

Joy and Purpose

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[0 : 00] Well, it is a joy to be with you all this evening. It's a special day. It's, as I said a moment ago, a day when we focus on the ascension.

It's also in our country Mother's Day. A little bit later we'll be praying a prayer for all kinds of motherhood, spiritual motherhood, adoptive motherhood, actual motherhood for our mothers. And so hopefully in some way you'll realize that this is a time that connects to all of us. But right now we're going to continue our series that we started a few weeks ago in the book we call Philippians. It's Paul's letter to the Philippians. And the title of this series is The Joyful Life. The Joyful Life. And that's because joy is one of the great themes that runs through Philippians.

It makes it a wonderful book. But it's unique in this sense that when you look at the themes in Philippians and you look at the circumstances in which this letter was written, there's a massive disconnect.

[1 : 11] So you have themes of joy and gratitude and rejoicing and generosity. Those are the themes and then the circumstances in which this letter were written.

Imprisonment, suffering, wrongful accusation and persecution, betrayal, unrest, rivalry, pending execution.

There's a massive disconnect. In other words, it's a joy that doesn't make sense. And what we'll see is that Paul's joy is possible.

It's a unique kind of joy and it's possible because of the way he measures his life. In other words, joy is not connected to our circumstances themselves.

Joy is something that comes out of the meaning that we attach to our circumstances. And that depends entirely on what we believe about the purpose of life itself.

[2 : 14] So this is what we're going to be talking about tonight. The passage is Philippians chapter 1 verses 12 through 26. And first we'll see something about God's purposes.

And then we'll see how those purposes shape Paul's perspective. And then lastly we'll consider the implications for our own lives, our own measurements and metrics, our own definition of life.

Let's pray. Our Father, we do ask that you would lead us and guide us. Lord, you're here in our midst. We know that.

And we pray that as you are present, so you will speak. Lord, that you would open our hearts to hear what you have to say. In your Son's name we pray. Amen. So first of all, we have to understand something as we read this passage about God's purposes.

This passage is actually sandwiched between two verses. And these verses aren't actually included in the passage, so I'm sort of cheating a bit to reference them. But any time you see recurring references to the same idea throughout a letter, it means it's pretty important.

[3 : 30] And so we're going to look at this sort of sandwich that happens before and after our passage. First of all, just before our passage in verse 6, Paul says this.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. So that's just before our passage.

And then just after it, in chapter 2, verse 13, he says this. For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Purpose. So both of these convey the same thing, that God is at work fulfilling his purposes. And a joyful life starts with this as a core assumption.

It starts with this as a core assumption. That God's purposes are always unfolding. God's purposes are always unfolding.

[4 : 28] God is orchestrating everything from the time it all began in creation to the time that everything draws to its conclusion.

That God is in it every step of the way. And this theme isn't just in Philippians. It's actually a theme that runs through the whole Bible. And we could spend hours surveying that.

It would be worth your time to look up the word purpose and to look at all of the places where it occurs in Scripture. I just want to give you a few interesting examples to show what I mean. In Genesis, we read about Joseph.

And some of you know the story. It's very well known. Joseph is betrayed by his brothers out of jealousy. He's sold into slavery. His father thinks he's dead. Decades pass.

And Joseph rises in the ranks of Egypt to become a very powerful man. And famine strikes. And his family's on the brink of death. And they travel to Egypt to beg aid.

[5 : 27] Or they're going to starve to death. And who is in the position to decide whether they live or die? It's Joseph. And Joseph famously, in Genesis 50 verse 20, says this.

He says to his brothers as he's letting them know he's going to have mercy on them. He says, As for you, you meant evil against me. But God meant it for good. That many lives could be saved. He's not saying it was one or the other. He's saying it was both. You meant evil. And at the same time, God meant good. You had your purpose.

But even your purpose was subsumed into God's purpose. God's purposes were unfolding. In Exodus, Pharaoh enslaves God's people.

Sets himself up as a rival to God. You know, the early chapters of Exodus are all about who's the real God. Pharaoh or the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[6 : 26] And Pharaoh refuses to listen to Moses when God sends him. And says, let my people to go. He utterly mocks and blasphemes and rejects the God of the Bible. And here's what God says in chapter 9 verse 16 of Exodus.

