

Order of worship for June 9, 2013, title, “Joy in the World”, text, Philippians 1:12-18

Opening Song:
Welcome

Invocation: Isaiah 52:7-10
Ministry Moment:

Message theme: The Christian’s joy is first of all in the advance of the gospel as the proclamation of salvation through faith in Jesus.

Worship theme: Thanks giving for God’s great gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and commitment to proclaiming the gospel near and far

Sunday Evening in the Word
The Christian and Worldly Authorities: 1 Peter 2:13-25
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Church Library

Opening Song:

“Come, Now is the Time to Worship” overhead

Welcome

Invocation:

Isaiah 52:7-10

Special Music:

“All You Died for Me to Be”
Mike Kokoletsos

Ministry Moment:

Youth Summer Plans

Preparing the Heart in Song:

“Before the Throne of God Above” overhead
“O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” Song # 21
“I Love to Tell the Story” Song # 444

Offering and Offertory

Message:

“Joy in the World”
Philippians 1:12-18 Pastor John Bronson

Response to the Word:

“I’ll Tell the World That I’m a Christian” Song # 448

Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer

Sunday Evening in the Word:

5:30-7 pm, in the EFC Library
The Christian and Worldly Authorities:
1 Peter 2:13-15

“The Prayer Closet”

June 2, 2013

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

“The Prayer Closet”

“And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Matthew 21:22)

This week let us be united in praying for:

The Nelsons: the Spirit will impart His joy to them as they promote missions locally and work with missionary candidates; the Lord will render them effective in influencing their children and neighbors for godliness; they will be protected from illness and loss.

President Obama, The Congress and the Supreme Court: the Lord will renew in them an understanding of the genius of the Constitution and the priority of the defense of individual liberty and responsibility in accord with the Bill of Rights.

Trustees: the Spirit will guide them into unity of mind regarding the summer projects for upgrading our church facilities. **The Building Committee:** they will enjoy the Spirit’s wisdom in anticipating how best to meet the future needs of the church and school.

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: SMSgt Tye Turner, Air Force (husband of Cathy): for safety in his commute to and from Beale, for safety for all his unit on the job here and overseas.

Young Adult of the Week: Kate Finn at Azusa Pacific (daughter of Sean and Penny): comprehensive exams coming up, please pray for a successful testing.

Please pray for our homebound family members: Hilda Chapman , Carol Koehler, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Fred & Jean Pauly

(please call the office to request updates)

Our holy and gracious Father, we are here because You called us here. In our own minds and in the history of our decision making which covers the past few hours and perhaps days, all of us had various decisions by which we ended up here, but behind our decisions is Your grace. Jesus said, “No man cometh to Me except the Father draws him.” We believe You are drawing us, Father, into the presence of Your Son. We ask that we would now enjoy the illuminating presence of Your Spirit, granting to us an understanding mind and a believing heart as we hear Your word. We pray this giving thanks in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Let me ask if you would open your scriptures and turn to Philippians I. The title for today is “Joy in the World”. The question that I would ask is, this morning when you got up – and if you were blessed of the Lord you have air-conditioning, and if you are a little less blessed of the Lord you didn’t have any air-conditioning – so you went through the night sighing; but could you rise up and meet the dawn with joy? That is the question. Often when people speak of the letter which Paul wrote to the Philippians they say that this is a letter of joy. Paul uses the word joy over and over again in the course of the letter. So we should be thoughtful as to whether or not joy is in fact a significant and perhaps we would say a defining quality of our Christian life, that it describes who we are as we live in Christ.

We are going to be looking at Philippians 1:12-18; but we didn’t quite finish last week! I want to be sure we finish [that earlier message] because what is being told us in the very last verses of Philippians 1:3-11 is so critically important for how we live our Christian lives. Let us begin by picking up our study at verse 9. In v. 9 of Philippians I Paul says, *“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with all knowledge and discernment.”* Then he goes on and says, *“...so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory of God.”* I hope that I can impress on all of us the importance of those comments for how we live our lives together.

The thrust, you might recall, of last week’s message was the importance of cultivating the affections of the heart or the affections of Christ (v. 8) for the well-being both of the individual believer and of the Body of Christ as a whole of which we are a part. This is a needed supplement or actually a completion of what we normally understand as the defining love amongst Christians. That defining love is agape; it is a love of the will, a love [which is summed up in] the determination, “I will do the best I can for you. Whether I like you or not makes no difference. I am committed to your well-being.” That is God’s attitude towards us and that needs to be our attitude towards one another. “I am committed to pursuing your greatest good.” That is agape love.

