

# What Brings You Joy (Part II)

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[ 0 : 00 ] I want you to keep the words, the message of that song in your mind because part of this message will touch on that. Thinking about, as Christians, heaven in a positive way, being a home.

Over the past several months, several of our church members have died. In fact, let's just say beginning about Thanksgiving until right now.

To the best of my memory, we've had more church family members to die than in any period like this, this two or three month period in the last 25 years.

Two of the most common words that describe what family members are going through right after the death of a loved one are sadness and grief.

It's just part of being a human being, isn't it? It's sad when your loved one dies. There's a certain amount of grief in just about every death.

[ 1 : 08 ] However, in each of the services that I've been a part of, the funeral services that is, I've also seen Christians rejoicing, seen real joy in the family members of the person who died.

Now, don't misunderstand. Funerals are not happy places, but I think it's great when a funeral service has laughter. I think it sort of eases some of the tension.

It helps you to relax. There's some things in a funeral about the person who's died or a family member that you point out that's funny, and it's like everybody wants to laugh.

They laugh harder during those times because it's like a stress relief. But funerals are not funny places. They're not happy places.

But when Christians attend the funeral of a Christian loved one, there are at least two reasons to rejoice.

[ 2 : 11 ] Number one, that parent or grandparent, spouse or friend who was a Christian, you know that at that moment they're in heaven.

Whenever they close their eyes in death to this world, they open them immediately in the presence of Jesus. And that's reason to rejoice, for that person at least. But there's another reason to rejoice.

If you're a Christian, they are, you know that one day, you're going to see them again. And in case like my parents whose bodies and minds were worn out, when I see them again, they'll be in the best shape I've ever seen.

No more than they've ever known. That's the reason to rejoice, isn't it? The idea of rejoicing at a funeral, it really helps us to understand that there's a difference between the word happiness, like we use it, and Christian joy.

I've pointed it out the last two weeks. Happiness is an emotion of delight. It's really dependent on what's happening around about us, if life's going our way or not. But Christian joy is more of an attitude, more of even a character quality.

[ 3 : 33 ] It's part of the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit lives within us and enables us to experience this kind of joy that is not dependent on our circumstances.

It's a joy that has a lot in common with peace within our soul that we experience when we know we're not just right with God, but that we're close to Him.

Now, that explains how Paul could make joy one of the themes of his letter to the Philippian Christians.

Even as he wrote from the hardship of being in prison, awaiting on a trial that could end in his death. I want you to turn, if you would, back one more time to Philippians 1, verses 18-26.

Philippians 1, verses 12-18, he talks about some reasons why he rejoiced. The gospel was being preached, some of them sometimes not by good motives, but nonetheless, people were hearing about the Lord, lives were being changed, he was happy.

[ 4 : 43 ] And he rejoiced. He was both happy and he rejoiced. Well, now we're looking at some other reasons why he rejoices. We're looking in the middle of verse 18.

If you've got a Bible translation that is in paragraphs, most likely the new paragraph begins in the middle of verse 18. 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, 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.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell.

I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again.

[ 6 : 09 ] I want us to look at three reasons why Paul had joy even as a prisoner. Let's think about it by asking ourselves three questions.

Number one, do thoughts that God will always take care of you bring you joy? We looked at that the last two weeks. The idea, no matter what, God is going to take care of me.

My hand's in His life. Does that bring you joy? Well, it should. Verses 18 through 20. We're not going to look at it anymore. We've done enough. Let's move on. Number two, do thoughts of your relationship with Jesus Christ both now and in heaven bring you joy?

Look at verse 21. He says, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. We're going to spend most of our time right there on that one verse today.

So what I want to do is just sort of say, pause. Let's come back to it. Look at verse 3 for just a moment. Or look at number 3, verses 22 through 26.

[ 7 : 19 ] Do thoughts of serving other people, even putting other people ahead of yourself, does that bring you joy? Paul wants his friends in this church that he's writing to to know that he's having a hard time deciding what would be the best outcome of his trial before the emperor.

