

Advent 2024: Joy - Philippians

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Date: 15 December 2024

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Let me invite you to take your copy of God's Word and join me in the book of Philippians. Ladies, yesterday at dinnertime, I was scheduled to do nothing this morning.

And by the time I went to bed, I picked up leading our Lord's Supper. And then at 7.30 this morning, Cody Klickner called me and said that he had been up all night with food poisoning and thought he could push through.

And I said, brother, well, there's two questions. The second doesn't matter if you can't answer the first in the affirmative. And that question was, are you done?

He called me back at 8 and said, I don't think so. And I said, well, then stay home by all means. So I threw something together last minute.

And I happened to find in notes an outline, which I think was from a Bible study, not from a sermon, because it didn't really have a whole lot to it.

[1:08] Some points, some historical quotes, some references. And so at 8 a.m., among some other things I was taking care of, I frantically expanded on these notes.

So we're going to do it. We're going to think about the advent of joy. I didn't want to step off theme and do something altogether different. And I'm telling you all of that just to say, please be nice to me and that this may be short.

So we'll see. What I want to help you do today is to look at the thematic joy in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

I'll show you in just a moment how many times this idea comes up in this particular letter. But I'd like to start with a quotation from John Newton, who was an 18th century Anglican minister.

You probably know him from his most famous song, Amazing Grace. And he once wrote this.

Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his carriage should break down one mile before he got to the city, which obligated him to walk the rest of the way to the inheritance.

[2:20] What a fool we should think him if we saw him wringing his hands and blubbering out all the remaining mile. My carriage is broken.

My carriage is broken. The man going to take possession of such an inheritance wouldn't care at all about the carriage because of what he was set toward taking possession of.

The joy is crucially thematic in Paul's letter to the Philippians, as I've said, as he's working throughout the letter to encourage them to continue in and contend for their faith.

We see it twice in chapter 1 and verse 18, and then in chapter 1 verse 25, chapter 2 verse 2, chapter 2 verse 28, and then verse 29, chapter 3 verse 1, chapter 4 verse 1, twice in chapter 4 verse 4, and then finally in chapter 4 and verse 10.

So it's this thread that runs throughout the letter. And while the verse doesn't contain the word joy, listen to what Paul says in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 21.

[3:39] Remember, he's writing this letter from a Roman jail. He's imprisoned. He's awaiting a trial before Caesar. And here he says, For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

He doesn't know what the state, what the outcome of his current condition is going to be. And he says, right, if I'm to remain here, it's going to be to your service.

And he would be in the process, experiencing the ministry and the power of Christ in his life. And if he were to die, what does he get from that? More Christ.

That's the gain. More of Jesus. Right? Unfettered glory in the presence of his Savior. C.S. Lewis in his work, *The Weight of Glory*, wrote this of mankind.

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

[4:55] We are far too easily pleased. Right? Infinite joy is ours in Christ. Now, joy in Christ fuels Christ-likeness in three ways, and I want to show you that throughout the book of Philippians.

And I may add, in at least three ways joy does this. It fuels, it undergirds, it gives energy to our pursuit of Christ in this life.

So firstly, joy in Christ fuels Christ-likeness by empowering the Christian to resist sin. Paul says in chapter 1 and verse 25, Convinced of this, I know that I will remain.

He's talking about that state. He's unsure what will happen to him. He's convinced that he will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.

We have this surpassing value, this thing that is greater than anything this world has to offer us. And this becomes a heartbeat for Christian conformity.

[6:11] We want to look more like Christ. We want to gain more of him because we've tasted and seen that he is good. We have a joy that's been granted to us and we want to continue to pursue him for the sake of that joy and further joy.

In Nehemiah chapter 8, we get the record of the law being reopened to a group of exiles that had been returned to Jerusalem.

And in the hearing of this law, they recognize there a tragic breaking of that law. And they begin to weep and to tear their clothes.

