

REJOICING IN SERVICE

Phil. 2:1-18

Intro: It is one of the most important features of a joyous life. Yet, it seems to go against the grain of all that we are taught about happiness. The world and perhaps even our instincts say to us, "the key to happiness is getting"; but Jesus said "it is more blessed to give than to receive".

The world insists that happiness comes to one when everyone is fitting into his plans, when he can control those around him and they perform his wishes, and he is happy because he is being served. But again, Jesus said the opposite: "Let him who is great among you be your servant" (Mt. 20:26).

So then what is real path to joy? In giving or receiving? In serving or being served? For an answer let turn to Phil. 2. In this chapter Paul speak of his joy that came through serving.

Paul's joy in serving others—Phil. 2:17-18

Consider carefully Paul's choice of words and you will see the most vivid figure of selfless sacrifice for others.

First notice the words "sacrifice and service". This is how Paul thought of his work on behalf of the Philippians. Like Jesus our high priest, Paul as a priest gives himself as a sacrifice. His whole life is devoted to God in helping others to believe and to manifest the deeds of faith.

Then notice the additional expression, "even if I am poured out as a drink offering" (NASV). Paul uses the figure of a libation, the OT ceremony of offering in addition to a sacrifice, a free-will offering in the form of oil or wine. Such libations were poured out upon the altar. Paul's life has been devoted to the service of others; but it will not stop here. If need be, he will give his very life's blood in martyrdom to continue his service.

Yet remarkably Paul said he found joy in such a life; and he wanted the Philippians in imitation of him to have a similar "servant" mentality. In fact, that is the key to our understanding of this chapter. Paul is exploring the joy of serving others. He wants the Philippians and all other who read this epistle to find the joy of serving others in the gospel, even to the point of death itself if necessary.

Why we serve others

What motivated Paul to give his life in service to others and to rejoice in doing so? In a word, Jesus! Look at what Jesus did for us: v. 5-8

He existed in the form of God. He possessed the essential glory and honor of divine nature.

Did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. He was one in nature with God, and as God was deserving of the service and praise of mankind, so was He. Yet, Jesus did not cling to that. He was willing to let go of that to do the Father's will.

Emptied himself. What powerful words! He did not cease to be deity; but he gave up the full use and exercise of his divine prerogatives...taking upon himself the form of a bond-servant. From glory to Galilee. From riches to rags. From heaven's spiritual palace to a place where there "the Son of man hath no where to lay his head". He took upon himself the mentality and activities of a common slave! The Creator served his creatures...he took away our diseases, he sought to lead us out of our misunderstandings, he even washed our feet. He looked like a man and possessing a body as a man he committed himself to the task not of commanding as a king but obeying as a servant. Identifying with the creatures who are obligated by their nature to obey God, He as God, the one who had the right to be obeyed, joined with us in obeying the Father! He obeyed to the ultimate degree--to death. He was willing to obey even to the point of losing his life. Jesus was the only man who ever lived who had the choice not to die!!! For us death is an unavoidable appointment; but for Jesus it was a choice! He chose death for us! He chose death on a cross, the most shameful, painful, and ignominious death one could experience. God did that! "He left the Father with all his riches, with calmness sweet and serene, came down from heaven and gave his life-blood to make the vilest sinner clean! Oh, what a Savior, oh hallelujah! His heart was broken for you and me, his hands were nail-scarred, his side was riven, he gave his life blood for even me". He did all of that to rescue us from our own sins, the genius of which is our own personal selfishness and pride. He unselfishly gave up everything he had a right to, to experience what he had no right to...death at the hands of godless men. He did that for all of us. Because of his selfless love, God exalted him to his right hand and declared him Lord and Christ, his name is above every name. And what he calls upon us to do now is to acknowledge him for what he has always been--the Lord of our lives--to serve him and others for the sake of the service he rendered to us.

That's why Paul rejoiced in service--because of Jesus and what he did. And that's what will motivate us to serve as well and to know joy in serving—as disciples, we are following the example of our master.

How we serve others

SERVE HARMONIOUSLY--2:1-2

Verse two abounds in descriptions of harmony.

Harmony in thinking--learning to see things alike

Harmony in feeling--loving each other

Harmony in spirit--not merely external conformity (United in spirit) motivated by the same inward cause!

Harmony in outlook--intent on one purpose

SERVE UNSELFISHLY--2:3-4

Paul here implies a contrast between two approaches to God's work and our place in it.

Pride--feeling a sense of self-importance we demand that our ideas be accepted, that our way be honored.

Humility--feeling a sense of unworthiness, we seek what is for the good of all.

All of us need to work to serve this way.

SERVE SACRIFICIALLY--2:5-11

We are of the spirit of Christ when we are willing to sacrifice for the Lord and others. When we are willing to give up what we do not have to give up in order to help His cause; when we give up rule and control to others. When we regard the best of another to be our best. When we give rather than receive.

SERVE REVERENTLY--2:12-13

Work out with fear and trembling. Do we recognize that as we obey God, that He is working through us? Our reverence for Him should not allow us to even think of changing His will! Or of not giving our best.

Paul speak of when he is there and when he is not. But God is always there! Our respect for Him should secure continuous faithful service. Here God's power and man's will come together to make life change!

SERVE CHEERFULLY--2:14-18

God wants us to cheerfully serve Him. The two words here convey first without complaint and without talking back or disputing (we get our word "dialogue" from this noun.) This is not to say that we sometimes will do some things we would rather not do. But the tenor of our lives should be that of joyful compliance with what God has said.

What a refreshing presence a cheerful Christian has in this world of sin and darkness. He is a luminary in this dark world. Do not let the world draw you into their complaining mentality! When we cheerfully serve the Lord we stand out like a light in darkness. Serve God without murmuring and complaining.

Conclusion: It took me a long time to finally see what the Bible teaches about service. I would often fret because I would give myself totally to others only to feel unappreciated or to experience no reciprocation. Now I know that the joy we feel does not depend upon how others may respond but how we know God will respond!!!! In Christ we have the pattern not only of how to serve, the but hope of how God will respond to our service. "God has exalted him and given him a name above every name." And so Jesus taught us. He that humbles himself shall be exalted!! And this is our joy that God will exalt us!