

Is your life filled with JOY?

October 9, 2016

This past week I was listening to a radio program of Charles Stanley and he was speaking about Christian growth. He advised anyone who was looking to grow in the Lord to read the book of Philippians at one setting and to think about it chapter by chapter after reading it. I have read this book many times, but decided to do just that as soon as I got home. I encourage you to read this short book; it only has four chapters but it is a gold mine for the subject of "JOY". How can we have joy in the midst of trouble and sorrow?

Paul is the author of the book and he is writing to the believers who dwell in Philippi. He has travelled all over the world, liberating people from the bondage of sin and offering them freedom in Jesus Christ. He has been famous in his own right yet few would desire to walk in his shoes. When he was called to be an apostle, the one thing that was offered to him was suffering. Jesus told him that he would suffer for the cause of Christ. Yet Paul gladly picked up his cross and followed Jesus Christ. This book was written in a prison which consisted of a drab room surrounded by high walls. Paul is an older man with chains binding his hands and feet. Also chained to him is a guard from the Roman army. He has every reason to be depressed and sorrowful. He has labored much for the cause of Christ, yet now he is confined to this restricted room because of his faith. His friends have forsaken him and many were ashamed of him and he is conflicted by danger. See chapter 1:15, 1:21. The letter that he wrote didn't speak of self-pity, hurt over grievances by others, disappointment in God for not delivering him of his chains or any other thing that he could have spoken about concerning his condition. He wrote about JOY.

Imagine being in this state of misery yet having a heart filled with JOY. How does that happen? The book is filled with treasures and reading it certainly changes a person's focus from this world to a higher plane.

Paul speaks in his letter of praying for the people of Philippi. He thanks God for every one of them and remembers them in prayer with joy. He mentioned how grateful he was for all their help while he was ministering among them and he encourages them by telling them that God has done a great work in their lives and will continue to do so until the work is finished and Jesus Christ returns. His letter is filled with loving, encouraging, faith filled admonitions and there is no hint of any despair due to his dark environment.

He spoke about the contents of his prayer: He desires that their love will continue for one another and will grow; He desires for them to increase in knowledge and understanding with their love; He prays that they will discern the difference between good and evil and will choose the good; they will be pure and without wrong at the coming of Christ; and finally that they will do many good things with God's help to bring glory and praise to God. He wanted people to know that the evil things that have come against him have brought good results for the cause of Christ. It has helped spread the gospel to a dying world and that has brought Paul much JOY. He states that all the palace guards and everyone else

knows that the reason he is in prison is because of his testimony of believing in Jesus Christ. He rejoiced because now that he is in prison, other believers have stepped up to the plate and become bold in Christ and have not allowed the fear of man to stop them from speaking the word of God. Paul acknowledges that there were some who preach about Christ with wrong motives, but there are true believers who are motivated by love and earnestly desire to help the cause of Christ. They believe that Paul was given the work of defending the work of Christ and building on the foundation that Jesus laid. Some are motivated to preach to cause trouble for Paul while he is in prison but Paul says that the reasons or motives behind those who preach the gospel isn't important to him, for he just rejoices that the word is reaching those for whom Christ died.

Paul declared that he is happy and will continue to be happy and because he knows people are praying for him and the Spirit of God is helping him, he knows that this trouble will ultimately bring him freedom. His concern is that he doesn't fail Christ in anything, but that he will always have the courage to show the greatness of Christ in his life here on earth whether he is alive or dead. To Paul the only important thing in this life was Christ and he would gain when it was time to die. He had come to the place in life where it was hard to choose between living on earth or dying and going to be with the Lord. He had reasoned that he would profit by being taken out of harm's way if he died, but the people who he desired to win to Christ would suffer loss because of his absence. He was willing to continue until his work was done in order to help others grow and have joy in their faith. Therefore he looked forward to being released from prison so he could work among the new believers.

He said "There is only one thing that concerns me: Be sure that you live in a way that brings honor to the Good News of Christ." He desired that when he came to visit them that he would hear that they were standing strong with one purpose, that they worked together as one for the faith of the Good News and that they would not be afraid of those who were against them.

