



Sermon Growth Guide

February 12, 2023

Heaven's Call



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Take Joy - Heaven's Call

Philippians 3:4-4:3

Key Verse: Philippians 3:14 "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Big Idea: The sure hope of our heavenly call and King allows us to take hold of joy here and now.

Foundations

The invitation is to "take joy," implying its sheer availability. Unlike happiness, which is largely due to our circumstances, joy is granted to us as a gift, always available since we are God's children, known by Him, also knowing Him and ever able to celebrate that which is ours in our union with Christ.

But available as joy is, our perspective is often clouded and confused by those obstacles and trials that lay before us, deceived by the sin which sneaks into our hearts. We are made to believe that God is not truly good, and that our "spiritual blessings" in Christ (Ephesians 1:3) and relationship with Him have no bearing on our present circumstances.

Yet, by looking up, by seeing life from the upward call (Philippians 3:14), from the perspective of our possession of Christ, of His Kingdom come, and of His possession of us, we can move through our trials in such a way that they don't break us, resisting sin in such a way that it does not defeat us. We take joy, a weapon, a gleeful confidence that what God has done, is doing, and will do, His presence with us, is a greater source to live from than any challenge we may face.

It is not a distant knowledge inaccessible in heaven, but rather, it is declared and kept for us there, even as we are sealed here and now with the deposit of the Holy Spirit into our hearts, "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (Ephesians 1:14).

Understanding God's Word

Under what circumstances did Paul pen this letter?

Now, together, read Philippians 3:4-4:3. What formerly gave Paul a sense of certainty and confidence? What changed? Where does he now put his confidence?

Read again 3:14 and 3:17-21. What is a life marked by a heavenward calling and what is a life marked by an earthly perspective?

Applying God's Word

The Lord's Prayer says, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Scriptures like this calls us to not seek evacuation from earth, but to live out our heavenly calling on earth!

What does it mean to live out a heavenly citizenship on earth? Does it mean absolutely denying the world we inhabit, or seeking to engage it in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ and coming of His Kingdom?

Witnessing God's Word

God's people can take hold of an otherworldly joy, because our God, in Christ Jesus, has taken hold of us. And He'll never let go. How might your family, friends, community and co-workers see the light of God in your heart, as you take hold of the joy that is yours in Christ.

Whenever I preach on joy something happens to test it. My son Liam was in a serious accident last Monday sledding with friends. Prayers were answered for his safety and recovery, and for my quick return from California allowing me to be there when he was coming to after two-hour emergency surgery to install a titanium rod in his femur. He is expected to be running full speed by summer. Amazing. But these things put it all in perspective, don't they? How quickly things can come apart and life can shift. We are so grateful for our Life Group who fed us all week. If you don't have one, get one. So many of you have been through worse and are going through worse right now. What about joy?

If you think of joy as a superficial emotion, a happiness you feel when things happen to be happening well, you won't get what this letter is talking about. You won't understand how the Lord invites us, commands us, to **Take Joy**. Joy is not a fleeting emotion; it has roots beneath the surface. Joy is a battlefield. Those who wrestle with mental health know. Joy is resistance, counterattack, protest. Yes, I will take joy. Yes and I will continue to take joy. Joy is stronger than circumstances. I'm reminded of the tale of a young Irish sailor whose boat capsized at night off the coast. He was rescued in the morning light, near hypothermia, shaking uncontrollably and clinging to a rock. "How did you endure through the night?" they asked him. "Though I trembled and shook, the rock never moved." "I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:1-2).

Jesus spoke of joy on his way to the

cross, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). Paul wrote of joy that endures prison and trial and judgment. "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy" (Philippians 1:4). "And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice" (Philippians 1:18). "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). The rock never moved. You say, "I can't have joy until everything in my life is going right. I can't have joy until there is nothing wrong all around me." Let me tell you a secret, joy is deeper and stronger than that. And let me tell you another secret, the time is coming, and is already here, when all wrongs will be put right. We call it Heaven, and it is fast on the way.

Where do you put your hope? Where do you rest your confidence? We see today that worldly successes, accolades, and accomplishments, they won't be enough. They won't keep you steady when you tremble and shake. Even religiousness, even virtue, even righteousness—"righteousness based on the law" in verse 6. "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:7-9). Faith in Christ. Trusting Christ. Knowing Jesus. The little lights are nothing compared with that Light. The little gains and little things of this world, they are candles held on the beach when the sun rises and bathes you in

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the light of eternal day.

