

ENEMIES OF OUR JOY

Dowlen Road, January 11, 2009 AM

INTRODUCTION

- A. Philippians has always been an odd book to me. Let me explain.
 - 1. Paul is in prison as he writes (1:12-14). Even worse, some of his own brethren were trying to make trouble for him while he is in prison (1:17).
 - 2. You would think that a letter coming from a guy in Paul's situation would be loaded with complaints about his lousy circumstances.
 - 3. But this is the odd thing about this letter. It is filled with expressions of Paul's joy (1:3-4, 18) and admonitions for the Philippians to rejoice (4:4).
 - 4. But how can that be? How can someone be filled with joy in the midst of such lousy circumstances?
- B. I think this question would be particularly difficult for disciples who do not experience a lot of joy in their lives.
 - 1. After all, Christians are supposed to be happy.
 - 2. But sadly, there are some who are not! Some disciples are miserable and unhappy most all of the time.
 - 3. They look around at other Christians who seem to find so much joy in serving the Lord and they wonder, "Why can't I find that kind of joy in my life?" "Why am I not happier?" "Where is my joy?"
- C. In this lesson we will try to answer these questions.
 - 1. I want to examine some of the underlying problems that rob many Christians of the joy God wants them to have.
 - 2. But I will warn you; we are not going to be pointing the accusing finger and blaming others for stealing our joy.
 - 3. Instead, we will take a long hard look at ourselves and the destructive attitudes we have and actions we take that rob us of our joy. Several can be found in Philippians. We will take our study from this letter. Why do I not experience the joy that other Christians seem to have?

I'M SELFISH.

- A. Westley likes to say that there are two basic kinds of people in the world: those who wear bibs and those who wear aprons.
 - 1. The ones who wear bibs are those who are focused on self. Their minds are filled with questions like:
 - a. Who is going to pay attention to me?
 - b. Who is going to take care of my needs?
 - c. Who is going to have me to their place?
 - 2. By contrast, those who wear aprons are focused on others. Their minds are filled with questions like:
 - a. Who do I see that needs something?
 - b. How can I help them?
 - 3. But this is the interesting thing.
 - a. If you pay attention, you will find those who are focused on others are far happier than those who are focused on self.
 - b. Look around our own family at those disciples who seem to be the happiest and you will find that, typically, they wear aprons, not bibs.
- B. Notice one of Paul's admonitions to the Philippians (2:3-5).
 - 1. There are two fundamental thoughts here.
 - a. On the negative side Paul is warning us not to get consumed with self. Life is not all about me and taking care of self.
 - b. On the positive we ought to take an interest in other people. Have the mind of a servant. Focus on what I can do for someone else.
 - 2. Notice also that, in doing so, we are imitating our Master (v. 5). Aren't you glad that, at Calvary, Jesus was thinking about what we needed?
 - 3. If we really want to find the joy that Paul experienced and other disciples have found, then we must get our minds off self and get focused on serving others. Selfishness is a terrible enemy that will rob us of our joy.

I'M SINFUL.

- A. The point here is not that we have all committed sin and need salvation.
 - 1. I am focused instead on the decision some Christians make to reject the truth they have learned, rebel against God's will and continue in some behavior that they know is wrong.
 - 2. For a Christian this choice brings two powerful negatives into our lives.
 - a. First, there are the consequences of my sin. The man who cheats on his wife is bringing a world of grief and pain into his life. He will be miserable because of the consequences of his sin.
 - b. But in addition to this, he will also suffer the guilt and remorse that inevitably follows our acts of rebellion (Psalm 51:1-4).
 - 3. The simple truth is this: as long as I continue doing something I know is wrong, I will never have the joy God wants me to have.
- B. Notice again one of Paul's admonitions to the Philippians (4:8-9).
 - 1. Godly living is an indispensable component of our joy. If I want to be happy, I've got to live right.
 - 2. We will never find joy, as long as we choose to persist in some sin.
 - 3. Sin is a terrible enemy that robs us of our joy.

I'M GRUMBLING.

