

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles

"On Being a Benediction"

Series: "Finding Joy Right Where You Are"
January 15, 2023

Philippians 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXKYNnir55g>

Finding joy isn't always easy, especially, right where you are. It's a new year, and just like the video clip said, we always want to mean it when we make resolutions and then we get side tracked and disappointed either with others, life or ourselves. A lot of the time with ourselves. Too much of the time.

Whenever I'm disappointed with things, I sometimes think about little Jamie Scott. Jamie was trying out for a part in a school play. His mother had told a friend that he had his heart set on being in it, though she feared he would not be chosen. On the day the parts were announced, she went with the mother to collect him after school. Jamie rushed up to her, eyes shining with pride and excitement. "Guess what, Mum," he shouted, and "What? Did you get the part!" "Nope. Better! I've been chosen to clap and cheer!" He had been chosen to be a benediction. We all need people to be for us those who would clap and cheer. We all need cheerleaders.

Paul knew it. The Christians in Philippi were his benediction. Thanks why he was able to find joy right where he was and he was in prison.

"Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are in Philippi...Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy...for all of you." Paul knew that some Christian's make it easier to be or become a Christian--that's our calling you know to be a benediction. I want to tell you, being a benediction to one another is a gift that comes from Jesus Christ. Look, if you will at verse 8. "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. We become benediction because we have been hanging around with Jesus.

As I think of the people who have been benedictions in my life, I at times, find myself unable to speak. Some of them are at home with the Lord now, and oh how I long for them and one day I will see them again--and oh what joy.

Let me give you a principle of Steve Browns. "People who hang around Jesus become benedictions to people who hang around Jesus." And so, if you have been hanging around people who devalue you, who make you feel small and condemned--get away from them for they have been going to the wrong store. For believers who hang around Jesus are benedictions to others.

I

The first thing we notice about Paul being a benediction was his **thankful moments**. Philippians 1:3. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." To be thankful or grateful is

to recognize the blessings one has received. Paul was thankful to God for his friends in the faith. Hugh Kingswell, one of Malcolm Muggeridge's close friends, use to say, "Friends are God's apology for relatives."

Paul had time to think about his friends. He had time to think about what God had done for him--he was in jail, what else could he do; as a result, he thanked God. When we think about those who have blessed us, we begin to be a blessing? Did you know that the words thank and think come from the same root word? If we would think more, we might thank more. Paul did.

Often the reasons we don't, are because we get caught up in the problems and pressures of our life. We say, "why should I thank him? After all, look at what is happening to me? Neither you or Paul should expect me to thank God after all I've been through. "So we hold on to our burdens and become a burden to ourselves and to others. Paul had every reason to be bitter--and you may think you do too--but he didn't become bitter. He had been beaten, whipped, stoned, and threatened with death. And now, in jail awaiting death, he thanked God. He thanked God for certain people, he thanked God even for the problems for they allowed him to proclaim the gospel in a new area and in a new way. He experienced God's benediction through it all. And he became one.

A few years ago at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100- yard dash. At the gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with the relish to run the race to the finish and win.

All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry. The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and paused. Then they all turned around went back. Every one of them. One girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line.

Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for 10 minutes.

And heaven joined in.

Paul knew this joy of heaven. For the Christians in Philippi had linked arms with him. They had lifted him up, as he once did for them. For people who hang around with Jesus are benedictions to people who hang around with Jesus.

II

Being a benediction involves a thankful moments and also **painful fact**. If you are going to be a benediction you are going to experience pain. Because relationships are painful. Paul was sitting in jail and he was remembering people in Philippi were the only ones who had been a benediction to him. He says at the end that even in Macedonia and Thessalonica, "you alone shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving."(4:16) He knew the pain of rejection.

Being a benediction is painful because of the *risk of rejection*. Jamie Buckingham used to say, "The truth will make you free, but first it will make you miserable." I agree and every husband should. We know that truth will make us free, but first it will make us miserable because of our wives. They say things like, "Do you like this dress? Or do you like my hair do?" Do you really expect us to tell you the true? We know that the truth may make us free, but you will make us miserable.

Paul had told people the truth. And sometimes people don't want to hear it. Someone once said, "True friends stab you in the front." Why, because they tell you the truth. Friends don't let friends drive drug. Friends risk rejection, by telling you the truth.

There was a conductor who had a habit of throwing things when the orchestra got things wrong. I would often say at rehearsals, "Beethoven got it right! And YOU got it wrong. He would then through things.

