

Sunday, July 23, 2017

Philippians 4:4-13

Luke 15:1-10

Spiritual Fruit of Joy and Peace

We continue in our summer series focusing on the fruit of the Spirit as Paul described in his letter to the Galatians 5:22-23. Paul is teaching the young church at Galatia about the acts of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit. Paul describes in verse 19-21 what he calls the acts of sinful nature also known as the works or sins of the flesh. These acts of the sinful nature are obvious and then he warns the people, if you live like this, you will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But those who will inherit the kingdom of God live by the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit is what Paul describes as the relational characteristics which lead us to grow. For example, we can be joyful but unless we share it no one knows of the joy we feel. We can also be at peace but unless we share how we are at peace with God's Spirit, no one knows. However we do need to know how to share/ show and have these characteristics without flaunting them, exaggerating them, and even in telling others what they mean to us. How joyful we are and how we maintain peace within is nothing unless it is extended toward others specifically people whom we care about. How we live with these characteristics is key to living by the guidance of the Spirit.

Are you full of joy? Are you joyful? It all depends upon what we mean when we say joy. We have sung the song, "I have the joy, joy, joy... down in my heart---- to stay" but what does having the joy of the lord? It is the gladness of heart that comes from knowing God, abiding in Christ, and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

When we think of Christmas and the story of Jesus' birth, the angels announced that they were bringing "good tidings of great joy". Even the shepherds who went to see Jesus were filled with joy because they had seen the Infant. But what does having joy within and why is it considered to be a fruit of the Spirit?

Let us look at Jesus' life. Jesus exemplified joy in His ministry. He was not glum and down even though he knew his future on earth was not good. Jesus enjoyed his life—he was joyful and some of his enemies thought he was too joyful—eating and drinking on many occasions. Jesus enjoyed people and he "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (Luke 10:21); He also spoke of "my joy" (John 15:11) and promised to give His disciples a lifetime supply of it (John 16:24). Joy is reflected in many of Jesus' parables, including those we read in Luke 15. Often these stories are the parables of the Lost sheep, Lost Coin and the Lost Son. But maybe we

need to shift our focus on not what was lost, but what was found and who became joyful in the end. The shepherd rejoices at finding the 100th sheep and he lifts it up and carries it home. He calls his friends and neighbours and tells them he needs to be joyful—I have found my lost sheep. The shepherd is joyful.

The woman who risks spending money on burning oil in order to find a coin worth 1/10 of what she has is not pitying herself at the end of the story. No!, She calls out to her friends and neighbours and tells them rejoice with me—I have found my lost coin. The woman is joyful.

The man with two sons divides his property and gives the portion to the younger son because he wants to live on his own. However, the son squanders it all away and comes to his senses when he sees that what he is feeding pigs is better than what he can afford. He returns home ready to be a hired hand. But it is the father who is filled with joy—his son has come home. He is joyful.

It is our Christian duty to be joyful. If we believe in Jesus we are to be like him; and to be like him means to have joy. When we say we believe we begin our life in faithfulness. It is this faith that overcomes the world, with the joy of the Lord giving us the strength we need. Even though we might face adverse circumstances, instead of hindering our faith, these circumstances may be turned into opportunities and can actually enhance our joy.

There is a story of a Russian countess who accepted the Lord Jesus as her Saviour and was open about her testimony. The Tsar or Russian ruler at the time was displeased and threw her into prison. After 24 hours with the lowest level of Russian society, in the most miserable conditions imaginable, he ordered her brought into his presence. He smiled sardonically and said, “Well, are you ready now to renounce your silly faith and come back to the pleasures of the court?”

To his surprise, the countess smiled serenely and said, “I have known more real joy and more real happiness in one day in prison with Jesus than I have known in a lifetime in the courts of the Tsar.” She found out what was really important—the joy of Jesus.

However we also know that there are times when what we seek the most is peace a quietness of heart and mind. .Peace which passes all understanding and offers serenity and calmness within our lives. But how would you describe this peace?

There once was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures. But there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky, from which rain fell and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest - in perfect peace. The king chose the second picture because peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.

But what really calms your heart? Medical doctors suggest taking as little as a 90 second break to focus on calming your heart because what goes on in our hearts affects our entire bodies. They suggest activities like consciously relaxing, meditating or praying which will nourish and calm the heart and give you a brief rest. These activities will produce what's called, the relaxation response which is a physiological state that is the opposite of stress. This calming creates feelings of peace and serenity in our minds and enables our bodies to be calm from within. And in this 90 second focus,, one might say a prayer—the Lord's Prayer, recall a bible story or passage, or even just say a word or two as a mantra. All that is needed is 90 seconds and then the stress will be relieved. When ready to return to work or tasks, there is renewed calmness from within. It is peaceful amidst all the tasks and noise of the day.

Let us rejoice together as we give thanks for the Joy we have in knowing God, that he is our strength and that we can calm our hearts and know that Jesus is with us in those moments of chaos and activity. Let us rejoice in the fruit of the Spirit as we have joy and peace in Christ Jesus our Saviour.

Let us pray:

Holy God, we praise you for your teachings of the Spirit and how we may stronger and be more willing to share and show the joy we have in you as we seek to live peacefully with one another. Bless us O God as we seek to live by the fruit of your Spirit. Amen.