

Rejoice Over How God is Working in Your Life

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Preacher: Fred Stone

[0 : 00] experience a lot of joy in your life. Do you often rejoice about what's going on around about you?

You know, the Apostle Paul did. He writes about it. In fact, the letter that we're going through now on Sunday mornings, the book of Philippians, he used the words joy and rejoice more in this letter than any other one that he wrote that we have in our New Testament.

Now, I want you to think about this. Paul talks about experiencing joy, rejoicing. But at the same time, as he penned those words, he was at all times chained to a Roman soldier.

He was at all times under house arrest, at least for two years. And he was awaiting trial before Caesar.

He didn't know what the outcome would be, whether he'd be set free or whether he would be condemned and executed. Now, Paul talks a lot about having joy, rejoicing in that context.

[1 : 16] Well, that raises or should raise a red flag to us. Paul's not using the word joy like we normally use it.

I mean, think about it. Don't you mostly equate the words joy and happiness? I mean, I use them. Most people use them just in normal speech interchangeably.

You know, you wake up in the morning. Your spouse looks at you. Smile on his or her face. What can I fix you for breakfast?

Brings joy to you, doesn't it? Makes you happy. If my boys came to me today and said, we're going to cut down, we're going to cut up those two little trees on the edge of the property, that'd bring a lot of joy to my soul if they would do that.

We use that word joy and happiness just without thinking they're the same. Well, that's not how Paul uses it. In fact, that's not the way the word is used in the New Testament.

[2 : 36] Paul obviously would not have been happy about what was going on in his life as he wrote this book. At all times, chained to that soldier. Couldn't leave the place he was renting and not knowing what his future held when he stood trial before the emperor.

In the New Testament, the word joy is not used to describe feelings of happiness. Happiness is really an emotion of delight.

We're happy when the people or the things around about us are going our way. People are smiling at us, doing for us.

Everything's going the way that we want it to. Well, that doesn't always happen, does it? Those trees on my property aren't going to get cut up.

Your spouse is not always going to wake up in the morning with a smile on his or her face and look at you and say, good morning, darling. There's going to be a lot of times in our lives when we are not happy.

[3 : 44] We're not happy about the situation that we find ourselves in. And that's just life. There's nothing wrong with that. That's just the way life works in this world.

Happiness comes and goes in everyone's life. It's not a good or bad, right or wrong. It just is. But Christian joy is different.

Christian joy is more than an emotion. It is described in one place as being a part of the fruit of the Spirit, something the Holy Spirit works in us and through us.

Joy in the Bible, in the New Testament, is really more of an attitude, a character quality than it is an emotion. Joy is really the way a lot of commentators like R.C. Sproul, for example.

They describe joy as being similar to contentment. Really experiencing peace in your soul because you know you're right with God.

[4 : 51] You're one with Him. Even the word or the idea of being thankful goes along with this idea of Christian joy. Now this means it is not dependent on what's going on around about us.

We can have Christian joy even when we are not happy. And that's what I want us to look at this morning in Philippians chapter 1. We're going to begin in verse 19, or rather verse 18.

Two weeks ago we saw in verses 12 through 18 that Paul found joy in knowing that the gospel was spreading throughout the area in spite of the fact that he was in prison.

In fact, he found joy in knowing that through his being in chains to those Roman soldiers, you know, swapping in and out around the clock, many of those soldiers in the guard, Caesar's guard, they were hearing the gospel.

He even found joy in the fact that he was told there are people preaching and they're doing it not with good motives.

[6 : 03] They're doing it to make you jealous, to make you envious. They're out there preaching. They've got the freedom and maybe people are responding. Good things are happening. But they're doing it, Paul, to sort of jab you because you're here confined to this place.

Look now in verse 18, in light of, he's in prison, but people are hearing through his witness to the soldiers.

The gospel is being preached even with poor motives. He says, What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Now, let's read on and see why, or other reasons why, Paul rejoiced. Look in your Bible, Philippians chapter 1.

Now we're in the middle of verse 18. That's where a new paragraph begins. Yes, and I will rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

[7 : 11] As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

I want you to note that last phrase, whether by life or by death. As we go through this, this whole section, verses 18 through 26, we're going to look at verses 18 through 20 today, 21 through 26 next week.

Paul doesn't really know how this is going to turn out. That's important to understand. As you go on and read, he has some strong feelings that when he goes before Caesar, he's going to be set free. He's going to be able to continue his work. He's going to be able to, you know, help the Philippian Christians, but he doesn't know for sure. Only God knows the future.

And so he's just putting it in his hands. These verses show us that Paul was rejoicing over how God was going to work out his future well-being.

[8 : 28] Here's the first point. We can rejoice over the fact that God will bring about our future and ultimate well-being. Look at it again.

