

Pursuing Joy Over Happiness

REVIEW: If you can believe it, we are coming near the end of our series in which we have been taking a long look at salvation. This series began way back in March. It has, of course, been made longer do to my travels with the teens and vacations, etc. When September arrives, we will begin a new series on the book of Ephesians. It will be a great time to jump in with a Life Group if you are not already involved in one. The book of Ephesians is an awesome look at what it means to be the Body of Christ, His church. It gives us the theological insights as well as the practical matters.

If you have been with us through the entire series, you know we started with God and how amazing He is, looked at our sin, and how offensive and punishable it is, looked at Jesus taking our punishment, then our responses to that. Since then we have looked at the doctrines of repentance, justification, adoption, and sanctification. Then two weeks ago we turned the corner and looked at how sanctification works in human relationships.

INTRO: Today I want to turn our attention to the pursuit of joy (not happiness). Joy is capable of sustaining you, even in some of the difficult things we have talked about for the Christian life: confession, repentance, community (life together with others). Joy really should be a part of the mission statement for the Christian.

I. Biblical mission statements

- A. What would it be like if Jesus created a mission statement?
 1. What verses sum up Jesus, His life and ministry well?
 2. Mark 10:45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
 - a) It’s clear, straight to the point
 - b) Jesus came to serve by giving His life
 3. Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
 - a) Again, clear, to the point
 - b) Jesus came to seek and save the lost
 4. How about John 3:17 “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”
 - a) If we are looking at mission statements, this works well too
 - b) Jesus did not come to condemn the world
 - (1) And think about that
 - (2) So many people think that church is about condemnation
 - (a) NO!!! Jesus did not come to condemn the world - nor should we, btw
 - (b) Jesus came to save the world

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- (3) So if you feel condemned when the talk of Jesus comes up, realize that condemnation is NOT why He came
- (4) He came to rescue you from that feeling of condemnation that was there before Jesus said anything about - that issue, that sin that makes you feel bad - Jesus came to save you from it
5. One last one, John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”
 - a) This is a great statement for Jesus, but it is also a great statement for us
 - b) Jesus came to give us life, and a full life at that!
 - c) Here is the problem:
 - (1) We, and by that I mean humanity, are all...ready for this, hedonists
 - (a) For those of you that don't know, a hedonist is a person that lives only for pleasure
 - (b) Some of you may be shocked by that so let me help you see this
 - (2) We as humanity are convinced that what we do will make us happy
 - (a) So we become driven by our appetites
 - (b) You do what you do because you think that by those things you will experience satisfaction, and joy
 - (c) Some of you are in this room because of your desire for joy and happiness
 - i) So that drive is not all bad
 - ii) It depends on what the actions are that you are finding joy in
 - iii) EVEN if you are here because mom and dad dragged you here, or your neighbor wouldn't shut up until you came and tried out their church - you might be thinking, “I don't even care about God, if He's even there”
 - (1) Understand, the reason you are here is for your happiness
 - (2) You think that by showing up, you can get mom or your neighbor off your back
- B. Here, however is the mission we need to wrap our minds and our hearts around
 1. This happens again and again in the Bible, and is the cornerstone of the book of Hebrews
 2. Jesus is better than...(fill in the blank) (everything)

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- a) Jesus is celebrated as better than everything else we can mention
- b) Being reconciled to God through Christ is the place where the greatest pleasure is found
3. Psalm 4:7 “Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.”
 - a) Do you get what David is saying?
 - b) When the rest of the world is happy with their grain and wine - Your joy is better - I’d rather have that!
 - c) Grain and wine were symbols of wealth, and life (literally because its food) in the ancient world
 - d) David says, “God you are better, and I want you more than that.”
 - (1) That should set us back on our heels a little bit
 - (2) Think about the amount of time we spend wasting our lives thinking, “This is where joy will be found” only to find the joy is not really there - not lasting joy
 - (3) It is only Jesus that satisfies in that way
4. Psalm 16:11 “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”
 - a) Not only is Jesus better than symbols of wealth in this life, He IS the path of life!
 - b) Deep life is found in Him
5. This one is familiar to us all - Philippians 3
 - a) Paul gives us his spiritual resume in which he says that in regard to the law he was faultless (that’s some confidence there)
 - b) Philippians 3:7-11
 - (1) So Paul is saying, all my religious activity
 - (a) Every Bible study, every verse I memorize, every Life Group, every devotional book, everything I have ever done
 - (b) If it does not bring me into deeper relationship and greater obedience with Jesus it is excrement!
 - (2) When Paul says “whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss...”
 - (a) Ever think about the flip side?
 - (b) There appear to be gains for just being good
 - i) Too many people have made their way through church just being a good person and received gains because of it
 - ii) It’s not about being good, its about loving Jesus
 - iii) Loving Jesus transforms us - it may take time, but it does transform our hearts

