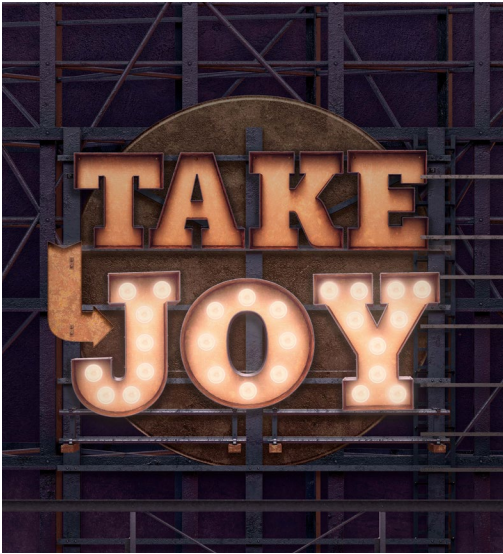




Sermon Growth Guide

January 15, 2023

Pray with Joy



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Take Joy - Pray with Joy

Philippians 1:1-14

Key Verse: Philippians 1:4

“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.”

Big Idea: No matter our circumstance, we can and are called to Take Joy.

Foundations

Said another way, the command for God's people to *rejoice* (Philippians 4:4) may be translated “Take Joy in the Lord always. I will say it again: Take Joy!”

This week we begin our new sermon series, **Take Joy**. How does the church answer the call to Take Joy when the world is such a broken place? We do not rejoice in ourselves, our position, our good fortune, or our capabilities. We rejoice in the Lord. Always. God's people are a people of hope who defiantly take joy in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote the letter of Philippians from prison. Prison in his time sometimes meant being constrained by chains and locked up in small places, but also being kept under constant watch by a group of soldiers.

His imprisonment was the product of awaiting trial for upsetting Rome. His life and future were in the balance. Separated from friends and bound in chains, Paul wrote a letter about joy. It is not escapism. Paul knew that he could rejoice in the Lord no matter his situation. He wanted the church to know the same.

Spend time hearing from one another. Do you have a felt sense of balance this new year? Is taking joy in the Lord easy or difficult for you? How can you be caring for one another even more deeply as we begin this new sermon series?

Understanding God's Word

Together, read Philippians 1:1-14.

In verse 4, Paul says he prays with joy. What reasons for praying with joy does Paul give in verses 5-7?

In verses 12-14, what circumstance is Paul describing and what is happening with the gospel through this context?

Applying God's Word

Verse 5 mentions the word partnership. Pastor Tim writes: “Partnership is a Greek word: *koinonia*. It's a deep tie, deep fellowship, intentional community, oneness that can transcend divisions, transcend relationship hiccups, transcend racial divide, social divide, political divide. Oneness established by Christ himself.”

How might your Life Group cultivate *koinonia* even more in the way you invest in one another's lives?

Witnessing God's Word

No matter our circumstance, we can and are called to **Take Joy**.

How might Paul's hopes and prayers in verses 9-11 become even more of a reality in your own life, that the unbelieving world may see your life and see Christ's gospel of salvation through you? Spend time praying this prayer for one another in your group.

So, my plant is not doing great. I probably should have brought it home with me over Christmas break. But I believe in the resurrection of the body. Over break, we visited my brother-in-law who lives on a farm in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The farm used to have an orchard, but over the years the apple trees died one by one. He decided to start over and has planted eight new fruit trees in two neat rows of four. Right now, they look like dead sticks stuck in the yard. You know how new trees look? Lifeless. But one day, they will be heavy with fruit.

The Bible uses images like this to talk about joy. It's a fruit. How do you get joy? It emerges in time. Paul wrote, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful... Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:1-2,4-5). And then (look for yourselves) Jesus goes on in that same speech to talk about love, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. How does this fruit emerge? By abiding in the true vine—by holding on to Jesus.

"How can you talk about joy? Why should we focus on joy? This world is a mess, and my life is a mess in it? My life is a dead plant. My life is a lifeless stick poking out of the mud, and you talk about joy?" The roots of joy are not spread out on the superficial surface of life. The fruit of joy is not the product of your current situation. The fruit comes from a root that reaches down deep under the surface of ordinary or visible things, like the tree in Psalm 1: "Blessed

is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers" (Psalms 1:1-3). "Blessed," *asher*, happy, joyful; it's the very first word of the book of Psalms. The tree goes through its seasons. It has spring, it has summer. It has fall and it has winter when all its branches are empty. But the tap root of that tree is deep, next to the streams of the Lord, and it is never without contact, connection, nourishment, of the waters of life—His law, His Word, His Spirit. The taproot is connected to the Word of God and never loses contact with deep happiness and deep joy and deep contentment in the Lord.

Philippians is sometimes called "The Joy Letter." The word "joy" appears five times and the verb "to rejoice" shows up nine times in this little letter. You feel the joy in it when you read it. It has a kind of contagious happiness in it. But Paul wrote it from prison. One man sits in prison in utter despair, seeped in bitterness, soaking in resentment. Another man asks for pen and paper and writes The Joy Letter. What's the difference? Paul wrote Philippians, the Joy Letter, around 61 AD while imprisoned in Rome awaiting final judgment. What did Paul have to be joyful about? Was Paul a success? He didn't know what his writings would become or what his name would mean to us. His first career as a Pharisee ended abruptly. In his Christian ministry, he was rarely fully trusted. He did little in Jerusalem. His preaching gathered few. Peter preached and thousands gathered—three thousand baptized after one message! Paul never saw anything like that. He went from town to town starting small house churches, constantly chased by false teachers who would confuse these little groups as soon as he left. He was arrested, beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, snake bit, thrown in

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prison for years waiting to get a hearing, then sent to Rome just to go before an unjust, horrid emperor named Nero, who eventually took his head. That's the life of Paul.

