

Philippians Chapter 3 & 4

Study 2

“Know the Secret for Experiencing Real Joy”

Dear Co-workers,

Why is our joy, peace and happiness so quickly hindered by whatever is talking place around us, while Paul, although imprisoned, can proclaim, “rejoice in the Lord.”(Phil.3:1 NIV)? Could it be that we are not watching out for the “dogs” that he warns us about in verses 2 and 3? Those that Paul calls “dogs” are the ones who are so quick to get us to put our confidence in the “flesh”. This flesh being our achievements, appearances, efforts to create favorable circumstances. Paul points out that is not where real joy can be found. Instead he warns us to, “steer clear of the barking dogs, those religious busybodies, all bark and no bite. All they’re interested in is appearances--knife-happy circumcisors, I call them. The real believers are the ones the Spirit of God leads to work away at this ministry, filling the air with Christ’s praise as we do it. We couldn’t carry this off by our own efforts, and we know it—even though we can list what many might think are impressive credentials. You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God’s law: a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting Christians; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God’s law Book. The very credentials these people are waving around as something special. I’m tearing up and throwing out with the trash--along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung”. (Phil.3:2-8 The Message Bible)

If we want to release the joy of the Lord God in our lives we must spend time alone with God and develop intimacy with the Almighty. This is what Paul says really matters. It means we must get beyond the surface and experience the deep things of God. In 1Cor 2:10 we read that the Spirit of God “searches all things, even the depths of God”. The depth of His wisdom and ways are defined as “unsearchable” and “unfathomable.” We find this in Romans 11:33 “Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” What joy comes from knowing the judgments and unfathomable ways of God. Daniel declared that God “reveals the

profound and hidden things” and that “He knows what is in the darkness”.(Daniel 2:22) We discover in Job 12:22: “He reveals mysteries from the darkness, and brings the deep darkness unto light”. Paul shares with us in Philippians 3:10 his desire to plunge into these hidden mysteries of God and get to know Jesus intimately. (For my determined purpose is) that I may know Him—that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding (the wonders of His Person) more strongly and more clearly. And that I may in that same way come to know the power overflowing from His resurrection (the power it exerts over believers); and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed (in spirit into His likeness) even to His death”.(Phil. 3:10 The Amplified Bible)

In this verse we see Paul’s purpose for living. “That I may know him...progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving..recognizing..understanding..continually transformed”. Paul says nothing on earth is more important. Yet how many make getting things and earthly achievements their priority for living. Paul is challenging us to make our number one priority to become more intimately acquainted with Christ. Then and only then can we experience real joy in living that is not dependent on circumstances.

The psalmist declares his deep desire to get to know God intimately in this way: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the Living God”.(Psalm 42:1,2) There is nothing more important than to get to know God intensely and Jesus is the way, the truth and the life who makes that possible. Before Paul states in Philippians 3 his determined purpose, he identifies his accomplishments in verses 5-6 and then declares in Philippians 3:7,8, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord... and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ”. Paul counts everything else as rubbish in comparison to knowing Christ. The Message Bible called everything else dog dung. The question that is now before us is, how much time do we spend in getting alone with Christ and seeking Him in comparison to the time we spend watching junk in TV? If everything else is rubbish, next to knowing Christ, why do we spend so much time then in the rubbish and such little time with the Lord? No wonder we don’t have more joy of the Lord in our lives. It is this time with the Lord in solitude which enable us to experience the key to surrender and the releasing of the joy of the Lord. It is the key of surrendering all to God that unlocks the best and deepest of God’s treasures. To surrender to God means to trust God. As Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do

not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight”. That is why Paul declare in Philippians 3:10-14, “I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience His resurrection power, be a partner in His suffering, and go all the way with Him to death itself. If there were any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it. I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out to me. Friends, don’t get me wrong. By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.”(The Message Bible) Do you have your eye on the goal? Are you going to keep moving closer to Jesus each day and not turn back?

