

True Joy – The Wisdom of Philippians

Looking for joy in all the wrong places (Acts 17:16-34)

9-13-09

We're all looking for joy in all the wrong places. (first and main or 4 pts.)

This is a problem for all of us, Christians and non-Christians alike. The only difference is that Christians are aware it.

We're all looking for joy.

- Blaise Pascal quote – p. 12 The Dangerous Duty of Delight by John Piper
- (blez pascal)
- mathematician, physicist, and Christian convert at age 31 from the 1600's

We're all coming up short in our quest for joy.

- most people realize this
- a few do not (like me)

The reason we're all coming up short in our quest for joy is not that we aren't trying hard enough, but that we're looking for joy in all the wrong places.

- C.S. Lewis quote – p. 22 The Dangerous Duty of Delight by John Piper
- Famous author of the *Chronicles of Narnia* and former atheist who came to Christ at age 33.

God created us to find our joy in Him.

Athens was “full of idols” just like our lives are. Full of things that we try to find our joy in other than God. Full of things that we put above God or love more than God in our lives.

Paul could see that Athens was full of idols by simply walking around, looking at the people's objects of worship, and seeing that what they worshipped was not God. We can do the same thing in Duluth.

You can identify people's objects of worship by asking the following sorts of questions...

- What are the things that people are willing to dedicate themselves to?
- What are the things that people put their hope and trust in?
- What are the things that people invest their time, their thoughts, and their money in?
- What are the things that people are looking to for joy, fulfillment, and meaning in life?
- What are the things that people just can't do or live without?
- What are the things that get people up early in the morning, that they can't wait to do when they get home from work, that they look forward to on the weekend, and that they MAKE time for in their lives. What are their TOP priorities?

As you walk around Duluth and look at people's objects of worship, what do you see? As you walk around your own life and look at your objects of worship, what do you see?

Chances are, you see things like: family, education, career, physical fitness, leisure, recreation, food, alcohol and drugs, sex, relationships, music, video games, movies, TV, social networking, money, possessions, social causes, retirement, sleep, etc.

Most of these things are perfectly innocent, good things, in and of themselves. The problem is that all of ALL of these things can very quickly take the place of God in our lives and become idols in our hearts; things that we put above and love more than God.

Because Paul loved God and loved the Athenians he was "greatly distressed" by their idolatry. We should feel the same way about our own idolatry and the idolatry we see around us.

Paul addressed the Athenian's problem with idolatry by *letting them know* Who had created them and why. Note I said "letting them know," not "reminding them," since many of them were not aware of this

Acts 17:24-28 (NIV)

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and

earth and does not live in temples built by hands. (creator of all things and omnipresent)

²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. (sustainer of all things and totally self-sufficient)

²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. (completely sovereign)

(Why did God create, sustain, and determine the exact time and place of our lives? ²⁷ *God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.*

²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

God created us to seek after Him, reach out for Him, and find our joy in Him
There is nothing that He wants more, there is nothing He is more honored and glorified by than this. This is why He created us.

Matthew 22:34-38 (NIV)

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus replied: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*"

³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.*

If you really think about it, if God does indeed exist, and if is indeed the good and awesome God described in the Bible, then it makes all the sense in the world to seek our joy in Him.

Most people find their greatest joy in relationships.

God is offering us a relationship with Himself!

John 17:3 (NIV)

³ Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

What is it like to know God? You would think it would be great, and that is exactly the testimony of those who knew Him best in the Bible.

King David described knowing God like this...

Psalms 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ ...in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Jesus describes knowing God this way...

Matthew 13:44-46 (NIV)

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven (which we know from John 17:3 is all about knowing God) is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

And the Apostle Paul describes the joy of knowing God like this in his letter to the Philippians, the book that we're going to be studying for the next several weeks.

Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

So why don't we do it? Why don't we seek our joy in God like Jesus suggests and like David and Paul did? Why don't we do what makes all the sense in the world? Because we are sinners.

Because of our sin, we try to find joy in the creation rather than the Creator.

Romans 1:20-25 (NIV)

²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

²³ *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...*

²⁵ *They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.*

A classic Biblical example of our sinful tendency to try and find joy in the creation rather than the Creator is Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, who sought his joy in "wild living" rather than in the love and provision of his father, who is representative of God.

