



LET THERE BE LAUGHTER

Joy in the Lord in Philippians

Session 6

Joy in Purpose - Philippians 3:1-8

Watch Out for **JOY ROBBERS**

For believers, two main dangers vie to rob us of our joy: **pride or despair.**

1. Verse 1 It's safe to say it again: **"REJOICE!"**

1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

There are many things that can rob us of our joy in Christ. Philippians is full of Paul's encouragement to **rejoice**, which he mentions 16 times in this letter.

2. Verses 2 – 4a As in football D  wins games.

2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

Truism heard in TV recently: "No team has ever won the Super Bowl that didn't have an excellent defense." Defense is necessary against spiritual pride in our religious heritage, i.e., as Lutherans. It's important for us not to lose our emphasis on the pure gospel of Christ, while not "cashing in on it."

Those Paul was defending against were called "Judaizers," who gloried in their having been circumcised. Controversy arose in the early church re: whether Gentile converts should be required to be circumcised. In Acts 15 the first church conference was held. Answer: Circumcision would **not** be required.

In O.T. it was vital to see meaning behind physical circumcision: Jeremiah 4:4, "Circumcise **your hearts**, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out...because of the evil you have done." Stephen in his speech before being put to death: "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!...You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:51)

Jesus was using hyperbole in Matthew 5:29, but He made His point: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

Paul contrasts the Judaizers ("dogs," "mutilators of the flesh") with those who "worship by the Spirit of God, glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh." See Jesus' words in John 4:24 about "worshipping the Father in Spirit and truth."

3. Verses 4b – 6 Paul’s credentials used to look good.

4b If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Paul lists 7 assets in his religious resume. And then he dumps them in the “garbage” (verse 7).

In a recent Newsweek article George Will highlighted our current American tendency of hedonism, whereby “every pleasure soon becomes an entitlement.” Why, “because we are Americans.” Really?

Predestination is a truth which God gave to help struggling Christians not to give in to despair because of their low social status, nor to allow His people to develop a spiritual elitism. He never intended that we make passages like Ephesians 1:4-5 into an excuse to become spiritual couch potatoes: “For God chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Paul asked the Corinthians (1 Cor.4:7): “What do you have that you did not receive?” And Jesus assured his trembling followers (Luke 12:32), “Don’t be afraid, for your Father has been pleased to **give** you the kingdom.” We need to be on guard against the subtle suggestion: ‘God chose me in the beginning, because, knowing all things, he knew I would turn out good.’

4. Verses 7-8 Turning the tables puts our priorities in an upright position

7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul that his dependence on his credentials had become an obstacle, not an asset, to serving God. “I (now) consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” (verse 8)

Paul’s now sanctified attitude showed he had emptied his heart of the “foreign matter” of being full of himself: Gal 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Paul “put to death the flesh” (the weak, sinful self), changing his orientation from self-focus: “Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again.”

There was also a practical reason Paul needed to drop his excess baggage: it was a drag on the dynamic advance of the gospel. His new orientation: “We put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:12). “What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it” (v.18).

SHARING THE JOY

1. When feeling a void, beware of grasping onto the straw of spiritual elitism (self-justification re: our heritage).
2. Put up the healthy defense of not depending on externals like “I’ve been circumcised” or “I’ve been baptized.”
3. Assess your view of your “rights” and how you use them.
4. Set as your #1 goal in life: “I want to know Christ.”