

Cultivating joy through humble service (Philippians 2:1-11)

In the excellent message last Sunday, we learned that the lives of the people of Christ should be marked by **great joy**. This doesn't mean that as a mature Christian you will never experience sorrow. On the contrary, knowing the love of Christ will not only increase our capacity for joy, but also for sorrow.

When we have love in our hearts we will experience sorrow. But we can also know a joy in the Lord that will keep us from drowning in sorrow. Moreover, the joy of the Lord will not only keep our heads above the waters of pain and suffering, His joy will also strengthen us to rescue others who are drowning in a sea of sin and sorrow.

On that first Christmas, the angel of the Lord appeared to lowly shepherds out in the fields and announced: "*Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger*" (Luke 2:10-12).

What was the good news of great joy? The good news was not that the messiah was riding into town with an army of angels ready to deliver His people from Roman oppression. The good news of great joy was that the Savior was born, who is Christ the Lord. And where would they find the Christ child? In a palace fit for a King? The lowly shepherds would find the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

Now the fact that the shepherds were the first to receive the good news of the birth of Christ tells us something very significant about the King of kings. In those days royalty did not associate with lowly shepherds. They would likely be the last not the first to receive an important announcement from the palace.

But Jesus was not like the kings of the earth. Jesus Himself not only came to earth in a humble manner, He also lived a life of humility. He was not only laid in a lowly manger when He was born, during His earthly ministry the King of kings said to a would-be disciple, *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”* (Matthew 8:20).

The fact that the joyful news of the humble birth of Jesus was first announced to lowly shepherds speaks to the purpose of His incarnation. He didn’t come to be served, but to serve and give His life to rescue the rejected, to save the sinner, and to lift up the lowly.

The good news of great joy is that the Son of God became the Son of Man so that the lost and the lowly can enter into the joy of the Lord as sons and daughters of God. The joy of the Lord is the salvation of sinners at His expense.

Now this good news of great joy not only saves all who humbly receive it by faith, but it’s also made complete in all who humbly live to serve others for their joy.

The good news of Jesus is too good to keep to ourselves. Our Christianity ought to be contagious. But for it to be contagious, great joy must characterize our lives as followers of Jesus. As Andrew explained in the message last Sunday, “Joy isn’t passive. It must be active, cultivated, chosen, and sometimes, we must often battle for our happiness in Christ.”

Does great joy characterize your life as a follower of Jesus? To be compelling and contagious Christians, joy must mark our lives. But this will not happen automatically. We must cultivate and fight for joy day by day.

And as we will see from the Apostle Paul’s description of the humility of Christ in Philippians chapter two, to cultivate His joy we must emulate Christ’s humility and others-oriented life.

Main idea: Living joyfully in Jesus is enhanced by humbly serving others in His name.

To unfold this theme, we are going to consider 3 ways that we must cultivate joy through humility and service to possess a contagious Christianity.

1. Cultivate joy by harmoniously maintaining the unity of the faith

First of all, joy is cultivated not in isolation, but in community. We cultivate joy by harmoniously maintaining the unity of the faith. Before unfolding this first point, it's important to note that Paul is writing to the Philippians in a time of persecution. Not only were the Philippians facing opposition, but Paul himself was writing his letter from a prison in Rome.

Knowing the opposition to the spread of the gospel, Paul writes to encourage the church at Philippi. And he does so by exhorting them to not only stand together for the faith, but to do so in the joy of the good news of Jesus.

Joy is a major theme in the book of Philippians. Paul teaches that their faith and joy in Jesus will not exempt them from suffering, rather their faith and joy will give them strength to endure.

With this in mind, Paul writes: *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind”* (Philippians 2:1-2).

Notice that before Paul gives the Philippians their marching order so to speak, he first speaks of the blessings of being in relationship with Jesus. When Paul points to these blessings, he begins with the words, *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ...”*

When Paul uses the word *if*, he's not doubting whether one is able to find *encouragement* in Jesus. Rather, he's saying that if the Philippians were experiencing all the blessings he mentioned, which

are indeed found in relationship with Jesus, then they would most certainly be able to fulfill the imperatives that he lays out.

What are the blessings that Paul highlights that are found in close communion with Christ? First, when we are pursuing a close relationship with Jesus, we will find *encouragement* in knowing that we are in Christ—that we are united with Him—that we are heirs together with Jesus.

Secondly, Paul speaks of the *comfort from love* that flows from our communion with Jesus. There is no greater joy, no greater blessing than to know the manifest love of Jesus. To know the eternal comfort of God's love is what the incarnation of Jesus was all about. In 1 John 4:9 the apostle John wrote: "*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him*" (1 John 4:9).

Now Jesus didn't just manifest the love of God through His earthly ministry and sacrificial death on the cross. His comforting and soul satisfying love is also manifested in and through the lives of Spirit filled believers. We are saved to incarnate His love.

Thirdly, Paul speaks of the blessings of *participation in the Spirit*. When we receive Christ as Savior and Lord, the Spirit takes up residence in us so that we can participate with Him in what God wants to do in and through our lives.

