

THE JOY OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT, PHIL.1:27-2:11

Letters From Prison #3

♦**Intro:** Lets press rewind for a little bit. How many remember the band Chicago? The singer, Peter... (Cetera)? Anyone recall this song, "I'll be a man who will (fight for your honor"). Peter sang lead on that. And what movie was it from? (Karate Kid 2). Good job! There's something in that story I want to point to. Though a visitor to the culture, our hero Daniel, saves a child from a tower during a typhoon, when an older native boy should have done so but remains cowering in fright. Now he is "dishonored." The story revolves then around this boy's desire to regain his honor by facing off in a fight to the death with Daniel San. Why? Apparently in oriental culture honor is held in high regard. Wining a fight results in honor, in some degree even to cruel people. And here's the comparison. It was the same way in Roman culture. Honor, power was esteemed. Humility on the other hand was looked down upon as a shameful characteristic. It was more honorable to disdain the lowly, to win the fight, and to not help the needy. We could say that many societies associate humility with servility rather than servanthood, and wimpy-ness rather than good wishes. The tough, the hard, the strong are lionized.

♦Then here comes Christ and Christianity. The savior tells his people to turn the other cheek, to let people hit you, to give more than demanded, to not fight for mere honor among men. It's a hard bite to chew. And in his letter of joy (Philippians) Paul

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preaches it. What does humility and servanthood have to do with us finding inner joy as humans imprisoned in hostile world?

♦1. I am called to be an agent of suffering in Christ's place.

To take what Christ would take. How does that bring joy? Let's think it over. In verse 29 Paul says that Christians are to suffer on behalf of Christ. What does that mean? Well, it doesn't mean that to be Christian you have to always have a no-good, very bad day. It doesn't mean you should necessarily let people cheat you, and overpay your taxes. It doesn't mean simply that you ought to suffer "because" of Christ, although this is closer to it and we talked about that last week a bit.

♦ If you are a follower of Christ and people can actually tell, you can count on suffering; a sinful world doesn't like a savior and it won't like a saviors representatives either.

♦ *"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."* John 15:20, 21, NASB.

♦ When I was working in a transmission shop they all knew I was headed to college to become a pastor and they made fun of it everyday with as many offensive terms as they could think of. That was suffering by association with Christ or because of Christ. That's part of a follower's calling. But there's something more

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specific here. When I suffer “on behalf” of Christ it’s because I am standing in for him. I am his representative on his behalf to do and be what he would do or be.

♦Someone is rude to me and I want to tell him off, but if and when I am conscious of being there *on behalf of Christ*, I do not because he would not. I am a stand in for Him. I read a story of a man who saw an accident in which a drunk was at fault. The passenger in the car quickly pulled him to the side and assumed the driving position. Why? Obviously the other person was trying to take the coming suffering and punishment for the errant driver. Now whether or not you think that was a good idea, it illustrates the “standing in” that Paul is talking about.

♦Now Paul links this suffering “on behalf of Christ” with joy (v29). He says it has been “granted” that they suffer -same root word as “joy”, (charis). This tells us that joy is an inherent by-product of suffering on behalf of Christ! Suffering for doing the right thing! Verse 28b tells us that those who oppose Christ are destined for destruction and those who contend for Christ are destined for salvation, joy, goodness, etc

♦How does this wash out? One of the highest joys is to know you have done the right thing. It’s a sort of internal reality. Probably several of us in the room chose happily to do the wrong thing this week on account of the small pleasure it brought us (moments of pride, satisfaction, etc). There’s a long theological term for doing the wrong thing: “sin”. God hates sin because the wrong thing

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always does us wrong. Have you noticed how short the pleasure of wrong lasts! (Kinda like the excitement and novelty of a new piece of clothing flies away after you've had it for a few days.). On the other hand *the joy of having done the right thing lasts even through pain and suffering.* My older brother got a black eye standing up to a bully at the park one day. He didn't mind 'cuz it was the right thing to do. (That brother just retired from 25 years as a MI State Trooper. No surprise there.)

♦So essentially, each time you or I chose to do the right thing even though it brings difficulty (lack of moments of pleasure, or actual abuse by those applauding the wrong) we are opening our lives up to more possible joy. Sometimes you just need to accept that on faith, because you can't see it right away. But the option is to grow old and look back when you really do understand more and say like the proverbs writer:

♦"*At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors."*"

Proverbs 5:11-13, NIV.

