



Page I volume 81

VOLUME 81 AUGUST 2013 THE JOY OF THE CROSS

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Messiah- Christ the King supreme!

Shannon, Levi, and I pray that this letter finds you prospering in all things and living in divine health as it is the Lord's will for you.

Wow! I have been super-blessed to see the response of many of you to my upcoming mission's trip to India. Thank you, thank you, thank you, to everyone who have given so graciously and sacrificially to it so far! We pray an abundant harvest will come forth in your life for your gifts of love as I am sure an abundant harvest will be produced in the lives of many in India during and even after my two weeks there. God is faithful who also will do it!

There are certainly still needs involved with this trip such as sponsoring the pastors and evangelists who will attend the meetings in both Bangalore and Madurai and also for the costs of the facilities, so if you want to be a part of what the Lord is going to do, we continue to welcome your contributions.

As for this month's teaching, I want us to look at the Book of Philippians and take a look at a truth that is extremely important towards us walking in the level of joy that we are capable of. But let's begin by turning over to Hebrews chapter 12...

TAKING UP OUR CROSS

Hebrews chapter 12 teaches us that Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (verse 2). This means that He took up His cross in exchange for the joy that He would experience as a result. In other words, Jesus made an exchange- He traded His life for the joy that He would receive as a result.

Now, of course, this did not mean that the joy necessarily came while He was hanging on the cross. There was pain involved there. There was suffering that was experienced in that moment. But, praise the Lord, joy indeed came in the morning of that third day! There was a complete satisfaction and a taste of the resurrection life that He partook of on that great day!

And this wonderful principle lies true for us as well. When we take up our "cross" and follow His example of laying down our lives- our desires, our needs, and our feelings- we too will experience joy unspeakable and full of glory!

How does this work, you ask? It works according to the kingdom principle that the first shall be last and the last shall be first and also by another that says whoever loses his life for the Lord will find it and whoever seeks after his own life will lose it.

However, these kingdom laws are absolutely contradictory to the way the world thinks. The world thinks

that if they are going to be happy and possess joy that they must get all they can, “can” all they get, and then sit on the can! In other words, they think happiness and joy is found in acquiring things- gaining wealth, health, fame, relationships, etc. but the Word of God teaches us differently. It teaches us that the key to finding the life that we all seek after is actually found by learning to lose it and not by trying to add to it.

This is proven true by simply looking at those who live completely for themselves... There are many people in the world today who possess all of the things that we feel we need to possess to be happy, yet they are miserable. They accumulated all of these “things” and they are no better off than the one who is still seeking them.

So my point is that accumulating things will not make you happy. If you want to have joy, you must learn to take up your cross and you do this by dying to yourself and living for a higher purpose- seeking first the kingdom of God and esteeming others better than yourself.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

The Apostle Paul was a man who did this... This man of God laid down his life. By his own self admission, he had learned to die daily. Therefore, it is of no surprise that he was the author of the book of Philippians which we call the epistle of joy. We even find evidences of this selfless and sacrificial life in his letter to the Philippians.

In Philippians 1:21 we see him making a profound truth concerning his attitude towards life and death. He said, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

What did he mean when he said that to him, to live was Christ? He was declaring as he did in his other epistles that as far as he was concerned, he was dead and his life was hidden with Christ in God (see Colossians 3:3). The man who was formerly known as Saul died that day on the road to Damascus- this being culminated in Damascus when Ananias was sent to him, baptizing him in water and the Holy Spirit. So from then on, as he declared in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

This is what the Apostle meant when he said that for him, to live was Christ. As far as he was concerned, being alive on this planet was all about Christ. It is not about us building our own kingdoms and laying up treasures here on the earth. Our life is all about Christ and His kingdom; it is not about us at all.

He went on to describe this in the following verses of Philippians chapter one when he explained why he had a desire to not only depart this earth and be with Christ, but also had a desire to stay here in the flesh. Why? In verse 24 he said that for him to remain in the flesh was more needful for them! In other words, he was not trying to remain alive on the earth because he was either afraid of dying or because he had other things he wanted to do for himself. As far as he was concerned, he was already dead! He only wanted to stay because of how it affected them! Then in verse 25 he said that he had concluded that he would remain and continue with them all for their progress and joy of faith. In other words, the reason Paul said that he had decided to stay was for their progress in the faith and their joy in the faith. Notice that it was not

about him. It was not about his progress or his own happiness. It was all about how he could help them and make them happy. This is the attitude of a truly selfless man!