Look at it again. Verses 22 and 23. Yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. Now I want you to think about what he's saying.

Paul is saying, I can't figure out what would be best for me to live or die. As if he had that power to make the decision. He does it. He's a prisoner. The emperor will decide.

I think what Paul is talking about is, he doesn't know how to pray. He doesn't know whether to pray that he'll live or for God to just go ahead and let him die.

But one of two things is going to happen. He's either going to be sentenced to death or he's going to be set free. Here's what I want you to know.

[ 8 : 34 ] Surprisingly, unbelievably, he speaks of both in positive terms. If he's sentenced to death, it's going to result in him immediately going into the presence of the Lord.

And that is his desired outcome. Look at it. Verse 23. My desire is to depart and be with Christ. That is far better. Real clear.

If he gets his druthers, that's what he wants to happen. If he's set free though, there's going to be a good outcome. It will result in his continuing in what he calls fruitful ministry.

And it will benefit his friends there and Phil that he's writing to. Look at this. Verse 22. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Verse 24. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

I think the way to take this is Paul is struggling over how to pray. What should I ask God to do in terms of the outcome of this trial?

[ 9 : 40 ] It's sort of like as he's writing this, he is intentionally thinking out loud. He wants those people to understand what's going through his mind, the process he's going through. He's asking.

On one hand, should I ask God for what I really want to do, which is to die now and immediately be with the Lord? Now, you might think, is he just crazy to actually pray to die right now?

And to die right now for him, keep this in mind, it would be by execution. Which most likely would be to be beheaded.

Lord, should I pray that I'll just go ahead and die now and go be with the Lord? And that is, look at it.

That'd be far better, he said. Here's why he said that. If you've read Paul's letters in the New Testament, read about his life and ministry in the book of Acts, he lived an unbelievably hard life. [10:52] I mean, he writes about some of the things he went through. He was beaten, flogged on numerous times. He was stoned in the midst of a mob riot and one time left for dead.

Drug out of the city and left for dead. He talks about being cold. He talks about being in prison multiple times. He lived a hard life. And so, as he thought about the way life had been as a Christian for him, it's probably not going to change.

He thought to himself, I'm tired of getting beat up, being mistreated, being cold and hungry at times. I'd welcome death. I'd be through with all this junk. I'd be in heaven. I'd be with the Lord. Life would be better than it's ever been.

Some of us in this room, we've had family members who have felt that way, maybe talked that way, prayed that way because of maybe a terminal illness they had, they were suffering or some other type of tragedy they were going through.

[12:06] They were not thinking about suicide. Don't let that thought enter your mind. Suicide is wrong. It's sinful always under every circumstance. It can never be justified. But we're talking about someone whose life is miserable.

Let me give you an example. I've talked about an old uncle I had. Ninety-something years old. Highly committed Christian. Lived a very, very active life all many, many years into his 80s. Well, in his 90s, his health was broken. He's 90-something years old. He's living alone. His wife has died. He's homebound. He can't go anywhere.

He can't do anything. He prayed on a regular basis. Uncle Dolan prayed on a regular basis. Lord, take me home like Richard was singing. Take me home. Take me out of this world.

Bring me into your presence. Bring me there where my Christian loved ones are. And you know, I thought that was a great way to pray.

[13:12] You may have now or may have someday family members or friends who talk like that or pray like that, tell you they're praying like that.

Never tell them that's wrong or not good or don't do that. Pray with them. That's what they want. Why would we as Christians who live a miserable existence now not want to pray and ask God to take me out of it?

Why would heaven not be again like he talks about? And we'll look at it just a little bit later. That's not a crazy prayer for Paul or anyone else.

But he's also thinking, should I ask God to set me free so that I continue on preaching the gospel, helping Christians to grow, straightening out trouble in some of these churches where a lot of Paul's letters were written just to straighten out problems in the church.

Paul knew there's more people to reach. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, said he wanted to go to Spain. He wanted to go to what would be called today a frontier mission place, to reach an unreached people group.

