

United by the Gospel

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Date: 18 September 2022

Preacher: James Barnett

- [0 : 0 0] The great Japanese philosopher and house declutterer Marie Kondo called us to throw away things that don't spark joy.
- She made us ask that great question, does it spark joy? Do you remember this? It was a couple of years ago. We'd take something and think, how does this make me feel?
- Does it spark joy? I was tempted to pick up my children and ask that question. No, I didn't do that. That's okay. Joy, defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is a feeling of pleasure or happiness that comes from success, good fortune, or a sense of well-being.
- That seems to be the worldview of most of us. I am built for joy based on the things that I have, the things that I hold, the things that I can achieve, and I will pursue joy at the expense of other things.
- I will hold some things, they will give me joy, I'll hold some things and I'll put them in the bin because they do not bring me joy. Joy, according to Marie Kondo, is about having the right stuff, or the right amount of the right stuff.
- [1 : 1 4] And that dictionary definition of joy, well, I think we'd all like some of that. Joy from a sense of well-being and good fortune.
- And I think that's been pretty hard to have over the last couple of years. Can we depend on something so intangible as well-being or good fortune to find joy?
- Here's another definition of joy. This is Pastor John Piper from the US, his definition of joy. Christian joy is a good feeling produced in the soul, feeling in the soul produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world.
- There's a little bit more going on there, so let me just unpack that briefly. Joy is a feeling. It's a feeling. It's a feeling found in the soul, not in the head, not in the mind.
- It is not just an idea, but it is something that comes upon us. It is a feeling that comes. It's produced by the Holy Spirit. It's not produced by things.
- [2 : 2 3] There is no shortcut to real joy, but it is from God. And we find it in the beauty of Christ, as we see it in his word and in the world.
- So as we sit down and do, you know, as we seek to do four or more devotions, seek to read the Bible, or as we see the impact of God in the world, as we've heard briefly today about what God is doing in Japan and in Germany.
- So one view of joy says it's found in the things we have or the things that we chase in a temporary way. And the other says it is from God and it is not temporary because our God is not temporary.
- I wonder if we know where we are seeking our joy from, or if we end up getting stuck chasing fake joys.
- Looking at myself, I'm actually worried that I won't even chase joy in this season because it's too great of a risk. And so instead, I will just try to avoid pain.

[3 : 34] I'll avoid difficulties. And so I don't want to have real lows. So I'm not going to try and do real highs, try and work hard to get real highs instead. Because it has been a hard season, joy just seems far away.

And so this week we are starting a short four-week season in the book of Philippians, united by joy. Two weeks ago in chapter 15 of Romans, Paul spoke about how he longed to visit the church in Rome.

And he's now achieved it. It's wonderful. It's just a slight problem. He's in prison. He wanted to go and visit the church, but he can't because he's under arrest.

He's under lock and key. And so while he's in Rome, he writes this letter to encourage the Philippian church that he planted. And so today, as we see this letter that Paul writes to the church in Philippi, we're going to start building a picture of what real joy is, true and lasting joy.

A joy that is deeply satisfying. Our one key aspect of that joy that we find is in relationship with others. And so today, there are three points for us.

[4 : 52] You can find them on the St. Paul's app. Have that open. Have your Bible open. Three points. Joy in relationships. Joyful ambition. And joyful sacrifice. Let me pray and we'll have a look.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for your word to us. Father, I pray that today, as we read your word, we would see the beauty of Christ.

That we would find joy in you, not in temporary things, Lord. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. United by joy.

And so first of all, we see some joyful relationships. When Paul starts writing his letters, he often writes about how much he has affection for a church.

And Philippians, the letter to the Philippians, is just such a delightful start to a letter. He has such deep affection for these people. He loves them dearly.

[5 : 51] Chapter 1, verse 3. I thank my God every time I remember you. And he prays with joy in all of my prayers for all of you.

I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Paul gets joy from this church partnership.

He gets real joy. That definition from Piper, he is getting to see the impact of the beauty of Christ in the world. He is seeing how God is impacting this church and it is giving him joy.

They are sharing the good news of Jesus. They are growing like Paul and they are growing in God confidence. The way Paul describes where he gets his joy, it's really helpful.

It's really instructive for us. He gets it from a partnership with them. His joy is not just from the fact that these people are like him.

[6 : 57] He is not saying, I have great affection from you, Philippians church, because you are like me. We have a lot in common. We are doing similar kinds of things.

He doesn't just have affection for them because they are easy to love. It's not just like, you know, those memes of cute puppies you see. Oh, I have such affection for you.

