

How do we find joy that lasts?

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[0 : 00] Hey everybody. It's a real privilege to be here. We're really looking forward to coming back again. We've already prayed and we've read the passage so keep your Bible open as we hear from God's Word.

I've got a little question I want to start with. Have you heard of Blue Monday? Have you heard of Blue Monday? Tomorrow is Blue Monday.

It's actually labelled the most depressing day of the year. New Year's resolutions down the drain. It's dark. It's cold. We don't really want to go to work.

Christmas has been and gone. Everything just feels a little bit rubbish. When I was a secondary school teacher this kind of felt really real. This is a real thing.

People kind of doubt it's a real thing but at the whole school staff meeting quite a lot of people didn't turn up on that particular day. You know, are they ill or just, you know, another reason?

[1 : 00] How can we get through Blue Monday? How can we find joy in the joylessness? Perhaps you're lacking joy at the moment.

Maybe you're serving tirelessly on rotas at church. You're busy. You're discipling people. Maybe there's little payoff there. People aren't really noticing your efforts that you are putting in.

Perhaps you're just busy in life. You're up to your neck in paperwork. The next target's around the corner. Everything's just weighing you down. Maybe your life is just decidedly normal compared to what I've just said.

But as you look out of Bethel, you see lots of people really excited about Jesus. But maybe you're not one of those people. The world's answer, I think, is just to keep positive.

Grit your teeth. How superficial, how exhausting is that to keep up on the daily? How can we find joy in life, let alone Blue Monday?

[2 : 10] How do we find joy that lasts? Well, the book we're in today, Philippians, is all about joy. Last week, Johan helped us to see how to shine as Christians.

Shining stars for Jesus in a joyless world. Responding to Jesus' gracious salvation. But how do we keep that flame burning?

How can we have lasting joy? Well, the basic answer is this. Joy in Jesus.

It's how Paul starts that passage. You've got your Bible open. It's the first one. Rejoice in the Lord. That's the answer. Joy comes from Jesus.

But what does that really mean? You know, on its own, just saying that to somebody who's not very joyful, actually might be quite a blunt and unhelpful thing to say. But there's more, though.

[3 : 09] Look at the end of the verse. It is a safeguard for you. A safeguard for you. Paul doesn't just want us to feel happy for the sake of it.

This isn't self-help. This is safeguarding. Safety. Chapter 4, verse 1, if you look at that on the next page. Rejoicing means standing firm in the Lord.

Not fragile Christians who can't stand the trials of life at risk of banning Jesus. Joy in Jesus keeps us safe.

Standing firm. So how do we get this joy? Well, the first part of the answer is this. Get rid of competing joys.

Put no confidence in our achievements. No confidence in achievements. Now, there are some joy killers in town, in Philippi.

[4 : 10] And what they say was very dangerous. Yes, believe in Jesus. But also get circumcised. Also, keep the law a little bit. And then you'll be saved. Then you'll be okay with God.

Confidence before God in achievements, they're saying. But look at Paul's response in verse 3. It is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his spirit, who boast in Jesus Christ and put no

confidence in the flesh.

No confidence in what we do, our achievements. Confidence. Like a Christian is precisely someone who doesn't put confidence in what they do. But it's also, what we're going to realise is it's unsafe to do that.

Not because it's our eternal destiny, but partly because it hinders us from standing firm in Jesus and having joy. How well Paul says, look, believe me, I've tried this way of life and it's a horrible way to live.

Look at verse 4. Middle of verse 4. If someone else thinks they have reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. Verse 5. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regards to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

[5 : 40] What we've got here is kind of Paul's spiritual CV. With all his good deeds on his CV to say, this is who I am.

This is what I'm putting confidence in. But he ends the passage renouncing it all. Why? Why? Well, let's see what happens when we try to get joy from putting confidence in our spiritual CVs.

I mean, what's on your spiritual CV? What's on your spiritual CV? Maybe you could put faithful churchgoer. Lots of us have been at Bethel for many years.

We've been coming for a long time. What about a sacrificial server? Maybe you're on lots of rotors. You're sacrificially serving without many thanks at all. Many hours behind the scenes.

Maybe you could put good person. You know, if you're honest, people would say that you are a good person. You're a nice person. They wouldn't say you're a bad person, would they? Perhaps you're just quite successful at what you do in life.

[6 : 48] Maybe you contributed a lot to society and your job. Maybe you've just raised your children really well. How's your CV looking? I think we've all got things that we can point to and we're proud of.

Now, obviously, to fully rely on our achievements, to get into heaven, that isn't Christian. I think lots of us know that hardly any of us here are probably doing that. And if you think that's how you get to heaven, I think talk to me afterwards and keep listening.

I'd love to chat to you. But I think, actually, we do put confidence sometimes in more subtle ways in our spiritual CVs and without realising.