Lastly, Paul speaks of the *affection and sympathy* that believers in relationship with Jesus will experience. O brothers and sisters, when these blessings are being experienced in our lives, when we know the *encouragement* of Christ, the *comfort of His love*, and the participation or *fellowship of the Spirit*, we will be filled with *affection and sympathy* for others.

Now in the strength of these overflowing blessings in Christ, Paul gives several exhortations. And before giving some imperatives that involve unity in the church and humble service, he begins with the personal exhortation, *complete my joy*.

Notice that Paul's joy was tied to seeing the church in Philippi united in Christ and growing in His likeness. Paul didn't say to them, *complete my joy* by starting a fund raiser to get me out of prison.

Paul's joy, which flowed from the blessedness of his relationship with Jesus, was enhanced by knowing that this same blessedness was being lived out in the Philippians. Moreover, as with Paul, when the blessedness of Jesus is lived out, the same others-oriented joy would be true in the Philippians and also in our lives as believers today.

When we know the blessedness of being in relationship with Jesus, which Paul described in the opening verses, our joy will also be complete, enhanced and cultivated by seeing Christ at work in the lives of those we serve.

With this in mind, notice that the next exhortation that Paul gives has to do with harmoniously maintaining the unity of the faith. He continues: "*complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind*" (Philippians 2:2).

According to Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, the unity that the church is called to supernaturally display is a vital witness to the world that God the Father really sent Jesus to save sinners (John 17:20-21). Unity rooted in the love and joy of Jesus is a defining mark of a church that impacts the world for Christ.

Now this unity that Paul is talking about is not uniformity. When he exhorts believers to be of the *same mind*, to have the *same love* and to be of *one mind*, Paul doesn't mean that Christians are to think the same about everything. Rather, we are to have the same heart as Christ and stay focused on our common mission, namely to spread His fame in the world.

When we have the same heart as Christ and the same gospel focus, we can set aside petty differences so that we might spread the good news of great joy to all people. When we have the same mind and love of Christ, our joy will not be found in getting our way or having

others meet our expectations. Rather, like Paul, our joy will be complete when we are doing our part to maintain the unity of the faith.

Remember, we learned in Andrew's message last week that the word "*blessed*" in the bible can also be translated *happy*. Perhaps the place where we are most familiar with the word *blessed* is in the sermon on the mount. In the Beatitudes, Jesus used the word *blessed* to describe a state of deep-seated joy that is experienced by those who have entered into His kingdom and are living a kingdom lifestyle. Now among other qualities of His kingdom, Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God*" (Matthew 5:9).

Brothers and sisters, when you're not experiencing the joy and happiness that is to define the people of the kingdom of God, you will be easy prey for the enemy to use you to bring dissension and disunity in relationships.

But when you know the blessedness, the contentment, the delight and the joy of being in relationship with Jesus,
You don't need to get your way to be happy.
You will more readily give up your preferences to maintain the unity of the faith.
You will possess a spirit of cooperation.
You will not sweat the small stuff.
You will not major on the minors.

And a community with this same mindset, this same love, this same Christ centered focus is a place where joy is cultivated and made complete. It's a place where people find happiness not just in being served but in serving others for their joy in Jesus.

This brings us to a second way that we cultivate joy, namely by humbly ministering to the needs of others.

2. Cultivate joy by humbly ministering to the needs of others

Paul continues in verse 3: "*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* ⁴ Let

each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

As you may know, we are living in an entitlement culture. People who are enmeshed in the entitlement culture act as if the whole world revolves around their perceived rights, needs, and wants.

“Its rallying cries [as got questions explains] are ‘my way,’ ‘my rights,’ and ‘I deserve.’ Within American society certain rights are acknowledged as God-given and inalienable. But the entitlement culture takes it further, presuming rights that are neither divinely granted nor constitutionally guaranteed. Often, entitlement culture is associated with the younger generation and manifests itself in demands to get something for nothing—education, health care, wages, advancements, etc. But those with a feeling of entitlement—that the world somehow “owes” them—can be older, as well. Many middle-aged and older people feel entitled to a comfortable life, a lack of pain, a freedom from difficulty of all kinds. Everyone likes the idea of being pampered. It’s when we start demanding perks and comforts as a “right” or when we try to circumvent the principle of *earning* privileges that we succumb to the entitlement culture.”
www.gotquestions.org/entitlement-culture.html

Interestingly, research shows that with the rise of the entitlement culture there has also been a rise in depression and anxiety. According to an article in Forbes, “researchers from Case Western Reserve University found that entitlement typically leads to chronic disappointment; you feel like you deserve certain things, whether tangible or intangible, yet you never get them, so you always leave a situation with unmet expectations. People then feel frustrated, unhappy, and overall disappointed with life, and cope with this by blaming others—rather than themselves—to continue feeling that it’s the environment that’s responsible for their disappointment. Over time, this can lead to clinical depression and isolation.”

In contrast, the apostle Paul, writing from a prison in Rome, exhorts believers to *complete my joy* by casting off the entitlement mindset.

He wrote: *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves”* (v.4).

