

11/27/11

That Crazy Family of Yours #1 – Tis the Season for OCD

- I hope you had a great thanksgiving with your family and friends on Thursday...we had a marvelous time last Sunday evening thanking the Lord and celebrating as a church family...so hopefully we've all been focusing on thankfulness...
- but in this culture...you barely finish your last bite of pumpkin pie before the attention switches to Christmas...and that's not necessarily bad, but it's certainly busy...
- and many of us would say that we have something of a love/hate relationship with this time of year...
 - we look forward to it...we like it – but it also has some very unique challenges...
 - we always have a surge of calls to our counseling center after the holidays...
 - the volume is turned up for all of us, both good and bad...that just comes with this time of year...
 - which, when you think about it – is kind of sad...because at the time we give over to celebrating the One who came to be the Prince of Peace...for many of us, this is when peace is most elusive...and that in and of itself, probably indicates that we allowed something to get out of balance...or we haven't yet found answers to handling the special challenges that come with this time of year...
- for many men and women—if you made a list of what aspects of Christmas are most difficult or perplexing...it wouldn't be long before the topic of your extended family was on the table...
 - you will probably be spending more time with your immediate family in the next month because of school breaks and vacation days from work...and you'll also be spending more time with extended family because of people traveling all over the country to see one another...
 - that's why this year, we want to take the next several Sundays and just talk about **That Crazy Family of Yours**...we want to think about principles and passages from the Word of God that can help us navigate this time of year more successfully...
 - This morning we want to focus in on **Tis the Season for OCD**...and to help us get a handle on that topic...please open your Bible this morning to Philippians chapter 3...page 155 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
 - while you're turning there, let me just be sure I've said that in this series...we're really poking fun at ourselves...
 - we're not here to criticize our extended family members or cast them in a negative light...we're here to think about why we don't handle those challenges any better than we sometimes do...and what principles from the Word of God will help us do better...
 - and we do want to make this enjoyable – because we have been pushing very hard together as a church family – the banquet last Sunday night illustrated some of the many things the Lord has allowed us to accomplish as a team – so it doesn't hurt from time to time just to lighten things up...plus sometimes it's OK to laugh where we hurt...and some of what we get upset at around the holidays is pretty goofy when you step back and think about it...
- I also want to be sure we're said that when we use words like crazy, or OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), we're using those in the broad way they're used in popular culture...not in some professional sense....and again, to mildly poke fun at how obsessive we can be about certain things...

- the challenge we always face in situations like this is that on the one hand, there's the way you mean something...and on the other hand...the way someone in the audience hears it, or receives it...
- believe me, we know that what the world refers to as mental illness is no laughing matter...
 - we spend literally thousands of hours providing counseling for people in our community, many of whom have been given one or more labels from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders...we take that as seriously as can be...
 - I also know as a parent of a special needs child that children with organic abnormalities in the development of their brains often have all sorts of versions of Obsessive Compulsive Behavior...that too is a very serious phenomenon...
 - I was even asked to write a chapter this year in a book that is about to be released by Broadman and Holman entitled Counseling the Hard Cases – and my chapter was titled The Gospel and Obsessive Compulsive Behavior...so we're not talking about any of that in a formal professional way in this series...
 - we're using these words the way they are thrown around in broad culture for the purpose of mildly poking fun at ourselves and then searching for answers in the Word of God...now, is that enough disclaimers to keep the email traffic down this week?
- now, maybe at this point it would be good to throw out a few definitions...
 - **Obsess** – “To haunt or trouble in mind, especially to an abnormal degree”
 - **Compulsion** – “that which compels; driving force; an irresistible, repeated, irrational impulse to perform some act.”
 - in other words – because we think about something too much – or place too high a value on it...we respond in ways that are really counter-productive...
 - I'll try to illustrate this much more in a minute...but just a random example – the person who obsesses about being able to bake a turkey as juicy as mom used to gets very little sleep the night before because she's worrying about the turkey being dry...and then is mad all thanksgiving day because it didn't come out as juicy as mom's...so the holiday is ruined because of a problem that could have easily been solved with a can of gravy you could have bought at Meijer---which when heated and slathered over the meat solves all culinary problems...
 - here's a little holiday tip, just like caulking solves all construction mistakes...gravy solves all culinary ones...
 - our obsessions can ruin the holidays...
- now, can I tell you something amazing?...
 - you and I are not the first people in the history of the church to struggle with thinking about the wrong thing too frequently – or placing too high a value or priority on certain aspects of life – in other words, to obsess...
 - nor are we the first persons in the history of the church to live compulsively...to take certain irrational actions as a result of a mind that's racing in the wrong direction...
- in fact, you could say that at one point in his life – the apostle Paul did the exact same thing...and what's especially great about that news is – he also specifically taught and powerfully modeled the process of getting to a better place...
- read Philippians 3:1-16
- so we're talking about, 'Tis the Season for OCD...and with the time we have remaining...let's think about...**3 steps to placing the focus of Christmas where it belongs.**

I. Identify the Areas You Might be Tempted to Obsess About.

- did you see how Paul did that in these verses?...