He says this to Pharaoh. But for this purpose I have raised you up. Pharaoh. To show you my power so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

Even your rebellion. Even your resistance. Even your mockery of me. Even your refusal to listen. All of that is actually a part of my plan.

You're playing your part. Job. After all Job goes through. And all of the unanswered questions. 42 chapters of struggling and strife.

At the very end of the book. Job's breakthrough. Job's realization is this. Chapter 42 verse 2. I know that you God can do all things. And that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

[7 : 29] No matter what. No matter who. No matter how. The one sure thing is God's purposes. Unfolding. And this is how the first Christians understood all of history.

In Acts chapter 13. There's a sermon. And in verse 36. It says this. For David. And this is talking about King David. The great king. The great. One of the greatest figures.

In. The history of Israel. It says. For David. After he had served the purpose of God. In his own generation. Fell asleep. And was laid with his fathers.

And saw. Corruption. What they're saying is this. David. And all the exploits. All the amazing things that he did. David wasn't. A hero. In the sense that we normally think of a hero.

David was just playing his part. God is the hero. And David was simply fulfilling. The purposes. That God laid out. For him to play. So all of history.

[8 : 28] Is part of God's purpose. And this raises questions about. Well how does that. Work. And the way this plays out. Is. Is.

Is. Is. Is. In my opinion. Way beyond anything you find. When you look at other. Philosophies and religions. At the risk of a bit of oversimplification. I'll just say that up front.

You can loosely group. Most philosophies and religions. Into one of two camps. You have. The philosophies. That. Tend toward. Fatalism. And. Determinism.

And without. Geeking out over the differences. Between the two. They essentially both say. In one way or another. That. The end is fixed. And that your choices.

Ultimately don't matter. That the end is set. It's determined. Right. So think about the classic story. Of Oedipus. Right. Oedipus was told.

[9 : 23] At the very beginning. You have been fated. Oedipus. To kill your father. And marry your mother. Oedipus says. No way. He spends the entire time. Trying to make sure. Doing everything he can.

To fight this destiny. And in the end. What happens? He kills his father. He marries his mother. It was destined to happen. It was fated to be. Right.

A more modern example. Is the. The. The Matrix series. Where you have Morpheus. And Mr. Smith. They're. They're. They're fatalistic. Right. What is Mr. Smith's famous line? It is inevitable. Mr. Anderson. It is inevitable. Right. The destiny is fixed. Whether you know it or not. Whether you like it or not. Whether you choose it or not. That's where you're headed. So that's one way of thinking about. This kind of thing. The other. Sort of grouping of world views. Tend toward. Free will. Right. So fatalism and determinism. [10:19] They say. The. The. The future is fixed. Despite your choices. Despite your choices. But. The free will side says. Your future is determined.

Not in spite of your choices. But. Because of your choices. Because of your choices. So. Choose your own destiny. Choose your own adventure. Choose your own path. Right. You can change your destiny. You can make the future. Into anything you want it to be. You just have to make the right choices. And so we can imagine. Like in back to the future. That if you want to change the present. And you. And if you could go back in time. Then all you would have to do. Is make different choices. And you can radically change the future. The future is up for grabs. It's all about. What we choose with our free will. So Christianity.

When you look at these. Comparatively speaking. Christianity is both. And neither. At the same time. Because the first perspective says. Our destiny is determined. [11:19] Despite our choices. The second says. Our destiny is determined. Because of our choices. But Christianity says this. And it's. And I think it's much more nuanced. And balanced. And beautiful.

And realistic. It says this. That God has. Such control over history. And yet he's so intimately involved. In our lives. That the future is determined. Not despite. Not because. But through. Our choices. And what I mean by that. Is this. That God is sovereignly able. To weave. Our choices. Into his. Ultimate purposes. Like a tapestry. That regardless of what we choose. Regardless of. How we might mean things for evil. Like Joseph's brothers. Regardless of how we might rebel. And resist. Like Pharaoh. That in some way. Beyond our ability to understand. God is able to weave. Those things. Into his.