However, that love, in and of itself is rarely sufficient. Conviction alone rarely suffices to sustain faithfulness or the bonds of servant-hood over the long haul. We are simply not strong enough. We do not have an adequate inner strength of the will and a determination to pursue a proper course to the very end if in fact we are not also animated by a lively affection for those with whom we live. So in addition to having the determination to do what is good, Paul responding to the motions, the motion of the Spirit in his life, is falling into, [actually] is cultivating a lively affection for the people that he serves. That is what he says; notice that Paul wrote in the eighth verse, that he yearns for the Philippians. He yearns for them and he does so with the affections of Christ.

In the next verse Paul refers to the love of the Philippians. That love needs to be expressed in or by the affections of Christ. But just as this love is more than moral love alone, it has more as an addition to affection. The first thing we recognized about Christian love is that it is a moral love; the second is that we desire to cultivate affections for one another. When we live in proximity to one another we learn to appreciate and delight in one another. But there is something else. Notice what Paul says: *“My prayer is that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and discernment.”* The love which Paul has for the Philippians and that the Philippians are to have for Paul is a knowledgeable and discerning love. Paul goes on to say it is a love which knows how to seek and know the truth.

What you are going to watch here is what helps us know that Christian love is so distinct from what you hear sung about on the radio [and other media] over and over. When we say to one another – I will say this to Frank, “Frank, I love you.” Now some of you don’t know this, but Frank is a major irritation! He is! If you go to the Sunday School class that we normally have after the sermon, and he is just, well...! But when I say that I love him, I am saying I am determined to do what is right for him. But that is not enough. Then I am saying, I cultivate, I determine, I choose to look upon him and develop an affection for him. I will come to know who he is, how he is, what his life situation is, to delight in him. Then there is another step. That step is the one that Paul is now talking about. This is a love that Paul says is knowledgeable, that it has knowledge and discernment. What is it going to be discerning? The first thing is that it knows the truth, not just about Frank in this case or any other individual. It is about the truth of God, of course. The love that I have for someone is going to be defined, controlled and directed by my love for God and what God says is true and good. That is going to be a defining reality [of this kind of love]. So it is going to be a love that disciplines itself to discern good from evil. It disciplines itself to discern the distinction between what is virtue and what is sin, between what edifies and builds a person up as opposed to what tears them down. It is a love that promotes obedience both in myself and in the man whom I love.

What you understand is that when we use this term “love” as Christians we are not describing a sentimental love. Sentimental love is best understood as what Junior High children have. Junior high kids are so excited about being in love. It doesn’t need to be with anybody in particular; it’s these emotions, the dance: it is so wonderful to be in love! That kind of love is preoccupied with its own emotion. But that is not the kind of love that we are to share with one another. The kind of love that we share with one another is a love which sees and accepts the deep seriousness of the purposes of God in the redemption of souls.

If we put all that together we begin to realize how when we receive the gift of God’s love, when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, when we receive the gift of His life in us, something significant begins to happen to us. The way we respond to others, the way we think about others, the way we look at the issues of life, the way we weigh things out begins to change in response to the active presence of God changing us into His servants. We become His servants.

Christian love is to be knowledgeable and discerning. In verse 10 notice that Paul prays for the Philippians, “...so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Think about that statement: if in fact I love with the love of God – that is the point here – a person, and that person is turning away from the Lord and falling under the control of some destructive habit, what must I do? I must intervene; I must speak; I must pray to the Lord and I must then seek to reach out to that friend of mine and say, “Please, my brother, please my sister, I cannot abandon you into your walk of sin; I cannot do it because I love and I have a discerning mind that knows the course of action you are taking is leading you to destruction.” This is what is meant to say that our affections for one another are informed, the inner structure of them, reflects the moral will of God; it is a moral love. Paul prays that they will be discerning, that in their love they will approve what is excellent.

These two things come together, they are succinctly joined in Hebrews 5:11-14. Please turn there in your scriptures. We just looked at Philippians 1:10. In Hebrews 5:11-14 we read what many people find surprising. This is absolutely essential. Why is this so essential? We have watched something happen in our country. Our country has gone into moral decline. Yet there are in our country literally millions of people who say “I believe in Jesus.” Millions of people say, “I read the Bible.” The question is, then why does that not make any difference? For the decline in the moral quality of American life is not limited to non-believers. The decline in the moral quality of American life is almost equally true of us, those who are constant in the body of Christ. What is going on? There is an essential aspect of our life in Christ that has not been, perhaps, emphasized that is here put before us. Hebrews 5:11-14, “*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For*

though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” Constant practice, discerning the difference between good and evil: that has not been the characteristic of American life. Indeed, even within the context of the church there has been a massive and continuous effort to redefine what is good and redefine what is evil, so that very little is evil and almost anything can be good.