And he writes, from prison, "The Joy Letter." "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:1-2). "Paul and Timothy." We are never alone in our suffering. Paul was not alone. His friend Timothy was there with him. We will talk about friendship more later in the letter.

There were a lot of different ways to be imprisoned in ancient Rome. Paul experienced most of them. You could be stuck in a dark dungeon, chained with no food or water apart from what friends might drop through the grate. Paul might have experienced that in Philippi in Acts 16 when he and Silas were thrown in prison without the magistrate knowing he was a Roman citizen. You could be held in a holding cell in a household—a little better. Paul did that in Caesarea (see Acts 22 and following). Or you could just be watched under house arrest, which is what Paul experienced in Rome when he wrote this letter back to the friends in Philippi. "When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him" (Acts 28:16). That didn't mean the chains were not real. Wherever Paul went, he was literally chained to a guard. These are not metaphorical chains. But the Philippians knew him when he was in the dungeon. They would have been the ones to care for him then. "I thank my God every time I remember you" (Philippians 1:3). Their generosity continued. Later Paul says, "Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only" (Philippians 4:15).

The Philippian church is Lydia's church, remember. Lydia was a wealthy woman

who hosted the church plant when Paul and Silas (and Luke, see how he says "we") came through. "From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us" (Acts 16:12-15). There's no mention of a husband. It seems likely that she was a widow as that was one of the only ways a woman could become the head of a household in that day. We don't know.

But we know Paul loved that church dearly. "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:4-6). I always pray with joy. **Pray with Joy.** That's the title of the sermon. What does it mean to "always pray with joy"? And, he says, "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me" (Philippians 1:7). When someone says, "it is right," that means others say it is wrong. Who would say it is wrong? Who would claim Paul is off base to pray with joy for this church? It is right? "Why? The church is suffering and about to suffer more. The church is languishing and about to languish more. You, Paul, are bound in chains and about to lose your head to a Roman sword. What on earth is right about praying with joy?"



"I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." Partnership is a Greek word: *koinonia*. It's a deep tie, deep fellowship, intentional community, oneness that can transcend divisions, transcend relationship hiccups, transcend racial divide, social divide, political divide. Oneness established by Christ Himself. That's a reason to pray with joy. "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." That's a reason to pray with joy. The story is not all written yet. As bad as it looks, Jesus is writing this story, and He is going to bring it to the conclusion He wants. The roots of joy are not on the surface; they go deeper than that. Can you pray with joy? One man sits in prison hopeless, sick with regret, wracked in despair, every breath, every swallow of moldy bread taking every bit of energy he has. Another sits in prison brimming with hope, praying with joy. What's the difference?

January is a time I always challenge us to renew our mission, to reinvigorate our mission as a church. We are to be **Light and Life for the City. Light**—sharing the gospel news of a Savior named Jesus who brings light into the darkness. **Life**—living out the mission of Jesus, living in the way of Jesus, showing Jesus—who is the life—through our lives. Proclamation and demonstration. **For**—that's an important word. For those around us. In a posture of helpful service; sacrificial ministry; loving helpfulness to the city around us. **For the City**. How is our city going to see Jesus this year? How? We don't attack this lost and darkened city. This strategy actually washes up to my desk every now and then. "Isn't it time to attack?" Remember the disciples in Luke 9: "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" (Luke 9:54b). "This city is full of people who hate you and hate us. This city is full of people who deny your ways, and dismiss your laws, and deride your name. Let's call down some hellfire. Want us to call down hellfire on them? Let's get 'em!" No. No! You don't hate someone who sits

in darkness because they can't see. You bring light. We are here to save them, Jesus said.

Imagine if God took 3,000 citizens of heaven and said, "Now, go on down to Colorado Springs. Go on down there. You are going to suffer everything they suffer, feel everything they feel, experience the same sicknesses, frustrations, trials and tribulations as every one of them feels. Only, here's the thing, you are going to sit through suffering with Jesus next to those who sit through suffering without Jesus. Don't forget who you are. Don't forget the fruit. In the Holy Spirit, when you suffer, there will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control all hanging off you like apples." One man sits at the auto shop without the Lord; next to him sits a man who knows Jesus. One woman sits in the chair receiving eight hours of chemotherapy dripping into her burning veins through an IV. She sits without Jesus. Next to her is a woman who knows Jesus. Her joy comes up from a deeper root. Or as we remember the life of Martin Luther King this weekend, two men sit in prison wrongfully accused. One is despondent. The other calls for pen and paper, writes "Letters from a Birmingham Jail," lifting up courage over fear, hope over despair, love over hatred. What's the difference?

How are they going to see Jesus, church? How? Can you take joy? Can you pray with joy? Can you let the fruit of the Spirit emerge as you hold on to Jesus in your trials and tests? "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11). What's the difference?

