

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Joy

Part 3 Philippians 1:15-18

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 12.11-12.10

Let's open our bibles to Philippians, the book of Philippians, chapter one this morning. We are continuing our look at the Apostle Paul. If you remember what I said a few weeks ago we're taking a break from 1 Corinthians. We're doing that intentionally. We're doing it through the holidays as well so that we have opportunities to focus on other aspects of scriptures that teach us about the Lord. We're going to be doing that in the series that Deering told you about called The Promise starting next week. We're going to get back into 1 Corinthians the first of next year but we're not straying too far with our Joy series because essentially this is a series that helps us understand the author of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul. What we're doing is we're really digging through some passages in this book, a letter that he wrote to the Philippians to learn a little bit about him and we've said that one of the characteristics that stands out about Paul is that he was a person of great joy, inner joy and nothing seemed to be able to rob that from him. It was unconditional joy; unshakable joy. It was not influenced by his outward circumstances and I find that to be extraordinary because what I've experienced in my own life is that my joy seems to ebb and flow with my circumstances, and yet here was a man who models for us on a number of levels true, intimate joy of knowing the Lord. That's why we're studying him. That's what makes him such a great model.

Now, let me remind you just a bit of the outline so you know where we're heading this morning. I told you that we're going to watch Paul be a man of joy regardless of persecutions in his life. We know that he was a man who was persecuted. He was in a Roman prison, if you will. He's under house arrest in Rome awaiting his fourth trial for a crime he did not commit. He'd been up to this point imprisoned upwards to two, two and a half, three years. He's going to be in prison for nearly four and yet that doesn't stalemate his joy. He writes a book, the book of Philippians that is about joy. Fourteen times he tells us to be people who are rejoicing in joy so we know that persecution that is not something that will steal his joy. But we're also going to see that he was a person of joy regardless of those people that came into his life that would like to rob it from him. And then, thirdly, that he was a person of joy regardless of even his own personal failings. So, that's our outline: persecution, people, personal failings. We said that if you can learn to overcome those three nothing, no one will be able to rob you from joy.

Now, last week we looked at joy regardless of troubles; regardless of persecutions in verses 12 through 14. I'm not going to recap that for you. Instead we're going to move right into point numbers two and three and that is how can we be people of joy regardless of other people? I think it goes without saying and I would imagine that you would agree that people can be a great source of joy for us but they can also be a great source of pain, would you agree with that? That just comes with the territory. We all know the sting of deep hurt caused by another person. In fact, so much so that it has a tendency to want to rob us of joy. If circumstances can rob us of joy, certainly people can rob us of joy. In fact, probably even more so. We're going to see in verses 15 through 17, 18 that Paul did not allow people to steal his joy and they were trying. Follow along with me in verses 15 and following.

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He says, some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the Gospel. Now follow carefully. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me. You might want to underline, circle, highlight that word afflict. That gives us the idea of what's going on in Paul's life. Thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Now, let's back up. What's going on? Obviously there was some intense pain going on in Paul's life because of people. What do we know about these people? Let's look at the text. First of all you might find it about shocking. He says some indeed preach Christ. They are preaching. Caruso is the Greek word. It literally means to herald. It's what I'm doing right now. There were people who were publicly proclaiming the Gospel, much like Paul. Not only were they preaching Christ, but if you continue looking in verses 16 & 17 they were proclaiming Christ. Again, another word technically used in the Greek to mean to herald or to declare publicly. So, these were not heretics. These were not unbelievers, these were not even false teachers. These were believers who were preaching the name of Christ and yet they were doing it with motives to afflict pain in the life of the Apostle Paul.

Now, let me just make sure you understand these were believers. That often is a shock for many of us. Don't you find that true that when you're deeply wounded by another believer you find that somewhat hard to take because you don't expect it on one sense because you're following the same Lord. You have the same value system. You're called to the same love and yet when someone who names the name of Christ wounds you deeply it is a deep wound. It tends to steal your joy. That's what is going on in the life of the Apostle Paul at this time.

Now, let me make sure you understand it. He delineated carefully. These were believers not false believers. These were not false teachers. He's very clear when he runs into false teachers how we ought to handle them. For example, in 1 Timothy he speaks of Hymenaeus and Alexander who were blasphemers. They were false teachers. They say they should be excommunicated from the church. By the way, that's very typical of what goes on throughout scripture. For example, the Apostle John in 3 John 1:9 talks about Diotrephes – a man who loved to have the preeminence and they were removing him from the fellowship because he was a false teacher. Paul writes in Romans, chapter 16, verse 17. He says watch out for those who cause division. Teach contrary doctrine. Avoid them. Remove yourself from their presence. So, Paul was very concerned about false teaching. He does not give us any sense of that concern here in the text. Rather, these were people who were following after Christ; who were preaching Christ much like Paul but their motives were a bit skewed.