But this law is opened on a feast day. And so Nehemiah says to them in verse 10 of chapter 8, Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready.

For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved. For the joy of the Lord is your strength.

[7:18] Knowing this God, this good and loving kind God who sent his Son, God himself in human flesh.

Live the life that was required of us, that we could not live. Die the death that we deserve. Be raised three days later. This Lord is the strength of our obedience.

It empowers us to resist sin. Sin is fleeting. It offers me nothing in comparison to the surpassing value of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew Henry, who was a Presbyterian minister in the 17th and early 18th centuries. You may know him for his commentary on the entire Bible. You can find it online easily.

Once wrote this, The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks.

[8:27] No longer attractive to us as the joy of the Lord grows in life of a Christian. So, joy in Christ fuels Christ's likeness by empowering the Christian to resist sin.

Secondly, joy in Christ fuels Christ's likeness by enabling the Christian to bear up under suffering. I'll show you two texts in Philippians.

First, chapter 4, verse 11 through 13. Here Paul says, And then he tells us that secret.

Not a verse that has anything to do with winning football games. He says, I can do all things. All of this.

Content in every circumstance. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Now, you might go, Oh, wait a second.

[9:43] You in nowhere in those verses said joy. Those three verses do not contain that joy. But the concept is there. And I want to show you that because if you back up a little bit in chapter 4 to verses 4 through 7, Paul writes this.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Have joy in the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.

The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. So regardless of the circumstance, whatever it is that we're walking through, Paul says, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice.

The Lord is there. He is with you. Let Him know what's going on with you, and He will guard you. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me, who follows from there.

[10:53] Joy in Christ fuels in us the ability to bear up under suffering. Light, momentary affliction compared to the surpassing weight of glory.

Jeremiah Burroughs. This is why I think this is a Bible study because I have so many historic quotations in these notes. Jeremiah Burroughs, who is a Puritan pastor, wrote this great little book that I just entirely commend to you, which is a bunch of thoughts about this idea of being content in every circumstance.

It's called The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. And from his estimation, and I would agree with him, it's a rare thing that the Christian is fully content in Christ.

And he works out a number of analogies that I've just found particularly helpful for me and my endeavor to fight for joy and contentment in Jesus. And this one I found particularly helpful.

He writes, No.

[12:33] No. The reason is because the thing is not suitable to a craving stomach. Yet there is really the same madness in the world. The wind which a man takes in by gaping will as soon satisfy a craving stomach ready to starve as all the comforts in the world can satisfy a soul who knows what true happiness means.

It's a joy in Christ that brings about contentment. And if we find ourselves not contentment, then the thing to do is not to look outside to find that contentment, but to that joy in us that Christ has accomplished on our behalf.

Another example from the scripture. The faith of Moses. The author of Hebrews records for us in chapter 11, verse 24 and following, that when Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

He had everything this world could possibly offer to him as an adopted daughter of Pharaoh.

Excuse me, an adopted son of the daughter of Pharaoh.

Choosing, verse 25 says, Rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered, and this is just an astounding thing that the author of Hebrews does this for us.

[14:09] Looking back, an inspired view of what's going on in the life of Moses' faith. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt.

For he was looking to the reward. He was looking to the eternal greatness. Put off the joy of fleeting pleasures that he would have eternal reward.

So joy in Christ fuels Christlikeness by enabling the Christian to bear up under suffering. Thirdly, joy in Christ fuels Christlikeness by encouraging the Christian to live sacrificially in at least two ways.

We see in the book of Philippians. Joy in Christ fuels Christlikeness by encouraging the Christian to live sacrificially. Number one, in service. Number one, in service.

Giving of ourselves for the sake of others. Paul says in Philippians 3.8, Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

[15:26] For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. There's that language again, right?

That I may gain Christ. I'm willing to give away everything else. Everything else in comparison.

When you put this surpassing worth of Christ against anything else, right?