Though we are going to focus on the younger son in the parable, it's important to note that the older son is also guilty of seeking his joy in something other than the love and provision of his father; it's just that his sin is more subtle and refined, and less noticeable to the outward eye. As we read ask yourself which son you're more like.

Luke 15:11-32 (NIV)

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons.

¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, *set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.*

¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'

²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off,

his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.

²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.

²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

There are two things I want to point out from this parable.

The first is the deceitfulness of sin. The prodigal son was searching for joy and made the same mistake so many young people men make, especially young men. He sought his joy in sex rather than in God. Now "wild living" doubtless encompassed more than just sex, but we know from the older brother's comment in verse 30 that it meant at least that. Sex is a perfect example of the deceitfulness of sin, in that it a perfectly good, perfectly natural, God-given desire that the world, the flesh, and the devil use to turn us away from God.

There's nothing wrong with sex.

- God calls Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply in Genesis 1:28,

- He calls us to rejoice in the wife of our youth, to let her breasts satisfy us always, and to be ever be captivated by her love in Proverbs 5:18-19.
- He calls husbands and wives to come together often in 1 Corinthians 7.
- And He dedicates an entire book of the Bible, the Song of Solomon, to the celebration and description of erotic, sexual love, between a husband and his wife.

The problem isn't sex. The problem is, because we are sinners, we take God's good gift sex, which is meant to point us toward Him, and fall in love with and put our hope in IT rather than in HIM. It is this sinful, idolatrous, exchange of the Giver of the gift for gift itself that leads to things like: sex outside of marriage, adultery within marriage, divorce, sexual abuse, exploitation of women, and abuse of pornography, just to name a few.

The Every Man's Battle for Purity event that is coming up Sept. 26th is meant to help men who are struggling with this problem, especially in the form of pornography. I took these statistics off the website where you sign-up, which hopefully all you guys have visited ☺.

You have probably heard the statistics. In 2004, over \$57 billion dollars was spent worldwide on pornography and the sex industry. That figure is only increasing. Sadly the church is not immune to the wave of unhealthy sexuality sweeping over the nation. Estimates range from between 60-65% of Evangelical Christians access internet pornography monthly. This also includes 33% Evangelical pastors. Surveys show that 47% of Christians indicate that pornography is a major problem in their homes. It isn't only men who are targeted by the sex industry. Women, teens, and children are also targeted. The average age of first exposure to pornography is 11 years old. And women are the fastest growing segment of the population accessing pornography.

Jesus warns us that this sinful, idolatrous, obsession with sex can have serious eternal consequences in Matthew 5:27-30.

Matthew 5:27-30 (NIV)

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'

²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is

better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Why does Jesus take lust so seriously? It's not because it's any worse than any other sin, it's because it has such potential take God's place in our hearts. When we allow anything to remain on the throne of our hearts before God, we are playing with fire.

Men, if sex is on the throne of your heart (and only you know), then you need to come to the Battle for Purity September 26th. If it is not, then come and support those for whom it is. There's a bright green sign-up sheet on the welcome table in the hall. We already have 10 guys signed up and we are hoping for 20.

The second thing I want to point out from the parable of the prodigal son is the amazing grace and forgiveness of God.

Just as the father joyously opened his arms to his son despite the fact that he had abandoned him for other things that he thought would bring him more joy, so too will God the Father joyously open His arms to those of us who will leave our idolatry and come home to Him.

Paul concludes his sermon to the Athenians by calling them to repent or turn their idolatry and I want to conclude this sermon by calling us to do the same.

Acts 17:29-31 (NIV)

²⁹ "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone--an image made by man's design and skill.

³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

The man that Paul is talking about, the man that God appointed to judge the world with justice, the man that God raised from the dead, is Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus we can find true joy in God.

- It was Jesus who created us to find our joy in God
- It was Jesus who died on the cross and rose from the dead in order to defeat the power of sin in our lives and make repentance possible.
- It is Jesus who opens our eyes to the deceitfulness of sin and draws us onto Himself by His Holy Spirit.
- It is Jesus who empowers us, by His Holy Spirit, to begin to say no to sin and yes to God.
- And therefore, it is ultimately Jesus, who freed us to come to God so that we can find true joy in Him.

I've never seen these truths more powerfully illustrated than by the skit I'm about to play for you.

Lifehouse's *Everything* skit.