

“RADICAL JOY” - Part 2

Spiritual Rules for Radicals

Romans 8:31-39 February 19, 2012

I just finished a book about the Millennials, the generation that was born between 1980 and 2000. It said that only about 15% of the millennials are Christian, but those Christians, and those who might lean toward Christianity are looking for a radical church. And they defined radical in two ways. One is those who will give all they have to live what they read in the gospel, complete commitment. And the other way is to get back to the mind set of the first century church, to get back to the roots. And then the book said that not many churches are talking about being radical. And I yelled, “We are.” We are looking at how to be grounded in Christ, that our roots might grow deep in the Lord; that we might be strengthened and nourished to do all that Jesus calls us to do. We started talking about radical gratitude and radical faith. Last week we started looking at Radical Joy.

We are living in Radical Joy when we follow the advice of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:4: “*Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, rejoice.*” But it is hard to rejoice when the world around us is being difficult. We have gone through some pretty tough years, and there are liable to be tough, maybe even tougher years ahead. And so we have to be intentional in finding ways in which we can be joyful in the Lord at all times and in all times. Understand that we are not talking about happiness. Happiness is an experience that can come and go. Joy is an attitude that springs from the heart. But how can we find that joy? What reasons do we have to be joyful?

Romans 8 gives us 6 reasons. We looked at three of them last week. When we are in the Lord, when we are in Christ, we can be joyful because God Has Forgiven Us Completely, because God Has Given Us Eternal Life, and because God Is Working All Things for the Good of those who Love the Lord. That is the beginning, but there is more to come.

4. The Bible Says That If I’m in Christ, God Is for Me.

God is not just with us, He’s for us. He’s on our side. Romans 8:31 “*What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?*” If we’ve got God on our side, what more do we need? One plus God equals a majority. If God likes you and you like you, if other people don’t like you that’s their problem. One plus God equals a majority. If God is for us who can be against us?

Psychologists have discovered that there are six hundred forty-five different known fears that people can have. That’s a lot of fears. Fear is a universal problem. And fear like guilt, shame, anxiety can take away our joy. We cannot be afraid and joyful at the same time. Yet God says, “I’m on your side. I’m for you. I’m going to protect you.” So what are we worried about? What are we afraid of? If God is for us who can be against us?

What is your greatest fear? Embarrassment? Death? Failure? Studies have shown that one of the most common fears is the fear of rejection, of not being loved, of disapproval. They’re all the same thing. We fear not fitting in, or not being liked, or not being a part of the crowd. That’s why a lot of people are afraid to come to worship. They’re afraid that they will not be accepted, that they won’t fit in. We

have to be aware of that and go out of our way to let everyone know that we are glad they came. They are accepted by God, and as God’s people, they are accepted here. And yet Satan will use our fear of rejection to rob us of joy. Particularly here, because Satan knows that the church is to be a place of joy, and so he will use that fear of rejection to keep people from experiencing joy.

Think about this. One of the greatest joys we can experience is sharing Jesus Christ and the love of God with an unbeliever. And yet most Christians are scared to death about the possibility of sharing their faith with an unbeliever. Fear of rejection and ridicule robs us of joy. Speaking the truth in love can bring joy. But that sounds too much like confrontation. Someone might get hurt. And it might be me. So we remain silent. We are afraid of the reaction, the rejection, the accusation of someone saying, “Who are you to...” fill in the blank. Often we do not speak the truth in love, fearing the accusation, and yet we are told in Romans 8:33 “*Who can accuse the people God has chosen. No one, because God is the One who makes them right.*” It doesn’t say we’re perfect. It doesn’t mean we don’t sin. But it says who can accuse them? No one. Because God makes them right. In Christ, there is no condemnation.

God does not want us to be imprisoned and frozen in our fears. Not that we won’t have problems when we live our faith. Matter of fact, Jesus told the disciples in Luke 21:12, “*They will lay hands on you and persecute you.*” Not if it happens, but when it happens. Jesus even went to the other extreme in Luke 6:26, “*Woe to you when all men speak well of you.*” Why? Why will people persecute us? Because there are people in the world who are one hundred percent opposed to what we believe. We get criticized because we stand for something. We stand on the Rock that is Jesus Christ. We say that He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him. But the biggest sin in this society is intolerance. And people believe that we are intolerant when we say that Jesus is the way. But the reality is that we are not. In fact we believe that Jesus is the way for everyone. Everyone is included. People can reject Him at their own peril. We won’t hate them for that because we are to love and pray for those who persecute us. There is some criticism we deserve because we are not perfect. We sometimes violate the commandments that we are to uphold. But there are other times people will hate us simply because we are in Christ, and they have walked away from Him.

But there is good news. We don’t need the approval of others to be joyful. If you’ve been spending your life trying to earn the approval of your parents, your friends, your peers, or even someone out of your past, you’ve wasted a whole lot of time and energy. If they can’t accept you, respect you as a human being, that’s not your fault. It’s their fault. And the thing is, we don’t need their approval. We only need God, and God is for us. We just need to hold on to the teaching in Romans 8:37: “*None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us.*” Don’t ever let anybody rob you of your joy. Remember that Jesus also told His followers that “*I say these things while I’m still in the world, so that they [that means all of us] may have the full measure of my joy within them.*” Jesus is for us. God is for us. That is a tremendous reason to be joyful.