II. Our search for joy

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- A. I encourage you to make sure you understand what you are searching for, happiness, or joy
 - 1. If it is happiness, that “whatever makes me happy in that moment” feeling, it’s time to trade up
 - 2. If it is joy you want, marked by confession, repentance and life with other believers, joy that transforms your life, you need Jesus
 - 3. So go to Colossians 3:1-17
- B. If we are serious about real joy that transforms us, it is found in pursuing Christ - Col. 3:1-4
 - 1. This of course does not mean that you cannot or will not experience pleasure - of course people can experience pleasure
 - a) But will they experience the fullness of joy, that full, abundant life that Jesus talked about back in John 10:10?
 - b) No - because fullness of life, and the deep joy is only found in Christ
 - 2. How many of you have ever walked through a period in life we generally refer to as “the desert?”
 - a) Keep your hands up and look around for a moment - that should encourage you because you are NOT alone!
 - b) Now sometimes God, by His grace leads us to the desert
 - (1) Why? Why would He do that?
 - (2) Think about it - nothing is going to get you on your knees faster than being in the desert - nothing is going to return your heart to Him, help you see your need of Him faster than the desert
 - c) However, sometimes we are in the desert of our own accord
 - (1) Let’s face it, some of us wander around the spiritual desert of our own choosing
 - (2) You know you are thirsty, and hungry and tired - but there is nourishment available
 - (3) Jeremiah says “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.” (Jer. 29:13)
 - (4) God is not trying to hide from you - Isaiah 55:6 “Seek the Lord while He may be found...”
 - (5) And still we complain that we are so tired and weary, and thirsty
 - (a) Well here is some water for your soul my friend!
 - (b) But I’m so thirsty!
 - (c) I don’t know what to tell you besides there is a giant well of water right next to you if you would just get up and drink from it
 - (6) Have you ever seen those Snickers commercials? (Play Commercial)

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- (a) Even the ad guys get that when we are not fed and are tired and need nourishment we are not ourselves
 - (b) And that's what seems to happen spiritually - we are not ourselves when we are thirsty and hungry
 - (c) When we are not plugged into the source of life (food) or in our case Christ, we are not able to experience life as it should be
- (7) Sadly, many of us have a lot of strength to run on our own for a while
- (a) Oh that we would surrender ourselves to God and live in His power
 - (b) That we would stop trying to prove ourselves and realize where genuine life is found
3. So the first thing we need to do to seek this real joy that helps us live a transformed Christian life is to be serious in seeking Jesus Christ
- a) I said before that we are a hedonistic people (we seek pleasure)
 - b) The truth is we need to seek ultimate joy - not stop short at some lesser pleasure - if we are going to be hedonists, let's take it all the way and seek the ultimate joy in Christ
- C. The second thing that we need to do to experience this life transforming joy is put to death earthly things in us - Col. 3:5-10
1. Now Paul just lists off a number of sins, and I promise you, ain't none of us getting out of this room without one of those pricking our heart
- a) If it's not sex or lust for you, maybe its greed, or anger, or slander, or filthy language
 - b) I guarantee you that all of us fall under the category of idolatry
 - (1) Yes, we are not bowing down to little statues in our homes
 - (2) But we SO VERY OFTEN set something or someone other than God on the throne and bow down to it
2. So let me ask, how many of you, and be honest, would say that you have battled a sin in your life and that, while you may have victory over it for a time, it seems to creep back in - a so called besetting sin?
- a) Look around again
 - b) This should be another moment where you think, "I'm not alone!"
 - (1) Your sin may be different from someone else's sin
 - (2) But it proves that we all battle and struggle and we need one another to help pull that sin into the light and kill it off
3. And that is just what Paul said to do, "PUT TO DEATH"
- a) The question is "HOW?" "How do we put sin to death?"
 - b) Allow me to give you two thoughts on this

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- c) First, we trust the Word of God
 - (1) Anyone ever memorize Scriptures to help you battle sin?
 - (a) “I made a covenant with my eyes, not to look lustfully at a girl.”
 - (b) And yet we still struggle with lust even though we may have memorized this verse or others like it
 - (2) Here is the issue, what we need to do is not just memorize verses, good of an idea as that is, but we need to believe God’s promise that His way is better
 - (3) Let me break this down using a couple of examples: laziness and anger
 - (a) Laziness - the promise of laziness is that if I shirk my responsibilities to get some more rest, I will be ready to go for the next day with more energy
 - i) This is the lie that laziness gives
 - (b) So how this works in real life and I will pick on the men
 - i) When you come home from a long day at work, I get it if you need a little time to uncork from the day
 - ii) But after you get 20-30 minutes of “me time” it is time to engage your family
 - (1) Help your wife in the kitchen
 - (2) Get in the floor and play with your kids - love them, wrestle with them, hug and love on them
 - (3) Help tuck your kids into bed
 - (4) And engage your families hearts and point those hearts to Jesus
 - iii) You may come home exhausted from work, but when you are engaging your family and fall in bed at the end of the day - what a great feeling of exhaustion
 - iv) You have not just provided for your family like society has molded you to do - you have sought to be the spiritual leader of your home
 - (1) You have sought to love your wife, sought to love your kids
 - (2) You have sought to point your family to Jesus
 - (3) And I tell you men, there is nothing sexier than a man in love with and plays with his kids
 - (c) Anger - the lie of anger is “I am getting justice - I deserve justice”

