

BE JOYFUL, BEWARE, BE HOPEFUL**Philippians 3:1-11****(Read Philippians 3:1-11)**

Intro: Joy is infectious. If you walk through a crowd and smile at people – they will smile back at you. I make it my mission to bring joy to the people I meet and I'm usually successful. Ten years ago last month I had hip surgery and Dr. Bernhard told me if I wanted my new hip to last for 30 years I should discontinue running. This made me sad, because I LOVED running. I'd go out on Saturday morning with Robin Mark's Revival in Belfast album playing in my earphones and I would run ten miles with a smile on my face as I reveled in the joyous Celtic reels and jigs like Lion of Judah and Garments of Praise. I couldn't help it. Joy is infectious. Paul felt joy when he thought of his friends in the Philippian church – and they felt the same when they thought of their favorite apostle. And so he repeats it here in Philippians 3 as he begins with . . .

Let me say it again: REJOICE!

- This is the Epistle of Joy – we've been saying that since we began this study. Paul is repeating himself a lot – in my ESV translation this is the ninth time, by my count at least, that he uses the words joy or rejoice. And, right away, he begins it again here in Chapter 3, as he writes, *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.* Philippians 3:1a. Repetition is a good thing. It has been said that people need to be reminded far more than they need to be informed and Paul is making sure that Christ followers know that they are to be joyful. **In all things.**
- It's fitting, after all, since Paul is trying to make an important point – it's the principle of being able to rejoice in the Lord, period, and not in circumstances or in situations, but in the Lord who works all things together for good. This is why Christ Followers experience joy even in the face of adversity or even tragedy.
- Barclay calls it "The Indestructible Joy" And then he explains it with, "*He (Paul) sets down what we might call the indestructibility of Christian joy. He must have felt that he had been setting a high challenge before the Philippian Church. For them there was the possibility of the same kind of persecution, and even the same kind of death, as threatened himself. From one point of view it looked as if Christianity was a grim job. But in it and beyond it all there was joy. "Your joy," said Jesus, "no one will take from you" (John 16:22). There is a certain indestructibility in Christian joy; and it is so, because Christian joy is in the Lord. Its basis is that the Christian lives forever in the presence of Jesus Christ. He can lose all things, and he can lose all people, but he can never lose Christ. And, therefore, even in circumstances where joy would seem to be impossible and there seem to be nothing but pain and discomfort, Christian joy remains, because not all the threats and terrors and discomforts of life can separate the Christian from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord (Romans 8:35-39).*" And then Barclay uses two illustrations from the life of John Wesley that I won't take the time to share, to show Wesley's indomitable joy in the Lord in all circumstances, and he summarizes these accounts with "*If the Christian really walks with Christ, he walks with joy.*"
- Christ Followers walk with joy! So, was Paul wrapping up the letter that he says "Finally"? Maybe. When a preacher says "Finally" lots of people say "**Finally!**" and maybe he's wrapping up his teaching but then he remembers a tangent he needs to cover. So he detours and calls out a warning . . .

LOOK OUT!

- And then he uses very strong language that betrays his frustration with his former brethren – the Judiazers. Beware! Look out for the dogs! Look out for the evil doers. In this society where we love dogs so much that sometimes it appears people like them more than people – it's difficult to understand how despised dogs were in Biblical times. Just a quick study will reveal that in the Bible the dog always stands for that which nothing can be lower. And it was the same in Greek thought; where the dog stood for everything that is disgusting and unclean. Dogs could be found at the city dump feeding on garbage growling at one another and snarling at any humans who got too close. For the Philippians Paul's warning would have been as familiar as it was vivid and graphic.
- David Guzik points out that when Paul warns to beware of dogs: that it was a harsh reference to the troublemaking legalists who attempted to deceive the Philippians and practically every other church plant

Paul had begun. “Dogs” is exactly the term of contempt Jews would actually use when referring to Gentiles. And now Paul is using it for Jews. So Paul was saying a lot by using this word against these Jewish-influenced legalists.

