

Galatians 5:22.

Feb 17, 2008

John 3:1-17

“Love, Joy, and Peace that Last Beyond Christmas”

Last week I spoke of Jesus’ temptation by the devil, illustrating the opposition of the Spirit-led life and the life of the flesh. Jesus knew he was divinely called to be God’s Messiah, a Savior for all people, but was tempted to use worldly means to fulfill this calling. It is the same temptation we all face. [God intends for us to live by the Spirit and to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit.]

Here (in the Gospel of John) Jesus talks with Nicodemus, a man of faith, about how essential it is to live by the Spirit in order to understand God’s purposes. Until one is “born again,” that is, given a whole new worldview, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to see and understand the love, joy, and peace that comes from following God’s purpose in life.

This week we continue our focus on the Fruit of the Spirit, which comes from Spirit-led living. The fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Each of these qualities is an aspect of the Fruit, and each aspect is related to the others. It is fruit that is in season all year round, and can be produced in all seasons life. God has in mind for us to produce this fruit – it’s part of our divine calling.

Today we look at the first three qualities of the Spirit-fruit: love, joy, and peace. Love, joy, and peace are often seen on Christmas cards, but God intends us to live these qualities all year round. It is no accident that Paul lists them first.

LOVE

One of the favorite Scripture passages selected for weddings is from 1 Corinthians 13. You recall, it says that, “Love is patient. Love is kind.... It is not rude, it is not self-seeking... Love never fails...” Paul concludes by declaring that of three eternal things faith, hope, and love, the greatest of these is love.

English has one word for “love” which we use to describe feelings or responses; whereas Greek, the language of the N.T., has three words for love.

The first is *Ερως*. Most likely when couples choose 1 Cor. 13 to be read at their wedding, it is because they have feelings of *eros* for one another. This word comes from the name of the Greek god of love, Eros. It means “longing and desire.” It is often associated with sexual love between a man

and a woman. Ironically, *eros* never appears in the N.T. – though it was a very common word for love used by all Greeks. We know that unless this love is redeemed by God, it easily becomes possessive and leads to jealousy.

The second Greek word for love known is *Φίλος*. It is the love one has toward a friend or companion. It is often called “brotherly love,” as in Philadelphia, “the city of brotherly love.” [Those whom we love in this way we hold in high esteem, (as illustrated in Luke 14:10 – seating at the banquet, take lowest seat so that host may say, “friend, move up higher.”).] *Philos* comes from shared experience; the joy of one is the joy of the other. [(Luke 15:9, when the woman found her lost coin she called her “friends” – the Greek is *τας φίλας* meaning her girlfriends, who shared her distress at losing the coin, and share her joy in finding it.) Women will often develop friendships over sharing their thoughts and feelings. Men often develop friendships over shared activities, that might lead to talk of thoughts or feelings.] Shared hardship can do the same. Military service develops this kind of friendship for many men and women. *Philos* finds expression in adoption of like interest. James 2:23 says that Abraham was a *philos* of God. Does that mean they were “chums?” No, it tells us that Abraham adopted God’s interests as his own. As you can see this word is used in the N.T., but it is not the word used in regard to Fruit of the Spirit.

The third Greek word for love is *Αγαπε* - caring love. *Agape* is the type of love that God expresses through the H.S. *Agape* stands in a class all its own. This is the word used in Gal. 5:22.

Unlike *philos*, *agape* is not based on a feeling, relationship, or common interest. It is propelled by higher ideals. *Agape* is not fueled by the desire of the recipients, but by their need. John 3:16 “...God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” [The love of God caused Him to design salvation’s plan. If God had waited for humans’ desire to be saved, it wouldn’t have happened. God’s *agape* did what humanity most needed.] *Agape* is always demonstrated – not a matter of words, but of action. God’s love for us was demonstrated in Jesus. This means nail-pierced hands reach out in love from the cross. God’s love is not just a sentimental feeling, but sacrificial action. In 1 Cor. 13 the words translated as “love” or “charity” are *agape* in the Greek. *Agape* love stands above even faith and hope.

Furthermore, God has commanded us to demonstrate *agape* love; that’s part of our divine calling. “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34). It is

near impossible to obey this command, because , it does not come naturally to us. It comes with the fruit of the Spirit, energized and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was explaining this to Nicodemus when he spoke of being born again – born into Spirit-led living. *Agape* is divine love, from the heart of God, expressed through us to others. [It works like this:

We enter a situation where God directs us to *agape* another person.

