

## Foundations of a Joyful Church

### Acts 16:25-40

*“Joy is the serious business of heaven.” C.S Lewis*

**Introduction:** In an article from June 8, 2018, Paul Sullivan dove into the age old question, "Can money buy happiness?"<sup>1</sup> (since the Beatles told us you can't buy me love). The answer was not shocking: YES, money actually bought them a lot of happiness. A survey of 200 people from ages 25-65 with assets ranging from \$1 million to \$20 million said they equated wealth first and foremost with **peace of mind** and second with **happiness**. They mentioned the freedom, independence, and satisfaction followed the acquisition of wealth, but it was NOT without its downside. Many cited the weight of obligation that money brought, while more **regretted the sacrifice of their family in pursuit of wealth**. Sullivan wrote, "What I found is something that won't surprise anyone who struggles to pay the bills: *more money is better than less. But financial comfort does not make the feelings around wealth less difficult.*"

What does this point to? 1) Money brings a certain type of happiness (peace of mind, freedom, comfort), and that happiness satisfies in part, but is not lasting and not without regret. I am more happy when the new alternator on our van cost almost exactly what we had budgeted, rather than having to find the money somewhere else. But I also know there will be more fixes to come; 2) there is diminishing returns on the pursuit of happiness and the cost of that pursuit can be devastating. One can get to the end of wealth and utter what Solomon stated in Ecclesiastes 5:10, "*He who loves money will never be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this is also vanity.*"

How does this factor into our look at happiness vs. joy? Happiness is good, its a gift, it is not ultimate, and it is also NOT A RIGHT. In other words, since happiness is not ultimate, being unhappy is not always something to be avoided. Since happiness by definition waxes and wanes with circumstances, unhappiness can be embraced without diminishing our joy. Let me try to illustrate in parenting. Our desire as parents is to bring happiness to our kids. We give good gifts to our kids (see Luke 11:11-13) because we desire their good, not ones that breed unhappiness. Yet, we also know there are times we are willing to make our kids **unhappy for a time** for their greater good. We withhold candy late at night, we feed them vegetables when they want mac n cheese at every meal, and send them to bed when they beg to stay up. I remember sprawling out on the floor of Lucky's grocery store because I wanted the cap gun at the checkout, and my mom gave the firm and repeated "no". I was unhappy (so was she), but she did not relent. Why? She was teaching me that life was not about me, that I don't always get what I want, and those are valuable lessons that are for my best in life. We need to pursue joy in Christ, rather than happiness, since even unhappiness can be used to teach us.

This morning we want to look at two parts of joy: ***where does it come from, and what does it look like?*** The first will come from a survey of joy in Scripture, and the second will be back in the city of Philippi where we left Paul and Silas in a dank prison last week.

### Pathway of Joy in Principle

**Source:** God's presence

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<sup>1</sup> nytimes.com, Paul Sullivan, "[Balancing the Benefit and the Burden of wealth](#)" June 8, 2018

Happiness is both temporal and shared among humanity, but joy is distinctly a gift from God, because it is the gift **OF GOD**. God created mankind to enjoy Him, putting Adam and Eve in the garden to work, enjoy marriage, have kids, and do all the things that humans do as they delighted in the presence of God. True joy cannot be experienced apart from God, since He is the ultimate source, and it is **IN HIS PRESENCE** that joy is found. We often turn His gifts for happiness to the neglect of the gift giver, and in this exchange we trade lasting joy for fading happiness.

**"You have put more joy in my heart** than they have when their grain and wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." Ps. 4:7-8

"You make know to me the path of life; **in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**" Ps. 16:11

"For you make him most blessed forever; you make him glad **with the joy of your presence.**" Ps. 21:6

God is THE source of joy and in His presence we experience it. But there is clearly a problem since we have not had the kind of access to Him that was enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. So how did God bring joy back to us?

**Means:** Those who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ

*"And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you **good news of great joy** that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord."* Luke 2:10-11

"These things I have spoken to you, that **my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.**"  
John 15:11

Since joy is by nature supernatural (given by God, not conjured up by man), God had to bring us back to His presence through the work of Jesus Christ. Joy and peace come through believing (Rom. 15:13), and in Christ we have a **redeemed, reconciled, and restored** relationship with the Father, ushering us back into His presence positionally to worship Him, delight in Him, and rest in Him.