[12:15] Ultimate. Purposes. And what this means is amazing. On the one hand it means. Our choices are our own. They matter. They have consequences. They impact the world.

They change things. I'm responsible for my choices. I'm not just following. A deterministic path. I am. I am.

I am. Responsible. For the. Choices that I make. And the impact that those have. And yet. God is ultimately directing the courses. And outcomes. He's weaving everything. Together. Repurposing. Even the most. Dire. Evil acts. For good. And what this doesn't mean. Is evil is. Replaced by good. What this doesn't mean. Is that the ends justify the means. This is not me saying. Oh this is bad now. And death. And evil. And suffering. But one day.

[13:08] It'll all be worth it. It's a both end. This is bad. And evil. And horrible. And somehow. God is able to triumph. Over it. And bring good.

From it. In ways. Only he understands. And all of this. Is moving toward this. Ultimate purpose. Of God. God. And so the question becomes. What is that ultimate purpose? And I think the clearest statement of it. Is in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10. Where it says. The ultimate purpose is this. God's ultimate purpose in history. Is that. He's drawing all things together. In Christ. Things in heaven. Things on earth. All things in and under Christ. Right. The ascension is what? A celebration of. Jesus becoming king. Of all things. God's ultimate purpose. Is that all things. Would then come under. And into. King Jesus. This is the ultimate purpose.

[14:05] It's centered in Christ. So what you need to understand. Is this is the backdrop. That Paul is working with. This is his world view. This is the set of assumptions.

That he has. When he's trying to make sense. Of his life. And it radically. Shapes his perspective. He's assuming that everything. That happens. Is a part of God's unfolding purpose. Centered in Christ. So now the question becomes. If that is the way. God's purpose. Works. Then how does that shape. Paul's perspective. See for Paul.

The purposes of God. Define his sense. Of purpose. In his own life. So they kind of form the lens. Through which he looks. At his life. It all. Is seen. Through the lens of God's purposes. And you see this. In how he looks in his past. His present. And his future. Right. So in verses 12.

[14:59] 13 and 14. Paul is kind of looking. Backwards. He's looking. At the past. And he says. I want you to know brothers. That what has happened to me. Has really served.

To advance the gospel. It's really served. To advance the gospel. Now. Think about what has happened to Paul. Right. Paul is commissioned. Personally by Jesus. Jesus. That's. That's pretty unique. To go. And to plant churches. And to evangelize. And to tell people about. The gospel. And he goes. And his dream. From the very beginning. Is to go to Rome. I want to go to the center. Of world power. I want to preach. To the. To the highest authorities. And I want to tell them. About Jesus. And he gets to Rome. And what happens? No evangelism. No church planting. He's there in chains. He's put in prison. Under house arrest. And the way this works is. He wasn't necessarily chained to the floor.

[15:56] It's not as bad as we sometimes think. He was under house arrest. But he had to be chained. To a guard. All day. Right. So a rotation. Of praetorian guards. Would come in. And be chained to him.

Right. And so you look at this situation. And you think. You know. Paul. I want to plant churches. I want to tell people about Jesus. Now he has no chance of getting out of his house. No chance of going to the public square.

No chance of preaching the gospel. No chance of building churches. No chance of training leaders. And certainly no chance. Of talking to. The heads. The higher ups.

The center of power. It looks like a total failure. And yet through Paul's lens. Because his one constant. Is the unfolding purposes of God.

Because he knows. Whatever else is happening. Those purposes are right on schedule. He's able to recognize what's happening. He doesn't collapse in despair. He realizes. Oh.

[16:55] Here's the situation. Every day. Cynical. Pagan. Military. Civil servants.

Have to come to his house. And they have to be chained. To the most effective evangelist. In the world. For hours. And there's no TV.

There's no iPad. There's no books. All there is. Is conversation. And so Paul says. Guess what? The entire. Praetorian guard.

They've all heard the gospel. They've all heard the gospel. One by one. In the comfort of his own home. He doesn't even have to put his shoes on. One by one.

Intimate evangelism. Right? And he says that other people are seeing this. Other brothers in the faith. Brothers and sisters. And they're seeing this. And they're realizing. Well if this is. How God is using Paul's imprisonment.