You're adorable. He doesn't just get joy sitting next to them in church singing the same songs. He doesn't get joy just from having a coffee over morning tea. He doesn't even get joy from having a meal with them after church.

These are places to start a relationship or to continue to build. But he gets joy from partnership. They are co-workers.

They have the same drive, the same vision. Jesus is continuing the good work in them. They want to love Jesus more and they want to see more people love Jesus.

[7 : 59] The New Testament often uses this partnership word. And it's a bit strange when you read in the original language because it's a business term. It's a picture of two people getting into business together.

It's like somebody buying a company, a bus company or something. You know, two people. We're both going to invest all of our life savings into this company. We are both invested. We both need this to work.

This is the idea of Paul. We have both committed to this. We both love Jesus. We both want to see him known in the world.

We both want to see Christianity flourish across the world. There is warmth and intimacy here. Because Paul has a shared vision with them.

These people are going in the same direction. And he is thanking these brothers and sisters that from the moment of conversion, they have rolled up their sleeves and they've gotten involved in the advancement of the gospel.

[9 : 05] They've served. They've shared the gospel. They've prayed for Paul. They've sent money. It is all a picture of what is important in church partnership. Back when I was in Moore College, many, many years ago now, it was a really unique time.

It was, on the one hand, wonderful because I just had four years of studying theology and studying God's word. But one of the unique joys was that at the time we lived in Parramatta.

And there's just a unique joy from living in Parramatta. And we lived with 18 other families in the exact same situation. They were all studying and serving in church.

And we were all going through the exact same things. And there was a joy to see each of us flourishing, to see them succeeding in what God was teaching them to do.

And so there was a joy in church partnership going, oh, look, you know, this person, he's the year ahead of me. They're going out to a church now. They're serving in a church. Isn't that amazing that they're doing that now? Gospel ministry, when we deeply partner, there is joy to be found there.

[10 : 22] That definition from John Piper of joy, a feeling of joy. Paul is getting a feeling of joy, not brought from a success he has had, but from seeing the impact of Christ's work in someone else's life.

They are going in the same direction. The Philippian church has been changed to be like Jesus. They have been so impacted by the beauty of Jesus that Paul gets joy from them as they're going in the same direction.

Church, we as a church missed out on something last week. We missed out on something quite unique. We had a prayer afternoon on Zoom with our mission partners.

And there was only a couple of us that attended. And we actually missed out on having an opportunity to encourage and hear from our missionaries directly over Zoom.

It's one of the strange things that came out of COVID last year, being able to have our mission partners in the same online room as us. And we as a church missed out on being there and hearing from them directly and praying for them and getting the joy that comes from deep gospel partnership.

[11 : 43] So let me be encouraging you. Know what they're up to. Check the emails and be reading in the mission book about what our mission partners are doing.

Be praying for them. Send them an email so that we can have joy from seeing Christ work across the world. Paul is so focused on seeing people saved and starting churches that he, in one sense, doesn't care how it happens.

He has such a joyful ambition for the gospel. It's our second point today. That, in one sense, he doesn't care about how it happens. And he talks about, let me go forward.

Thank you. Yes, thank you. Verse 12. Paul continues by talking about the elephant in the room. He is in prison.

I can imagine people in the church in Philippi going, oh, there's a letter from Paul. He sent us a letter. He's the guy that's in prison. Should we really listen to him? Well, he can't be really spreading the gospel in Rome if he's stuck in prison, can he?

[12 : 55] If he's locked up, should we even listen to this letter being read out? And as he answers this question, it reveals his joyful ambitions.

Verse 12. Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me, the fact that he's been arrested and he's in prison, has actually served to advance the gospel.

I wanted to come to Rome. I wanted to advance the gospel here. And even change to these soldiers, this has advanced the gospel. It's happened in three ways.

The first way, the palace guard. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Historians tell us that the palace guard, the praetorian guard, was 9,000 soldiers.

Paul is such an extraordinary prisoner who he has made it clear that he is there because of a dead Jewish rabbi who he claims has come back to life.

[13 : 59] Instead of protesting his innocence or trying to curry favor in the Roman court, he is talking about a man who has been raised to life.

Paul was so unique that stories spread around about him, but also about Jesus because it was for Jesus that he was in chains.

Paul wanted to go to Rome and have an impact for the gospel. He would never have dreamt of being able to impact 9,000 soldiers and the whole palace with the gospel.

It's almost like he's infiltrated the palace as a spy, but under lock and key. It is such a wonderful accidental turn of events.