We admit to God that we lack *agape* for this person.

We consider how God would personally respond to this person according to the Scriptures.

We ask for God’s power to do likewise.

We obey God’s direction and example and respond as he would.]

God is not commanding us to a feeling, but to an action of the H.S. in our lives. Feelings may accompany *agape*, but are not the same as *agape*. God expects us to demonstrate *agape* even when we don’t feel like it.

Sometimes we demonstrate *agape*, not because we feel like it, but because we know it is the right thing to do, and so ask the Holy Spirit to be in us.

The irony: *agape* begins with a response, an act of obedience, and ends with a feeling – feeling the joy that God’s *agape* can bring. Those who give of themselves in *agape* because of the need of others often experience joy not found by indulging their own desires. [I have seen it on mission trips: people give up the comforts and conveniences of home to offer their hands to someone in need. Joy results. Which brings us to the second aspect of fruit of the Spirit.]

JOY

“Joy” is the most often used translation of the Greek *χαρᾶ*, which means “joy, rejoicing, gladness, enjoyment, or bliss.” In many ways, joy means to celebrate! This is not happiness, which is fleeting and superficial. Joy is deeper than happiness. *Agape* melts the heart of stone, while *χαρᾶ* touches the deepest part of that heart.

New Testament scholar William Barclay comments about our Lord at the wedding of Cana and then asks a pertinent question: Jesus was perfectly at home at a wedding feast. He was no severe, austere killjoy. He loved to share in the happy rejoicing of a wedding feast. [There are certain religious people who shed a gloom wherever they go. There are certain people who are suspicious of all joy and happiness. To them, religion is the thing of the black clothes, the lowered voice, the expulsion of social fellowship. They

descend like a gloom wherever they go . . .] Jesus never counted it a crime to be joyful. Why should His followers do so?¹

The Bible highlights several (five) reasons for joy. The first is salvation. Psalm 51:12 reminds us of the, “joy of thy salvation.”. Revelation (7:10) states that salvation belongs to our God. God has the power to grant salvation. It is God’s gift to give. Χαρις, the Greek for “grace,” is closely related to χαρα or “joy.” Joy is found in receiving the gift of God’s grace, which is salvation. That is why joy is sung at Christmas, the birth of our Savior. [Salvation is not about us, but about Christ: Luke 10:20, “Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Heb. 12:18-24 names of the church of the firstborn are written in heaven. Rev. 13:8 – names in book of life, which belongs to Christ. Rev. 3:5 – those who overcome will have their names in the book of life.]

The second reason for joy is discovery. Joy comes in discovering something hidden. [Matt. 13:44; Matt. 28:8; Luke 1:44; Luke 2:10; Luke 20:21; Luke 24:52. All these Scriptures have to do with things hidden.] In the N.T. joy results in the discovery of Christ. Joy is the supernatural result which flows from the glorious discovery of our Lord and Savior in every circumstance where we wish to find him. Even in difficult, deadly circumstances joy can be found in discovering Christ. [Acts 16:16-40, Paul and Silas imprisoned. Acts 7:54-60, Stephen filled with the Spirit, joy at seeing Christ standing at right hand of God.]

The third source of joy found in the Bible is restoration. Joy results from going through difficult times in obedience to God (perhaps demonstrating agape love to someone you don’t like). [Psalm 71:1-24; Phil. 3:10 Paul desires to know Christ: the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing his sufferings.] Life with God may not be easy, but it will be good. Good does not equal easy. We cannot really begin to know Christ until we share in his sufferings. Our closest friends are often those with whom we have shared suffering (that is why soldiers have deep and lasting connection). [2 Cor. 1:3-7, God can turn your miseries into ministry. If God has ordained suffering for you, he has also ordained restoration. 1 Peter 5:10 Repentance, the restored sinner rejoices. Jeremiah 31:1-20 discipline precedes restoration of those separated from God. Are you in need of restoration? Have you been experiencing hardship which seems to have come by God’s hand? Have you been separated from God because of sin?

¹William Barclay, THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, Volume 1 (Westminster Press, 1956), 85.

Have you known the discipline of the Lord? If you are willing, the restoration is coming.]

