them up to Philippians 4. We will be finishing our series on the book of Philippians today, a series we have titled JOY. The reason for this title is that this letter is aimed at bringing joy to a people who are suffering persecution, as well as, an attempt to use JOY as the building block of confident Christian living. Paul uses the word joy, or rejoice, a dozen times over 4 chapters, leads us to terms like thanksgiving, contentment, and peace. So living out of joy will produce a character, that character will produce God's good. Paul is building for the Philippians, and for us, a way to interact with the world, from our joy in Christ - to produce God's good in everything we do.

In other words, he isn't so much making a case for joy, trying to convince us to be joyful. He assumes that as people who have been given a new heart, been made able to see the goodness of God, that we HAVE joy. He is encouraging us to apply that joy to all of life. As we talk about things acting out God's order in the church, or setting our minds on and drawing out God's good in community, this is all being built on the assumption that we have recognize what it is we have in Jesus Christ.

Our JOY is based in the fact that Jesus has done everything needed to make us His, He has taken away all of the pressure to make a name for ourselves, and He has taken care of the fear of the future. In Jesus, we can be confident, secure, and thankful. This is WHO WE ARE.

So today, Paul is going to bring this letter to a close. He is going use who we are as a means to maintain our relationships. Paul is going to use the relationship that he has with the Philippians as a teaching tool for them and an example to us. Let's get into it. Philippians 4.14:

GOSPEL RELATIONSHIP

[14] Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. [15] And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

The yet implies that he is building on the former conversation (continuing what he was talking about). Last week, we saw that Paul was thanking them for their kindness to him, though that kindness had a lapse. They had not supported him in some time, and he went out of his way to assure them that their lack of support was not being read as a lack of concern. He understands that his travel schedule did not provide the opportunity for them to get a gift to him.

Here he adds something else. It has to do with the character of their giving. He says: Yet it was kind of you to share in my struggle. Which implies that their giving was voluntary. The Philippian church chose to share in his struggles; he did not guilt them into giving. Which relates to something we hit on last week.

Last week was all about contentment, which we said means: self-sufficient; satisfied in yourself. We were careful to define this as: not a prideful self-confidence, but a sufficiency in who we are and what we have been given in the gospel. We have Jesus, we don't need anything else. One of the things Paul revealed, through his action, was that contentment brings with it the ability to see the concerns of others. No longer do you view people through what they do for you, or how

they complete you; people are now the focus of your love and service. People are who you share this crazy journey we call life. Paul connects the action of the Philippians church (giving a gift) to the source. You chose to share in my struggle. You didn't see my suffering as something that was mine to deal with, but you entered into it with me, and helped to alleviate some of the burden.

This is a description of their action, which brings with it an invitation for us. Sharing the trouble of others is something that accompanies contentment. When you have everything you need, when you are secure in yourself, then you can begin to help carry the load of others. This isn't just about helping people who are less than; serving the poor. This is about entering into the kinds of relationships that provide the kind of give and take that all human beings need. Paul refers to it here as: *partnership with me in giving and receiving*. Every person in the world needs relationships that have this push/pull, a faithful give, and a joyful take.

This is how Adam and Eve were created to function (helpers and companions) and how relationships will be in the New Heavens and the New Earth, with everyone perfectly serving one another. Acting out their God given roles for the benefit of others. I always point to these two places (beginning and the end), because these are where we see sinless, perfect relationship happening. What we see in both of these places is that people act out of a confident relationship with God, as an act of worship. This is how the Bible describes how we should live in community, because Jesus Christ has healed our relationship with God, we can now have healthy relationships with others.

If you have been here for any length of time, you have heard me harp on this, I am not going to stop. As the people of God, we have had the burden of self-justification taking off of our shoulders and have been given a joy at the core of our being. This peace, as Paul describes it, should change how we live with one another. As the church, we should be a reflection of the heavenly family that we will one day be a part of. Beyond just should be, more than this being the right thing, we should WANT to live this way because it will provide for us the sorts of relationships that we all desire. While we are all sinners and will mess up along the way, a community that operates as Paul describes here, will be able to weather this, because they are built with the reality of sin as a component.

What is the nature of these relationships? I have 5 characteristics, we have already covered the first 2:

1. These relationships are rooted in the joy of Christ. They come from a recognition that everything good you have comes from God, your future is secure because of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit is with you in everything.
2. These relationships begin with choosing to take on the trouble of others. You choose to let them in and to take the baggage that comes with that.
3. These relationships recognize the positive contributions of other people. This is the give and take aspect. You take on their trouble, but with it you gain something. What you gain in relationship is going to vary based on the person, but no person brings nothing to the table. There is not a person that God will not use to give to you in relationship.

4. These relationships do not expect anything. That may seem like a contradiction (you will gain a positive, but you shouldn't expect anything), but it isn't. In the next verse, v.17, Paul says:

GOSPEL FRUIT

[17] Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

This is to say that while Paul has just acknowledged the give and take, the relationship isn't based on measuring the give vs. the take. Relationships that are always comparing what you give vs. what you get don't work out. Not because you don't receive as much or more than you give, but because when you look at it this way, you just can't see it. A large portion of the good you receive is not felt. It is instead what Paul refers to here as fruit.

