

THE JOY OF WHINING – NOT!

Pastor Jeff Wood

Sept. 27, 2017

The sermons recently have been on the influence we all have and how we can leverage that for Christ and how it is most impactful when we are servants of another, when we look to give of ourselves to another. There's a joy in that self-giving. Those messages took us into Paul's letter to the Philippians and I'd like to go there again today and talk about another joy.

Pray.

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus.

"These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

"Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

This isn't exactly the way the Bible puts it but it is God's dream for the church. He dreams that they be a force of blessing expressing the very blessing heart of God.

Read

That this united force is in God's mind is clear. For example, there are around the text this morning six tight paragraphs that unite around unity.

Paragraph one employs words from civic life, military life, and athletic life – be a citizen (community builder), keep the ranks tight, work like a team. Unity.

Paragraph two: if in Christ you have even a thimble full of encouragement, comfort, fellowship, consolation ... and you indeed do have that much and a lot more, then bing, bing, bing, bing (four reiterations in rapid succession in one verse) – have one mind, one love, one purpose, one spirit. One, one, one, one -- Unity.

Paragraph 3 is a hymn, drawing then from the musical world, so we'll say that *harmony* (unity) comes from humility. Harmony – unity.

Paragraphs 4, 5, 6 illustrate humble service in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus (one paragraph each). And their service makes for unity.

So unity is clearly in God's mind. Think of the dearest family experiences, a vacation or baking cinnamon rolls for the holidays; the best working group at work that really moved a project forward; the foursome that brought home the trophy. This camaraderie of heart and purpose God wants to see cropping up everywhere all the time. He wants it. Don't you?

In fact when we consider what being saved means it means at least in large part that our disjointed and fragmented selves be knit together, integrated, given integrity and wholeness and with it shalom and fruitfulness. It's a unity thing.

And it is true for us as individuals BUT ALSO for families and communities. Swords get beaten into plowshares because there is unity and peace.

This salvation is gift but also involves us in working with the gift. We get a gift at Christmas and it's wrapped but there's a part of us getting the gift that is unwrapping it and taking it out of the box.

This is what Paul means when he says, "For it is God who works in you (you, plural) to will and act." Then, "Work out your (you, plural) salvation." God works in. We work out.¹ God gives us the medicine and instructions. We take it and follow it. His work, our work.

But it is work and, specifically, ours is 1) to be humble servants putting others' interests ahead of our own (that's what we develop) *and* 2) to desist from strife, conceitedness, murmuring and grumbling (2:3, 14 – that's what we eliminate).

Here's the first part of our work – you know in the grocery store when you have three items and you're behind someone with a full cart and they say, "You can go ahead"? That feels good. That's what Christians do ... all day long, every day, whenever they can.

This second part I want to focus on for a few minutes and I want to do it now because it is not really an issue for us generally. Solving hurricane problems before it comes if it comes is better than solving in the middle of the fierce wind and rain.

Now we are told plainly to eliminate grumbling.

¹ There's so much Christian doctrine in these two phrases joined together!

We don't own up to being divisive or grumblers very well. It'd be helpful to have a test we can administer for grumblers like they do for rednecks. You know, "You're a redneck if ... if you think a stock tip is something that has to do with de-worming your hogs." Or, "You're a redneck if ... if you have been married three times and still have the same in-laws." So it'd be great if we could go, "You might be a grumbler if..." I think we might suggest, "If you find it easier to criticize than compliment ... find you generally are more ready to say what was wrong than what was right ...

We human beings can, almost without trying, become good at grumbling. One of the kids looked at Mom that morning and said, "Did you wake up grouchy?" She replied, "No, I left him asleep." See? Dad had become good at grouchy and got the name.

We can become good at grumbling because we're sinners and that's the way of sin. It's related to Satan who, remember, sowed seeds of dissension in the garden of Eden, "Did God say?" Satan created a rebellion in heaven.

We're good at it because Madison Avenue suggest that your computer's processor isn't fast enough, your beer isn't fresh enough, your car not flashy enough, your mate not sexy enough?

We're good at it because in the name of being supposedly loving we excuse murmuring or tolerate it rather than confronting it. We "understand" it but we don't say, "Elevate your game, brother (or sister) because that grumbling isn't helpful" So it hangs around.

But, but, but ... we are simply commanded not to do it. Did you know that it is possible to have a life,

personally and communally, without murmuring and grumbling?

Let's look at how that can happen. First, see it as a matter of obedience (and trust). Jesus said and I'm not going to let it go in one ear and out the other.²

Second, practice thankfulness and encouragement. Practice makes perfect. Practice makes a habit. If you ever, like with putting up hurricane shutters, find yourself cursing, I feel some concern. Because I don't want to get practiced in saying those things. You might bump me and like coffee in my cup those words will spill out.

² Three friends decided to go deer hunting together. One was a lawyer, one a doctor, and the other a preacher.

As they were walking, along came a big buck. The three of them shot simultaneously. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and all three rushed up to see how big it actually was.

Upon reaching it they found out that it was dead but had only one bullet hole. Thus a debate followed concerning whose buck it was.

A few minutes later a game officer came by and asked what the problem was. The doctor told him their reason for the debate. The officer told them he would take a look and tell them who shot it.

Within a few seconds the game officer said with much confidence, "The pastor shot the buck!"

They all wondered how he knew that so quickly.