I know I'm saved because I believe in Jesus, we say, but surely that midweek ministry I run, that's going to count for something before God, isn't it? It's going to change how he looks at me a little bit. I know I've been shown grace, but what will God think of me if I don't read my Bible today? Surely if I'm a good family man, I work hard, God will give me the thumbs up.

[7 : 55] To myself, you know, I preach in church. Surely God thinks I'm pretty great. None of those things are kind of bad things in themselves.

But, you know, even those smaller, subtler ways of putting our confidence in our achievements, well, they lead to joylessness. Why is that?

Why do they lead to joylessness? Well, think about it. When you don't quite meet your expectations or other people's expectations, how do you feel? One minute you feel happy because you think God approves of you, other people approve of you.

Well, the next you're not. Because you fail. I fail. Look, when we take stock, we don't have a great CV.

We are sinners. It should say sinners. That's why our achievements can't give us joy. Because we're never going to be good enough to get that approval we want when we put confidence in what we do.

[9 : 05] You know, the moment you fail the facade of, you know, you're doing okay. Well, it all comes crashing down, doesn't it? I think we know that feeling. We're doing all right. We make a mistake.

And we just feel like failures. In despair. Joyless. You can't depend on achievements to give you joy.

What are you subtly putting confidence in? That's sapping your joy. Have a little think about that. Probably different for all of us.

But the main reason I think we can't find joy in achievements is because all the time we're searching for joy over here, it competes with joy in Jesus.

Put no confidence in achievements in order to know Jesus. Read from verse 7. I love this passage. Verse 7.

[10:11] Joy doesn't come from what we do, but who we know.

It's an exchange, isn't it? You want to know Jesus and you want to find joy in him? You've got to trade in those achievements. Empty hands before we take hold of Christ.

You know, we've got to think like an accountant, Paul says. All the things on our CV over here are kind of in the prophet column. Years served in church. Prophets.

All the evangelism you've done. Prophets. All the prayer and Bible reading and discipleship and all the being a good person I've done. Prophets. But we've got to count it as a loss.

We've got to count it as garbage. Paul says. Literally done. We've got to crumple up our CDs and chuck them away. But we gain Jesus.

[11:19] We gain immeasurable worth. Have a look at verse 8. What is more, I consider everything a loss because there's a passing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

This is my all-time favourite Bible verse. I promise you that. I'm not just saying that. I read it at my wedding. It's probably still on my Facebook profile from 10 years ago. It describes what a Christian is and why it's so good to be a Christian.

Christians are people who, we're in a relationship with a person. Listen, we know Jesus personally, don't we?

But the Jesus we know, what he highlights here is he's of surpassing worth to us. To know Christ is to know the one who you were made to know.

The most eternal, most valuable being in the whole universe. And now you can call that person friend.

[12:27] Jesus is our big brother. You can hear him in his word. You can pray to him. And you can know that he's with you in times of trouble.

That's kind of what knowing means practically, doesn't it? We know Jesus. It's staggering. I probably should have put this up on the board actually.

And this is a parable. One of Jesus' parables is very short. And he illustrates the idea in this passage. Listen carefully. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.

When a man found it, he hid it again. And then in his joy, went and sold all he had and bought that field. But the king of that kingdom is Jesus. And when you find him and you realise who he is, your God, your king, your saviour, your brother, your everything.

Well, we sell everything. We count it as a loss. And we find joy. And then in his joy, he went and sold all he had. Look, our world is searching for value.

[13:34] In so many different places. Money, success, valuable things. Crossing things off the bucket list. Experiences. They offer fleeting happiness, don't they? But not joy.

In Jesus we find the greatest treasure. What our hearts were really looking for all along. Who our hearts were made to treasure. The eternal creator.

The one who saved us. We drop everything for Jesus. And we gain everything. I think this is why only Jesus can give us this lasting joy.

Here's a helpful definition from a famous Bible author, John Piper. You might know him. Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul. Seeing the beauty of Christ. A good feeling in the soul.

Seeing the beauty of Christ. A good feeling. Not a kind of a thought or an idea. It's in the soul. It's not in our bodies. It might not manifest itself in a big beaming smile all the time.

[14:37] Independent of circumstance. That Christians are people who are just ecstatic and joyful. They have found treasure. Jesus is everything we could ever ask or ever want.

We've got him. It's actually joy on offer all the time. He will never fail us. It's not dependent on our circumstances. Jesus is our treasure that we can rejoice in and know now.

Supreme value. And that gives us joy. But it gets better because knowing Jesus means that we can rejoice because we've gained his righteousness.

We have Jesus' achievements. Let's read from verse 9. Talking about Jesus. And be found in him. Jesus. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Lord.

My CV. But that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. When we put our faith in Christ.

[15:41] Jesus' righteousness becomes our righteousness. Our achievements. The things that we do. All his achievements get credited to us.