Verse, last part of verse 18 and 19. Yes, and I will rejoice for I know that through your prayers and help of the spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

We can have joy, not happiness, but joy if we'll keep in mind God's always working in our lives and he is going to bring about our future and ultimate well-being.

Paul says he is rejoicing over the fact that he's going to eventually be, look at that word, delivered from his imprisonment. The actual word is my deliverance. Now, the word translated deliverance here is more often than not translated with the word salvation in other parts of the New Testament. That raises the question. When this and most of the major translations use the word deliverance here, when Paul talks about this deliverance, is he talking about being delivered from prison, getting out, having freedom, or is he talking about ultimate deliverance and being in the presence of the Lord free from all the stress of life in this world?

[10 : 07] Now, Paul has been talking about his imprisonment in chapter one already.

In fact, he uses the word or phrase my imprisonment or some translations say my chains four times in chapter one. So it makes sense that he's thinking about his deliverance is going to be, he's going to be set free from prison.

But on the other hand, in this section, he makes it clear that he knows that death is a real possibility. Look at these verses. Verse 20, whether by life or by death. In verse 21, to die is gain. Verse 23, to depart and be with Christ.

He knows death's a possibility. Well, we can't resolve this 100% no matter what. Either way, Paul can rejoice.

[11 : 12] Then one way or another, God is going to take care of him. That's what his thought is. If he is found innocent and set free, he's going to continue to serve the Lord faithfully and find joy in that.

if he is found guilty and executed, he will immediately be in the presence of the Lord and all of the worries and stress and suffering he's experienced will be a thing of the past.

So he can look at that with joy. Now remember how we're using the word, how the New Testament uses the word. Paul finds true joy, contentment, being at peace in his soul.

All hell may be breaking loose all around about you, but you have a sense of peace, of contentment in your soul because you're right with God, you're trusting God, you are in his hands.

That's the kind of joy that comes when we know that God is going to take care of us. no matter what, no matter how he does that.

[12 : 30] Now, can you ever rejoice like that? Do you know what he's talking about? Do you know it from experience? Do you have confidence that God's going to bring about your future and ultimate well-being?

If you're going through a difficult time right now, right this minute, are you trusting God with the outcome regardless of what it might be?

Regardless of how difficult it might be? You know, if you knew what was going to happen down the road, it'd be easier to do that, wouldn't it?

But we don't know. No one does. It's just a rarity in the Bible or in our lives that we ever know how our difficulty is going to turn out in advance.

If you're dealing with a difficult situation right now related to your job, is it going to continue? Maybe there's some family issues you're struggling with.

[13 : 45] Maybe it's your health. And right now, it could go either way. You just don't know. You can't see.

Well, don't expect God to show you how it's going to turn out. I personally think it's a waste of your breath to pray, Lord, help me to know what's going to happen.

That's just not the way God works most of the time. That's not the way it worked out for Paul. He has a feeling what's going to happen.

But he doesn't know for sure because he keeps on talking about he may die. We all have to deal with our present difficulties, our present circumstances the same way, one day at a time.

Here's a good thought. We can. You and I can. We don't have to be super saints like like an apostle Paul.

[14 : 48] A few weeks ago, Lisa, my wife Lisa's older sister, her husband died. He was 67 years old.

He was diagnosed with a lung disease three or four years ago that they said was fatal. there was nothing that really could be done to prevent it from destroying his lungs.

On top of that, he developed lung cancer and had never smoked. Well, he went through this process.

He went through chemo. He went through a lot of processes, but over time, his physical condition deteriorated.

His lungs stopped functioning. About three or four months ago, he shared something on Facebook that's sort of like what Paul is sharing here about confidence.

[16 : 06] you see, his name's John. John was a Christian, but John was a regular guy kind of Christian, like us in this room.

He was actively involved in his church. He taught Sunday school. He was a deacon. He worked what you call a regular job. If he was a member of our church, he just fit in, fit in in any Sunday school.

class. Blend in. People would like him. He'd laugh a lot. A regular guy, dying from a lung disease and lung cancer.

And he put something like this, I'm paraphrasing this, on Facebook. It was read to me because I am not on it. But he said that he had complete assurance of his salvation.

He had his faith in Jesus Christ. He appreciated people's prayers and concern. He basically gave an explanation of the gospel.

[17 : 18] He said, in effect, I'm right with God. I have no doubts. And I want to encourage you, if you're not a Christian, to put your faith and trust in Jesus.

He was telling the world, telling everybody that he knew, that he kept up with, that he kept up with him, I'm okay. I have the utmost confidence that God's going to take care of me, that my ultimate end is in his hands and whatever it is, and most likely he knew, I mean, it's death.