It's clearly only God at work. He has that feeling of joy seeing God at work in the world. The second impact of his confinement is in verse 14.

[15 : 06] Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. Oh, wow.

Paul, he's in prison and he's still preaching the gospel. He can face persecution. And we'll get to the persecution that he's facing in chapter 4 later when he says that he can endure all of this because of God who strengthens him.

But he is an encouragement to others. And I love Paul's descriptions here. These people have become confident in the Lord. Confident.

That's what we want, isn't it? We want to have more and more confidence in the Lord. And they dare all the more to proclaim without fear. Now this really takes me back to my primary school years.

When was the last time someone dared you to do something? When was the last time someone said, I dare you. I double dare you. That was the language of me growing up.

[16 : 09] I think I had this moment. Well, not I. My wife with the kids were out yesterday at the beach. I think my darling daughter was daring my son to climb up a rock wall.

And he did because he doesn't have any fear. And then he fell down and sliced the bottom side of his toe. He's fine. But this concept of dare. I dare you to go up to them and tell them about Jesus.

I wonder if there, for me, there is similarities with language learning. Because for me, we need to be dared to do things because there's fear. I think this is why children and maybe young men do it.

I dare you. Because we want to show that we don't have fear. I don't have fear. I'm not fearful. I'm a big kid. I'm a man. So dare me. Do whatever you like.

And so for me, I see similarities with language learning. It's often described as being really hard for adults to learn another language. Children are better at language learning, I hear. And there's probably truth to that.

[17 : 16] But I've also heard that adults can learn language faster than children. But the problem is fear. You can compare a two-year-old and a 42-year-old in their language learning.

A two-year-old does not have fear. So they stumble and they mumble. They say whatever they need to communicate. My three-year-old nephew, I cannot understand about 50% of what he says.

But I get the rough enough gist of it. That's how we learn language. But an adult will often not say anything unless it is perfect. Because they are fearful of getting it wrong.

Being looked down on, I must say the perfect things. I must have the perfect grammar. I must have the perfect tones. I must know all of the words. I must know everything before I say anything.

Fear rules the adult. Isn't this the same when it comes to sharing the gospel? What if I don't know what I'm going to say? What if I don't have all of the words?

[18 : 21] What if I get it wrong? What if they say something back to me and I don't know how to answer it? I wonder if this is often why our kids are better evangelists.

Hey, come to my church. Hey, come to youth group. Come to this lunchtime group at school. There's food. And they're not as fearful of being knocked down. The Roman church, seeing Paul in chains, sharing the gospel, it grew their confidence in God and not in themselves.

And so they were not controlled by fear. They dared to share the gospel. Making mistakes. Stumbling, I'm sure.

But learning to speak the language of how good Jesus is. And so brothers and sisters, let me encourage you. Share the gospel. Don't be motivated by fear.

But by confidence in God. And do you know what? If the series throughout the book of Romans hasn't given us confidence in God, I don't know what will because that is wonderful truth about God and how he is sovereign and good and he is in control of all things and he works in us.

[19 : 38] The third thing that Paul finds is that he is joyful and has joyful ambition despite how the gospel goes out.

Paul was so motivated by seeing the gospel go out, he did not care how it went out. For him personally, in prison, didn't care. I'll tell these people around me. They'll tell others and they'll come back to me and they'll find out more.

He is so ambitious for people to know about Jesus. He is so motivated by joy. He doesn't care if others have bad motives. Verse 15. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

It seems that there are factions within the church, those who have good and those who have poor motives. It seems as if there were preachers and leaders within the church building up their own ministry while putting down Paul's.

[20 : 55] Paul must have deep character flaws. He must have all kinds of issues and that's why he's in prison. I'm not in prison. I'm blessed out here. God is blessing me and my ministry. Now, I'm not sure how you'd respond in that situation.

I'm not sure if you'd feel the need to defend yourself. But Paul's response in verse 18, what does it matter? What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or from true, Christ is preached.

And because of this, I rejoice. What does it matter? Christ is being preached. I will rejoice. Paul's example is clear. Put the advance of the gospel at the center of our ambitions, our own comforts, our own bruised feelings, our own reputations, our misunderstood motives.

All of these are insignificant compared to the glory, the beauty and the goodness of God. What do they matter? And so Paul says to rejoice.

Paul has a singular vision in life. He can be joyful in prison because his ambition isn't about his situation. His joy is not found in his money, his marriage or in the size of his following.

