

Joy for the Journey (2)- The Joy Paradox

(Matthew 5:3-5)

I. Introduction

- A. I heard about song leader who saved time by leading 1st verse—“*All of Self...*”
1. I promise, we’ll sing the rest of the song as the invitation song later
 - a. Maybe it’s more honest to end “*None of Self and All of Thee*” after v. 2
 - b. None of us are very good at “*none of self and all of Thee.*” Not for long
 - c. On our best days, we muddle through “*some of self, and some of Thee*”
 2. I remember two different lessons about happiness when I was growing up
 - a. In Sunday School, we learned that the way to happiness was JOY
 - 1) Remember the old acrostic-- JESUS 1st, OTHERS 2nd, YOURSELF last?
 - 2) So there was the idea that real happiness was not really about me
 - b. That was Sunday school; learned another lesson on the schoolyard
 - 1) “*No one else is going to stand up for you, so stand up for yourself.*”
 - 2) “*Nice guys finish last.*” “*Show me good loser, I’ll show you a loser*”
 - 3) “*Don’t let anyone push you around.*” “*You have to look out for #1*”
 - c. So happiness was all about being first, being best, getting your own way
 3. So there was and is a **disconnect** between how we really see real happiness
- B. **Question:** Is it possible to find joy in sacrifice... or is that just Sunday School?
1. **Story:** Kay Poe and Esther Kim were best friends (sisters) since age seven
 - a. They also trained together at the highest levels in Olympic taekwondo
 - 1) Kay was world champion; Esther a surprise finalist at Olympic trials
 - 2) Kay sprained a knee and could barely stand to face her friend in final
 - b. Remember in *Karate Kid* where he’s crippled and does the “swan” thing?
 - 1) That’s didn’t happen; what happened is even more like movie script
 - 2) Esther forfeited the title and her Olympic rather than defeat friend
 - a) She wouldn’t injury to get to Olympics over one she considered better
 - b) She said, “*I didn’t throw my dreams away; I handed them to my friend*”
 - c. In this munificent act of losing, Esther became a winner in the real sense
“*I didn’t have a gold medal, but for the first time in my life, I felt like a real champion*”
 - d. What Jesus tells us is that real, lasting joy does not come from SELF

2. Sermon on Mount begins with overview of kingdom attitudes— *Beatitudes*
 - a. Word “*beatitude*” is from the Latin “*beatus*” meaning “*happy or blessed*”
 - 1) Most translations use the word “*blessed*” here; the TEV has “*happy*”
 - 2) The NASB footnote offers the synonyms “*fortunate or prosperous*”
 - 3) Max Lucado in *Applause of Heaven* suggests “*outrageous fortune*”
 - b. However you translate word, this isn’t “happiness in what’s happening”
3. Beatitudes were shocking; they flipped upside-down the accepted standard
 - a. Only reason they fail to shock us today is because we’ve heard them
 - 1) Blessed are those who mourn? *Really?* The meek? *Are you serious?*
 - 2) The peacemakers? *You sure?* Those who are persecuted? *Come on!*
 - b. Jesus is talking about a joy/happiness far different from what we mean.
4. Last week, we introduced a series we’re calling “*Joy for the Journey.*”
 - a. We’re contrasting our modern obsession with self with true, lasting joy
 - b. Jesus puts his finger on difference as He begins the Beatitudes (**Matt 5:3**)
God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. (NLT)

II. The Joy Paradox

- A. In the OT, the poor had no refuge or resource except for God Himself
 1. David uses this language of poverty (**Psa 40:17**, also **70:5, 86:1, 109:22**)
Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay.
 - a. When we moved here out of school, we had friends we thought were rich
 - 1) It didn’t take much to impress us, but we thought they were wealthy
 - 2) They talked about how poor they were. *Is that what David is doing?*
 - b. David wasn’t poor financially— poor in sense of his need for God
 - c. In Luke’s version of Beatitude, Jesus says, “*Blessed are you who are poor*”
 2. The kingdom of God belongs to those who see their need for God
 - a. The haughty or arrogant have no place in the kingdom (**Isaiah 57:15**)
For this is what the high and lofty One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.
 - b. Fundamental requirement for knowing God is knowing that we need Him
 - 1) When Jesus says “*poor in spirit,*” we can translate it as “*poor in ego*”
 - 2) We will never claim the blessedness of God until we see our poverty