Now, a little help. We are talking today about **Heaven's Call**. We learn from this passage that we are citizens of Heaven. "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). And our key verse comes a little earlier. It's verse 14, but let's start at 12: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14). God has called me heavenward. More accurately, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14 ESV). God has called me up toward Heaven. What on earth does that mean?

We think we know what Heaven means, but we are usually wrong. My picture of Heaven was deeply formed by hours of Tom & Jerry cartoons. You? Heaven is not some cloudscape up there. But the Bible does regularly point us upward toward Heaven. Paul knows there is an upward call in his life. He knows that Christ has won a place for him in heaven, in the eternal kingdom. It is an upward call—not so much because it exists up in the clouds as that it lifts our heads with hope. Heaven is not a cloudscape above the skies, but a Kingdom that is on the way, the Kingdom of God where all things are set right. Jesus ascended into Heaven, and we will too. Forward into God's eternal world-put-right. That is the true upward call that gives

me energy and motivation to push through my day and take joy. That is the call that allows me to lift my head. Where are your eyes? On earth or on heaven?

In *Pilgrim's Progress* is a character known only by his muck-rake. Over his head was suspended a celestial Crown of eternal life, but he didn't look up. He could never look up. He just kept scraping his rake around in the trash and muck. "For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things" (Philippians 3:18-19). Eyes on the earth. Eyes down, pushing the muck. Where are your eyes? Can you lift your head to things above? There is a lot that can keep our head down, scraping around in the muck, minds set on earthly things. This is a powerful description, isn't it? Their god is their stomach. Drives and longings and hungers become a religion, a matter of worship and identification and devotion. Their glory is their shame. They revel and celebrate what they should confess and carry to the cross for forgiveness. It's easy to say "they," but can't we say the same for ourselves sometimes? Where is that all headed? That destiny is destruction. This is the antonym of salvation. Destruction or salvation? "Our Tears to Joy, our Fears to Faith are turned as we see; Thus our beginning Shews what our end will be." (John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*) What will your end be? Your eyes, the beginning, your eager expectation, this defines your end.

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians

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3:20). What does it mean to eagerly expect something? It means your heart is halfway there already. Like when you are waiting for a package you ordered on Amazon, every truck or van makes you look up with hope. It is easier to move through struggle and trial when you know there is an end on the horizon. It is easier to find your joy when you know the Savior has won and his salvation is on the way. The upward call, the heavenward call, this is the home where we are headed in Christ. Philippians says we are “citizens of Heaven.” I have said along the way, what if God gathered 3,000 citizens of Heaven and said, “In 2023, you are going to live in Colorado Springs. Live in such a way that those people see Jesus, that they know Jesus better at the end of that year than they did at the beginning.” Well, that is what God has done. We are those citizens of Heaven. We hold dual citizenship. We are citizens in the country in which we live, and we have another passport for our heavenly home. It is dual citizenship, but by no means is it equal citizenship. Our true home is with Christ. Our citizenship is in Heaven. Even though we have not yet been there, that is where we are called. Heaven is a song you hear for the first time and say, “That’s my music.” Heaven is a meal you’ve never had before that makes you say, “Now that’s my food.” Heaven is where we belong. Until we get there, we live on the foretastes and promises and visions.

Where are your eyes? Staring down the muck-rake, we scratch around for satisfaction chasing the hungers of our bellies. That’s earth-eyed vision. Just up is a crown of glory! If any have reason for confidence in the flesh, says Paul, I have more. But that’s eyes on earthly things, earthly glory, second-rate shine that passes away.

Even better is the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ. Even better is being saved, “and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:9). This is reason to take joy and lift my head. Even better is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. I forget what’s behind. I press on toward the goal. My eyes are on the Kingdom. I lift my head in hope and anticipation. My life is hid in Christ. As it says in Colossians, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:1-2). I lift my head to Heaven; the upward call is good reason to take joy. But even better still, even better still is this: knowing Christ.

Oh, I want righteousness. Oh, I want heaven. Oh, I want to live toward my upward call and live out my true citizenship. Oh, I want all those things and I lift my head on pilgrimage toward the great City of Heaven. But better still is simply this: knowing him. “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8). I want to know Christ. I want to know Jesus and be known by him. “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” (Philippians 3:10-11) Knowing him. Knowing him. This is heaven right now. This is hope. This is the unshakable Rock. This is joy. Knowing you, Jesus.

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