

# Joy, Always?

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[ 0 : 00 ] What a passage. I think you could probably preach eight sermons on that. Should we do that?! Let's not do that. We are going to do something slightly different this morning. We've been thinking about joy, haven't we, in this book of Philippians, as we've been following it through. Joy in Jesus.

Jesus. We've just read from verses one to nine of chapter four, because we've reached chapter four in our series. We're going to be really thinking about just verse four. We're going to put in the other verses too, but I'm not going to cover all of that because there's so much. So we're just going to be thinking about verse four. Before we do that, should we pray? Let's pray.

Lord God, we thank you that we have your words here. We thank you that it is food for our souls. And we pray that you would speak this morning, Lord.

Lord, nobody needs to hear more of my voice. We need to hear your voice. We don't need to hear our own voices. We need to hear the loving voice of the Lord Jesus as he speaks hope and whispers comfort and shares joy.

We pray that we would hear his voice this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice.

[ 1 : 29 ] What's your reaction when you hear those words? Maybe you're thinking, that sounds great. I would really love that. I would love to have that. But how? How does it work?

Or maybe you're thinking, possibly a more common reaction, well, sorry, Paul, that you can't actually command anybody to rejoice.

It doesn't work like that. I can't even make myself rejoice. Or maybe you're thinking, do you know what? I just don't understand this. I just don't understand. I'm really not sure what God was thinking when he put it in the Bible.

If he did, it seems deeply unrealistic to me. Or maybe you're thinking, quietly on the inside, being joyful all the time sounds absolutely exhausting.

And that little word, always, just raises the stakes even higher, doesn't it? Well, the language helps us a bit because when it says always, it just means consistently.

[ 2 : 37 ] It doesn't mean constantly. But even then, we could ask, couldn't we, is this really livable? Is this something we can do? No one gets to rejoice at all times, do they?

And yet, if you've been following along through our series, you'll know that Paul repeats that word, joy, rejoicing, about 20 different times at least in this letter.

And in fact, if you look at chapter 3, verse 1, it's right there. Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. So why does he keep going on about it?

Well, partly, of course, because human beings forget. So we need reminding. But partly also because rejoicing in the Lord is absolutely crucial if we're going to last.

If we're going to stand firm. Chapter 4, verse 1. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way.

[ 3 : 39 ] Dear friends. So if we are going to stand firm, we need to rejoice. Here's how Matthew Henry, one of my friends from the Puritans, puts it. Joy in God is of great consequence in the Christian life.

And Christians need to be again and again called to it. Why? Because it's important. So that we stand firm. And don't miss that.

We are called to joy as Christians. Isn't that amazing? Called to joy. Now, if Paul's telling us to just be happy all the time, that's pretty useless, isn't it?

Because as one of the commentators puts it, emotionally, I cannot move myself to do that. We just can't. Emotions don't respond to commands like muscles do.

Do they? It's not authentic joy if you think you can make yourself happy. If we're physically and mentally and emotionally healthy, then our feelings can be influenced.

[ 4 : 40 ] They can be led. They can be tamed. They can be channeled. But they can't be commanded. Can they? And that's not really what Paul is talking about here.

What if instead true joy is found in a person? And then what if real rejoicing was about being with that person?

Enjoying them. I think that Jesus tells us here in this passage, you can always rejoice in me because I am your joy.

You can always rejoice in me because I am your joy. Now we need to unpack that, don't we?

There's a lot to it. And to do that, we need to answer, I think, at least two questions.

First of all, what does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? And then secondly, how on earth can I obey that command?

[ 5 : 46 ] What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? Well, I think it means at least this. Do not rejoice in what is around you. Don't rejoice in what is around you. Let's think about Paul's situation for a moment.

If you've been following the series in Philippians, then you'll know where he is. He's in prison, isn't he? He's in social isolation. So if you want a sense of that, just cast your mind back to COVID and what that was like.

And now imagine that you're chained to your enemy as well. Because that's what Paul was in prison. He was chained to his guards. The walls are closing in. If you read his letters, you know there were deep frustrations in his work life.