The author to the Hebrews wrote to believers who have fallen short of the calling of God in two essential ways. Obviously they have ceased to study the Word so as to grow in knowledge. They have left off, however, at the same time their powers of discernment for distinguishing between good and evil. They have, in other words, become lazy minded regarding the Word of God, and they have become morally lax regarding good and evil.

We need to understand the relationship between those two things. The relationship is this: you cannot be morally lax or lazy and grow in your understanding of the word of God. When Paul is praying as he did in verse 9 that the Philippians will abound more and more in knowledge and discernment, he is not praying primarily for more Bible Studies, spiritual life conferences and better expositional sermons. Those are all great things but that is not what is on his mind. He is praying that the Philippian believers will do what the Word says. He wants them to be believers who will test the waters of their culture, not simply drink, but test [them]. They will test in order to see what goes in the way of goodness and to shun that which goes in the way of evil. He prays that they will be those who, learning to distinguish between the good and the evil, the right and the wrong, the virtuous and the not, they will have the wisdom and the strength to turn away from all that distracts them from the life of obedience. They will be those who focus on what furthers the gospel and what extends the kingdom of God, and they will then be very sensible of what is contrary to the holiness and purity of God.

This is not the American church today. The phrase that I have most frequently heard is: “You know, pastor, Christians can have fun too.” My thought is: oh, is that the top of your list? The top of your list is to persuade everybody that is not a Christian that just because you are a Christian [doesn’t mean] you can’t have fun. What exactly is that message? What exactly is it we are trying to say to people when we say, “Well, just because I am a Christian and therefore I believe in a morally exacting, unforgiving and condemning God, even so, I can still have fun!” How can I have fun? I can have fun by doing the things that He doesn’t like me to do, even though He doesn’t like me to do them.” Is that what we want to say? No, we don’t want to say that. But what to you thing the people around us hear? If you are talking to someone whose definition of fun is engaging in immoral and illegal activity, if you are talking to someone whose definition of fun is sneaking around authority, getting away with things their parents would never agree to, dodging the tax man, pulling one over the eyes of people who have reason to question who you are, if that is what they think is fun, what do you think they are hearing when you say, “Even though I am a Christian, I can have fun”? But God says that He wants people who love Him, who love His holiness, who understand that if they are to know the full goodness of life, they will desire purity, and they will exercise discernment, and they will be people of compassion, as He is a God of compassion. Consequently I will say to my friend, “What you are doing is deadly. I love you. I don’t want you to do that. I don’t want you to do it because it is deadly. I would love for you to discover the joy of knowing God.” Now you can say to your friend, “You know what, now that I am a Christian I have more joy in life than I ever dreamed was possible when I was lost.” Love: the love that we have from God. There are four questions that arise from a reflection on these comments by Paul. The first is, am I free from self-love, or am I so occupied with myself that how I am regarding myself is more important than anything else in the world, or am I free to love others. That is the second question: am I free to love others more than self? The [third] is, as a body of believers are we involved in furthering the gospel? The [fourth], are we involved in extending the kingdom of God’s righteousness? Those are applications from last week’s sermon.

Today we go on and I ask this question: joy; is joy the defining reality and theme song of your faith and life in Christ? That is a good introduction. Please turn to Philippians 1:12-18. Paul writes:

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice...”

Looking at those words Paul has written to the Philippians, we should recognize there is an underlying tension in what he has written and what they know of [Paul's] situation. Where is Paul when he writes these letters? He is in prison! What Paul wants the Philippians to realize is that the fact that he is in prison does not at all compromise his certainty regarding God's love for him. Therefore this does not compromise his joy. Paul wants the Philippians to know that difficulties or tribulations do not put in doubt God's goodness, that they don't put in doubt not only God's goodness, but the reality of God's grace and salvation. Thirdly, they don't put in doubt the ability of God to bring blessings and goodness into and out of every situation in life. When trouble comes to us, we are tempted to ask those questions. If suddenly you were to have a pain and you went to the doctor and you were diagnosed with cancer, how many of us would run through those questions? Or you appear at work and on your desk is a pink slip. Wow! How many of us would ask those questions? O you go off to High School and being a Christian and having a discerning and knowledgeable love you proceed to witness to some other [students] and in the next class period you are met with mockery and scorn: would ask those questions? When we encounter affliction and trouble rather than blessing and peace and happiness, does our joy have deep enough roots to withstand the disappointment?