It says refuse to be tossed away. None of it matters except that I might gain Christ. Jesus put it this way in very practical terms in Luke chapter 12, verse 33 and 34.

He says, sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail. Where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. And we can think about all of the implications of what Jesus had to say there.

[16:32] But what I'm trying to drive at is the point, right? If we have joy in Christ, then we're looking to that full and final realized joy in Christ.

Christ, it's going to encourage in us sacrificial living for the sake of others, right? We're looking to the eternal reward, right? We want that and we want it in full measure.

Clay and I, for a lot of years, have used an analogy of a ticker tape parade. And it just feels older and older, the older that we get. Because nobody does adding on adding machines any longer. But that's what ticker tape was. It was a way that people could add and then go back and see if they made any mistakes. It's all being done digitally. Now, the ticker tape parade was a grand parade. You know, the soldiers returned from home. And also back in the day when windows would open in buildings, about that day, accountants would throw their tape out the window to make these long streamers.

[17:35] You've seen this in pictures, I'm sure. If you haven't, oh, please go look them up. We like to picture the glory of heaven being a bit like that, right?

Eternal praise of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And all of us who are there will be as happy as we could possibly imagine being. But we like to think this picture of this treasure, right, being stored up for us is more praise for this king, right?

Who may parade down the street and we get to throw out our ticker tape. We get to rejoice in the work that he's accomplished. And I just want to be able to throw more and more and more out, right?

I want it heaped up on my desk that I can praise this Christ forever. So, this joy, joy in Christ fuels Christlikeness by encouraging the Christian to live sacrificially in service to others.

And also in evangelism, meeting those practical needs, but also meeting their greatest need. Paul writes in verse 18 of chapter 1, What then?

[18:55] And he's questioning the motivation behind the proclamation of Christ. But he just says, what then? Only that, in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

And in that, in that proclamation of Jesus Christ, I rejoice. I find great joy in the gospel being shared. J. Campbell White, who was the leader of the layman's missionary movement in 1906. Paul said this, Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives.

Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers, except the adoption of Christ's purpose toward the world he came to redeem. Fame, pleasure, and riches are but husks and ashes, in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of his eternal plans.

The men who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards. Joy propelling us to join God in his eternal plans in this world begets more joy and eternal reward.

[20:23] So joy empowers and enables and encourages the Christian to be worthy of that name Christian, to be Christ-like.

And it is not always easy to have joy. And I don't want to pretend for a moment that it is. But it is a good work in the life of a Christian to fight for joy.

To set our minds on the redemptive work of Christ. To think about all of his promises to us accomplished in his life, death, resurrection, and session.

Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ sits right hand at the right hand of the Father. He is there. He is bodily there at the right hand of God. The Scripture tells us, Romans chapter 8, that he is interceding on our behalf.

He prays for us. And he rules over all things. Everything is dictated by his purpose in this world. If God is for us, who can be against us?

[21:32] To set our minds on these types of things and to fight for the joy that is ours in Christ. It ought to be so freeing to know that the motivation for Christ-like living is not some duty in abject stoicism.

That we just put our heads down and grind away. But that we are to be motivated by joy. Christ Jesus came into the world.

The advent of joy. I am so very grateful this time of year that we have the opportunity. I hope that we do set our minds on his second coming and the great, boundless, endless joy that that will bring. In closing, I'm going to read you one more quotation. This is from a man named Blaise Pascal, who was a 17th century French mathematician.

And his account of his conversion was found on a piece of parchment that he had sewn into his coat eight years after his death. Eight years after his death, they found this parchment sewn into his coat.

[22:46] And it reads this. Year of grace, 1654. Monday, 23 November.
Feast of Saint Clement.

From about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight. Fire. God of Abraham. God of Isaac. God of Jacob. Not of philosophers and scholars.

Certitude. Heartfelt joy. Peace. God of Jesus Christ. God of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Joy, joy, joy.

Tears of joy. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. May I never be separated from him. Let's pray together.