And the church isn't what he wants it to be either. And his reputation's being trashed. And onto that you can add any personal issues that he felt he had.

Not much reason for rejoicing, you could say. But that's the point. If I only look at my circumstances for evidence that God loves me and I try to rejoice in those, then where am I going to end up?

[ 6 : 53 ] I'm going to end up thinking, God doesn't love me very much and I have very little reason to rejoice. Eventually, that's where I'll end up.

We need a different kind of approach, don't we? We need the kind of approach that we read about in Habakkuk chapter 3. You don't have to flick there if you don't want to. Here's what it says. 3 verse 17.

That's what we need, isn't it?

And while we're looking at our circumstances, Paul instead points to a person. If you look back to chapter 3, verse 20, 21. But our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Is your body slowly caving into time? Jesus promises to make it glorious. Does your family not help you?

[ 8 : 17 ] Perhaps they even despise you. What does it say in verse 1? There are brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers that Jesus will give you. Do you feel like there's no happy ending?

Not for you. Jesus talks about his servants' names being in the book of life. Do you feel anxious? Verse 7, there is peace.

Beyond understanding. Do you see? Jesus will transform our circumstances. He will transform our circumstances. So why does Paul need to command us again to rejoice in the Lord?

And now he adds the always bit. Because we tend to rejoice in other things. Like how it's going.

And then we get disappointed. And we blame God for our joylessness.

But if you go down that path, it just leads back to hopelessness, doesn't it? And probably bitterness as well. Don't rejoice in what is around you.

[ 9 : 16 ] Joy is not found there. I'd like to invite you to just take a moment. Be honest with yourself. And fill in this statement.

No one's going to ask you for your answer. This is just for you. Right now, my joy depends on what? Just take 30 seconds to reflect on that.

30 seconds seem a very long time, can't it?

Or a short time. Depending on where you're at. Don't rejoice in what is around you. Secondly, don't rejoice in yourself.

We'd all like to be able to rejoice always, wouldn't we? Because nobody's going to say no to that. It's when we get to the in the Lord part where people lose interest.

[10:35] Because they think our religion is just joyless really, isn't it? So what other answers are there out there? Here we go. If you go to success.com.

It tells you how to find joy in 11 easy steps. Now, I know you're busy people, so we'll just do three of them. Okay? Here we go.

Stop worrying. Very easy to say, isn't it? Stop worrying. Happiness is not within your grasp because it is quite literally within you. Make self-care part of your routine.

Get yourself sorted so that your me time can be as effective as possible. Number three, find bliss in a bucket list. It's every part of you, from your fingers to your toes, nearly bursting with light and full with purpose.

It's the amazement, pride, triumph, and an overwhelming sensation of the purest self-love. Do you hear the message? Joy comes from self-love.

[11:36] It comes from inside me. I can make it happen. It can be found by me when I surround myself with things that I love. And I give myself plenty of the me moments that I deserve.

And when I have around me people I think are good for me and they make me feel good about myself. It's the gospel of me. Of individualism. And joy comes from having my own purpose.

And I can make up my own purpose. All I need to do is write a bucket list. And I won't worry about what happens when I finish the bucket list. So I can write the story of my life and I can plan joy right into every chapter.

And who have I made myself when I think about the world that way? I've made myself God. Haven't I?

Now these aren't always bad things. That's not what we're saying here. But here's the thing. It doesn't work. Why? Because every morning I wake up and I'm still me.

[12:42] Still me. Flawed. Changeable. Inconsistent. Not the source of true joy for myself.

Or often, as my family will tell you, for others. I am wonderfully made. And I have talents. And I can do good things.

But I am not the person whose company always makes everything better. Are you? I am not the person who exemplifies fairness and kindness at all times.

In the words of Philippians 4, My gentleness is not always evident to all. Sometimes I'm too serious. Sometimes I'm too tired. Sometimes I'm too self-absorbed. I'm just too sinful when it comes down to it. And pleasing myself or taking charge of my life is not how I will find true and lasting joy.

[13:49] You ever tried pulling yourself up by your boot laces? That's the problem. And Paul actually says the same thing. If you think back to when James was with us, Paul had that huge list of all his credentials, didn't he?