[22 : 16] His joy isn't found in his desire to travel. His joy, that feeling in the soul given, produced by the Holy Spirit, is because he is seeing the beauty of Christ at work in the world.

People are hearing about Jesus. And the church is growing and spreading because of it. What are our ambitions for the future? Is it to have a good name?

A good reputation? A good house? A good job? A good marriage? To have children and grandchildren? To retire early? To have good health? All of these are good things.

But the question is whether these ambitions become so devouring that the central ambition is squeezed to the side or choked entirely. I so care about my reputation that I'm fearful about telling this person about Jesus.

This relationship is so important that I won't tell them I'm a Christian. And even though I'm dating them, it doesn't matter that they are not a Christian.

[23 : 20] This job, this money is so important that it cuts into my time worshipping God with my church or meeting with my community group. Well, it's worth it because this is my central ambition in life.

We all have ambitions for the future. And that's a good thing. But they can choke our chance to find true joy because those things will never satisfy.

We think that holding them will spark joy and they might for a moment, but not compared to the joy found in the eternal God. Finally and briefly, joyful sacrifice.

We see Paul struggling with his desire to be with Jesus and his desire to serve the church. I could preach a whole sermon on this part of Philippians.

It is quite a famous part of Philippians, but I'm not going to today. It's a picture of joyful sacrifice. What he will give up so that others can have joy. Verse 21.

[24 : 24] For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's very similar to the construction in the language that Steve spoke about last week.

For to me to live, Christ. And to die, gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me.

Yet what shall I choose? I do not know. I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is by far better. Paul's experience is so like Jesus's.

His well-being is so closely tied to other people. Jesus, out of joy for us, sacrificed himself.

And Paul, even though he wants to go and be with Jesus, is choosing to stay for other people's well-being. Verse 25. I know that I will remain. And I will continue with all of you for your progress and your joy in the faith.

[25 : 28] His decision about his future is what is best for other people's joy. He is so ambitious for the church to have joy. He will stay. So that they too can have that feeling of joy produced by the Holy Spirit, seeing God at work in his word and in the world.

Individually, we are faced with seeking our own personal joys and treasuring Jesus more. And so the challenge is about where we are finding our joy.

Brothers and sisters, to be honest, I'm actually really tired and pretty weary at the moment. I'm looking forward to holidays coming up. And I know the trap that they are, that I'll find joy in those holidays.

But at 7am this morning, as I stood and looked at my coffee machine, thinking about making my second coffee of the morning, I felt a fraud.

I was thinking that I've got to get up and speak about joy. And I'm not feeling very joyful. And I'm tempted to have a false joy, tempted to have an excitableness produced by caffeine.

[26 : 43] And I took a moment just remembering, I'm not sure if it was me or if it was God reminding me of Cheney's video today, which I recorded a couple of weeks ago, how great it is to hear about how God is working.

Just that moment of seeing real joy that God is seeing people come to know and love him. Real joy hearing about the beauty of Jesus being seen across the world.

And here in us, so brothers and sisters, this morning, as we finish in a couple of moments and we go out and have caffeine, and there's nothing wrong with caffeine, it is potential that we will miss out on seeing the impact of God in each of us.

We can just go through the motions and talk about our days and our weeks and how good the weather is. And the weather is good. And it is lovely. And it does make us feel better. But it is not joy.

We can get joy when we see how God is working in each other and in his word. So maybe even this morning, you grab a coffee, you sit down with someone and read some Bible.

[27 : 59] Or you ask them, how is God shaping you? What is God growing in you? What is God doing in your life? I want to know. I want some joy. Let me tell you what God is doing in my life.

Let me give you joy. I've been reading this in the Bible. This is wonderfully nourishing for me. Paul adds a wonderful element of finding joy where we see God working in the world and in other people.

There is a joy that can be found in seeing what God is doing in others. Jesus has so blessed us and made us into a family, he calls us to be going in the same direction, to have true partnership so we can celebrate and rejoice like Paul in the impact of God's word and work in our lives.

Let me pray that we would do that. Heavenly Father, I thank you for Paul's words here and to see the joy he gets from seeing the impact of you in their lives.

Lord, thank you for reminders today from Chenny that you are working in the world. God, you are working far away from us and you are working deeply within us.

[29 : 22] Lord, help us not to be quick to miss out on that, Lord. Help us build deep partnerships in the gospel.

Not just relationships of knowing one another, but of partnerships of loving each other and serving you together, Lord. Father, we ask that you would be giving us joy found only in you today.

We ask this in your son's name. Amen.