THE FOCUS OF THE SELFLESS

Then, as any good teacher does, after he offers himself as an example of how our attitude should be towards life, he goes on in the beginning of the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians to teach the church of Philippi how they can practically walk in this same attitude.

He begins in verse one to use the proper motivation for the admonitions he was about to make. He says, "Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy..."

The word "if" that is used four respective times in this verse is not a badge of doubt but should actually be translated- "since." Therefore I would translate this verse- "So since there is encouragement in Christ, since His love comforts us, since we have fellowship with Him through the Holy Spirit, and since we have obtained affection and mercy from Him..."

Paul uses the motivation of all that we have been freely given through Christ- encouragement, love, fellowship, affection, and mercy- to show how it is our reasonable service to lay down our lives and learn to live in unity and love towards our brothers and sisters in Christ (see Romans 12:1). Our motivation for doing anything for the Lord should always be out of love and appreciation to Him for all that He has already done for us.

Then he said, "...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." (Philippians 2:2) This is a side note, but isn't it interesting that the Apostle Paul said that what would fulfill his joy was when this body of believers would learn to live in unity? If we were honest, most Christians would not find the pinnacle of their joy in anything other than what happens directly towards them. Most would have to honestly say- "fulfill my joy by giving me something" or "fulfill my joy by being kind towards me." But not Paul! Paul again was genuinely concerned only for the welfare of others and not his own well being.

Then notice verse 3... He said, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." Again, Paul was preaching exactly what he practiced! If he didn't esteem this church better than he did himself, he would have at this point been saying, "Woe is me. I am here in this prison just suffering for the Lord. Pray for me, brothers and sisters. This is tough." But you do not hear this out of Paul, do you? All you hear is- "Alright guys, don't be selfish and conceited. Be like-minded. Be sure to stay in one accord. Esteem others better than yourself." You do not hear much at all in this entire epistle about what he was currently going through. As a matter of fact, if you were not aware of his current predicament through the historical evidence we have, then you might get the impression that Paul was sitting in some palace writing this letter while eating filet mignon and sipping on a soda pop! But this is just what someone who has truly taken up their cross will do. They will give the impression that all is well with them because they are more focused on you and seeking first the kingdom of God than talking about all of their problems.

Friends, this is such an important piece to living a life full of joy. We must live in such a way that we are crucified with Christ where it is no longer we who live but it is Christ living in us. When we adopt this mentality, our joy will remain full. Why? It is because if it is never about you, then you cannot be disappointed and discouraged when your circumstances are not favorable. This is how Paul lived, and this is how we should live likewise.

So now let's look at verses 3-4 in more detail in order to learn how we can practically live this selfless, sacrificial life...

Again, Paul begins verse 3 by saying, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit..."

Now it is important to interject this point here, but notice how Paul makes a point that we should guard against doing things through selfish motives and being conceited. Why is this important? It is because people who possess these two vices and are motivated by them are what I can guarantee you to be miserable people.

You see, to live life being full of yourself and only seeking your own welfare will never produce joy. It might produce periodic happiness in those moments where you get what you desire, but it will never produce the joy of the Lord that is everlasting and completely satisfying. Selfishness and self-centeredness will always produce a cast down countenance, but selflessness will produce a countenance that is lifted up more times than not.

And we experience this joy by doing everything through the proper motive listed in the second half of verse 3... Here Paul went on to say, "but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."

This admonition to esteem others better than ourselves is so important in regards to the whole Christian commission for this is what it means to take up our cross and follow Him. If we choose to die to ourselves- our wants, needs, and desires- and live for others then we will be esteeming others better than ourselves.