[17:50] I shouldn't be afraid of prison. And so they're all starting to preach. As well. And he says. Because of my imprisonment. Not in spite of it. But through my imprisonment. There's a groundswell of the gospel.

God's purposes are unfolding. And he says. Therefore I rejoice. I couldn't be happier. You know. God promised that the gospel. Would be advanced.

He didn't promise the circumstances. Paul's not holding on to circumstances. He's focused on the main thing. And then he looks at his present. In verse 15.

He shifts the focus. And we learn. In verses 15 to 18. That in Paul's absence. What's happening? Well you have other preachers. Coming into Philippi. And preaching and teaching.

Right? This is his beloved church. He had planted it 10 years earlier. I think they were his favorites. I really do. I don't know that he played favorites. But I think that they were his favorites. He's just crazy about the Philippians.

[18:48] And. You have these other people. Who are coming in. And some of them. From a good. Sincere motive. Are preaching. Paul's not here. So I'm going to do my best. To preach the gospel to you. And to teach you about Jesus.

But then you have other people. Who are saying. Paul failed. Look at Paul. He's in prison. God's obviously. Removed his anointing. God's obviously. Moved on from Paul. God's raising me up. I want everybody.

To listen to me now. I'm the new Paul. And you have people doing this. Out of rivalry. Out of contempt for Paul. Wanting to undermine. His authority. And Paul hears this. And you would think. Most people would freak out. Traitor. You know. Absalom. I can't believe you're doing that. And you would rally. You know. Epaphroditus. Go back there. And threaten them. And tell them. That's not what he says.

Paul hears about this. He looks at it through the lens. Of God's unfolding purposes. And he says this in verse 18. He says. What then?

[19 : 43] In other words. What should I do? Only that in every way. Whether in pretense. Or in truth. Christ is proclaimed. And in that. I rejoice. Right. So Paul's measure of success.

Is this. Is Christ being proclaimed? And you know. I said this this morning as well. I mean. It struck me today. How this could be. A whole conversation.

As we try to make sense. Of different churches. And different pastors. And those that have been. In the news. And been discredited. What we need to understand. Is they're preaching. The true gospel.

Not false gospels. But the true gospel. But with very. Very bad motives. And yet Paul says. Still Christ is being proclaimed. Praise God. In that I can rejoice. Now if you think this is unrealistic. If you're hearing this. And you think. Well that kind of piety. That kind of passion. Single minded focus on Jesus. That's unrealistic. Well I would say. I don't think that's unrealistic.

[20 : 42] I think that we do this kind of thing. All the time. Just not with Jesus. But I mean. If you're starting a business. And you know that. You've got to get that bottom line.

Up. Right. That everything hinges. That you will be bankrupt. If you don't build this thing. And you're looking at that bottom line. And unless your costs come down. And your revenue goes up.

Unless that profit margin. Increases over time. Then you're sunk. So when that thing starts to go up. You don't care. If you're sleeping three hours a night.

On the floor of your office. You don't care. If you haven't seen your friends and family. For months. You don't care about that. Because if you're solely focused. On that bottom line. And that thing is going up. You're going to rejoice.

Right. If you want to be. A world class athlete. Or a musician. You will joyfully spend hours.

[21 : 36] And hours. And hours. And hours practicing. Not hanging out with your friends. Not hanging out with your family. You will joyfully submit yourself. To incredibly challenging trials. Because why? Because your bottom line.

That thing. That main thing for you. Is excellence. In whatever you do. So we understand this kind of single minded focus.

For Paul. His purpose. Is God's purpose. To see all things come together in Christ. And then lastly. This impacts the way we see.

The future. The way Paul sees his future. I mean get this. Not only past. Not only present. But when he looks into the future. What's he facing? Most likely execution. Most likely execution.

And yet when he looks. He says. Beginning in verse 18. Yes. And I will rejoice. As I look at this potential future. I will rejoice. Well why can he rejoice in his future?

[22 : 30] Simple. Two options. He's either going to live. Or he's going to die. Two options. He has no idea. And yet he thinks about it.

Through the lens. Of God's purposes. And he says. Well if I die. I will actually get to. Be face to face. Face with Christ. It will be the thing.