- A. The grumbler chooses to see the bad in every person and in every situation.
 - 1. No matter how good they've got it, they will find a reason to complain.

- a. Comment on the great crowd last Sunday and they will complain about how difficult it was to find a place to park.
- b. Comment on their beautiful home and they will complain about how much it costs to cool it in the summer.
2. One of the problems with grumbling is that it becomes a mindset that feeds on itself.
 - a. The more I grumble the more negative I become.
 - b. The more negative I become, the more this attitude alters my perception of everything.
 - c. The more my perception is impacted, the less I am able to see the good in my life and become consumed with every little thing I don't like...and I grumble all the more.
- B. Paul had the opposite mindset.
 1. Remember that he wrote Philippians under lousy circumstances. And yet he refuses to dwell on the negatives of his situation.
 2. He chooses instead to focus on the good in his life (1:12,18). Paul certainly was not happy to be in prison or that some were preaching with evil motives. But he chooses not to dwell on such things or to be consumed with a negative spirit because of his problems.
 3. He would challenge us to have this same spirit (Philippians 2:14-16). If I'm missing out on the joy that comes with serving God, perhaps I need to pay attention to my words. If I'm grumbling and complaining all the time, I may be caught up in the downward spiral of grumbling. I need to start looking for good in my life and focusing on that.
 4. Ultimately, grumbling reflects an ungrateful spirit.
 - a. I think about the Israelites during the Exodus. After all God had done to deliver them from Egyptian bondage, all they could do was complain about every little problem they faced. They had no gratitude for all that God had done for them.
 - b. We need to be sure that we do not have the same spirit. God has provided us with a great deliverance – salvation from sin. If we receive nothing else, we ought to be filled with gratitude. Grumbling is an insult to the great God we serve.
 5. It is also a terrible enemy that robs us of our joy.

I'M UNINVOLVED.

- A. I mention this one because of something we learn about Paul from this letter.
 1. Paul clearly derives great joy from the work he does for the Lord (1:18).
 - a. You can sense his excitement in chapter one as he writes about the progress of the gospel (1:12-14).
 - b. He celebrated the work and growth of other Christians (1:3-5).
 2. It was his involvement in the Lord's work that served as the source of much of his joy.
- B. There is a lesson in this for us.
 1. Look around at the disciples you know who seem truly happy. Typically you will find that these are also people who have thrown themselves fully into some labor for the Lord. It is the disciples who are busy teaching their friends, working in Bible classes, visiting shut-ins, having people in their homes that seem to have found the joy.
 2. There is joy in all of these labors. Much of the joy we experience as disciples is wrapped up in the work God has given us to do.
 3. The most miserable Christians are also the most uninvolved. So, if I want to find the joy that is missing in my life, I need to get to work. Being uninvolved is a terrible enemy that robs us of our joy.

I'M DISCONTENT.

- A. The discontent live under the delusion that happiness is all about their circumstances, getting their situation in life just right.
 1. They are convinced that, if they could somehow change their situation in life, they would have joy.
 - a. If I just had a job I enjoyed...
 - b. If I could just make more money...
 - c. If my brethren would pay attention to me...
 - d. If I was married to someone else...
 - e. If my teachers would be fair...
 2. And yet, Paul's joy is clearly independent of his circumstances.
 - a. He is clearly full of joy as he writes this letter from prison.
 - b. In fact, he makes this point plainly at the end of the book (4:11-12).
 3. How is it that Paul could be content no matter what the circumstance in which he found himself (4:13)?
 - a. Paul understood that no matter what life threw his way, with Christ he could overcome. Jesus would get him through it.
 - b. It was his confidence in Christ that saw him through all the storms he had to face.
- B. We need to learn this lesson.
 1. Joy is not found in our situation, it is found in our Savior. It springs from the peace and comfort we receive from knowing that Jesus is with us; and with Him, we can overcome any adversity.
 2. This spirit of discontentment is an enemy that robs us of our joy. Finding joy is not about getting our situation in life just right. It's about building a relationship with the Savior.

CONCLUSION: DO YOU HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SAVIOR?