He was okay with it. He was ready and he was a witness to other people. That's what Paul is really trying to show us.

We can have joy, not happiness, but joy, inner peace, a sense of contentment with the way it is. If we're God's children, we can be confident he's going to bring about our ultimate good and future well-being.

But here's what we need to understand. God defines for us what our future well-being is.

[18 : 45] God tells us how he's going to bring it about. Look at this. God works all things for our good, Romans 8, 28. And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who've been called according to his purpose.

God works in Paul's imprisonment, in your difficulty, in your concern.

concern. He works for ultimate good. But then, God tells us what that ultimate good is.

The very next verse, Romans 8, 29. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

God's goal in all of life is to develop Christ-like character in us who are Christians. God's ultimate good for each one of us is to develop Christ-like character in us.

[20 : 01] It is not that we all be healthy or wealthy or have an easy life. It's not that everybody's even going to have a long life or an average life.

Now, let me say, sometimes God, just out of his grace, will make us healthy.

Some of you in this room, you've always been healthy. Some of you have never been in a hospital. rarely ever gone to the doctor. You thank God.

That's just a blessing. Sometimes God does that. Sometimes he makes some of his people wealthy. And if you've been faithful to God in the way that you've worked and saved and invested and given, and he's made you wealthy, thank him.

It's a blessing. Some people life's just sort of easy. You have good health, you have a good job, you have a good family, everybody loves one another, nobody just rebels, bad things just haven't happened in your life to this point.

[21 : 23] Thank him. It's a blessing. But at the same time, that is not God's ultimate goal for you.

God's ultimate goal is that we develop Christ-like character and for most people it's through hardship, it's through difficulty, it's through a life that's not easy, it's through not having everything you want, not being wealthy, not being always healthy.

What we've got to learn to do as Christians is to let God determine, I mean he does determine it, we've got to accept what God determines is for our ultimate well-being to be.

And when we will, if we will develop the spiritual maturity to accept that, like Paul, like my brother-in-law John, we will be able to rejoice that God is working in our lives to bring about our future and ultimate well-being regardless of what that might mean.

Not being healed, dying, it happens. There's something else we see in that Paul, in Paul, that we need to learn to rejoice about.

[22 : 54] Look at this, we can rejoice over how God brings about our future and ultimate well-being. Read these verses again with me. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

I want to stop there for right now. Paul is rejoicing in the process that God uses to bring about our future well-being. Look at that process.

God works through the prayers of His people. Look at that. Paul, the great apostle, the one in whom God worked to give us scripture, he says, for I know that through your prayers this will turn out for my deliverance.

In our first study of the book of Philippians, back on January the 3rd, we looked at how Paul explained God sovereignly works in our lives from the beginning to continue and to the end to bring about our salvation and His good work in us.

It's in Philippians 1, 6. It's not on the screen. He says, and I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 15] Paul taught more about the sovereignty of God in his letters than any other New Testament writer. But Paul equally believed in our responsibility as Christians to be faithful to God, to cooperate, to obey Him.

This verse shows that Paul believed strongly in the power of prayer. Paul, on many occasions throughout his letters, asked for and expected other Christians to pray for him.

You hear, listen to this. Paul believed that God worked His sovereign plan through the prayers of His people.

We need to be asking people to pray for us as we go through our difficulties. We need to pray for our difficulties. We need to pray for our difficulties.

We need to pray for people who are going through their difficulties. But listen to this. We need to pray for a whole lot more than physical healing or physical deliverance from a problem.

[25 : 30] We need to pray for ourselves and for other people to develop that Christ-like character, to become spiritually mature.

We need to pray for people, your children, your grandchildren, people in your Sunday school class, your Christian friends.

Pray for them to be able to have strong beliefs, real convictions, and stand firm on them in every situation.

And never compromise, never back down, never be ashamed of the truth that God makes clear in His Word. And we need to pray for one another and seek prayer.

We need the prayers that we'll be faithful like this until God calls us home. That we'll finish the race all the way.

[26 : 31] Is that how you're praying for your family members? I want to tell you, this is a totally true statement. The whole time I've been married and had children, I have prayed more for my wife and children, now daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

I've prayed more about their spiritual well-being when you put it all together than have their physical well-being. I've prayed more for our church family, our spiritual well-being, your spiritual well-being, more than the other things.

Now, I certainly pray for my family concerning all kinds of things, including physical situations. I've prayed long and hard about specific circumstances, asking God to change, to bring about this or that result.

I've prayed that for some of you. Specific things about physical things, situations. But even more than that, like Paul, we need to learn to pray for spiritual growth, spiritual maturity.

I want you to pray that for me. I really do. I want you to pray that for every leader in this church. They want you to do that as well.