That I have longed for. My whole life. The thing. That my most amazing. Spiritual experiences. Have just been a. A shadow. Of what I will experience. On the other side. Of that death.

Yeah. I can rejoice in that. But then he says. But if I remain alive. Then I will have the opportunity. To continue. To tell people about Jesus. To tell you about Jesus. To make sure your faith.

Is strengthened. In Jesus. And in that. I can rejoice. And so he thinks about it. And realizes. It doesn't matter. I can live or die. I don't even know what I want more. But I can rejoice in all of it.

[23 : 28] Paul looks at his whole life. Past. Present. And future. And he's able to rejoice. In all of it. Because while everything else. May be changing.

There's one thing. That remains constant. There's one constant. God's unfolding purposes. In Christ. And so here. Is the point. Paul has discovered.

The secret. To a joyful life. This is the. The secret. Of a joyful life. And you see it clearly. In verse 21.

Paul says. Here's my secret. Here's. Here's. Here's the key. For me. To live. Is Christ. To live. Is Christ. One of the most important.

Verses in the New Testament. To live. Is Christ. Christ. That's his whole purpose. That's the definition. Of his life. In other words. For us. As we think about this.

[24 : 22] This kind of joy. Becomes possible. When God's purposes. In the world. Are what define. Our purpose. In life. When God's purposes. In the world. Are what define. Our purpose.

In life. That's. The key. To making this kind. Of inexplicable. Joy. Possible. So I just want to consider. A couple of implications. Of this.

For us. Kind of bring it down. Into the dirt. So to speak. If you want a joyful life. Then you have to consider. This question. How do you measure.

Your life. And by that. I mean. What is the metric. You use. There's a Harvard business. Professor named Clay Christensen. He's very well known.

For his work. In the area. Of innovation. Um. But he's written a book. More recently called. How will you measure your life. And it's interesting. Because he's drawing. On the business world.

[25 : 18] As an analogy. That can then be applied. To our whole lives. He says. You know. In business. Um. There are different ways. That a company. Can measure. Their growth.

And however. You measure. Your growth. Whatever. That bottom line is. That's going to affect. Your strategies. That's going to affect. How you do. Business. Day to day.

And the decisions. That you make. And he says. The same is true. In life. However you measure. Growth. However you measure. Success. Whatever that metric is. That's going to shape. How you live.

So be thoughtful. About how you. Measure your life. And how you define. Success. So the question is. How do we measure. Our lives. What's the metric. What's the bottom line.

If you want to know. The answer to that. For yourself. Ask it this way. What is that thing. In my life. About which I say. As long as I have. That thing. I'm okay. As long as that thing.

[26 : 13] Is there. And secure. And growing. As long as I can count on it. I'm okay. What you're saying is. That's. That's how I measure my life.

Joy. Joy. Joy. Is. Is. Is. Is. Is. What emerges. When we know. That that bottom line. Is secure. Joy. Is the thing.

That we feel. When we know. That that measurement. That. That. That thing. The main thing. Is secure. And growing. And everybody has one. You know.

For some of us. And I. It's probably not too many of us. I don't think too many of us. Are in this category. For. For. For some people. It's. How much money you make.

It's. If you're climbing. The org chart. You know. It's the influence. That you have. The. The sense of. Your importance. Relative to other people.

[27 : 11] At the cocktail party. I mean. For some of us. It's that. Maybe. You know. I think. I think many more of us. Are maybe more noble. We say. Oh. We know. It's. We know. Life's not about that.

That's no way to measure life. It's about my friends. It's about my family. It's about my kids. And that's where Christensen goes. If you read his book. He. That's his thing. He's. The whole point of his book is.

It's not about your career. It's about your family. That's the most important thing. That's a lot more noble. I. I think there are a few people here. Who are even more altruistic.

Than that. It's about helping people. It's about making a difference. That's my bottom line. That's what I really care about. It's about. It's about going out. And.

And loving my neighbors. And helping people. And making the world a better place. That's what I care about. True altruism. Right. So all of these things are metrics. They're things that we look at.