[14:28] He wanted to go and take the gospel as far west in the Roman Empire he was aware of, basically. Start new churches there. He wanted to, as he's saying here, he wanted to help them.

He wanted to straighten out some things, some of the churches. When you analyze it, Paul's dilemma was a struggle over seeking what would be best for me or what would be best for other people.

And as we might expect, he chose what was best for others. Look again in verse 24. Paul found greater joy, we're saying here, in staying in this world in spite of the hardships, to be a blessing to other people, to be a benefit for other people.

We need to put the interests of other people ahead of our own more than we normally do. And for some people, some people never do.

It may be you, it may be somebody you know real well, just basically lives a very selfish and self-centered life. That can't be how we live and be faithful to the Lord. We need to learn to put the interests of others ahead of our own.

[15:54] Now Paul is actually going to command us to do this later on in chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. So we're going to look at that in greater detail when we get to that in two or three weeks. Let's go back now to point 2.

Do thoughts of your relationship with Jesus Christ right now in this world, your relationship to Him by faith, does that bring you joy? And the thought of one day being with Him in heaven, seeing Him

face to face, does that bring you joy?

Just think about it in order. First, do you find joy in your current relationship with the Lord? Paul expressed his joy like this. We're in verse 21 and we'll be for the rest of the time.

For me to live is Christ. He is really saying by that that Jesus is the center of His life. Jesus is the center and everything in His life revolves around the Lord.

He is focused on knowing, loving, serving His Lord Jesus. So he wraps, sort of summarizes, you might say.

[17:11] For me to live is Christ. Life for Him is all about bringing glory to the Lord, pleasing Jesus. Now you know what's going to be next.

Can you say for me to live is Christ? Let's back up a moment. I want to make a statement and you fill in the blank.

I want you to think honestly, the way you are, just you. Think to yourself, for me to live is blank.

How would you honestly fill in that blank? For me to live is what? Would you say for me to live is family?

For me to live is work? For me to live is sports? For me to live is what? You know what's near and dear to you.

[18:19] Now don't misunderstand. All these kinds of things have a place in our lives. Family and work and making a living and playing sports.

There's just a lot of things that go with living life in this world that's good. That's helpful. That's fun. And none of these things are unimportant.

But Jesus Christ deserves to be at the center of our lives.

And it makes sense. Think about it. He is the Son of God. He left the glory of heaven to come into this world for one purpose.

To die on a cross. As our substitute. To pay the penalty for our sins. He came into this world to die on a cross in your place.

[19:21] In my place. It's like He took our sins upon Himself. He suffered hell. Separation from God. That's why He cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He died for us. He arose victoriously from the grave. He ascended back into heaven. He's at the right hand of the Father now. The Bible says, Praying for us.

One day He'll come back into this world. He'll make everything right. He deserves to be the Lord. The focus.

The center of our lives, doesn't He? You know, I think all of us could profit from making it our consistent prayer and a real heartfelt desire to live each day consciously.

More focused on Jesus. Seeking to know Him better. To love Him more. To find ways to serve Him faithfully. And through His Spirit that indwells us to cooperate with Him and develop more Christ-like character.

[20:43] Things like the fruit of the Spirit. Love and joy and peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. These kind of things. You know, when Jesus is at the center of our lives like this, He will enable us to be better at everything we need to be doing.

He will enable us to be better in all of our relationships. I'm a better husband. I'm a better grandfather. I'm a better pastor.

I'm a better everything. But I'm really focused in on seeking to serve the Lord in these ways.

Seeking to honor Jesus for the way that I treat people, the way that I do my job.

All of us are that way. You're a better student, better at whatever you do at work, wherever you are at home, wherever you are at church. We're all better when Jesus is at the center of it.

We're doing it as if we're doing it for Him. We're wanting to honor Him. Now, we can have a relationship with Jesus in this world now that brings glory to Him and really does give us satisfying joy.

[21:59] And that's what we should be experiencing. That's why the Lord gave us the Scripture, gave us the privilege to pray, to develop this kind of relationship with Him. Excuse me.