So back to our CVs. I've got another one here. There's no joy from this fault ridden CV. You're trying to get approval. You never get it.

You fail. But when we ditch our CVs. Actually. We gain Jesus' CV. In return.

What does this mean for us? Well. Jesus' perfect obedience. Even to death on a cross. All the times that he kept the law. And obeyed when it was hard.

All the times he served. Well. This becomes ours. This becomes ours. When we trust in Christ. And we fully rely on him. By faith. Now in God's eyes.

[16:36] What does he see? He doesn't. He doesn't see this. He sees this. When he looks at us. Perfect. And this is cause for rejoicing.

Because. It means God will always love us. Look. God looked at Jesus. And he said. You are my perfect. Son. You have done everything I have asked. Come into heaven.

Take the throne. But now through knowing Christ. Trusting him. All that approval. All that delight in Jesus. Is directed at us. Jesus' perfect life.

Is. Is ours. As if we have lived it. No more. Have to worry about our reputation.

No more constantly trying to prove ourselves. Or constantly straying. Striving for the perfect looking life. Our performance doesn't affect how God sees us anymore. Despite your failures.

[17:34] God. Couldn't be more happy with you. Today. Because of Jesus. He's not frowning at you. He sees us as perfect. We never have to.

Worry if we've done enough. Or. Done enough for heaven. It's secure. It's secure. It's secure. Jesus actually gives us achievements that we can rejoice in.

They mean that. God's 100% for us. So if you know Jesus today. This is great news.

If you're a busy parent. You're striving for perfection. Or someone who's constantly working overtime to get approval from your boss. Or maybe you're a teenager.

You're just anxious about getting the grades. Approval from your parents. Or you're someone who's looking for favour. God's favour in your quiet times. Your prayer life. You can just feel that.

[18:30] Relief. And peace. And the joy of knowing that all those failures aren't accounted against you. That weight off your shoulders. You're loved. God is for you.

You're safe. In him. Strange achievements. For knowing Jesus. That's where the joy is found.

So what would it look like to be joyful if we grasp this? Recently I heard someone say this this week. It's cold. It's dark. She's a teacher. I'm just nagging the kids all day. I just want to find that joy. Perhaps that'll be you tomorrow on Blue Monday.

Waking up early. You drag yourself out of bed. Maybe that's you every day. You put in the working life. You try your best to please God in your Christian life. But it's never enough.

[19:28] At least it's fair. Where do we find the joy that lasts? Well, let me tell you about a man at my church. He really is joyful. You know you look at some people. And they are just beaming.

You know. He is joyful. But last year he proved it was real joy. Not just worldly happiness. Why? Because he had a...

Unfortunately he had a cardiac event. A problem with his heart. He was okay in the end. But actually it was a little bit touch and go. You can imagine he must have been... How he must have been feeling on the ward.

Quite scared. His achievements aren't really helping in this moment, are they? But despite all that, he rejoiced. He knew he still had Jesus.

He said to me that he brought to mind some of those verses in Philippians. He knew that God loved him to the death. It was real joy. He was sharing the gospel to people on the ward.

[20:30] I love that. It's supernatural joy, isn't it? That's what joy is. Despite what you go through, you're glad in your soul. You can rest assured that Jesus is the only person you need.

So next time it's all going wrong for you. Your car breaks. Your children are screaming. Your health is playing up again. Even in those moments you can stop and say, Wait a second.

Wait a second. I've got Jesus. And that means I've got everything. The creator of the universe, the greatest treasure is mine.

He's never going to fail me. I've got the highest never-ending approval from the most high God. I don't need to prove myself or find joy in my CV. I have Jesus's.

He loves me. The joyful Christian knows Jesus and what they have in him. Look, brothers and sisters, this joy might seem out of reach for you.

[21 : 34] How can I rejoice in my situation, you might say. You're busy in church ministry, that daily grind, 24-7 parenting. You might have resigned yourself to the fact that you are never going to be joyful.

You might be thinking that now. Well, Christian, this is joy where it's ready for us. It's ready for the taking in the Lord Jesus.

Now, it might not look like a beaming smile across your face all day. But it will look like a deep gladness in your soul that is unshakable. A warm-hearted confidence, security, safety, satisfaction, hope in Jesus.

A deep assurance that Jesus has done everything for you. The greatest being knows you by name. Reclaim that privilege. Reclaim what is rightfully yours.

Enjoy afresh what it means to be in relationship with Jesus. That's the joyful Christian life. I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

[22 : 42] You know Jesus. You have everything. Let me pray. Father God, we thank you that Jesus died on the cross for us.

That he lived that perfect life. That at the resurrection, you put your stamp on him to say that he is righteous. And thank you, Lord, that if we put our faith in him, that we get that declaration on us too. Father, thank you that we know Jesus. Thank you that's what the Christian life is like for us. We pray that we press on to know him even more.

Amen.