Keeping our eye on the goal is more than experiencing the peace, purpose, presence and joy of Christ now. If we let the grace of Jesus Christ save us and set us free from sin, we will achieve the goal of citizenship in heaven and being with Christ for all eternity. “For, I have often told you before and now say again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so they will be like His glorious body”.(Phil.3:18-21 NIV) What is your goal? Where is your head at? Do you long for the day when you shall be with Christ and He transforms these lowly bodies to be like His glorious body? Just thinking about our citizenship in heaven should bring joy to our heart unlike anything else we can imagine.

In the midst of the trials and tribulations remember that these also will pass. The day will come that these aching bodies shall be transformed to be like the glorious body of Jesus. Remembering that our citizenship is in heaven, Paul continues by saying, “Therefore my brothers, you whom I love and long for my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord.”(Phil.4:1 NIV) “I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn’t want His children holding grudges. And oh yes, Syzygus, since you’re right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with other veterans—worked as hard as any of us. Remember their names are also in the book of life. Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in Him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you’re on their side, working with them and not against them. Help

them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute”! (Phil. 4:2-5 The Message Bible) Are you celebrating life everyday? Paul declares “Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again. Rejoice!”(Phil.4:4 NIV) The reason Paul says you can rejoice in this way, even if you are in prison like he was, is because Jesus is about to return. The time for the return of our Lord is even closer now than it was at the time Paul spoke these words.

At this point I would like to tell Paul, “All that stuff about rejoicing may be well and good for you Paul, but you don’t know the troubles I’ve got. My wife has breast cancer which has spread throughout her left arm. What do you have to say about that Paul? In addition to that Paul there are bills, bills and more bills”. Paul’s response is, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”. (Phil.4:6,7 NIV) Paul is telling us that anxiety or worry is opposite of prayer or petition. Instead of worrying we should be praying with thanksgiving. Thankfulness in our prayers keep them God focused and not simple acts of vocalized worry. We are promised that if we pray with thanksgiving, bringing our requests to God, we will experience a peace beyond all understanding that will guard our heart and minds in Christ Jesus. That means that instead of worrying I can pray for my wife’s healing with thanksgiving, knowing that not only will Christ heal her and make us closer than ever before, but as this healing and restoration takes place I can have the peace of God that passes all understanding. The same is true for all the financial needs and for every need that you are facing as well.

Knowing how the mind can resist this spiritual truth, Paul proceeds to tell us how to use our minds in a powerful way. “Summing it all up friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice, what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into His most excellent harmonies”. (Phil.4:8,9 The Message Bible)

Paul’s proclamation of joy in spite of the circumstances now takes us to the subject of contentment in all situations. If there is no contentment there is no joy. “For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry, whether living in

plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength”. (Phil 4:11-13) These are the words of a free man. One who has discovered that union with the Living Christ is the secret to contentment and the source of on going strength and joy in every situation.(John 15:5, Eph.3:16-17, Col.1:11) At a time when prosperity theology and the philosophy of materialism is so prevalent it is critical that we do not forget that “godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief’s”. (1Tim.6:6-10 NIV) How do you feel that being discontent can destroy one’s faith? In what area of your life do you feel the Lord is trying to teach you contentment?

Paul concludes this great book where we are taught how to be joyful is very in every situation by declaring, “my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus”. (Phil.4:19 NIV) Let us take a closer look at each phrase in that verse. When the words “my God” are used they reveal a promise based on a personal relationship. When we die to ourselves and our selfish desires Christ resurrects us into the family of God. The words “will meet” in this verse reminds us that it is God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, who is our source of supply. In verse 19 we find the words, “all your needs,” not the words all your greed, reminding us of what Paul has said earlier about contentment. “According to His glorious riches” tells us that God’s supply never runs out. We will find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb.4:16, Eph.1:18,19). “In Christ Jesus” is where we find every blessing and every need met.(Eph.1:3) After this great verse, where Paul declares how all our need will be met, he then declares, “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever Amen”.

Paul has shown us in the book of Philippians the secret of experiencing real joy no matter what the circumstances may be. Now remember, “rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again; Rejoice”(Phil 4:4) Please join me this next week in reading the book of Colossians. Now “may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”(Phil.4:23)

Yours in Christ’s service

Larry Rice