B. The joy paradox is that to find real joy for myself, I must learn to deny myself

1. Jesus gives us this prerequisite to becoming his disciple (**Luke 9:23**)

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

- a. If we are to accept what Jesus says about joy, we must deny ourselves
 - b. The context this statement is very important—it is a key text in Luke
 - 1) There is Peter's "good confession," then explanation of coming cross
 - 2) By **verse 51**, Jesus "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" and the cross
 - c. Confessing Christ is not mouthing a mantra with a hand on the radio
 - d. It is a commitment to walk where Jesus walked—to deny self, take cross
2. Here is the paradox of the Beatitude—those who lose their lives find them
- a. The schoolyard teaches us to see happiness is in getting what we want
 - 1) I'll get happy when... new job, car, status, experience, pleasure, etc
 - 2) There's no free lunch, so I plow ahead trying to get my happiness
 - b. Universal experience is that we get "it" and then "it" doesn't deliver
 - 1) Thing, person, experience we thought would make us happy CAN'T
 - 2) Jesus, "Life is not measured by how much you own" (**Lk 12:15**, NLT)
 - c. If we are ever going to find real joy, they what has to change is You/Me
3. Jesus tells us that we have to die to ourselves in order to find what we want

C. What is it about SELF that must die? Notice 3 Points (from *Leslie Vernick*)

1. **First**, we must die to our **self-sufficiency** and **self-reliance**

- a. It's must be self-sufficient in the sense of personal responsibility
 - 1) Paul commands "for each one should carry his own load" (**Gal 6:5**)
 - 2) But is caveat to Paul's warning that we aren't self-sufficient (**6:2-3**)
² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.
- b. Children go thru a frustrating stage of fierce self-sufficiency— "I do it!"
 - 1) It's important they learn self-autonomy, that's part of growing up
 - 2) We can learn that too well and start thinking that we don't need God
 - 3) This self-sufficiency can become a lethal self-pride (**Prov 26:12**)
¹² Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.
- c. Pride tells us we really don't need God and keeps us from seeking him

- d. Think for a second about Moses and how God used him powerfully
 - 1) Here was this prince of Egypt with all kinds of power (**Acts 7:22**)
“all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.”
 - 2) So he kills the Egyptian task-master and all Egypt rises behind him?
 - 3) It was later, after Moses learned of his limitations that God used him
- e. We must die to our own sufficiency so we can rely on God (**2 Cor 12:10**)
¹⁰*That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

2. **Second**, we must die to our **self-righteousness** and **self-superiority**

- a. Paul warns of focusing on “words of human wisdom” (**1 Cor 1:17**)
¹⁷*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.*
- b. What robs the cross of its power is thinking that *our thinking* saves us!
 - 1) It’s easy to think that we’re righteous because we are right
 - 2) We put **right verses** together in **right way** to **make system**— “*truth*”
 - 3) We look down, judge and dismiss others—small step from Pharisee
- c. Oswald Chambers suggests, “*Perhaps the most subtle false standard of spirituality arises from a selfish adherence to ones own convictions*”
 - 1) To equate one’s opinions to the level of truth is self-righteous
 - 2) It robs the cross of its power because it sees the power in self

3. **Third**, we must die to our **self-centeredness** and **self-indulgence**

- a. The reason we don’t see God or others as I should—we’re looking at self
 - 1) We don’t intentionally hurt other’s feelings or ignore people in need
 - 2) We just get so busy looking at ourselves that we miss everything else
- b. Generally, we’re not like the man of sin Paul describes in **2 Thess 2:4**
who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God
 - 1) But we do often elevate our opinions, our desires, our ideas to throne
 - 2) We’re convinced that we **deserve** to get our way, our desire, our stuff
- c. Paul says to focus on needs of others as relentless as our own (**Phil 2:3-4**)
³*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* ⁴*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*
 - 1) He then says that this happens only if they have Christ’s mind (**2:5f**)
 - 2) The more we focus on Christ, the less we will focus on ourselves

III. Conclusion

- A. I read about a new “ride” being hawked to theme parks called “*The Ego Trip*”
 - 1. They use technology to simulate you being the center of the universe
 - a. You are hounded by paparazzi, have adoring fans, get ticker-tape parade
 - b. You even get a political rally with campaign stuff with your picture (\$\$)
 - 2. Does that sound a bit silly? Basking in your own glory in fake ticker-tape?
 - a. Is it any sillier than it is to get so hung-up on ourselves in real life?
 - b. To think our possessions, experiences, accomplishments are really real?
- B. If we really stand in the presence of God, will we continue to look at ourselves?
 - 1. Job struggled with his suffering to the point where he demanded answers
 - a. He had all these questions that he would ask God if God came down
 - b. What happened when God did appear in whirlwind? (**Job 40:4-5**)
 - “I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.
I spoke once, but I have no answer— twice, but I will say no more.”*
 - c. When Job really focused on God, he could not focus on himself!
 - 2. There’s an old story told of a performance by conductor Arturo Toscanini
 - a. The orchestra finished Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and it was flawless
 - b. Crowd was in stunned silence before exploding in thunderous applause
 - 1) Toscanini was totally overwhelmed, and stood motionless for while
 - 2) He said, “*I am nothing. You are nothing. Beethoven is everything!*”
 - 3. When we really see God, then our eyes are taken off of ourselves
 - a. We are driven to our knees by his majesty and our own unworthiness
 - b. And we say, “*I am nothing; I’ve done nothing. You are everything!*”
- C. Only when we get ourselves out of the way can we know the joy of the Lord!