The fruit of robust Christian relationships are not easily measured. They produce something that progresses God's mission in the world and glorifies Him. We are being remade, shaped, and the efforts involved in this are creating fruit all around us. Which means that living out relationships in this way will be creating a greater good that you may never know about. The conflict comes in the fact that this good does not match what we want or expect. We talked about this in relation to contentment. It isn't that our relationships aren't providing for us what we need, it is that they do not give us what we want. These unmet expectations keep us from being able to enjoy the blessings that other people bring into our lives.

This is a very serious problem for us today. I would say that loneliness is one of the more common issues that people confess to struggling with. There a lot of reasons for this, but it doesn't seem to get easier with age. While we grow and figure some things out as we do, this issue of loneliness is not something we get a handle on.

While jobs, kids, marriage, and time all play a role, I think one of the main problems is that we measure potential relationships against some idea of 'friend' that we have created. This idea has been built from buddy sitcoms, self-help editorials and our own previous experiences. What these expectations do is prevent us from being able to experience the variety of good that God has prepared for us. We are looking for a certain kind of friend and we can't see the community God has put around us. We get discouraged - that turns into loneliness. These unmet expectations keep us from growing into mature relationships that are others-focused. And it keeps us from producing the fruit that comes from giving without expecting anything in return. We need to learn to see the positives without measuring the value of relationships on what perceived benefit. Which will lead us to the 5th mark of the relationships as Paul describes them.

5. These relationships bring fulfillment, because they are in addition to what we need and deserve. Paul says, v.18:

GOSPEL FULFILLMENT

[18] I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Healthy friendships are part of being a complete human being. We saw that God created it to be this way. We are not meant to be on our own; we are created for community. We have also said that the way you define this 'need' plays a large role in how well you feel this need is met.

If you see friendship or relationship as a bucket that needs to be filled, you will go out to find the right kinds of friends and relationships to make you feel like you belong, like you have support, and like you matter. Your idea for what kind of relationships will do this will be built out of your own idea of what you need. This will lead you to:

- a. cut people out who don't fit your mold
- b. way too much value into certain relationships because you depend on them for meaning (you will crush others under this weight)
- c. ultimately, never be satisfied because people just aren't that great.

I love people. People are fascinating. People have so much to offer. People also do really dumb things. People act extremely selfishly, they get emotional and say stuff they don't mean. They play games. If your hope is in finding people who are above all of this...you are going to have an empty bucket.

The other way of approaching relationships, the way that Paul is describing here, is to see yourself as a person whose bucket is already full. That relationship with Jesus Christ satisfies your NEED. In Him you have someone who chooses you, who cares about your best, and who you can go to with your anxieties, fears, and hopes. He gives you identity: in HIM you belong.

Friendship becomes an added benefit rather than a need. I said, we are created for relationship, but these are a blessing not something we deserve. If friendship isn't something you are owed, every bit of other people we receive, every good we are the recipient of, is a gift. If it is a gift, than it is a reflection of the giver. This makes our relationships a vehicle for praise and worship. We see Paul doing this here, as the generosity he is shown through friendship turns into a fragrant offering. What was merely a kind action is transformed into a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

This turns our horizontal relationships into something much more than having friends; these are people who are entering into the worship of God with you through the act of sharing burdens and self-less giving. Your relationships with others is about much more than you or them.

If your relationships are founded on what we have talked about here:

1. rooted in the joy of Christ
2. taking on the burden of the other
3. recognizing the benefits the other brings
4. not expecting anything in return
5. seeing relationship as a gift from God
6. using your relationships as acts of worship - seeing others as co-worshippers

If your relationships have this nature, they will have a depth and the ability to survive through life's frustrations (in the book of Philippians, the deep love and affection has been able to survive a long time without seeing one another). More than just resolve, our relationships will actually be fulfilling. From my perspective, and I could be wrong, most people who claim to be

lonely do not suffer from a lack of people in their lives. There are people everywhere. Like most things, we don't suffer from not having enough, we struggle because we don't know how to enjoy what we have. We try to find things that make us happy, people who make us happy; think that this will, well, make us happy. It doesn't. So we either keep trying, pinning our hope to a new person/group, or we give up, convincing ourselves that we don't really need people. Maybe even label ourselves introverts so that being lonely sounds like something that is just an outworking of our personality.

The relationships that God has given us are ALL there for our benefit. Even the ones that are difficult and the ones that seem to take more than they give. The only way for us to find this is for us to go back to step one and find our joy in Christ, trusting that He is actually working toward something. Paul puts it this way, v.19:

GOSPEL HOPE

[19] And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

[20] To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Every need of yours WILL be supplied. Paul makes this statement based on His understanding of God, not his experience of other people. Because God created the world, we now that He has a reason for everything that is made. Those reasons are discovered, by us, in their completion. In other words, we know that God has a rich glory that all things are working toward. Not just working in the general direction of, but every event that ever happens is swept up in the great story arc of God's redemption of the world.

