

“From Anxiety to Joy—Joyful No Matter What”

We’re starting a new series today called “Moving From Anxiety to Joy”. The title for today’s message is Joyful No Matter What. We’re going to be using the book of the Bible called Philippians as our guide in this as we find ways to live joyfully in anxious times. As we study through the book of Philippians to fully understand what God wants to teach us, we have got to first embrace the context of who wrote the book, when it was written and why it was written. So let’s establish that today.

Here’s the context: The apostle Paul founded the church in Philippi on his second missionary journey around 52 A.D. So what does that tell us? Well, it shows us that about 20 years or so after the death and the resurrection of Christ the church in Philippi is up, it’s doing great. You could argue that this church in Philippi was the church that Paul loved the very most. He was very close to them. In fact, in all the other letters that Paul would write, he would always start off by revealing his office as an apostle. He would say “Paul, an apostle”.

An apostle simply means a sent one, one who is sent by Christ. Literally, the guy was a church planter. He would go in and he would preach the message. He would raise up a group of believers. He would disciple some leaders. He would train them and then release them and they would carry on the church and then he would go plant another one. This is the only letter that he wrote where he didn’t say, “I’m an apostle,” because he didn’t need to. He loved them, they loved him.

The second thought is this. Paul wrote the book of Philippians in 62 A.D. So about 10 years after he started the church he wrote this as a thank you letter to the Philippians. Now, what was he telling them thank you for? Well, there was a guy named Epaphroditus who delivered a very generous love offering. The Philippian church knew that the apostle Paul was in need, they took up an offering and Epaphroditus risked his life, he almost died in order to give this gift to Paul. Not only did the people of that church in Philippi send an offering to help Paul, but they covered everything for Epaphroditus—his business, his family, his home while he was there with Paul for what was probably a year, maybe longer. Another interesting thing about this is that Paul was adamant about not taking money from any of the churches he started. Whenever Paul was working to start a church, he’d work on the side (he was a tentmaker) and pay his bills that way. This was the first time that he humbled himself and he said, “We’re like family, I’m in desperate need. I’ll receive this gift from you guys, I know it will be a blessing.” He wrote this letter back as an overwhelming way of saying, “Thank you, I cannot believe you guys did this for me.”

And then this third thought is maybe the most important for our study. Write this down. Paul wrote the Philippians from a Roman prison while awaiting possible execution. So everything that we study, we have to study with that thought in mind. Paul was locked up 24 hours a day. From what I’ve learned he spent part of his imprisonment in the darkest, nastiest part of the prison in Rome, basically a hole in the ground. But he also spent part of that two years under house arrest. During that time he was chained to a Roman soldier. He was literally chained.

For part of that two years, he was chained up 24 hours a day to a Roman guard, locked up and the crazy thing is as he wrote the book of Philippians, there is one word that all Bible scholars agree describe this letter more than any other, and it is simply the word **joy**.

And what’s amazing to me is that there was one place that Paul always wanted to go to preach the gospel. One place he wanted to go more than any other and that place was the city of Rome. You see, Rome was the center of the Roman Empire. It was the hub location and Paul knew that if he could reach the Romans for Christ, then from that very place that he could send the gospel into all the world. He dreamed about going to Rome, he wrote about it, he talked about it. He envisioned going to Rome as a preacher, but instead he went there as a prisoner.

Everything he’d always wanted, his life dream, his greatest expectations were stripped out from underneath him and yet, he wrote this amazingly joyful letter. That may be where Paul’s story and your story intersect. Because maybe you’re saying, “I wish there was something different in my life. If only this one thing or these two things or these series of events were different. I thought that by the time I reached this age in life,

this position, things would be different.” There may be some things that are nagging you in the back of your mind that have robbed you of your joy.

Would you say that there is maybe one or a few things that you would love to change in your life? Here is what I would like for you to do if you would, think for a minute and write this thought down. What do you wish that you could change? If you could change something in your life, what would it be? How would you finish the statement, “I really wish I could change this in my life...” You might jot down a word or two or you might jot down a few notes in your notes. What I would like for you to do is experience the teaching of Philippians based on that which you wish that you could change.