This is why our belief in, walking in, and giving of the gospel is NOT simply about morality (you're a sinner and you are under judgment). It is about a restoration of a relationship with the God of this universe, who not only offers heaven but HIMSELF, not only forgiveness but JOY. The sad reality as we look around is not only that people are oblivious of their eternal destiny, they are equally oblivious that they are chasing after a life that can at BEST offer temporal happiness. Stress, anxiety, pressure, comparison, weight of expectations, fear, and anger plague our world, and those around us continue to look desperately for relief from the strain, without recognizing the reality that if they would simply yield, turn, and ask, God has done everything in Christ to bring them back to Himself. That is why our bringing the gospel to the world is a matter of life, death, and happiness.

**Production:** work of the Holy Spirit

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and **joy in the Holy Spirit.**" Rom. 14:17

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control; against such things there is no law." Gal. 5:22-23

Joy is not based on circumstance, but neither is it conjured up by self-will. When we are filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), being led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18), joy is **produced BY the Spirit**. God's Spirit indwells every believer, guiding them in the truth. That means as we pursue God in His Word, the Spirit not only illuminates the meaning but takes the truth and puts it into practice. Sometimes we think that being Spirit filled is when we crank up worship music to "11" and have an emotional experience. Not that there is anything wrong with that, but that is NOT what walking by the Spirit primarily is about. If you want to know if you are walking by the Spirit, simply observe the fruit being produced in your life. A lack of joy, love, and peace means we are NOT walking by the Spirit but by the flesh, and there is no middle ground.

**Experience:** Word received and obeyed

"And we are writing these things so that your joy may be complete" 1 John 1:4 (cf. Jer. 15:16; Psalm 119:11; Deut. 16:15)

How do we experience joy? God's words are a joy to us, since they show us who He is. Our life in Christ is a pursuit of holiness, a putting off our sin and putting on righteousness. When we are holy, we can be truly happy, which means that when we harbor sin in our heart, or engage habitually in sinful action, **joy is diminished**. How do we, then, experience joy? Start in God's Word, repent of any hidden sin, and put on righteousness.

**Mixed with:** Trials, suffering, pain

Perhaps the greatest truth about joy is that it does not require the absence of pain and suffering, but rather buoy's us up through them since joy is not the absence of suffering but rather the presence of God, which will never leave or forsake us.

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, **with the joy of the Holy Spirit.**" 1 Thess. 1:6

"**Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds**, for you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance." James 1:1-2

"In this (being born again to a living hope) **you rejoice**, though now for a little while, if necessary you have been grieved by various trials." 1 Pet. 1:6 (cf. 3-5)

These are not pithy statements or spiritual platitudes that fit on a meme or a mug. Trials, suffering, and pain are real for everyone. The evangelical was sorrowful and sobered this week as a young pastor of a large church named Andrew Stocklein took his own life after battling depression and anxiety for months or longer. He even began a preaching series on dealing with these issues, and had just preached on the depression Jeremiah felt. The sorrow and questions come when there is a brother or sister does not find solace in Christ and makes a decision to take life into their own hands. These things are real. But God promises **JOY IN THE MIDST OF, not simply on the other side of, our suffering**. Our salvation is secure, our purpose is clear, and our hope is never gone.

## Hope in: Glory of heaven

Finally, we rejoice in hope (Rom. 12:12) because our pain will end and our hope will become sight:

"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and **rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory**, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." 1 Pet. 1:8-9 (cf. 1 Pet. 4:13; Jude 24-25)

Heaven is not simply a place where our pain will be gone and tears dried up. It is the place that we will have the ultimate prize where we will see Jesus and be with the Father forever. This does not release us from sadness or unhappiness, but rather fills us with reason to rejoice. This is exactly what Jesus showed us in Heb. 12:1-2, where for the **joy set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame**. We are not gluttons of pain nor would we necessarily choose unhappiness, but we rather cling to something far greater called joy, when we cling by faith to Jesus, the Author and perfecter of our faith. *But what does this joy look like?*

## Picture of Joy in Action (25-40)

### Singing when it hurts

About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying and singing hymns to God**, and the prisoners were listening to them,