A. For Paul

1. circumcised the 8th day

- and I realize you might say – why would anyone think about that, or value that?...
- we learned the answer to that question in our study of the book of Acts...where some people even inside the new church were insisting that a person could not truly be a follower of Christ unless even as an adult, they were circumcised...
- that's obsessive...

2. of the nation of Israel

- in other words, my identity is wrapped up in the details of my birth...
- that makes me better than someone else...
- that gives me higher value...
- so I think about that a lot, and look for opportunities to let others know about it

3. of the tribe of Benjamin

- one of the favored tribes
- and by Paul's day, there had been so much intermarriage a Jewish person seldom would have known their complete pedigree...
- but Paul's family had apparently remained faithful to their heritage in the sense of only marrying within that particular tribe...
- and he saw that as a reason to boast...as a reason to think he was better than others...
- and if we think that doesn't happen today – we would be wrong...
- how many people from broken families go to their in-laws and feel inferior because of their heritage...
 - I don't fit in...I don't measure up...I wonder what they say behind my back when I'm not around....and that eats at them like an obsessive cancer...as if they had any control over their family of origin in the first place...

4. a Hebrew of the Hebrews

- in other words, even though many Jewish people at this time of history had blended into the Roman culture around them...Paul had maintained his Jewish distinctive...and he took great pride in that and thought about it a lot...

5. as to the law, a Pharisee

- in other words, he was all in...
- if he was going to do it...he was going to do it all the way – and that's where he found his joy...and his identity...in knowing and keeping the law and judging those who didn't... any person who would have known Paul at that point of his life would have said that he was obsessive about keeping the law...

6. as to zeal, a persecutor of the church

- when this new sect came along, he was so adamantly opposed to the message of Christ that he justified murder and persecution of completely innocent people...

7. as to righteousness which is in the law, found blameless

- he had religious OCD for sure – completely fixated on earning righteousness before God and finding His joy and identity in his supposed obedience...

- now, let's translate that over to you...but not in a general way, but specifically around what followers of Christ can become overly focused on during this time of year...it's a rather long list, isn't it?

B. For you.

1. the perfect decorations

- there's nothing wrong with having fun decorating your house – but when you freak out because one of the strings of lights went out just before the guests arrive...there's a lot more going on there than lighthearted decorations

2. the perfect meal

- here's the sad reality – just like most men will not be as handy as our fathers or grandfathers...most women will not cook as well as their mothers or grandmothers...
- and there's nothing wrong with wanting the meals to go well – that's one of the ways a person can glorify God...but when you cross the line into worrying about, or spending too much time or money to achieve, or neglecting other priorities, or getting upset if something doesn't turn out well...then you've placed way too high a value on the outcome of that meal

3. being accepted by your extended family

- some people crave position...
- and they demand to be treated in a particular way when they go into someone else's home or environment...
- and they walk into the room like this giant vacuum cleaner sucking up all the approval they can possibly find...
- and every word is a slight...
- and every lack of compliment is viewed as being on purpose...
- your mom complimented your sister's hair but she didn't say anything about mine...
- everybody made a big deal about your brother's promotion but no one mentioned mine...

4. having the perfect body shape or size

- some people go on a crash diet 3 weeks before Christmas...
- I am going to fit in that holiday dress...
- I am going to turn heads when I walk in the party...yea, when those buttons pop off and go flying across the room you probably will...
- and again, nothing wrong with trying to be good stewards of our bodies...but how much mental time is that subject worth...(cf. typing these very words when 2 little guys knocked on my door and offered me a cupcake for their birthday – I don't eat cupcakes every five minutes – but for crying out loud – why not?)

5. being thought of as being materially prosperous

- why do so many people spend more money than they have at this time of year?...
- many times it's to impress others
- it's amazing how many people will go out and buy a new car they can't afford just so they can one-up their brother in law in the holiday driveway...
- or buy gifts or clothes that you can't afford just to impress other people...
- haven't we learned the lesson that people who might be impressed by our material things aren't worth impressing anyway?...and are certainly not worth the pain of the debt that invariably accompanies the needless purchase?...

6. having perfectly behaved kids

- just like Paul found his identity in his righteous deeds, some parents find their identity in their children's accomplishments
- so we stuff our kids with sweets, keep them up too late at night, drag them halfway across the country---and then get irritated when they don't behave well, because of the bad impression that gives people about us...

7. being in the preferred marital or family state

- this one is much more serious...but this may be another Christmas where you have to endure family members making dumb comments about you not being married...or maybe if you are married, not having children...
 - or maybe in your case, you've gone through a divorce this year...and in your mind, that is what defines you...more than anything else...
- now, that's just the beginning of the list – we could do dozens and dozens of ideas...here's what I'm encouraging you to do right now...identify the area that you might be tempted to obsess about in the next 30 days...to think about too much, to too highly value...because remember, we don't change in general, fuzzy ways – we change when we identify specific habits of the inner/outer man...
- now, what happens next?...