The officer said, "Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other."

I'm trying to practice saying thank you to God for three things before my feet hit the floor in the morning and before my feet leave the floor for bed at night.

It's a complex world out there but sometimes it seems to me there's something that is so simple, that if we all did it, the world would in short order be a much better place. Don't you think all of us saying three thank you's at the beginning and end of the day would make the world a better place?

Third, center yourself in the sovereignty of God. I do not believe that God causes every bad thing that happens and that there is much that he laments and we should lament. On the other hand, he is good and uses all that is at hand for his good and sovereign purposes. That spouse, that funny nose you were born with, that financial setback, God can use. Move on from complaint to trusting God and being thankful that God will work this for your good.

Corrie Ten Boom was put into concentration camps with her sister, Betsy, during WWII. At one point the two of them were put in barracks filled with fleas. Corrie would not in trust thank God. Then they came to find out that they were unharassed and allowed to pray because none of the guards wanted to be around the fleas.

Fourth, pray. In James we have, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. (Or) When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives. Sometimes we speak more to others in complaint than to God in inquiry. He's not just going to give us whatever

our wanters but he can help us understand and tame and bring our wanters to him.

Fifth, manage. I was thinking that sometimes I say that I don't have time to pray. And it got me thinking that then if I'm not going to be grumbly, I have to figure out my time better so I can pray. If you are grumbly because you haven't prayed, because you haven't taken time, then grumbling is a time-management issue.

I go from there to ... If you're grumbly because you are in financial straits, then grumbling is a money-management issue. If you're grumbly because you haven't had enough sleep, then grumbling is a health management issue. If Jesus is your Lord and he has said through his word to not grumble, then we need to look at and deal with such matters as time, money, health, and whatever else is a feeder for our grumbling.

Sixth, have a plan. Because we have different values, different perspectives, different hardwiring we are going to have disagreements and when it is there, when we have done steps 1 through 5, what do we do?

The biblical plan (Mt. 18) is that we go to the person with whom we have an issue and I would encourage in that conversation to have the objective of asking clarifying questions like, "How did this come to be?" or "What was your thinking about such and such?" and to listen carefully.

If you're not talking to the person you have a problem with directly, or someone who is constructively able and responsible for correcting that situation, then you're not talking to the right person.

Proverbs 17:4 says that “Troublemakers like talking to troublemakers.” But Matthew 18 says go and talk to the one you have an issue with.³

I supposed it’s like being told about hurricane preparedness lists and websites when there hasn’t been a hurricane for a while. We say, “Hmmm, okay.” And that’s good because who wants to be on top of it because we have so many hurricanes?! We hear about those lists often enough, that eventually we know ... just naturally what we’re supposed to have in our hurricane kit.

Heaven ... you know there isn’t any grumbling in heaven. You don’t want to get there and need to detox from grumbling for the first couple hundred years. Get started now.

The church is an embassy and outpost of heaven. Its ways are our ways. Your heart is an embassy and outpost of the king of heaven. His ways are our ways.

Last week we had a representative of the presbytery meet with our session. It was very informal and very nice. They asked us about how things were going here and if there were any painful tensions. It was so nice to that things were going basically very well and that tensions were not a problem. So you know this sermon. Let’s keep knowing it. Let’s keep our good record going. It takes all of us. It takes all of us.

Do everything without murmuring and grumbling.” The word of the Lord.

Rules of a House

³ If people are sharing a lot of complaints with you, you might wonder if you’re giving off signals, that you are a supporter and safe haven for their grumbling.

1. We obey our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. We love, honor and pray for one another.
3. We tell the truth.
4. We consider one another's interest ahead of our own.
5. We speak quietly and respectfully with one another.
6. We do not hurt one another with unkind words or deeds.
7. When someone needs correction, we correct him in love.
8. When someone is sorry, we forgive him.
9. When someone is sad, we comfort him.
10. When someone is happy, we rejoice with him.
11. When we have something nice to share, we share it.
12. When we have work to do, we do it without complaining.
13. We take good care of everything God has given us.
14. When we make a mess, we clean it up.
15. When we do not know what to do, we ask.
16. When we disobey or forget any of the rules of this house, we accept the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Written by Gregg Harris

Rules of a Team

1. I will recognize the call and gifts from God in all of my fellow church members.
2. I will exercise vigilance over our unity.
3. I commit to speaking well of my brothers and sisters and will publicly express appreciation for them.
4. I will pray diligently and fervently for the blessing of God on my brothers and sisters.
5. I will shoulder responsibility for the ministry assigned to me and at the same time exercise prayerful concern for the field's ministry in its entirety.
6. I understand that in the "heat of battle" there will be misunderstandings, conflicts and offenses
7. I will deal with offenses promptly and appropriately
8. I will listen intently in order to understand the other person's perspective
9. I will avoid judging the motives of a brother/sister, because I cannot see my brother or sister's heart
10. I will forgive others without hesitation or precondition, knowing that I, too, will need frequent forgiveness for my offenses.

11. I will commit myself to becoming better acquainted with the brothers and sisters in my team.

Written by EFCM

Related Verses

Zech. 7:10 In your hearts do not think evil of each other.

Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

1 Peter 4:8-9 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James 5:9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

Ephes. 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

1 Cor. 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. pastorjeffwood@gmail.com www.welovefirst.org
www.facebook.com/welovefirstsebastian*