The key to understanding Paul's inner strength and what he is recommending to the Philippians is found in going back to Philippians 1:6. You have to have this inner confidence: Paul says, *“I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”* You have to have an inner certainty that it is God Who has laid hold of you and has turned you about and drawn you to Himself and He says, *“You are Mine and I am determined, I will bless you, I will keep you, I will protect you, I will sustain you: you are Mine.”* You must be confident of that and you have then also to have the confidence that whatever is happening to you is under His control and is ultimately for your good: pink slips, diagnosed with cancer, betrayal of a relationship: ouch! This is why it is so helpful to us [to know] that these letters were written to us by a man who was beaten, who was stoned, who was thrown in prison unjustly: The Christian gospel was not written by a group of guys who sat in a privileged high tower far removed from the troubles and adversities of life: that is not it at all. The men who wrote these letters knew more trouble than you or I will probably ever know, and yet they could say, *“I am confident, I have joy.”*

You and I, then, want to appreciate how they had that. We need to be clear on the power and the goodness of God and also clear on what is the work that God is bringing to completion. Notice again what Paul says in Philippians 1:6, *“...he who began a good work...”* You and I need to ask ourselves, what is that good work that God is doing? We have many answers to that, but are they correct? What is the work of God?

God does many things at once: have you noticed? When I was gone I was so pleased that the men who gather at my home on Wednesday nights – they gather at my home and we have a Bible study – well they continued while I was gone [on vacation] and they studied the little story of Jonah. How many know about the prophet Jonah? What a great guy. Let's think about what God was up to in dealing with Jonah? He was a disobedient prophet whom God

sent with a warning message to a great pagan city, the terrible city of Nineveh. Jonah was not excited at all about obeying God. So he decided not to. Can anybody identify with this? So he decided not to obey God. He decided to run away. The reason he wasn't pleased was because he was afraid that if he preached to the Ninevites they would repent, and he wanted them to fry! This was literally his desire: go back and read the prophet Jonah. So instead of riding a donkey or camel to Nineveh he boarded a ship to Tarshish, which was stupid idea because God is in charge of the oceans as much as he is of the land and God proceeds to stir up a huge storm and the storm threatens to overwhelm the ship and the sailors wonder what is going on and Jonah has to fess up and says “Throw me in the water.” They throw him in the water and then a big fish swallows him. Then the storm goes away and the men all pray and make vows to God. One of the men in the study said, “I'll bet that was God's plan from the outset. God's plan was to have Jonah disobey, get in the ship, sail across the sea, have a big storm, terrify the sailors, throw [Jonah in the water], calms the waters, and the sailors say, “God!” And yes, but that is not all that God was doing.

It was also God's way of getting Jonah's attention so that he would do what he was told. “Jonah; Jonah; Jonah.” (Stated three times with rising intensity!) So God captured the attention of the sailors on the ship and captured Jonah's attention, especially when he was on the bottom of the sea and captured by the fish. It was also the way that God had determined to capture the attention of the people of Nineveh: “I sent you to Nineveh; you will go to Nineveh!” As I said, God is about the business of getting peoples' attention. Why? It is so that they will turn away from evil and learn the blessings of reconciliation with God. The thing that surprises is how insistent we seem to be in saying that this is a simple thing. “It is a simple thing to be reconciled to God.” Really? How well do you know people? How well do you know yourself? Simple? Let me ask a question. For how many of you is it like this: I am here. God says, “John, I would like you to walk over to the flowers [about eight feet away].” And I walk over to the flowers! “Blessed be the God of heaven, Maker of heaven and earth! I am standing by the flowers.” Or, how many of you are like this? “John, I would like you to walk over to the flowers.” “I hate those kind of flowers! I have allergies; if I get close to those flowers I will be miserable. It is too far, it is too hot; I can't go all the way over there. Before I go over there I need to get a latte; I need something to give me strength along the way. I can't just rush over there to the flowers. I have to reconsider this. I have other things to do today. I can't just go over to the flowers.” Now please understand that my little drama is after I am saved!! What is it like before I am saved?

