

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE

March 25, 2005

GALATIANS 2:20

It's interesting to me that we have been studying through the book of Philippians during this Lenten season. It's strange because the book of Philippians is usually thought of the New Testament Book that deals with the theme of Joy. In fact, Warren Wiersbe titled his commentary on Philippians, "Be Joyful."

However, we have seen that the book of Philippians had just as much to say about unity, sacrifice, love and service. In other words, it seems as if Paul is saying that the way to find true joy is to put to death those things that keep us away from genuine humility. Last Sunday, we saw that the only way to experience the power of Christ's resurrection was to fellowship with Him in suffering and death.

Are we able to think in those terms? I think it's very difficult for me to think that the way to lasting joy in life is through death. In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul puts it this way, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."* It seems that Paul had already died to himself and placed all his identity in Jesus Christ.

The problem I face in life is that I know that I have to die to myself. But I'm not very brave or willing to die. If we were going to die, it should be quick and neat. But I always want to hang on to some of my accomplishments or something of my own identity. And so I tend to make dying to myself a long, slow process.

I find that when talking about death, it's always good to put things into perspective with a little humor. I want to give you an example of how we tend to drag out suffering and death.

Many married couples may reach their golden wedding anniversary without ever having thought of divorce, but not many without ever having thought of murder. Statistics show that single men die more quickly than married men. Therefore, if you are looking for a long, slow, death get married. I'm just kidding. I have been married for 32 years.

Look I know this goes against everything we have come to believe our whole lives.

But the truth is that we can only come to experience joy when we die to ourselves. Let me just address a few areas in which we need to die.

First of all, we need to die to the world's idea of what love is all about. In other words, we need to die to our self-centeredness. We have come to twist the whole notion of love the way God designed it. When we say we love someone, whether it be a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, children, parents, or even God ... what we really mean by that is that these people bring pleasure to our lives. And so our love lives have turned into a search for pleasure. We all have a basic need to give and receive love. But love has become a search to make us happy and get our needs met.

Why do so many young people get involved in premarital sex? Why do young people join gangs? Why do so many people settle for the wrong person to marry? Let me prove my point. Most people who get involved in premarital sex end up having more than one sex partner before they get married. The divorce rate in both the secular and Christian populations is now over 50%. Homosexuals and Lesbians end up with many sex partners during the course of their lives. And let's take the seemingly most genuine love relationship, the parent child relationship. Parents have children and then don't spend time with them. Parents are often disappointed when their children don't turn out exactly how they wish they would turn out. Even the best of us parents have children to please ourselves.

We have fallen in love with the idea of being in love in the United States . We have substituted all sorts of things for love. We first need to die to the idea that I come first. Anybody who has gone through my marriage counseling can tell you that. If you're not willing to give up friends, family, hobbies, everything in order to love your future husband or wife, you're not ready to get married. When young couples come to me all excited saying, "We're thinking about having a baby," I usually respond pretty deadpanned saying, "That's great, but know this. Your lives are over now for the next 25 plus years. If you're not ready to give up your lives for the next 25 years, then don't have a baby. This poor baby never asked to come into this world."

I'm going to share this with you so you can get a little insight into how I think. Oftentimes people think it's a cute idea to have children, and a lot of them. Then later they'll come to me and talk about how exhausted they are and how they are feeling bad that they don't have time for themselves. I am polite to be sure, but in reality I'm wondering, "Why did you have children in the first place, or why so many?" I am very up front with couples that want to get married. If you're not willing to let everything in your life go to love this woman or man, then you're not ready to get married. I am

very up front with young couples who think it's cute to have children that their lives are about to end.

I am a *take no prisoners* person when it comes to the realities of love. Love has everything to do with becoming more like Jesus in dying to self in order to enable the other to be all that God wants him or her to be. Your spouse is not here to make you happy. Your children do not exist to serve you or make you happy. Here is the definition of love, "For God so loved (you and me), that gave His One and Only Son to die so that (you and I) could have eternal life. Jesus left His throne in heaven, came down to earth, took on human flesh, suffered and died so that we could be in a right relationship with God. The Holy Spirit lives in us and never leaves us even though we grieve Him time and time again." That is God's definition of love. Do you hear any self-interest in any of that? We have to put to death all of our selfish, self-absorbed, self-centered ideas of love. We must put to death the world's perverted ideas of love and definition of roles. We must die to self and the world.

Next, we must put to death fear. I can remember from a very early age, that the world motivates us by fear. The more insecure we feel, the easier it is to motivate us. I can remember as a very young boy, going through air-raid drills at school in case Russia attacked us with nuclear weapons. The air-raid siren would go off and immediately we were to crouch under our desks. Now that I'm much older and look back, "Is that desk going to really protect me from nuclear fall-out?" I don't think so. Nevertheless, as long as we as a nation feared Russia, the government had no trouble getting taxpayers to vote for military bills. Playing on people's fears in World War II, we took away valuable land in California from Japanese Americans and sent them to internment camps. Because of fear, racial reconciliation has not taken place in the United States. Because of financial fears, terrorist fears, and fears of other people, our country has become a very lonely place to live.