Let's think now about our future relationship. Do you find joy in thinking about your future relationship with Jesus in heaven? Paul expresses that like this, and to die is gain.

And this is, as I mentioned a minute ago, it's just amazing that Paul could say, and to die is gain, knowing that the way he's going to die in this situation would be executed.

Paul's thoughts couldn't have been on the process of death, how it was going to happen.

Paul's thought had to be on the person, the Lord, that he was going to be with. It's going to have to be on the, his thoughts are going to be on the, the better life that was in store for him on the other side of death.

[ 23 : 07 ] But in both life and death, he's focused on, on Jesus, his Lord, center of his life. Life in this world meant that he would live for Jesus.

Death would take him out of this world where he would live with Jesus. Let's just think. Can you honestly say right now, to die is gain.

And the truth is, most of us in this room, just about all of us, if not every one of us, we're not really excited about the thought of dying today.

I mean, I'm not. I don't want to die today. I don't think anybody here, under normal circumstances, I mean, look, you're healthy enough to be here.

You got out, there's snow on the ground. You got to be in pretty good health, mentally and physically to come. So, it wouldn't be normal if you sit there and think, oh, I wish I'd die. Death is gain.

[ 24 : 13 ] It's just normal and natural to think, I'm going to live, like Paul, I want to live now and be productive. I want to be fruitful now. It's okay. We should want to live in this world as long as we can be productive.

It's not wrong. Paul is not all about dying and we shouldn't be as Christians. But the fact is, none of us are going to live in this world forever.

Unless Jesus comes first, you're going to die. I am going to die. And there's not one thing in the world that can be done about it. I don't know if you ever think about this.

Everybody in here, we're all aging. Some of us have gotten along further down the road, but every one of us in here, we're aging. You ever stop and think about how life has passed by so quickly?

That song that Richard sang, it was, obviously, I can't even remember now. B.J. Thomas, he came out with that song or he made it popular for him when I was in seminary.

[ 25 : 27 ] I can remember him singing it on the radio. And in my mind, it just seems like it wasn't any time that I heard B.J. Thomas singing that song on the radio.

But it's been 40 years. 40 years. And some people laugh, it's older than me now.

But let's just think. Think about how fast our lives go by. I don't want this to be morbid, but a lot of us in here, you know, we're in that fourth quarter.

So death is a reality. We should not try to ignore it because we cannot escape it.

So we need to be prepared for death. Let me just say this, if you're not a Christian, the only way and the first way, the most important way you can prepare is to put your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

[ 26 : 32 ] Repent of your sins. Commit your life to Him. The only way to have a relationship with Jesus in heaven is to begin it now on earth. But as Christians, one of the best ways we can prepare for death is to think what we will gain.

Now on one hand, as I said earlier, death relieves us from all pain and sorrow in this world. But even if you, if you're a Christian and you're relatively young, you in the prime of life have even reached the prime of life yet.

You'd say, life is good for me. Well, if you're a Christian and you die today, life is still, or death is still going to be gain for you. Death is always, for a Christian, going to be better than what life is here on earth, even when life is at its best.

Death is going to usher us to the presence of Jesus where there will only be joy and happiness. Only be that.

That'll be our life from then on forever and ever. So, let's think. I need to have in my mind for me to live is Christ, but to die is gain.

[ 28 : 02 ] Don't fear death. Don't think this is something that should never be talked about. In fact, if you're a Christian, don't just dwell on it, but let your family members know my faith and trust is in Jesus and whenever I die, don't you worry about me.

I'm going to be in heaven and life's going to be better than it's ever been. And if you have any doubts about their salvation, say, and I hope to see you there, but I only will if Jesus is the Lord of your life.

We need to think to die is gain. Now, I want to make sure that we don't miss a vitally important point that Paul is making with this whole statement. To me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

The only way death is going to be a gain for anybody is if it is centered now in Jesus. I read an article the past week or two, some of you probably read it as well, on ESPN. there was a pro football player talking about how hard it was for a lot of NFL players to retire.