Now Christians need holy ambition. We should have holy resolve and passion for achieving godly goals and dreams. But when our ambitions are purely self-centered, when they’re all about my comfort, my reputation, and my prestige, they will not lead to deep contentment, happiness and soul satisfaction.

Moreover, a community filled with self-absorbed and self-centered people who will only do something for someone else when there’s something in it for them, is a community filled not with joy and harmony, but with rivalry, envy and strife. How many of you know, being self-centered, prideful and thinking that everyone owes you something will not make you a truly joyful and happy person.

On the other hand, a humble person—a person who counts others more significant than themselves—who looks out for the interests of others, is easy to please. Or as C.S. Lewis put it, “they seem to enjoy life so easily.”

The happiest people are the humblest people. It’s been said, humility is not thinking less of yourself; it’s thinking of yourself less.

Similarly, deep seated happiness isn’t maintained by making life all about your happiness, but from living for the good of others, especially by helping others find their happiness in Jesus. Jesus said, *“It is more blessed, [or joyful] to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul said, *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* A preacher friend of mine often said, “Don’t give until it hurts; give until it feels good.”

Have you noticed that during the Christmas season people around you, (i.e. co-workers, and supervisors), who typically seem angry and unhappy all the time, are more cheerful and merry? I believe this is true because the Christmas season is a season of giving. So even when non-Christians give, they feel the joy of giving. But then when

the Christmas season of giving is over many go back to being hateful, angry, and unhappy.

But for those of us who truly know the grace of Jesus, the true Christmas spirit of giving should never come to an end. For those who know the blessedness of being in relationship with Jesus—God’s love that came down in the flesh, every day is Christmas.

This brings us to the final way that we cultivate joy, namely by honorably making it all about the Savior.

3. Cultivate joy by honorably making it all about Jesus

After exhorting the Philippians to cast off the spirit of entitlement, the spirit of self-centeredness and conceit, Paul continues:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

This passage on the humility of Christ deserves so much more attention than our remaining time will allow. But in the time we have left I want us to see how the incarnation of Jesus—deity clothed in humanity demonstrated the heart and humility of Christ.

Christ took on human form to embody for us the love and others-oriented humility that is to characterize our lives as followers of Jesus. Beginning in verse 5, Paul explains that the joy giving humility that we are to cultivate is not only ours in Christ, but it was also modeled by Jesus. In other words, we can live a counterculture life of humility and service even in the face of opposition, because we are in Christ and Christ is in us through the power of the Spirit.

Moreover, the ultimate motivation for living a life of humility and service is not the pleasure that we get from helping others. Rather, we

are compelled by the manifest love of Jesus—the love that came down for us.

How many of you know, not everyone you humbly serve and sacrifice for will appreciate it? In fact, there may be people in your life who will return evil for good.

As Christians, we should honor and show great appreciation to humble servants of God, as Paul demonstrated at the end of this chapter (v.30). But we don't humbly serve others ultimately for their approval, appreciation or recognition. We humbly serve with our eyes on the Savior *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped...*" -

Jesus, who had every right to be in the position of supremacy, did not cling to His rights, power or privileges. Rather, He emptied himself of all but love and was obedient unto death for the joy of knowing that His sacrifice would bring salvation to us (Hebrews 12:2).

Although as followers of Jesus we will find joy in serving others and seeing them succeed, our ultimate delight comes from bringing delight to the heart of our Savior and doing everything we do for the honor of His name.

Now after pointing us to the glory of the humility of Christ in whose grace we humbly serve, Paul concludes:

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

God being God has the right to tell us how to live our lives. But He didn't just tell us how to live; He sent His Son to show us how to live and love. No one will ever go lower than Jesus did for the sake of others. And no one will ever be more highly exalted.

There is an essential and life transforming principle demonstrated in Jesus' humility and exaltation, and all throughout the scriptures. During his incarnational ministry, Jesus summed it up like this: *"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted"* (Matthew 23:12).

If we sow pride and self-preservation, we will reap spiritual emptiness and ruin. If we sow humility and self-sacrifice, we will reap spiritual restoration, joy and soul satisfaction. As the Psalmist declared: *"Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."* Psalms 126:5-6

Writing about the humility and exaltation of Jesus, David Delp, observed: "Because great seed was sown, great harvest resulted. Because great obedience was demonstrated, great authority was granted. Because great sorrow sowed seeds of perspective, great joy came (Psalms 126:5-6). Because we have sown in tears we will reap in joy. Because we have sown precious seed we will reap a precious harvest. Because we yield our power and position, another day will come when we will find the greater joy of being exactly where God wants us."

Conclusion

Do you know the joy of being in relationship with Jesus, the lover of your soul? He was sent to embody the love of God in the fullest way through His life of humble service and ultimately through His death on the cross for our sin. If you don't know His manifest love, I plead with you to repent of your pride and self-rule, and receive Jesus by faith as Savior and Lord.

Remember, if you know the joy of being in relationship with Jesus, you must cultivate that joy through humble service and loving sacrifice. O let us seek every day to sow seeds of humility and service—to look out for the interests of others and not just our own so that we might reap a harvest of joy and righteousness to the glory of Jesus.