[28 : 09] One other thought along this line, don't ever give up praying for your unsaved family members and friends. If you haven't gotten it yet or haven't done it yet, read my article in the newsletter this week.

It tells the story about a man and his wife who prayed for his father-in-law for 32 years, witnessed to him in all kinds of ways, got other people involved. And it was only after 32 years that that man showed any interest and by God's grace eventually was saved.

We cannot give up. God works through our prayers and look at this. God works through the Holy Spirit. He says, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is called by different names. Sometimes he's called like this, the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Sometimes the Spirit of Christ. Sometimes the Spirit of God. Paul's emphasis here is not on the name of the Holy Spirit, but on his power.

It's the Holy Spirit living within us as Christians. He's the one that supplies us with the spiritual strength that we need. He supplies us with wisdom, with guidance.

[29 : 26] He's the one that works in us to enable us to develop Christ-like character. He's the one that gives us the spiritual strength and sometimes physical and emotional strength to persevere, to be faithful, to not give up.

You know, in Romans chapter 8, Paul even talks about how the Holy Spirit helps us to pray. Sometimes when we're too weak or we just don't know how to pray, He intercedes for us.

That's going on right now in your life. If you're a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives within you. And Paul also says in Romans 8, that the Holy Spirit doesn't live in you, you're not a Christian. We can think of Him as our resident teacher, our equipper, our energizer, our encourager.

We can't live the Christian life on our own. It is impossible. But the news is we don't have to. God has put His Spirit in us. All we need to do is choose to cooperate with Him.

Cooperate as He works. Think about it like this. We need to learn to be sensitive to the actual presence of the Holy Spirit. Be aware of His convicting, His encouraging, and then obedient to His leadership.

[30 : 44] For example, if you're a Christian, haven't you at times just been made aware that something that you were thinking, something you were feeling, something you were wanting to say was just wrong, and you shouldn't do it.

That was the Holy Spirit causing you to realize don't act on that thought. Don't fulfill those desires. Close your mouth. Don't say it. But you have to cooperate with Him and do what He's saying. The Holy Spirit also does positive things. He makes us aware of what's right. Sometimes something that needs to be said to encourage somebody. Something that we actually need to do to please God.

And what we need to do is when He prompts us to do something, say something, we need to do it as part of being obedient to His leadership. The Holy Spirit will guide us in the way that we think, the way that we feel, things we want to say, things we want to do.

Sometimes He'll check us. Don't. Sometimes He'll prompt us. That's right. But what we have to do is we're sensitive to Him doing this.

[32 : 08] We have to then obey Him. God works in our lives through the prayers of other Christians, through the power of the Holy Spirit. And then, we're going to look at this next week, but I will just show this.

God works through our faithful efforts. That's in verse 20. That'll be a part of what we look at next week. Everybody really wants to be happy, don't they?

I mean, if you don't want to be happy, something's wrong with you. I'm serious. You got a problem if you don't really want to be happy. And if you don't want to be happy, I can't help you.

You need somebody that's a real counselor. If you don't have the desire to be happy and make other people happy.

But the truth is, we want to be that, but no one is always happy. Because happiness is based on our circumstances being what we want them to be.

[33 : 17] Life's just not that way, is it? We can't always be happy, but we can always experience joy. We can be content. We can be at peace with God no matter what's going on around us.

We can be joyful people by trusting God to work in our lives for ultimate good and for our eternal well-being.

Ask God to help you work. Ask God to work in your life that way now. I want to encourage you to do that.

Or if you would say, you know, I struggle like everybody else, but I do experience a lot of Christian joy. Thank God.

Thank God for that gift. If you're not experiencing the kind of joy we're talking about, ask other Christians that you know, that you have confidence in, to pray for you this way.

[34 : 31] It's far more important for you to ask somebody to pray for you to have joy, to develop Christian character, than it is for them to pray for you to get well from some kind of sickness.

By God's grace, we can experience joy in this world, even in the midst of a pandemic, and all the uncertainty, and all the unhappiness that it brings.

In fact, let's just bow right now and ask God to help us to experience Christian joy and more. Would you join with me? Dear God, help us to see right now what needs to take place in our lives to experience this joy, this contentment, this peace in our soul that Paul experienced and prayed for others to experience.

Help us, Father, to seek that from you. Help us, Father, to request that kind of prayer from other Christians. And Lord, help us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He works in us to enable us to be more joyful.

Father, help us all right now to know what we need to do than to make the confession, the commitment, or whatever it is we need to do.

[36 : 12] And just with our heads bowed, eyes closed, and attitude to prayer, let's all do that. Seek to respond to God as He speaks to us so that we can be Christians who experience real joy in our lives.

Amen.