At the end of the concert year, the orchestra gathered to give a gift to their conductor who have told them the truth and helped them attain it. When he opened it, he found two watches one very expensive, and the other one very cheap. Engraved on it were the words. "For rehearsals only!"

Being a benediction is painful because of the risk of rejection but also because of the *reality of loss*. Let me give you another principle. The beginning of a relationship presupposes its end. Situations change, people move on, people die--and if there is love there is loss. It is a painful fact.

George Beverly Shea had sung at a Crusade just after his wife Erma had died. A friend of his--Fred Smith--came up to him after words and said, "Bev, I don't think I have ever heard you sing better or more beautifully then you just did." It was then that tears welled up in Bev Shea's eyes and he said, "You know what Fred, its then that I miss Erma the most. It's then that I want to go home and tell her." You can only brag to people who love you. If you didn't notice, Paul brags. He says, "If anyone has any reason to think they can rely on the flesh I more so." "I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus."

You see, when you love someone, you cheerlead them--you encourage them--for you want them to have everything that God would have for them.

Being a benediction is painful because of the risk of rejection, *reality of loss*, and the reason it costs. Paul said "you alone shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving."(4:16) There are few real benedictions.

There was a six-year-old girl who became deathly ill with a dread disease. To survive, she needed a blood transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the same illness. The situation was complicated by her rare blood type. Her nine-year-old brother qualified as a donor, but everyone was hesitant to ask him since he was just a little boy. Finally, they agreed to have the doctor pose the question. The attending physician tactfully asked the boy if he was willing to be brave and donate blood for his sister. Though he didn't understand much about such things, the boy agreed without hesitation: "Sure, I'll give my blood for my sister. He lay down beside his sister and smiled at her as they pricked his arm with the needle. Then he closed his eyes and lay silently on the bed as the pint was taken.

Soon thereafter the physician came in to thank the little fellow. The boy, with quivering lips and tears running down his cheeks, asked "Doctor, when do I die?" At that moment the doctor realized that the naive little boy thought that by give his blood, he was giving up his life. Quickly he reassured the lad that he was not going to die, but amazed at his courage, the doctor asked, "Why were you willing to risk your life for her?" Because she is my sister...and I love her, I love her." Friends, being a benediction, is painful--it costs.

III

Being a benediction involves thankful moments, painful fact, and **joyful demeanor**. Turn to 1:19-26. Why is it, that Christians look like they have been weened on dill pickles and lemons?

A noted radio Preacher and speaker Dr. Cadman, was once asked, "Where are all the dead." He said, "I don't know about all the dead; but I know that some of them are on my board of elders.

There was a study that found that adults laugh 15 times a day. You might think that is a lot, until you realize that children laugh up to 400 times a day. I think it is because we get so caught up in ourselves. Like the woman who was so frustrated with her weight prayed, "Lord if you can't make me thin, at least make my friends look fat.

The world is full with people of bad news, long faces, and heavy hearts. Much of today's popular music, speak of misery, sorrow and despair. Newspapers thrive on tragedies and calamities, lost jobs and horrible accidents. The same can be said of television news. We give primary attention to storms, droughts and blizzards.

Tomorrow will be partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of rain," What ever happened to mostly clear and an 80 percent chance of sunshine.

Christians are the only people on the face of the earth that has any reason to laugh. Everyone else feels their alone. But we remember Him. Let me remind you of Home, let me remind you of Him.

IV

Being a benediction involves a thankful heart, prayerful manner, painful fact, purposeful work, joyful demeanor and finally a **faithful walk**. Turn, if you will, to Philippians 1:21-27 "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. Yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus." Paul was faithful in his walk for his own sake and for theirs because he loved them and he loved Him.

There were two boys who grew up together. They went to school together. Then they went to war together. One of the boys was wounded in no-mans-land. His friend heard his cries and started to go for him. The Sergeant stopped him and said it is too late you will get killed and your friend is wounded so deeply he will probably die. The young man said, 'you don't understand, I love him, he is my friend and he begged until he was given permission to go. He crawled over the barbed wire and grabbed his friend and dragged him back to the foxhole. The Sergeant saw that the boy was dead and said "I told you it wouldn't make any difference. And the boy said, "Your wrong. It did make a difference because when I got there he was alive and he said, 'I knew you'd come, I knew you'd come.'"

You have been benedictions--and as you continue to do so, you will discover that being a benediction will make you grow, so when someone in need cries out, they will say when you get there. "I knew you'd come." You think about that. Amen.