

**STICK TOGETHER**  
**Philippians 1:27-2:11**

**Keeping The Joy Alive Series**  
**July 28, 2013**  
**Pastor Nathan J. Thompson**

We are continuing our series this morning on keeping the joy alive. Now it is important to note that we are not simply talking about happiness. Jesus didn't call us to the pursuit of happiness—that is talked about rather in the Declaration of Independence.

Jesus instead called us to his joy—which is much deeper than being happy all the time. In fact joy, according to the Bible, is not something we can make happen all by ourselves. The truth is that joy is a gift of the Spirit. Galatians 5 says that “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...*”

So you can be assured today, my friend, that no matter what circumstances you are facing or going through that Jesus walks with you. Be assured that no matter how dark and bleak things look you are going to make it. Be assured that because nothing can separate you from God's love you too can be filled with his joy.

Paul therefore was writing to this church at Philippi and was trying to help them grow in joy. Have you ever been in a church where you felt like saying, “Wow, something exciting must be happening here?” This feeling, of course, is the result of what the Holy Spirit is doing. The Bible says that where the Holy Spirit is alive and being experienced in the church there is joy.

Paul says in this passage that if you want to keep the joy alive “*live in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*” (1:27). Translation: live and demonstrate behavior that is worthy of the kingdom of God; live in a way that honors God in all things.

The truth if you will is that we all are tourists on this thing called earth. In other words this is just our temporary residence. Our true and eternal home is to be in heaven. We are therefore to live lives now that are worthy of God's kingdom and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that when Paul wrote this letter that some people in the church at Philippi were retired veteran Roman soldiers. What happened was that the government had given these retired soldiers a little land in Macedonia for them to live—it was a little Roman colony.

The government had also given them a small amount of pension money so they could take care of themselves in their retirement years. What happened as a result of this is that a number of these people in this colony became believers and followers of Jesus. In turn they joined this little congregation at Philippi.

So Paul really wants to connect with these people. Now if I wanted to really connect with you I might use some preseason NFL Vikings' imagery (training camp started this week), or some farm or commodity news, or some references to the area county fairs. In the same way in wanting to get their attention Paul uses military lingo and expressions.

He uses phrases like “*stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together...without being frightened...that they will be destroyed...*” Paul is telling them that they are in the midst of a battle for the sake of Jesus Christ. Therefore they are not to be intimidated by their opponents.

This is also true for us today. Paul says that we too are engaged in battle and this battle is for the hearts, and souls, of women and men. He is reminding us that we are under the attack of Satan; the powers of evil and darkness in this world are fighting against us each day.

It is very true that Satan will not sit passively by and watch the church of Jesus Christ grow and help bring people into the light of Christ. No, Satan will do everything he can to divide the church, to use half-truths and personal agendas to undermine what is good and right. As Messiah grows our outreach and mission we need to be aware that Satan will be fighting against us.

C.S. Lewis once said, *“Every square inch of this planet earth has been claimed by Christ, but counter claimed by Satan.”* There is a battle going on—not just with the demonic power of Satan but also with the reality of sin and evil in our world.

Paul was also reminding the Philippians how they were battling against the Greek culture at that time. The Greek people and society worshipped many gods—the Christians believed in just one. The Greek culture said that this Christian cult was crazy and needed to be stamped out.

Also every year these people who were under Roman rule needed to bend their knee and bow down to the emperor Caesar—they needed to proclaim that “Caesar is lord.” This is what has been called emperor worship. These Christians, however, needed to stand firm and say, “No, I won’t bow to Caesar; only Jesus is Lord!”

Finally there were some people of Jewish background who were known as the Judaizers. They said that it was fine to worship Jesus, but they also said that those who were Christians needed to follow the Jewish laws; they taught that you’ve got to do good works in order to make yourself right with God. Those teachings were also causing great confusion among the Philippian church.

Needless to say these early Christians were taking it on the chin from every side. So these are the people Paul is writing to, that is why he uses military language. He is reminding them and us that as Jesus’ followers we are called to be the church victorious, the church triumphant.

Now I know that military language is not used very much in the church today. People today would rather like to hear about a kinder, gentler, more passive Jesus. We don’t want to ruffle anyone’s feathers, or make anyone feel uncomfortable or challenged to grow their gifts.

Yet Paul makes it clear that we are working for the cause of Christ. His military language reminds us that we need to stand shoulder to shoulder and not retreat; we are to stand up for Jesus no matter what the challenges we face.

Jesus didn’t go to the cross and die for us so that we will subtly deny that he is the true way to heaven; or for us to give into the popular trend that says that Jesus was just a good teacher but no better than others. Jesus did not die and rise again so that we would just give into the latest trend or spiritual philosophy.

Paul is saying that we need to come along side of him, to proclaim the message of Jesus with boldness, so that others may know this truth of Jesus and may be saved eternally. That, according to Paul, is our cause. All other things are trivial in comparison.

So do we want joy in our Messiah church or in churches everywhere? Paul says, “Don’t forget the cause of Jesus Christ.” There is joy when people stand firm in Christ’s mission. There is joy when people are on fire for Jesus and the Gospel.

The truth, my friends, is that no one wants to give their life for a congregation and mission that waters down the message of Jesus; or one that tries to be like a country club; or one which focuses on simply making people comfortable. No one wants to give their life, or invest their money and talents, in a church that is not filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy-filled power.

Jesus said in Mark 8 that if you want to be a disciple that you “*must deny (yourself) and take up your cross and follow (Jesus).*” When we stand firm in following Jesus, when we put him first, there is great joy in serving him and in being part of his team.

Yet how do we stick together? Tony Campolo said one time that when you think about the church and how Jesus is the Light of the World, you might notice that sometimes this light attracts bugs. And sometimes according to Campolo it is difficult to stand together in the church because we can’t stand each other.

(Read Philippians 2:1-4.) Paul says, “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.*”

Paul is telling us to put selfish ambition aside. In other words get over yourself. It’s not about you. It’s not, what can the church do for me? It is rather, what can I do for the family of God? What can I do to help build up and grow the body of Christ in positive ways?

It is true that when I give my life over to Jesus; put aside my own selfish wants and motives; give up my desire to have people follow me and my complaining; it is then that there is joy in my heart and there is true joy in the church of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you saw the news a few years ago about the grandma who was run over and killed by her neighbor as she was walking her grandson in front of this neighbor’s driveway. It was a tragic and terrible accident that filled many news reports at that time.

Yet the amazing thing was how this grandma’s family surrounded this hurting neighbor with love and forgiveness; how they even had this neighbor complete this walk by walking their child home. In their strong and amazing Christian faith they let go of balloons and doves, and ate grandma’s favorite dessert. They stood against the powers of evil that would want retribution.

This family in the midst of their deep sadness is also filled with joy. They have allowed Jesus to fill them with forgiveness rather than revenge; peace rather than anger; hope rather than despair. Jesus calls us to stand firm in our faith as Satan tries to lure us into hurtful behaviors.

Paul tells us that we are to have “*the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had. Who being in very nature with God did not consider equality with God something to be used to his advantage; rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness*”—(Read Philippians 2:8-11.)

Wow, Jesus calls each of us to follow his example. He calls us to put aside our own agendas, our own sinful ambitions, to die to ourselves and become a servant. This is the way we are filled with real and lasting joy. Stand firm, my dear friends, for Jesus.