Then I love what Paul says next in this verse because in it he shows us how to practically esteem others better than ourselves. He says, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

Someone might think- How is this verse telling us how to practice the golden rule? The key is found in the two words "look out." These two words come from the Greek word "skopeo" which is where we get our word "scope" from. And the word "scope" is obviously where we derive words such as "telescope, microscope, periscope, etc" from. So, as it pertains to these words, we can see that "skopeo" means to focus on, to look specifically at or for something. So when Paul says for us to "look out" not only for our interests but also for the interests of others, he was saying do not just focus on our own interests, but learn to focus in on and specifically look out for the interests of others.

When I think of these things like a telescope or microscope, I see someone who is actively making an

effort to look for something that might not be seen by the naked eye. They are using a specific tool that magnifies the object that they are looking at so that they can see clearly something that otherwise would not be so obvious. And this is how we do this... We intentionally enter each day with the intent of looking for those who are hurting and those who are in need. For instance, instead of being so consumed with how we look or how we feel, we look for others who might have a physical or emotional need. Sometimes these needs and hurts are obvious. We can see that someone has a need for a new pair of shoes. We can see that someone is hurting through their downcast countenance. These are the obvious needs that we can be looking for, but just as it is with a telescope or microscope, sometimes needs are not always apparent and we need a tool to see them. So what is this tool, you ask? It is not an it; it is a He, and His name is the Holy Spirit! We “look out” for these hidden hurts and needs through our dependence on the Holy Spirit to show us what these hurts and needs are. And this is His ministry- to give us those words of knowledge and words of wisdom that both identify the need and then give us the answer!

So this is how we practically live this selfless and sacrificial life... It is in stirring ourselves up to think soberly concerning ourselves, evaluating our motives and actively looking for ways to esteem others better than ourselves. I can assure you that when you live like this, you will experience so much more joy than you will otherwise. As we have seen, this is just how God’s kingdom is set up.

So how do I know this? Well, let me conclude this month’s Living Logos by telling you what the Lord had to tell me several years ago...

FINISHING YOUR RACE WITH JOY

I remember early in my Christian walk being dissatisfied with the level of joy I was walking in. I was growing by leaps and bounds and learning more and more about the Lord, but I witnessed in others a joy that I did not see in my own life. This prompted me to ask the Lord, “Lord, why do these other individuals seem to have more joy than I do?” To which the Lord responded, “It is because you count your life dear to yourself.” Then He took me over to a passage of Scripture in the book of Acts where the Apostle Paul made a powerful and most revealing statement.

In Acts chapter 20 Paul was summarizing his message to a group of pastors saying that he was aware of the chains and tribulations that awaited him in Jerusalem. Then he said, “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy...” Through this simple, yet profound statement we see a major reason for the joy that the author of the Epistle of Joy obviously had.

The way the Lord revealed this verse to me was that the reason Paul was able to finish his race with joy was because, number one, he did not let anything move him and, number two, because he did not count his life dear to himself. But He showed me that there was a specific result to each action.

For instance, the reason that one will be able to finish their race is because he or she does not let things move them. If we operate in faith- not letting circumstances or situations move us because we are not moved by what we see, hear, or feel, but we are only moved by what we believe- then this is what will

enable us to simply finish our race. In other words, it is only in allowing ourselves to be swayed by the tribulations of life that we will be hindered from finishing our race and completing our course.

But just because we are strong in this one virtue does not mean that we will enjoy the journey to the degree that we can. It is only when we combine not counting our life dear to ourselves with not letting circumstances move us that we will finish our race *with joy*. In other words, while letting nothing move us through trusting and believing in God will enable us to finish our race; coming to the place where we become selfless and focused more on the needs of others is when we will fully enjoy our race. So what the Lord was saying to me on that day was, sure, I was growing in my faith, but the key to joy coming alive in my heart was found in dying to myself.

Friends, this is where joy is found. It is found in the laying down of our lives daily. Paul said, "I die daily"-meaning he had learned to die to himself on a daily basis. And this was undoubtedly the reason for the joy he possessed even in the midst of his undesirable situation.

So resolve today that you are going to lay down "your" life and begin letting Christ be your life. Resolve today to lay down your kingdom and begin to seek first His kingdom. This is where your joy is found! It is found on your cross!

Selah!

Victoriously,