Think about this business of God working with Jonah. [Was it] simple? How about overwhelming? “God!” Sinner? Grace? Deserve judgment? How about, “You mean, bend, bow, submit, confess, repent?” How about, “I can't believe it, what He has done: life, joy, hope, renewal, a way out!” How about terror? “Would you leave me here [in my sin and fear and perplexity and hopelessness]? What do we think went through Jonah's mind as he sat in the belly of the fish as he sat at the bottom of the sea? Returning to Paul's letter written from Rome we can surely see that God is doing many things at once. He is not just doing one thing; He is doing a variety of things at the same time.

As we saw in the first message, all that God is doing at all times focuses on Jesus Christ. The focus on Jesus is essential for us to understand. Turn in you scriptures if you would please to Colossians 1:15-18. We have a tendency, an understandable tendency which is even more understandable when you have a person who is not a believer and they have just come to faith. Remarkably it remains dominant in our thinking even after years that we have been walking in Christ. This is the attitude: The gospel is all about us being saved. But beloved the gospel is not all about us being saved. It is about us being saved – don't misunderstand me. But us being saved is [only] a part of what the gospel is about. Listen to what Paul writes here to the Colossians 1:15-18.

“Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”

We attended a worship service while we were gone [on vacation]. Everything was fine about the worship service except as I told my wife for one thing; there was almost no sense of reverence. Reverence? Yes. When we gather together into the presence of Jesus Christ to worship Him, we are worshipping the preeminent being of all time. He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God; He has purchased everyone of us by the blood of His body. We are His by creation and re-creation. He is holy. Do we remember what the angels did in the presence of God [as recounted in] Isaiah 6? They fly around the throne and they cover their eyes because they dare not look upon the presence of God and they cry out, “Holy, holy, holy! Great is the Lord God Almighty!” And what do we do? “[We say] hi’ya, hi’ya. You are so lucky to have us here!” I hope that that is not the inner attitude or the spirit of any of us. But when I was at the other church I noticed no sense of awe or wonder in the realization that we are privileged to gather together to worship God and His Son, reverence.

That comment by Paul in Colossians 1:15-18 should help us begin to understand how Paul views the whole matter. What is the good work that God is doing? We know what it is, but we don’t always know what it is. What God is doing is advancing Christ’s kingdom. He advancing in the hearts and the minds of those who come to faith the realization: Jesus is king, and I bow before Him. He is an absolute ruler, and I bow before Him. He is to be exalted and I bow before Him. God is advancing the kingdom of Christ and His righteousness on earth by advancing the name of Jesus through the earth. “I want to be like Jesus.” He is bringing people to faith and righteousness.

What Paul says to the Philippians is that what has happened to him has served to advance the gospel. The gospel is good news. We understandably tend to emphasize that it is good news for us, and it is good news for us. But we need to understand that the good news is good news about God, God the Father and God the Son, that He is a God of salvation, that He is a God that loves and saves sinners. That is what we need to know and understand. This is the good work that God is pursuing. He is pursuing this good work; that you and I will know without a moment’s hesitation and receive with joy and exaltation the goodness of God as the One who dwells within us and has claimed us as His own and asks us to serve Him in all places at all times.

Please pray with me: Heavenly Father help us to bow to You, reverence You, to find again that center from which all things flow. That center is Jesus the magnificent. O we would adore Him! Father may we learn that whatever befalls us, whatever happens to us as Your children is part of Your purpose and we are to look for that and see how You are teaching us to keep our eye fixed on Jesus and the glory of His great name. O Father, no matter what our circumstances may we not betray our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in His name, amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. In your experience do you find most Christians motivated by commitment of the will or by affections of the heart?
2. Why is it good and necessary for Christian fellowship to be animated by love “with knowledge and all discernment”? What are ways we can train ourselves to discern good from evil? Do you agree that, “You cannot be morally lax and grow in your comprehending knowledge” of God and His word? Why or why not?
3. Is joy the defining reality and theme song of your faith and life in Christ?
4. Have you had experiences which caused you to doubt the goodness or the grace or the ability of God? Have you sought help in dealing with them and if so, what sort of help did you find?
5. In your opinion and experience, what is involved in turning away from evil and placing faith in Jesus as the Son of God? Could it ever be overwhelming, or even frightening?
6. What are some effective ways of helping people know that God loves and saves sinners?
7. What does it mean to you to be free in Christ?
8. Do you agree that what the Bible says about God, Christ, humanity, sin, being saved, good and evil is all objectively true? If it is true, does that mean it is morally obligatory?
9. How important is it that preachers and teachers, especially in churches, be morally pure and intellectually honest in their faith? How important is it that they understand and believe the Bible correctly?
10. Do many Christians put the advance of the gospel and salvation of the lost ahead of personal comfort, convenience and security? Do you?