- Archibald Hunter says that these are “*Paul's old enemies, the Judaizers, the men who argued that to become a perfect Christian, one must add circumcision and keeping of the law to simple faith in Christ.*” Dogs is a strong word and Paul was insinuating that the Judaizers fed on the garbage of human ordinances.
- F. B. Meyer writes, “*We are bidden, therefore, to beware of men of a quarrelsome and contentious spirit, who under the guise of religion hide impure and unclean things; and who are not only defiled, but defiling in their influence.*”
- It is no longer necessary to have the mark of Jewishness that circumcision was because Jesus did all the work at the Cross and with the empty tomb. In fact Paul says we are the true circumcision since we believe in spiritual rather than physical marks. Christ has done a work in us that shows our faith in him, rather than a work on us done by human hands.
- Instead of boasting in our keeping all the rules and rituals of Judaism, Christ Followers boast in Jesus Christ and his transforming work. And, the truth is, the only boast of Christ Follower is not in what he has done for himself but in what Christ has done for him. His only pride is that he is a man for whom Christ died. It makes the words of the hymn “*In the Cross of Christ I glory*” more poignant than ever. It’s in that Cross that we have . . .

The hope of resurrection

- The privileges and achievements of Saul who would later become Paul were all empty compared to the resurrection power of Jesus in his life. What he tells the Philippians is, essentially, “I know from personal experience that the Jewish way is wrong and futile. And I have the credentials to back that up: I was a circumcised on the eighth day, an Israelite, from the tribe of Benjamin. In fact I was named after the most famous Benjamite – Saul, the first King of Israel! I spoke Hebrew with the best of them – not Greek like everyone else. And to top it all off, I was one of the privileged few, one of no more than 6,000 Pharisees. I was the best of the best – and it’s all nothing! In fact, it was worse than nothing – it was manure in comparison to being in right relationship with Jesus Christ.” You see, you can never get into a right relationship with God by your own efforts – which is what the Jewish law is. You can get into a right relationship with God only by taking Jesus Christ at his word, and by accepting what God himself offers to you in Jesus Christ.
- Knowing Jesus Christ is everything and all there is. Barclay writes, “*It is the heart's desire for every religious man to get right with God. But how? There is a choice of ways: law righteousness or faith righteousness. As a practicing Pharisee, Paul tried the first of these, believing that by doing the works prescribed by the Law of Moses, he could put himself right with God and find peace. But Paul found only bitter experience that this way does not work. It leads only to failure and despair. To get right with God, you must give up all hope of earning your salvation by laying up a credit balance of good deeds in the ledgers of heaven. Instead, you must confess yourself a sinner and cast yourself on God's mercy offered to you in Christ, who, by God's appointing has died to save you from your sins. When you do this, God accepts you for Christ's sake, forgives you, and sets you among his people, to church, and you are on the way to salvation.*”
- This week Kathy and I met with a dear pastor and his wife for dinner in my role as Executive Assistant to the Bishop. Pastoral ministry is a second career that this man began in his 50 and he is now in his eighth year of vocational ministry. Prior to his pastorate he was a factory worker making parts for Honda. He had no formal training to be a pastor – in fact, he had no higher education at all. To hear him talk, it would seem he thinks that this is a disadvantage and I disagreed with him on it. Paul proves it here in Philippians 3 and Barclay puts it this way, “*To know Christ is not to be skilled in any theoretical or theological knowledge; it is to know him with such intimacy that in the end we are as united with him as we are with those whom we love on earth and that, as we share their experiences, so we also share his.*” I say AMEN!!! My pastor friend’s calling to ministry is the only credential he needs.

- If we put our hope in the world, we will fall waaaay short. If we put our hope in our own efforts we will fall waaaaay, waaaaay short! If we follow a formula that is anything other than believing in Jesus Christ and serving him – we will be hopeless. Our only hope is in Jesus.

Conclusion: Take joy in that ABC! Let that put a smile on your face. You've got

The joy, joy, joy, down in your heart

Where?

Down in your heart!

Where?

Down in your heart!

And it's not from anything you've done – but what Jesus did for you that makes the changes in you. Live like the redeemed people you are each and every day.

Be joyful. Beware! Be hopeful! Amen.