Lots of reasons for confidence in himself, qualifications, positive influences, self-esteem shots. It was all there in the list. And Paul says, I count it all as loss. Here's the point.

Don't rejoice in yourself. Joy is not found within you. But if I'm honest with myself, I don't really want to believe that my joy might lie in someone else's hands.

And so I hold on to that idea that I can create joy for myself. And then I end up being part of the problem. And I struggle to do the one thing that might help me.

So if I'm not to rejoice in my circumstances and I'm not to rejoice in myself, what do I do for joy? I find my joy in someone else. Rejoice in the Lord always.

[15:09] I will say it again. Rejoice. I'd love you to think about the last time that you laughed. Cast your mind back to that, like proper belly laugh.

Thinking about that. I'd be willing to bet, if I was a betting man and gambling wasn't wrong, I'd be willing to bet that the last time you really laughed, you were with someone.

Or you were reading something that somebody wrote and it connected with you. Or you were watching something that somebody created and it connected with you. Because, of course, joy is relational, isn't it?

That's why laughter happens when you're with people. And if joy occurs in relationship, then it follows, doesn't it, that the greatest joy, original joy, real joy, comes from the deepest relationship that you can have.

Have you noticed that people have funny laughs? They do, don't they? Really funny laughs. It always reminds me of that song in Mary Poppins, I Love to Laugh.

[16:17] And he goes through all the different kinds of funny laughs that people have. Embarrassing things happen sometimes, don't they? Like stuff coming out your nose when you laugh. But you can laugh the loudest and the proudest with somebody who knows all of that embarrassing stuff and who loves you anyway.

In fact, who loved you all the way to the cross. That's joy, right? There can be no deeper relationship than the one between you and the one who made you, who loved you, who died for you, who designed you to glorify him and enjoy him forever.

Question number one in the catechism. What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end, woman's chief end, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

See, it's being with him. It's believing in him. It's belonging to him. It's spending time with him. That makes real rejoicing possible. So if you look on a little bit further to verse 5, let your gentleness be evident to all.

Rejoice, because the Lord is near. If you were to turn to Psalm 16 and verse 11, I have another way of thinking about this.

[17:40] Here's what it says. You make known to me the path of life, sings David to his king. You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Sounds almost decadent, doesn't it? That's what we have in the Lord. That's why Paul commands us to rejoice in the Lord.

Let's think about that a little bit more. Who is Jesus to Christians? Well, he's the saviour, isn't he? But isn't it interesting that Paul doesn't choose to use that term here when he says rejoice?

He says rejoice in the Lord. Lordship is a relational term, isn't it? God is a kind of a neutral word. If you call someone Lord, that's relational.

Rejoice because he is your Lord. He is the captain of your ship. He is the king of love, the prince of your peace.

[18:46] That's who he is to us. Came across a really helpful quote from a Baptist theologian called John Gill. He says this, There is always cause for rejoicing in Christ, even in times of afflictions, distress, and persecution.

Why? Since he is always the same. That's it, isn't it? While times change, and we change with them, that's the expression, the source of our joy is always the same.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And that's good news for his children. And it is good news for joyless people everywhere.

And that's the explanation for how we can rejoice always, isn't it? The person in whom we rejoice does not change. And therefore, we can rejoice at all times.

Here's another great one from John Piper. I'm throwing a lot of quotes at you today. If God loves us, then he would surely give us what is best for us.

[19:58] And what is best for us is himself. If God loves us, God must give us God for our enjoyment and nothing else.

We mean so much to him that he has given us himself. So rejoicing in the Lord means enjoying, celebrating the fact that you are one with your Lord.

The fact that you are together and not apart. And that helps us understand what joy is actually, doesn't it? Because that's what we've been circling around all this time. What is joy really? It is gladness in God.

Joy in Christ, therefore, is then not an emotion it's not just a feeling, but it's a benefit. It's something we have to which a feeling or an emotion attaches.

It's like the foundness of the lost sheep. Think of it like that. Or the rights that come with being a citizen of heaven like we've just read about. Like being a spouse or a son or a daughter.