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- i) Because in your mind, all it takes is for you to speak your mind and all your relationships will fall into place
 - ii) People will be grateful once I have told them the right way to do things or the right way to think
 - iii) The promise is that justice will satisfy you
 - iv) The problem is, when you explode, justice is not served, things do not all run the way you thought they would, and you wind up with broken relationships
- (4) This is why I say that just memorizing verses that say, “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger”, verses that tell you not to do things are not the full answer
- (a) The answer is to soak yourself in the Bible so deeply that not only do you know God’s promises
 - (b) You BELIEVE God’s promises
 - i) That hard work is well worth it
 - ii) That allowing God to right wrongs suffered and let go of your anger is better
- (5) What if, when we read verses like “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” we trust in that and believe it
- (a) When temptation comes, we start to realize the empty promises that the temptation offers
 - (b) Instead we realize we will see God by keeping our heart’s pure
 - i) And please note the verse does say blessed are the PURE in heart NOT blessed are the PERFECT in heart
- (6) How about when God says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” we trust that, and we test Him and see His goodness
- (7) Or when it says “Because Your love is better than life my lips will glorify Your name” we glorify His name because we trust and believe
- d) The second way we put sin to death is again by having a group of brothers or sisters that we can confess and repent with in life
- (1) We have all admitted that we have struggle with sin - is there a big shock factor?
 - (2) Why would we ever get judgmental just because someone is weak where we are strong
 - (3) Being in a Life Group is a place to start - having a group of brothers and sisters you already do life with that act in this manner works just as well

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- (4) But we all need brothers and sisters that are willing to help us put sin to death in our lives by allowing us the space and the grace to drag the sin into the light so it can be known, and killed off
- D. The third thing in the pursuit of life transforming joy, recognizing relationships - v.11
1. Basically Paul said there are no divisions in Christ
 2. There is the race of Adam and the race of Christ
 3. So should the church be divided by racial differences?
 - a) Of course not
 4. Economic differences?
 - a) Of course not
 5. The point is that we are a family in Christ, and the family should mirror it's community
 6. This is not as big an issue in Almont
 - a) But if the day ever came that our town became ethnically diverse
 - b) There should be no division - we should reflect the community around us
- E. The final thing in pursuit of this life transforming joy - Understand how good God has been to you - v.12-17
1. Paul says "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved..."
 - a) That was a summary of the whole series
 - b) Holy - forgiven, justified
 - c) Dearly loved - adopted, delighted in by God
 2. Paul tells us the things we should be putting on in place of the areas of life we just killed off
 3. Primarily, what I want you to do is become an expert at what God has given to you
 - a) Ever notice that we tend to be experts more at what God has given to others and then compare it to what God gave us to see if we are better or worse off?
 - b) We really need to concentrate on what God has given us
 - (1) Learn to be thankful for that things God blessed us with
 - (2) When you marvel at God's goodness, rather than what you don't have, life begins to change
 - c) Today, you got up, got ready for church, got to stare and the incredibly good looking preacher while he rants and raves all over the stage
 - (1) Do you realize that we have some members of our community that would give anything to be here today?

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- d) No doubt there are people in our church that are experiencing marriage or family problems
 - (1) Some of you are in a sweet place in your marriage or with your family
 - (2) Be thankful for what God has given you
 - e) You were able to eat breakfast this morning
 - (1) There are people even in our own town that can't say that, much less around the world
 - (2) Be thankful
 - f) I could go on and on, but the point is simple - be thankful for what God has blessed you with
- F. My prayer is that as we begin to bring closure to this long look at salvation:
- 1. We begin to see the joy that God has blessed us with
 - 2. That we begin to see that the joy we receive from Him is greater than any foolish happiness we could seek otherwise
 - 3. C.S. Lewis has a very famous quote, and I will reduce it down here to just this: "We are far too easily pleased."
 - a) Please don't stop your search for joy and pleasure at the gifts God gave us
 - b) True joy, true pleasure is found in one Person, Jesus Christ, and He is the One we all need to seek, and push each other on to seek