II. Learn to Deemphasize Things in Your Heart that Don't Really Matter.

- see, verse 7 contains the great transaction...

A. For Paul.

- **Philippians 3:7 - But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.**

- do you see the key phrase – “gain to me”?...
 - that's what that whole list was...
 - Jesus was nowhere to be found...
 - which is sad, because that was the purpose of the OT law...

- **Galatians 3:24 - Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.**

- so the very things Paul is obsessing about – is focused upon – is finding his joy/identity in...are actually taking him further and further away from the Savior...

- it's like the story John MacArthur likes to tell of the family that had a new baby, and a couple of months later they had a lot of friends and family in to celebrate and they were enjoying one another's company and someone eventually asked where the baby was...and to everyone's horror the mom pointed to the same bedroom where they had all stacked their coats when they came in...and they had literally suffocated the very baby whose birthday they came to celebrate because of neglect...

- and did you see Paul's solution – it's the key to everyone we're talking about this morning...I had to learn to count that as loss...

- **count – ageomai – engage in an intellectual process**

- and Paul is saying that I had to make a mental shift, and come to the conclusion that things I used to believe were incredibly important or valuable were in fact loss...

- they don't really matter any more...

B. For you

- in order to handle the next month well...there very well may be all sorts of things that you have to say...that really doesn't matter...that's really not that important...I'm not going to let that get in the way of higher priorities...
- in fact, in verse 8 Paul goes so far as to say – I count all of that as rubbish...
 - **v. 8 - rubbish – skubalon – waste, dung, manure**
- So I am not going to overspend and bring all sorts of unneeded financial pressure on me and my family simply to impress people that I seldom see...it's no worth it...it's not that important...what I used to obsess about...I now consider loss
- I'm not going to worry about how my in-laws treat me...and whether the plans work out the way I want...and whether I'm accepted and revered...
- putting those issues in the loss column could dramatically reduce the amount of drama around the holidays...
- it doesn't matter if the presents all have matching ribbon...it doesn't matter if the cinnamon rolls aren't as tasty as Grandma's...it doesn't matter if this on my body is too big and that on my body is too small...

- now, what does this look like in real time?...how does this transaction work?...
- let's say that going to the in-laws is always a point of tension for you...
 - they don't treat you as well as you believe they should...
 - their traditions are different...
 - it's hard to fit in...you just don't like it, and it's uncomfortable...
- so every Christmas it's a fuss...you drag your feet...you're late...you make snide comments...you clam up...you make the process of your spouse visiting his/her family as miserable as you possibly can...and practically as soon as you get there you're wanting to leave...
- and you may not even fully understand why you feel this way, but you know it's powerful...
 - is it possible that you're thinking way too much about your comfort...and your acceptance...and your familiarity...and your treatment...?...the things you believe would be gain for you?...
 - is it possible that this Christmas, one of the best gifts you could give your spouse is – when we're going over to your family – I want to make that as pleasant for you as possible...and I'm going to learn to consider whatever I believe I want/need out of that to be loss...to be unimportant...far less valuable and important than I've thought before...I'm not obsessing about any of that...
 - so honey, what time would you like to leave?...I'll be ready early...
 - is there anything I can make or take that would especially show love to your family?...
 - let's talk about some of the great memories you have from your family on the way over and let's be sure the kids are learning them...
 - and I'll be sure to offer to help in the kitchen or serve in some other way to free your family up to visit...
 - and I'll do my best to engage in conversation even though I find your grandmother's love for NASCAR a little bit over the top...
- that's the kind of intellectual exercise Paul went through...and that's what God calls us to do as well...
- now I realize you might say – but you're talking about me giving up all of my rights...I'm losing myself in this process...

- isn't that the point of the manger?...isn't that the point of being united with Christ in His death?...isn't that what it means to preach the gospel to ourselves?...
- and isn't it unfortunate that too often the very time of the year that is given over to celebrating the birth of the Savior is the very season where we're least like Him?...
- now, Paul doesn't stop there...because the Lord never asks us to remove something from our hearts and lives without offering a far better substitute...

III. Find Your Joy and Identity in Your Resurrected Savior

- I really believe that there will be a direct correlation between the genuine joy of the holidays, and our ability to live in the middle of Philippians 3:8-11.

A. For Paul

- 1. v. 8 - The surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**
 - many times our obsessions are like cataracts that prevent us from clearly seeing Christ...
- 2. v. 8 – that I might gain Christ**
- 3. v. 9 – that I might be found in Christ**
- 4. v. 9 – that I might be found in Christ's righteousness**
- 5. v. 10 – that I may know Him**
- 6. v. 10 – that I may know the power of His resurrection**
- 7. v. 10 – that I may know the fellowship of His sufferings**
- 8. v. 10 – that I may be conformed to His death**
- 9. v. 11 – in view of my coming resurrection**

B. For you

- bottom line – what you frequently think about is where you find your joy, it's where you place you identity, it's where you locate your trust...
- many of the things that get us upset during the holidays do not deserve that position...the One whose birthday we're celebrating deserves it.