[ 29 : 23 ] He was talking about just the changes they went through. It was just a traumatic experience for them to retire. And he said, and I quote, he said, for many of those men, life is football.

football. And when there is no more football, they have a very difficult time living life. what we need to think is when our life comes to an end, if it's true that our life has just been about sports or work or money or popularity or anything like that, dying will only bring us loss. It will not bring us gain. if sports is your God or if you are your God or if another person is your God or something is your God, when you die, you're going to lose it all.

You're going to have nothing but torment in hell if Christ is not your life.

[ 30 : 47 ] so the only way for death to be a gain is to have our faith and trust in Jesus and Him be the true Lord and focus of our lives.

Now let's be real honest. For most of us, there are many days when we cannot say for me to live for me to live as Christ.

Let's be all honest. I'll be at the top of the list. There's a lot of days where I cannot honestly say for me to live as Christ because He's not really the center of my life.

You'll have to admit that too. We all have our struggles. Some of us more than others. So what we need to do right now is just if we can't say right now for me to live as Christ Jesus is not the center admit it to God.

Confess it as sin. In fact, confess as sin whatever or whoever you have allowed to be the center of your life instead of Jesus.

[ 32 : 02 ] Repent of it. Change your mind. Change the way you're living. Ask God to help you. Then make a commitment that with God's help you're going to seek to live each day with Jesus as the center of your life.

In other words, He's going to be your focus. You're going to seek to know Him better. Spend time in the Word, in prayer, talking to Him. Love Him more. Be more faithful in serving Him.

In fact, do what you do for other people as God, start now. We need to do this.

Start now asking God to give you the desire and the ability to live this way every day, to make it our prayer in the morning, at lunchtime, in the afternoon.

You know, when we fail to live this way, and we all will at times, just confess your sin again. Some of you right now, you may be very serious about what we're talking about, and you may confess that you have allowed somebody or something to be the center of your life, and you're repenting of that.

[ 33 : 15 ] You're making Jesus, making a new commitment to Him as the Lord of your life. You want to love Him more. You want to serve Him more faithfully. But Wednesday, you may have a breakdown.

You may just want to be selfish. selfish. You just may want to serve something more than Jesus. When you realize that, confess it then. Repent of it then.

Come back to the Lord then. That's how we all live a Christian life. Christian life is a lifestyle of ongoing repentance and faith. It's like Chuck Swindoll says, we take three steps forward and two steps back a lot of times.

by God's grace when we do that, we still make some progress. We never make just perfectly consistent progress. We're all to some degree.

Three steps forward, one step back, five steps forward, three steps back, something like that. What would it take this morning to have the testimony of Paul to me to live as Christ and to die as gain?

[ 34 : 26 ] if you know there's some sin to confess, do it now, this moment. If there are some things that need to change in your life, some priorities that need to change, make the commitment.

Plan now how you're going to bring about those changes. What's going to change? What are you going to do to change? Do you need to get more serious about just your relationship with Jesus? you need to really start consciously thinking more about pleasing Him instead of yourself or anyone else.

Ask God, and I do this sometimes, and he do this all the time, but ask God to give you a greater desire to know and love and serve Him and be like Jesus.

I want us to close by praying and asking God to help us to develop and enjoy a close relationship with Him and our Lord now and then be able to look forward to the closest relationship with Him in heaven.

[ 35 : 43 ] Let's pray together. Dear God, as we look at Paul's statement about his own life, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

We know that we can't say that as often as we should. Lord, create within us a true heartfelt desire to be able to say that.

Help us to confess the sin, make the commitment, rearrange priorities, whatever it takes to make sure that Jesus is the focus of our life, the center.

And as we walk with Jesus in this world, we seek to be the best that we can be in our homes, at work, at school, and everywhere else.

So just show us to God how we should respond so that this can be our testimony. That's just an attitude of prayer.

[ 37 : 02 ] Respond to the Lord as we all need to. see fit to at this time as we close out our service. Just bow and pray.