♦2. I am called to be an agent of service in Christs place.

That is, as well as being an agent of suffering in the fallen world, a Christ-Follower is an agent of service. We can see right away that serving is the nature of Christ and of God. At first glance

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you might wonder, what exactly is it that “makes [Paul’s] joy complete”. Verse 2 says by being like-minded, but like-minded with who? With each other? We all agree and think the same way? Or like-minded with Christ? We think and behave according to his example? Well the latter is clearly Paul’s emphasis. (But the latter insures the former!). Verse 5 literally says in greek *this is the mind to have: Christ’s.*

♦So his argument amounts to this: “Has knowing Jesus encouraged you? Does his love comfort you? Does knowing that he stood up from his heavenly throne, laid aside his royalty like a robe, stepped out of heaven, instead of being served and worshiped by millions of angels, encapsulated all his divinity into the body of a homo sapien, and not a kingly one at that -a helpless baby of a poor family... on top of all that, he who could command the waves of water and the wind of the weather allowed puny humans to kill him on a cross so puny humans would not have to die eternally apart from their Maker. If you can see the marvel of this servanthood, then be that way yourself and see if something good doesn’t rise from it.

♦[After all, what was the fall out of Christ’s serving? The second half of the hymn in our text is the reversal, a rising up, a resurrection after a death! His is the greatest name ever! His was the way of the servant.]

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♦A. So what was that servanthood? Servanthood is a putting aside of myself for the sake of, and the love for, another. And that putting myself aside will necessarily lead to joy. Ask most kids what is better: getting Christmas presents or giving them? They'll probably say getting them. But ask anybody who has grown up and they'll tell you the opposite. God says the same thing.

♦"*In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' " Acts 20:35, NIV.*

♦Servanthood requires humility. Humility is not thinking mostly about yourself. The opposite is selfish ambition and vain conceit (3), when you pretty much spend your life thinking all about yourself, your own pleasure, your feelings, your urges, your wants. Humility is not thinking you are no-good as a person. It's just not thinking all about yourself as a person as much as you think about others.

♦What does selfish ambition and vain conceit look like? Well, lets say there's a group of kids at an event and the host brings out a tray of cookies. Wham! 8 guys are there and back with 6 cookies each. You tell me. Does that look like Christ? Joe is telling this great story about a fishing adventure, and how he had to battle to land this bass, etc. Tom's not really listening at all. Joe reminded him of a great catch he himself made and he's prepping

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to jump in with his own story as soon as Joe takes a breath. See, servanthood sees the other people in the room. Servanthood hears the person telling his story and delights in that person.

♦ You mean to tell me that I'd feel more joyful inside if I didn't insist on telling my story and I happily interacted with someone else about theirs? Yes, I mean to tell us that, because love is both a motivation and a by-product of service.

♦ As long as you racing to the cookie line, you are living in anxiety about getting enough for yourself. As long as you have to dominate the room with your opinion on the matter to make sure things go your way, you are living in anxiety about being or looking right, and getting your way. The Christian way is not about you!

♦ **B.** And guess what? My neighbor is the god-ordained recipient of all I offer to Christ. Just read Matthew 25 this week to get the idea. Jesus spells it out there: what we do for other people we are doing for him.

♦ Watchman Nee, the Chinese evangelist tells of a Christian he knew in China. He was a poor farmer with fields high on a mountain. Each day he pumped water into his rice paddies. He morning he found that an unbelieving neighbor down the hill had opened the dykes of the Christian's field so the water would fill his own paddies. The farmer was becoming desperate. So the Christians met, prayed and came up with a solution. The next day the Christian farmer rose early and filled his neighbors fields with

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water first. Then he pumped his own. The neighbor man eventually became a believer as well. Can you figure out why? Christian love, demonstrated through servanthood.

♦**Conclusion:** Now in religions of most cultures the gods are not considered the servants of the people. God's don't serve. They rule. They receive from the created realm. They don't suffer. They cause the suffering of others. In most cultures people are out for themselves, their own honor, their own progress.

♦And now Paul has told us that this is not the way in the Christian culture. The hero in God's narrative has both of the points we've been talking about today: suffering, and servanthood. In fact the prophet Isaiah calls the Messiah the Suffering Servant.

♦*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ... And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."* 1 Peter 5:5-11, NIV.