Now how many of you would say that quite honestly maybe this week you had a day that wasn't so good? You had a bad day and it was kind of frustrating to you. If you did, listen to this just for fun. I thought this might kind of lift your spirits. This is supposedly a true story. I found it on Paramedic online News Service. If you thought you had a bad day, listen to this guy. A man was working on his motorcycle on his patio and his wife was in the house in the kitchen. The man was racing the engine on the motorcycle and somehow, the motorcycle slipped into gear. The man still holding on to the handlebars was dragged through the glass patio door, along with the motorcycle, dumped onto the floor inside the house.

The wife, hearing the crash, ran into the dining room and found the husband lying on the floor cut and bleeding, the motorcycle lying next to him and the patio door shattered. The wife ran to the phone and summoned an ambulance. Because they lived on a fairly large hill, the wife went down several flights of long steps to the street to direct the paramedics to her husband.

After the ambulance arrived and transported her husband to the hospital, the wife up righted the motorcycle, pushed it outside and seeing that gas had spilled on the floor in a big puddle, she got a roll of paper towels, wiped up the gasoline and threw the towels in the toilet.

The husband was treated at the hospital and was released to come home. After arriving home, he looked at the shattered patio door and the damage done to his motorcycle, he became despondent, went to the bathroom, sat on the toilet and smoked a cigarette. After finishing the cigarette, he flipped it between his legs into the toilet bowl while still seated. Let us pause for a moment of prayer. The wife who was in the kitchen heard a loud explosion and her husband screaming. She ran into the bathroom and found her husband laying on the floor, his trousers had been blown away, he was suffering burns on the buttocks, the back of his legs and his groin.

The wife again ran to the phone and called an ambulance. The same ambulance crew was dispatched and the wife met them at the street. The paramedics loaded the husband on the stretcher and began carrying him to the street. While they were going down the stairs accompanied by the wife, one of the paramedics asked the wife how the husband burned himself. She told him and the paramedic started laughing so hard that one of them tipped the stretcher and dumped the husband out. He fell down the remainder of the steps and broke his arm. So you thought you had a bad day. (from *Living Hope* By Claude T. Stauffer)

Can we be joyful no matter what? The answer is absolutely. And the key is found in a little book called Philippians. Everything that Paul had dreams of was stripped out from underneath him and yet, he was joyful in spite of the circumstances. How do we do that? In the next few weeks, we are going to discover.

Today, we're going to start with a foundational thought which is this; we must learn to ask the right question rather than the wrong one. **Instead of asking “Why?” we learn to ask “What?”** Instead of saying, “Why is this happening, I don't understand, why, why, why, why, why?” Instead, we're going to ask “What?”

That's exactly what Paul did. He asked, “Now what?” Now what is God doing? Now what is God's purpose? Now what does God want to show me? Now what does God want to do through this? In verse 12, instead of asking *why*, Paul asks *what* and we see exactly what God was doing. He said, **“Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel” (Philippians 1:12, TNIV).**

Paul is saying, “To the untrained eye, what I'm going through looks like a tragedy, but if you have eyes to see, you're going to see what God is doing. To the untrained ear, this sounds like a tragedy, but to those who have ears to hear, you're going to see that God actually had a purpose. What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.”

In verses 13 and 14 Paul says, "**As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And 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**" (Phil. 1:23-24, TNIV). He's saying, "Because I'm chained up here, others are saying, 'We'll go and proclaim this message of Jesus with passion.'"

Now here's what's crazy. The very chains that the Roman soldiers thought would restrain Paul, God actually used to release him. The very chains that looked like they would bind him were the chains that God used to free him. Why is that? Paul wanted to reach Rome and what better way to reach Rome than to reach the leaders of Rome? Who were the leaders? The Roman soldiers who happened to be chained 24 hours a day to the apostle Paul. They were the Praetorian Guard. They were the best of the best elite military. They were the body guards of the Emperor himself. As Paul talked to people, as Christians visited him, as he wrote and conversed, these elite soldiers heard every word. Paul would have had plenty of time to talk to them personally about why he was in chains. And every 6 hours Paul would get a new chained up prisoner. You start to have to ask yourself who was the real prisoner don't you? What are the chains in your life that are binding you? That which you wish you could change. The thing that you may feel restricts you, may be the very thing that God uses to release you.

