

“COMPLETE MY JOY”

Philippians 2

All of us have known people who had a certain sadness, hurt, hardness in their eyes, their facial expression. No matter how happy people are around them, they just can't join in the happiness. No matter what good fortune comes to them, they can't appreciate it – something is missing. When someone tries to love them, something holds them back. They are broken people. Inside their heart every spark of joy is quenched in a pool of tears or a whirlpool of anger.

Each one of these broken people has a story, a story that is hard for them to share with anyone else. It may be the sadness of not being able to have children or the sadness of having lost a child in death. It may be the sadness and anger of having been abused. It may be the sadness and anger of having lost a spouse they loved and trusted to unfaithfulness or to alcohol or drug abuse or gambling. There are many, many more other reasons that so many people are incapable of joy. They are so sad and/or angry that happiness seems to mock.

There is nothing that you and I can do for these people. BUT we know Jesus Christ who can help them. Therapists spend hours with patients trying to get inside to bring to the surface what is buried.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings." (Jeremiah 17:9-10 NKJV)

Satan doesn't want people to be happy. It is a lot easier to get people to sin when they are sad and angry. He hides all kinds of lusts, resentments, lies in our heart to bring them out when he needs them. Jesus Christ can get inside our heart, cleanse it, fix what is broken.

1.) Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:1-11NKJV)

Paul is not talking to people who are broken and have no joy. He is talking to Christians who have some joy. He wants them to have more joy. Jesus and the apostle John use the expression “that your joy may be full.” At the same time Paul urges them to make his joy complete. On other occasions he says that his joy would be full if he saw someone or some group. On this occasion he says that his joy would be complete if they made changes in their conduct.

What has thrown a wet blanket on Paul’s joy to dampen it or put it out? Imagine a soldier comes back from Iraq. At first he has occasions of joy one after another meeting family, old friends. Then he becomes aware of tensions, hard feelings, jealousy, and rivalry. He feels pulled in every direction. Each one wants him to agree; take sides with them.

Paul’s solution is that each of them should have the same mind. They should follow the example of Christ in His humility. Paul then quotes the words of a hymn which begins, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...” This hymn traces His preexistence, incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God.

2.) Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

(Philippians 2:12-18 NKJV)

Some people have taken the phrase in this passage "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" to argue against the doctrine that salvation is by grace alone and not by works. That is taking this phrase out of its context. Paul is telling busybody, judgmental, holier-than-thou church members to look at their own lives. It is equivalent to Jesus' teaching:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:1-5 NKJV)

Not only were they criticizing and judging others in the church but whenever there was something to be done, there were always griping and complaining, counting how many times one person had done some job compared to how few times another person had done their share.

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, It isn't just the peace of the church and Paul's joy that is at stake, it is the church's credibility in the community. Who is going to want to hear the message of a church whose members are at odds with one another? If they will follow the example of Christ, they will be blameless and harmless, loving one another, in a world that is crooked and perverse.

3.) But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly. Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

(Philippians 2:19-30 NKJV)

Paul now introduces two men into the discussion. He informs the church at Philippi that he is sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to them. This is so that they will know that these men come on Paul's authority. He had used Christ as an example of how they ought to act. Now he uses two men, like themselves as examples of godly conduct.

He had instructed: Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Of Timothy he says: For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, Paul had instructed them: Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. He says about Epaphroditus: I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick... Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life. They will rejoice; Paul's joy fulfilled.