Most of us don't really know our neighbors. We are afraid to live and afraid to die. Motivated by fear, we live with anger, frustration, mistrust, and in isolation. We look to all sorts of worldly solutions to our fear. We buy all sorts of insurance. We invest money in all sorts of ways. We think that if we have the right insurance, the right investments, the right alarm systems on our houses and cars, and perhaps if we have a gun, then we are safe. We must die to the notion that we can insulate ourselves from bad things. We must die to the notion that we can control events and situations. We must die to the thoughts and behaviors that say I am in control. The fact is that life and death are beyond our control. We have to quit embracing worldly solutions to our fear. Life is not safe and it is certainly not in our control.

We have to die to the world's definitions of love. We have to die to self-centeredness and self-absorption. We have to die to the world's solutions for fear. We have to die to the notion that being in control is the solution to fear. And finally this evening, I would like for us to die to chasing after the things in life that this world defines as valuable. We have to die to the world's definitions of what makes life meaningful.

The world tells us that climbing to the top gives meaning to life. If we can get a good education and make a lot of money, we will find satisfaction. If we climb the corporate ladder, then we will be successful. If we can at least climb higher and have more things than our friends, then we can feel good about ourselves. If we can get money, fame, and power, then we will find happiness. If we can buy houses and put a lot of money in the bank, then we can feel successful. The world tells us that if we get to the top, if we make a lot of money, if we buy a lot of stuff, if other people look up to us, then we are living a meaningful life.

The fact is this. I personally know a lot of people who have all these things and who have achieved all of this, yet they are not really happy or content with life. In fact, they seem very empty. The problem is that we have let television, magazines, newspapers, and even our well-meaning family and friends tell us what is desirable and what would give meaning and happiness to our lives. We then become proud in all our achievements and acquisitions. We have to die to the world's ideas of this. After all, Jesus said that all these things will perish one way or another. Thieves will steal them, rust will corrode them, or moths will ultimately eat them. We chase after so many things.

The problem is that we have bought into this thinking hook, line, and sinker. Even though I have been in the ministry for over 25 years, I still have to fight off this thinking. We see commercials on television of happy people driving expensive cars, living in expensive houses, going to expensive clubs, and going on expensive vacations. And we start to desire those things. I'm no different than you. I too was raised in the United States. I too am seduced by the American dream to earn and buy and spend as much as possible. We think that having letters after our name is meaningful. We think climbing to the top of our profession is meaningful. We think sounding intelligent or being in charge is meaningful. But all these things are meaningless.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon said he had and did it all. He had the Ph.D. behind his name. He had the title, "King of Israel", wisest, richest, and most

powerful King in the world," behind his name. He had all the titles you could possibly have. He had unlimited power, wealth, and resources. He built great buildings, including the luxurious temple in Jerusalem and an even more palatial palace for himself. He ate and drank the most exotic foods and drinks. He had all the crazy wild sex a person could imagine. Yet, having it all, he died in disgrace. None of the worldly things brought satisfaction or meaning to his life. As we read through the life of Solomon, we say to ourselves, if I had all his money, or if I had accomplished all he had accomplished, if I had all the pleasure he had, I would certainly be happy. But if we want to find joy, we have to die to all those ideas. Even King Solomon, at the end of his tragic life, had to admit this.

I know this sounds totally absurd to us. We have to die in order to find joy. Here is the dilemma we face. From a very early age, we have been taught to chase after all these things. They have become part of who we are. We think all these things that our family, friends, television, and culture told us would bring us joy and happiness are all lies. In fact we have to admit that we have lied to ourselves. We have to die to selfishness. We have to die to fear. We have to die to pride. In order to find the joy Paul has been talking about in Philippians, we have to first die. If we try to hold on both to the world and to heaven, we will never find the joy God promises. In order to live the abundant life that Jesus promises, we first have to die to the ideas the world has and we have of what abundance is. We must fellowship with Christ in His sufferings and death before we can experience His resurrection power and joy.

Think about it like this. I know it will be difficult since we often learn to live with our misery. We are miserable, but we know our misery, so we are reluctant to change. But please, I beg you; let's make this commitment tonight to die together. Let us die to the ideas of this world and embrace the ideas of God's Kingdom. It is truly scary but I know we can do it. We have so much to gain. And in reality we are giving up garbage.

Jim Elliot put it this way; "*He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.*"

We think money, power, fame, sick relationships, and achievements will bring us happiness. The truth is that everything in this world is perishable. We are constantly frustrated because we know they are perishable. On the other hand, we cannot buy or earn the joy and happiness that God has for us in eternal life. But we must die to ourselves and this world. Let's make Jim Elliot's quote personal in our lives. Tonight I want to die to selfishness, pride, fear, and all the things of this world. "I am no fool.

So tonight I give up every worldly thing because I cannot keep it. I give it away in order to gain, the joy and peace and happiness of Jesus Christ which I can never lose."

We have now talked about being crucified with Christ and no longer being alive to this world. On Easter we will talk about what life in Christ looks like.