[21:02] We can feel more or less married, can't we? We can feel closer or further from a father or a mother.

But that feeling doesn't change the status. It doesn't change the security that I have in that relationship. So just like love is setting your affection on someone, rejoicing is seeking delight in someone, in Jesus.

Now we can make sense of the command, can't we? Rejoice in the Lord always. How on earth can I obey that? Well, I can obey if I am in him.

Because Paul is saying enjoy what you have. If you have him, he will never let you go. You can always rejoice. Rejoice. And we should obey.

Not only can we, but we should obey. Because that's leaning into our new identity in Jesus, isn't it? It's working out our salvation, what the Bible calls sanctification. Just think about that for a moment. [ 22 : 10 ] It's amazing. Amazing. Manifesting his joy in our lives is part of our mandate. I don't know what you think when you hear the word sanctification, but for a long time it felt like a joy, to me, like kind of a joyless process of sort of, you know, self-discipline and maybe beating myself up a bit.

Not manifesting the joy of Jesus in my life, but that's what it is. How? Well, we need to be with him, don't we?

He's the source of our joy. If it's in him that we rejoice, we need to be with him. Be in his presence in an intentional way. As often and as long as you can. That doesn't necessarily mean being on your own with the door shut on your knees.

Just means realising that he's with you and leaning into that wherever you are. And Paul is dead clear if you read Philippians that it also means being together as his family.

so we go to church and we ask the Holy Spirit to help and we say help me give my heart in praise to you and help me to have joy in that.

[ 23 : 28 ] Here's a quote from C.S. Lewis. I already gave you these two so we'll skip past them. Really helped me understand this. We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.

You see what Lewis is saying there? Somehow our enjoyment of God is not complete until we express our love for him together. We do that joy will follow.

But maybe you're sitting here thinking Johan this is all very well and I can see where you're getting it from but I just can't. I know I can't.

I can't rejoice. I can't obey. Well I can think of two possible reasons and maybe there are others.

The first reason is that your relationship with God is broken.

That you are not in Jesus so you don't have joy. In fact you can't rejoice and you may not even know that you don't have it because you may never have experienced it because you've never been near him as Philippians puts it.

[ 24 : 46 ] Well then friend there's only one doctor who knows what to do with that condition and that is Jesus who for the joy set before him went to the cross and do you know what the joy set before him was?

us isn't that amazing? So if your relationship with God is broken then friend just come to him turn back to him surrender yourself to his care be with him so that you can rejoice in him if you want to be free from whatever it is from shame from yourself from your circumstances from the exhausting gospel of me because it is exhausting then ask Jesus to forgive you make you one with himself and then his joy will be yours the other possible reason that you're finding it impossible to rejoice is that there is distance between you and God and I'm thinking really of believers here and joylessness really hurts then doesn't it because you know what it's like and you don't feel you have it you're not out of his hand friend but you feel like you are two possible causes one is you're seeking joy elsewhere you've forgotten to seek it in the Lord

Jesus and instead you're going somewhere else for it identify your idols get rid of them another possible cause is that you're sick and because we are complete integrated beings body mind soul that really does matter in our relationship with God you're sick with something that destroys your intimacy maybe with other people possibly with God something like depression can do that and you feel distant from God and you cannot feel the joy of your salvation you aren't distant from God but you feel it and friend ask him for his help ask him to heal you and however long that takes in the meantime thank God that real joy is not a feeling but it is your inheritance your right in Jesus forever if we're going to stand firm if we're going to endure with the

Lord Jesus if Bethel as a church is going to stand firm we have to rejoice in the Lord this is why Paul makes such a big deal of this he puts it so black and white doesn't he we have to rejoice in the Lord in his presence in who he is nothing else at the top of the list because the source of true joy and the reason for true joy and the goal of true joy are all the same they are all Jesus and we can rejoice always because he's always the same whether or not we feel like it Jesus says to us you can always rejoice in me because I am your joy let me just pray some words from 1 Peter 1 to help us Lord though we have not seen you we love you and even though we do not see you now help us to believe in you and so to be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy as we are receiving from you the end result of our faith the salvation of our souls amen

Thank you.