5. If I’m in Christ, God Will Meet All My Needs.

Some people refuse to believe that, but we are told plainly in Romans 8:32: “*Since God did not spare even his own Son [Jesus] but gave him up for us all, won’t God, who gave us Christ, also give us*

everything else?” If God loved us enough to come to earth and die on the cross for our sins, don’t you think that any other problem is small potatoes? I mean, forgiving our sins - that was a big problem, a killer, literally. Don’t you think He is able to deal with the problems of finances and relationships? Problems of health and career are small in comparison. And the promise is that God will care for all of that. Boy, that’s a reason for joy.

God says I will meet all your needs. Philippians 4:19 *“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”* Listen carefully. God did not promise to meet the needs of everybody in the world. No. He’s promised to meet the needs of those *in Christ Jesus*. And it doesn’t say that He will meet all our greeds. If He did, most of us would have already won the powerball jackpot by now. God never promised to buy Janis Joplin a Mercedes Benz. (Parents, explain that to your children.) We can talk about living in the mansion in the sky, but not on the hilltop. Because we don’t need that, and God promised to meet our needs.

There’s an interesting concept in Psalm 84:11 *“No good thing will the Lord withhold from those who do what is right.”* No good thing. As a father, I always want to give my kids good things. And I never wanted to withhold any good thing from them. But I did withhold things that might harm them, things that might hurt them physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. But I try not to withhold anything that is good for them. Now if a very imperfect father like myself has that desire, how much more is it found in the will of a perfect heavenly Father.

God wants us to have good things that can help us, and He wants us to ask. James, the brother of Jesus said, *“You do not have, because you do not ask.”* (James 4:2) And Jesus told us, *“Ask and it shall be given. Seek and you’ll find. Knock and the door will be opened.”* (Matthew 7:7) I’ve heard some preachers say that there is a storehouse in heaven that is filled with good things that we could use. But we never ask, and so they remain in the storehouse in heaven. How many times have you failed to ask for things that you needed? God has all these good things but we keep saying, “I have to do this myself.”

Okay, if God knows what we need, and He has the power to provide it, why doesn’t He just give it to us? Two reasons: One, He waits to be invited into our life. We have a free will. We can invite God in, but we do not have to. God waits for that invitation. And He also wants us to ask so that when we receive, we can be filled with joy. I know how good it feels when my kids are filled with joy. And joyful kids help me look good as a father. In the same way, when God’s children are full of joy it makes God look good. There are Christians I’ve met over the years who must have been baptized in vinegar. That’s how sour they are. And that’s not a very good advertisement for God. “Boy, I hope I can be irritable and depressed just like them. I’m going to be a Christian.” No. Not what God wants. God wants what we are told in John 16:24 *“Ask, using my name and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy.”* The reason for asking is joy.

6. God Will Never Stop Loving Me!

God will never stop loving me. No matter what happens in my life. No matter what I do or don’t do. Things go right, things go wrong. Whatever. God will never stop loving me. I know because I am told

that in Romans 8:38-39 *“I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. Death can’t and life can’t. The angels can’t, and the demons can’t. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can’t keep God’s love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Wow! Talk about your good news. And I want to point out that this promise, this source of joy says something that none of the other points have said. Every other point in the message last week and this week has been conditioned on our being “in the Lord.” This doesn’t say that God will love you if you come to Christ. This says, “God loves you, period.” The greatest hymn every written, the greatest theology ever uttered is based on this verse. “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” It says nothing about whom we are or who we have been. God loves us. There is nothing we can do to make God loves us less than He does in this moment. And there is nothing we can do to make God love us more than He does at this moment, because He loves us wholly and completely. God is love, and we, simply because we exist, created in the image of God, we are the beneficiaries of that.

When I think of the depth and breadth of that love, in my heart I turn to the psalms saying, *“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?”* (Psalm 8:3-4) The omnipotent, eternal God, who does not need us in the least, and yet He looks to us, reaches down to us, leaves the heavens for us, allows us to destroy His human life and yet He loves us still. Who can understand that? And I don’t have to understand that. I just accept it. And that allows joy to spring up in my heart, overflowing my soul until it fills my life and pours out into the world around me.

When I read of the love of God in scriptures, when I receive that in my heart and mind, it makes me want to come to God, to be with God. And yet, I know that I can’t be with God because of my sinfulness that separated me from Him. But God did not want that separation. And His love would not allow that separation to continue. I see that love when Jesus was born. I see that love when He called His disciples. I see that love when He taught those whose spirit hungered. I see that love when He healed the sick and the lame, the deaf and the dumb. I see that love when He knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane. I see that love when He was suspended in the air, nailed to the cross by my sins. I see that love when the stone was rolled away, and He came back to me and to you.

“I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.” I have seen it. I have felt it. I have received it. I have experienced it. And I rejoice in it. Again I say rejoice. Filled with Radical Joy. Joy that is possible if we are grounded in Christ. Because Christianity and joy are expected to go together. And even if we lose it, which is a threat for us all, we can follow the example of David and pray, *“Restore to me again the joy of your salvation.”* (Psalm 51:12) That is an important prayer, because we are called to be Radical Christians, filled with Radical Joy regardless of what is going on in the world around us. And we can be joyful because God has forgiven us and given us eternal life; because God is working all things for the good of those who love the Lord. God is for us, and promises to meet our needs. And nothing is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is the will of God that we be grounded in Christ and filled with radical joy. And in your life may it be so. Amen.