[28 : 04] As long as this is happening. I'm okay. I can feel joy. I can feel contentment. See what we're really saying there is. Not to live is Christ. But we're saying to live is success.

Achievement. To live is family. Friends. Kids. To live is making a difference. And helping people. Some of these things are great measures. You could do a lot worse.

But they all have an Achilles heel. They all have a weakness. And here's the weakness. It's all a crapshoot. It's all a crapshoot.

At the end of the day. You have no control over whether these things will be secure or not. You can do all the right things and work 100 hours a week and still not get the promotion.

You know you can build a great business and the economy collapses out from under you and you go bankrupt. Nothing that you did. Things you couldn't control. You can pour yourself into your friends and you may lose those friends.

[29 : 05] You can pour yourself into your family. You can pour yourself into your kids and say for me to live is kids. I'm going to sacrifice to do everything to be the best parent I possibly can for my kids.

I can pour all of myself into them. And then guess what? They may grow up and say you kind of smothered me. I'm moving to the other side of the country. And you may not see them again. Right? Or you may do everything right and they simply may die. Right? Now that's a hard thing to bring up on Mother's Day. So I'm sorry. I beg your forgiveness.

But it's worth considering that there's a difference between the tragedy of that, the unimaginable tragedy of that. There's a difference between people who experience that but they're able to move on.

And people who are crushed by it. And the people who are crushed by it. Who can't go on living. It's probably something to do with the fact that those kids were the measure of their life.

[30 : 09] If I have nothing else as long as I have this. So whatever it is. Whatever your metric is. You know because it's the thing that when it gets taken away it crushes you.

Life is not worth living without this thing. There's only one definition of life. There's only one metric. There's only one measurement.

That is absolutely guaranteed never to fail or falter. And that is Christ. As Paul says to live is Christ. Nothing else works.

Nothing else is secure. It's all a crapshoot. Because it may or may not have connection with God's unfolding purposes. You have no way of knowing.

But the one thing that you know is a constant is Christ. So Paul's able to say in my past I suffered and I'm in prison. But the gospel of Christ is advancing. In the present there's so much uncertainty.

[31 : 07] And people are trying to displace me. But Christ is being proclaimed. And in the future I may live. I may die. But either way Christ is going to be glorified. And because that's his metric. He's able to rejoice.

Not by minimizing the suffering. Or explaining it away. Or ends justify the means. But simply because he has built his life on the one sure thing. These things are hard but they don't crush him. It's real suffering. It's bitter suffering. But it doesn't end him. Because that's not the measure of his life. The way we know that God's purposes will never fail.

Ultimately is when we look at the cross. That's how you know. It's the one sure thing. All of the powers of evil. All of humanity.

United against the purposes of God. Doing everything we could to thwart the purposes of God. What better way than to take God's chosen Messiah.

[32 : 12] Sent here to save the world. To save Israel. To save us all. And to humiliate him. And discredit him. And execute him. What better way to do it. And at the end of all that.

As humanity is walking away saying. A job well done. Let's. You know. We'll not have to worry about that anymore. Three days later. Jesus rises. And Jesus says.

You did only exactly what my father gave to you to do. You only did your part in the great play of history. You were playing your part. It doesn't matter if you knew it or not.

You were part of my purpose. You can almost say Jesus saying. Good job. You did it exactly right. Right. Every swing of the hammer into the wood had been planned.

It was a part of this unfolding purpose of God. And you look at that. And you look at the fact that the cross not only shows us. That God's purposes can't be thwarted. It shows us this.

[33 : 07] That. Before we even knew Jesus. Before there was ever even the invitation. To say to live is Christ. Jesus is the one. That looked at you and said.

For me. To live is you. In other words. You're the one. I'm giving my life to. You're the one. I'm giving my life.

For. Do you want unshakable joy? You will never find joy in your circumstances.

It comes from the bottom line. It comes from the measure of your life. And there's only one measure that is absolutely secure. And that is Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Our Father we do ask that you would. Take your words. Whatever of this is of you. And that you would drive them into our hearts.

[34 : 03] And as we sing and pray. And share in this meal a bit later. That those would be like water and sunlight. That would. Cause that seed to grow.

And bring life. Into our hearts. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.