God is the one that changes what we call obstacles into opportunities. God is the one who can take what we define as set-backs and he can use them as set-ups. The very thing that we wish would change, the chains, that which we think binds us could be the very thing that God uses to release us. That which we thought would restrain us, God used to release us. What are you chained to? A problem? A struggling relationship? A physical problem? Financial problem? That which we often most would like to change may be the very place that God does the greatest work. You may say, "Man I feel like I'm a prisoner of something." You, like Paul, are no ordinary prisoner. You're a prisoner with a purpose. When something happens that we don't understand, the first thing that we're going to say is, "Now what?" Everybody say it. Now what? Now what do you want to do God? What opportunities arise because of my chains?

The second thing we're going to say and this thing you have to say with a little attitude or it doesn't work, we're going to learn to say... "So what?" You got to say it with a little more attitude. So what? Paul learned to say on things that don't really matter, so what? So what.

Here's what's happening in some of the early churches--there were some people who were preaching Christ and they were kind of trying to gain popularity so that people would like them more than Paul. Some preached about Jesus with a sense of rivalry toward Paul. "I can do this better than you, Paul." And here's what Paul said about it. He said in 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. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.**"

Notice that little phrase there "But what does it matter?" Circle that. In Greek it's *tis gar plen*. So what? Paul's saying, "Some people are preaching out of love, some to be popular, some for profit. I wish it wasn't that way. It kind of offends me a little bit, but in the end who really cares? People are hearing about Jesus." *Tis gar plen*. So what?

So when you run into something that starts to steal your joy, if it doesn't really matter, *tis gar plen*. So what? Yes, there are some things that are very important and when we run up against something that is very important, we address it and take it before the Lord with intensity and passion. But generally, the things that freak most of us out are the little things that don't really matter that much. It's the little things that make me go home cranky. It's the little things that bring fights up in a lot of the marriages. It's the little things that make us wig out and we learn to say *tis gar plen*. So what?

Not every situation merits a "So what?" Here's how we judge if you can say it. You ask yourself so what will this matter 100 years from now? If it doesn't, *tis gar plen*, so what. Ask yourself, "What does this really matter in eternity?" If it doesn't, *tis gar plen*, so what, and then you ask yourself, what is really important right now? That which is important, we address. That which isn't *tis gar plen*.

Try it out. If it doesn't matter that much say, "So what?" Your car broke down. So what. Yeah it's a pain. But 100 years from now, so what? You don't really like your job? So what. Are you going to let that steal your joy or are you going to see that maybe God has a purpose there for you. So what. So and so doesn't like you. So what. So what. Are you here to please people or here to please God? Your hair is thinning. So what. Yea, that wasn't very convincing. So what if you got more hair on your back than you do on your head. I mean 100 years from now it's not going to matter.

Some things do matter and you take them before the Lord and you try to figure out what to do with it, right. If it doesn't matter, *tis gar plen*. You hit a wall, you don't understand, you feel chained, that which the world means to restrain you, God may use to release you, now what? What has really happened has served to advance the gospel, sometimes in ways that make me cringe. So what? I'm not going to let it get me down." Is the state of being joyful no matter what possible? Oh absolutely. Absolutely.

Now, we're not talking about happiness because happiness and joy are two different things. Happiness is based on happenings. When happenings are good, we're happy. When happenings are not good, we're not happy. Joy though is never based on happenings. Joy is based on God and God alone.

How do you get there? Mastering the right questions is a start. Now what? What do you want to do God? So what? If it doesn't matter, it's not going to get me down. That's what I would call level 1 of the joyful life and I'm not completely there yet, but I'm a heck of a lot closer today than I was a year ago.

There is another level though that I call the ultimate joy. That's where Paul was and we can be. Now remember, where was Paul when he wrote this, he was in prison and he was facing execution. In fact in 62 A.D. he was taken out and beheaded. He knew it was coming. And in verse 21, he wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and in the context that he was literally facing death. He said, "**For me to live is Christ and to die is gain**" (Phil. 1:21, TNIV). For me to live is to represent Christ. It is for my life to count for Christ. To die is even better. In the next few verses he basically says, "I don't know which to chose. To be honest, I'd rather die and go to heaven which is better by far, but for your sake, I'd probably better stay and so that's what I'll chose." How to be joyful no matter what, the ultimate joy, the win-win situation. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Now I'm not there and I'll tell you why, I'll just be real honest, because I still care too much about what you think about me. I still care too much about things that do not last. I still get wrapped up in things that don't matter in eternity, but with the help and the power of God, within my lifetime I pray that I will be able to say no matter what for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. And at that moment, I can glorify God with a joy that is real no matter what. It's possible for you as well. And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us pray.

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