In chapter 2, Paul stresses the attributes of Jesus Christ and how that we should strive to be like him. He asked some questions that are important to think about. Does your life in Christ give you strength? Does his love comfort you? Do you share with others in the Spirit? Do you have mercy and kindness? Paul said that if these things were true of the people, that would make him extremely happy. He warned against being motivated by selfishness and pride, but instead be humble and give more honor to others than to yourselves. Don't be only interested in your own life, but be interested in the lives of others. He spoke about what Jesus Christ gave up in order to obtain eternal life for us. He is God, yet he didn't use that for his own benefit here on earth. He gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He was born to be a man and became like a servant. When he was living as a man, he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God, even when that caused his death, death on a cross. So God raised him to the highest place and

made his name greater than every other name so that every knee will bow to the name of Jesus- everyone in heaven, on earth and under the earth. And everyone will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and bring glory to God the Father.

Paul admonished the believers to continue being obedient to God in his absence for it was even more important that they follow God whether or not; Paul was physically available to them. He told them that God was working for them to help them to want to do and be able to do what pleases him. He spoke of the importance of doing everything without murmuring and complaining. He told them that they would be God's children without fault. He mentioned that they were living among crooked and mean people and God would use them to shine like stars in a dark world. Believers offer the teachings that give life. Paul was happy because his life counted for Christ and it was not wasted for he ran the race and won. He spoke of the JOY that he felt knowing that there were people who believed and had faith in his message of salvation and would be with him in heaven when Jesus returns. His desire was that these people would also experience the JOY of salvation. In Chapter 3, the first line of the chapter tells us to be full of JOY in the Lord. He exhorts us to not have confidence in those who teach anything other than what Jesus Christ has revealed to him. We are to worship God through his spirit and our pride is in Christ Jesus. He warned against putting trust in ourselves or any abilities that we may have. He went on to share his life's accomplishments before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. At one time he took great pride in them, but now all these things were worth nothing to him except Christ. Giving up everything from the past gave him a new life in Christ and he was right with God not because of following the law, but because of believing in Jesus Christ. God used his faith to help him be obedient to the will of God. Paul desired to know Christ and the power that raised him from the dead. Paul didn't turn away from suffering but desired to be obedient regardless of the suffering the came his way. He wanted to have the assurance that he too would be raised from the dead to a new life. Paul admitted that he hadn't attained his goal but that he continued to strive for it. He wasn't perfect for he was a man, but he desired to be more like Jesus every day. That should be our desire also. He said that if there are teachings that we do not agree with, God will make them clear to you. But continue to follow the truth that you have been given. Paul warned us about people who mind earthly things, they have no respect for the commandments of God and they are enemies of the cross. One day they will be destroyed. But our homeland is in heaven and we are waiting for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ to return to earth. By his power to rule all things, he will change our simple bodies and make them like his own glorious body. In Chapter 4, Paul begins by expressing love towards the saints of God and telling them that he desires to see them. They bring him JOY and he is proud of them. He encourages them to stand strong in the Lord as he has told them. He mentions women who have helped him in the ministry and he asked a faithful friend to give aid to them. Once again

he reminds them to be filled with JOY always. Notice how many times Paul mentions the needs of others taking the focus off his own situation.

He mentions attitude in this chapter. He tells us to be gentle and kind for the Lord is coming soon. Instead of worrying, pray and ask God for everything you need and always give thanks. And God's peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Protect your thoughts. Think about things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure, beautiful and respected. Paul told us to do what we have learned and received from him and the example he lived before others. The God who gives peace will be with you.

Paul finished the letter by telling how happy he was in the Lord for the care that God's people showed towards him. Even when there was no way they could help Paul, God took care of his needs. He wrote that he was content in whatever state he found himself. He was happy when he had plenty and he was content when his cupboards were empty. He states that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. We can also claim that verse for ourselves for with God all things are possible. He ended the letter by saying that he had all he needed at that time for a friend had delivered the gift that the church sent to him.

Paul had leaned much and God had at this time seen fit to set him aside to write this letter so that down through the years people who need encouragement could find help within these pages. There is nothing as comforting to a hurting person as sharing burdens with those who have walked in their shoes and travelled that same road of sorrow as they are travelling. We all have sorrows, heartaches, disappointments in life, but strength is gained when we share with one another those things that have caused us pain in life.

I hope that you too will find the gold nuggets that are tucked into this small book of the New Testament. Whether you are in prison, are in a financial crisis, have lost some loved ones by death, Paul's words are powerful to help us gain courage, faith and victory in our lives. Jesus Christ is the answer to every situation and struggle that we face. He is all we need. Praise be to Jesus, our Lord, Savior, and deliverer.