This does not mean that everything is always good all of the time; sin and destruction are part of the story. The tough part for us, living in the story, is that we don't get clear lines and full understanding yet. As we live this out, we are navigating through the struggle; we are part of the sin and destruction. The one thing we do know, the thing we can be sure of, is God working in and through all of it.

If we apply this to our relationships, it means that the people in are lives have been put there by God. Their trouble is the trouble we are called to share. Their lives are lives we are called to be part of. Rather than trying to create some perfect group of friends or crew or squad or whatever stupid name we are giving to a group of people around us, simply practice mature relationships, trusting that God will work through them in our lives and that God will work through us in theirs. If the joy of the gospel is our motivation, we can continue to do this, even when it is difficult or seems fruitless.

The question is: what exactly does this look like? I want to end today with Paul's direction to the church in Rome on how to live this kind of mature relationshiping. In Romans 12, he says this:

[15] Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. [16] Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. [17] Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." [20] To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him

something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” [21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. | Romans 12:15–21

1. BE EMPATHETIC | *[15] Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* Share in suffering, celebrate victories, and give concern to how others are feeling.

2. BE KIND | *[16] Live in harmony with one another.* This is more than just: don't fight. To be in harmony is to be working with instead of against. We work against others when we don't give or take properly. When we are the help God has placed in someone's life, or when someone else is the gift God has given to us (which we don't even acknowledge). A very simple example of this is people in the various service-based jobs we interact with: cashiers at the store, tellers at the bank, or baristas at the coffee shop. These are people who God has put in your life, even if only for a moment, as a gift to serve you. I realize they are paid, I realize that this cost is reflected back into what you pay for services. These are people, not services. They should be honored and appreciated, not just looked past (or worse, depending on what kind of day you are having).

3. BE HUMBLE | *Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.* You are not too good for anyone, you are not right apart from God. This gives you the humility to listen and be compassionate, as well as the confidence to be bold when speaking God's truth.

4. BE POSITIVE | *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.* It is very easy to get caught up in the downward pull of sin and negativity. It is easy to fight back in the way you are being attacked. All of those verses about turning the other cheek, are about showing a better way by how you respond to the attacks of others. When someone comes at you, ask the question: what response will most benefit them? This keeps you from doing something you have to ask forgiveness for later, but also creates a basis for future interactions.

5. BE PEACABLE | *] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* One of my favorite verses, because Paul gives a caveat for those people for whom IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU DO. There will be people who take the love and service you have shown and throw it in your face as trying to control them or shaming them, or something else. You can't do anything for them. For your part, do everything you can to seek peace.

6. BE FORGIVING | *[19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.* The reason we can forgive is not because someone deserves it, but because we have been forgiven...AND because we know God is in control of vengeance. We don't have to be the arbiters of justice, God is. This doesn't mean that parents should not punish their kids and the state should not arrest anyone, God gives us direction in reflecting His justice on earth. When it comes to our individual relationships, we don't have to make the other person hurt in the way that they hurt us.

7. BE GRACIOUS | *To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”* This is only possible if you have the joy of Christ. To love your enemy, to give to someone who has done nothing but show disdain for you, this takes operating from something outside of yourself. Lucky for us, we have that. This is where we tap into WHO WE ARE, enemies of God, redeemed by Him

as a gift. This allows us to respond to hatred with kindness. With the hope of: heaping burning coals on their head, which doesn't mean, kill them with kindness. You win by being the better person. This is referring to conviction that comes from seeing your sin. The hope that you have for your enemy is that they will become reconciled to you through this reflection of grace.

8. BE BOLD | *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* Good has more power than evil. I know we believe this movies and fairy tales, but in the world we live in, evil seems so powerful. This power makes good feel like treading water at times. Truth is, the good has already claimed victory and the good will overcome. To enter into God's work, to add to His mission through your relationships, is connecting yourself to Him and His redemptive purposes. While it often feels small, it is through these small things that God changes lives and works out all things for good; this is how God connects your smallness to something so much greater. Which is Paul's final words to the Philippians, a reminder that you can not be lonely when you belong to the family of God, v.21:

GOSPEL FAMILY

[21] Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. [22] All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. [23] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

While this is an imperative to greet all believers in Christ Jesus, it is much more a reminder of the great family and purpose that those who have the joy of Christ are connected with. It goes beyond the people you personally meet, and it even extends into Caesar's household (which would be a big deal to them); the gospel has penetrated into the heart of the empire. All of these people who are out there attempting to live out their relationships as a reflection of the joy they have been given, these people will eventually be the community we live in. These will be your neighbors and co-laborers. For now, we are spread all over the world, as salt, flavoring and preserving God's world through lives lived for Jesus Christ. In the end, we will be gathered from all nations and brought together into a perfect community.

Until then, we have to do our best to live out our relationships as Paul describes here, tainted with sin and betrayal, but fulfilling because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. We come here every week to be reminded that our bucket is already full, so that we don't go out looking for something we already have. We come to Communion, to be filled; to be given the strength to keep going, living faithfully in a world that encourages us to put our hope, energy, and our worship in other things. We come to Jesus to be reminded WHO WE ARE. Come to the table today to be filled, and to tap into joy that is yours in Christ Jesus.