The fourth reason for joy is abiding in Christ. Fruit of the Spirit originates in the heart and personality of God (John 15:1-17), who was pleased to dwell fully in Jesus. Remain in Christ, even though he trims, like a branch is trimmed so that it can bear much fruit. [What does it mean to abide in Christ? Ruth 1:11-18 – Ruth chose to remain with Naomi; she clung to Naomi. It means to cling to him, refuse to be budged under pressure, to never allow loss to cause us to leave. We must be crucified with him in his death in order to be raised with him.] The key to abiding in Jesus is found in (John 15:3, 7, 10): His words remain in us, and we obey his commands. If you've lost your joy it's right where you left it: in His presence. He is our joy.

Lastly, the Bible tells us that joy is found in relationships. Believers are catalysts of joy for one another. Paul expresses his joy at how he was welcomed by believers, and how his joy was increased through his relationship with them. When have you last enjoyed the Body of Christ? You may be so busy that you are missing true fellowship and cohesiveness with other adult believers. That's one reason we have classes on Sunday and Wednesday, so that we may experience the joy that comes in fellowship. Joy in fellowship is one of the hardest things to find these days – our lifestyles conspire against it. Maybe that's why we long for it all the more.

Now, where there is *agape* love and genuine joy, there can arise true peace.

PEACE

There is a town not far north of here named “Tranquility.” Perhaps those who first named this town found it to be a peaceful place, or hoped it would be. If you could package peace, tranquility, or serenity, your wealth would be assured. Often more than wealth, do people desire this precious commodity we call peace,

The Bible speaks of the vital relationship between peace and the soul. The Greek word in the Bible for “peace” is Εἰρήνη, which means “peace of mind, tranquility.” Simply said, simply defined, simply found. Job is a great example of one who experienced terrible calamity in life, yet remained steadfast in his faith in God. Why? He had peace in his soul. Abraham was able to live out his faith in God. Why? He had peace in his soul. Jesus was able to fulfill his divine calling because He had peace in his soul. You and I

will fulfill God's call for us when we have peace in our souls. God's peace is paramount to spiritual, mental, and emotional wholeness.

Life without peace is unbearable. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a once in a millennium musical genius. The Austrian composer of the 1700's, whose works are still played today, was an accomplished musician on the clavier, violin, and organ by the age of six. By age 14 he had already written five works still played today, was commissioned to write his first serious opera. Rarely had a life held such promise. But Mozart's life was one of constant inner turmoil, that stole from his quality of life and the length of his days. At age 34, this creative genius died a pauper and was buried in an unmarked grave. He never discovered what he searched for between the notes on his pages of brilliant compositions: peace. Since then, millions of less talented and less famous people have also failed to capture that ingredient that makes life so livable.

[Life without peace is one of turmoil and no rest (Job 3:26). Turmoil means commotion, restlessness, agitation, rage. Lack of peace shows in sleepless nights of tossing and turning because something is on your mind; fear that sticks in your stomach like a knot; a body and mind in perpetual motion; unpleasant or guilt-laden memories that keep you imprisoned; never-ending strife; hopelessness; a sense of being out of control. Peace is often that "something" unsettled, dissatisfied people discover they are missing. (news clip of bomber on Enola Gay)]

Humans cannot create peace in their own souls. It is not a package picked up here and there, nor does it come as a partner to intellect, talent, or sensitivity. So how is peace simply found? Here's the key: we cannot experience the peace of God until we have peace *with* God. And perhaps that is the source of so much strife in the world: people do not have peace with God in their souls.

Peace is a disposition of God's heart, and this same peace is applied to the hearts of believers. Through Jesus, humans have been reconciled to God (sin and impurity nailed to the cross). He was uniquely qualified to accomplish this reconciliation because God's fullness was pleased to dwell in him. He completed his task of reconciliation by shedding his blood on the cross (Rom. 5). That is why we are able to say, Christ is our peace. In Him we have peace with God, which allows us peace with one another (Eph. 2:14-17). Simply said, simply defined, simply found. If you have not already done so, surrender your heart and will to Christ, and make peace with God.

Jesus taught Nicodemus, and is teaching us, that being born anew of the Spirit, allows God's love in Christ to empower us to approach all life's

challenges with joy and peace. The fruit of the Spirit, which grows from life in the Spirit, will refresh you and all around you, in all seasons. Love, joy, and peace are as eternal as the salvation message of Christmas.