Paul and Silas (Timothy and Luke apparently avoided arrest) were unjustly treated as they were **beaten in public**, stripped of their right to trial, and left in a dark, dank prison. Often these stories seem like they are mythical or legendary, or could never happen in a civilized society as ours, but Philippi was a place of laws, order, and due process, yet this still happened. Think about the type of physical pain, shame, disappointment, frustration and anger these missionaries would have felt. What would your response be? Sorrow? Anger? Seeking vindication? If we are honest, some of all of these would make up our response, yet note how these two men responded: praise and prayer! This is the epitome of joy in any and every circumstance. How were they able to get there:

- **They had proper expectations of life** - Paul and Silas understood that their life in ministry would involve suffering (Acts 9:16; Col. 1:24). They knew that proclaiming the gospel would bring on persecution and it was actually through their suffering that the gospel would be seen. That is why their mindset was intact as they were treated so cruelly. They did not cry out for justice but instead found ways to worship. What are our expectations of life? The sure fire way to avoid suffering of any kind is simply to keep our mouths shut and hope no one recognizes us, but that is not what we are called to.
- **They let the "Word of Christ dwell in them richly" (Col. 3:16)** - They prayed and sang. It's what we do alone and together as we worship corporately. But sometimes we think that the songs we sing are for this gathering alone, to praise God and then leave them here. But songs should teach, equip, and inform us. They should be truth based so that when we are in need to recall the truth, we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to saturate ourselves in Christ. Notice it was their singing that caused the other prisoners to listen, as well as the jailor to cry out, "what must I do to be saved."

### Relinquishing revenge

and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, **"Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."** And the jailer[a] called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"** And they said, **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."** **And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.** And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he **rejoiced** along with his entire household that he had believed in God

As the earth shook and the doors swung open, it would have seemed that vindication was theirs. The jailer would get what's coming to him, God brought about deliverance, and they could get back to their mission. But their focus was not on **vindication or justice**, but on their mission. Because they relinquished revenge, they could see the one who inflicted extra pain on them (unjustly) with compassion and love. Through their pain they were able to explain the goodness of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, the fact that He is Lord, and how to be saved. Belief in the Lord Jesus meant not only a mental ascent, but a confession of sin, an asking for forgiveness, and acknowledgement that He owns our life.

### Turning obstacles to opportunities

But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. **Therefore come out now and go in peace.**" But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. **So they came and apologized to them.**

**And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.**

Finally, notice that Paul and Silas were vindicated in how they were treated. The local government realized they had messed up, that they had a big lawsuit and civil liability on their hands, and hoped it would all just go away. They asked the missionaries to please leave quietly so as not to disrupt anymore. Notice that Paul leveraged this opportunity not for financial gain, but to protect the young church in the future. The local government were going to be less prone to attack or put their eye on Lydia's house knowing they had escaped a pending lawsuit. Paul was willing to have his rights violated for the gospel, but he absolutely knew them as a citizen and leveraged them for the good of the church and the sake of the gospel.

### Principles to Consider

- **Joyful worship and praise comes from our objective assurance in Christ, not circumstances. Joy is found in Christ alone, and happiness sought apart from Him in a mirage.**
- **The makeup of the church matters** - Notice that God started the work in Europe with an Asian woman, a slave girl, and a common Gentile worker (and their families). The church is not about finding people who are *like us*, it is being a part of those who have been redeemed by the same God and Savior Jesus Christ

- **God preps, draws, and calls people to Himself, but they still need messengers to hear the gospel**

**Counseling Thought:**

How do we know if we are fighting for joy or merely settling for happiness? Happiness is a gift to be enjoyed, but it makes a terrible goal. We enjoy the gifts God gives us in order to enjoy Him, the gift giver. How we respond if the gift is taken away tells us much about happiness vs. joy. The foundational reason marriages fall apart is that we are pursuing happiness, not joy. We think that our spouse is there to make us happy rather than seeing them as a gift. When we are unhappy, we view them as a roadblock to our true happiness, and are deceived into thinking a "change" will bring about the happiness we crave. The solution: fight to pursue joy in Christ, and our marriage and spouse can be treasured, served, and loved.