You say, what were their motives? Well, we see that in verses 15 and 17. He gives us a list. He says well, their doing this out of envy, out of rivalry, out of affliction to afflict me with certain pain. By the way the word afflict, *thlipsis* is a great visual picture. It literally mans to crush and the way that you might think of this is like a stone crushing and pulverizing something. In fact, when I was reading about it the idea came about like a child playing with

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something and crushing it. Immediately I thought of my son Jack, six year old Jack. A bright and sunny summer day, loves to crouch down on our driveway, rock in hand, waiting on some unexpected black ant to come by so he can crush it and pulverize it. That's what is going on in the text. That's the sense. That's what these people wanted to do to Paul. Could you imagine what pain that would cause? Do you know why that would cause Paul so much pain? Because he was a man of the Gospel. He loved the Gospel. That was his life.

Remember I said, one of the ways that you overcome persecution; overcome troubles in your life? Is that you have to have your joy anchored to something that is immovable? You don't anchor it to something like circumstances that ebbs and flows that is fleeting. You don't anchor it to something like pleasure or possessions. No, you anchor it to something that will not change and for Paul the Gospel was the thing that he anchored his joy to. There was a personal sense. Jesus Christ had done something for him that completely, radically changed his life. His joy was anchored to that salvation experience but more than that he lived his life by the gospel. He said I'm going to give my life to the glory of Christ so that no matter what happens to me circumstantially, no matter what goes on situationally I'm going to look at it as an opportunity to give God glory.

You know, when a person comes in and begins to steal your joy out of the very thing that you love; the thing that is the very center of your life it's difficult to maintain healthy joy. You find your joy actually begins to evaporate. Was that going on with the Apostle Paul? Did he look into those people who were admittedly his rivalry, admittedly were envious, admittedly were trying to afflict some type of pain in him? And did his joy start to evaporate? I don't think it did and I'm going to show you why in a moment.

The first thing we see here is that Paul clearly gives us a sense that there's personal pain but there's personal pain as if he understands a larger scheme of what was going on. Now he doesn't give us much detail much to his credit. He doesn't tell us why these people were trying to afflict him. Maybe they wanted to tear him down so that they could elevate themselves. Possibly, maybe they wanted to create doubt or distrust about Paul's situation. Remember he was in prison. Maybe they were saying this is what God wants for Paul – imprisonment so now you need to listen. Paul doesn't give us any of that. Instead, what does Paul do? He teaches us, he models for us how we actually can combat this kind of attack. How do we treat those around us who would like to steal our joy? Paul models it for us and I'm going to show you three things out of the text. I'm going to show you three ways how we can respond to people who are afflicting or who are attacking us. You ready?

First one, Paul doesn't react. He does nothing. In fact, verse 15 all he does is state the facts. He gives us practically no details, why? I'll tell you why. Paul was not about ready to get into a credibility war. Think about it this way, when someone attacks you what is your first desire? It's to reverse the attack, right? There's a sense of retaliation. You want to maintain that you are right; that you are a person of integrity, of incredibility and they're the ones who are wrong. Paul doesn't do that. Do you notice that? All he does is state the facts. The facts

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are not even that clear. He gives us very few details. And yet he's a man who's personally afflicted. Who does that sound like? Sounds like who? Christ, right? Remember what Isaiah said about Christ. Remember how Jesus would often handle conflict? He wouldn't answer those who were the ones who were inflicting pain. In fact, there was a prophecy in Isaiah that speaks to that very fact, That's exactly how he would act. You don't need to turn there but just listen to this. Isaiah 53, verse 7 and following. The prophet is prophesizing how the Messiah will act. It says he's going to act this way – that he was oppressed, he was afflicted and interesting enough, that word afflicted in the Hebrew is the exact same concept that you find in the Greek. I wonder if Paul was thinking about this passage, the idea of being crushed? He says when he was oppressed, when the Messiah was being oppressed and he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter; like a sheep before it's shears is silent so he opened not his mouth.

Listen, when someone is attacking you, what do you do? Sit quiet. Wait for the truth to be revealed. It may be a short period of time. It may be a long period of time but don't go down that road of self defense. Do you know what? It ruins your own credibility. Allow the truth to come out. I'll often say if someone is attacking you unjustly let them attack. In fact, give them enough rope eventually they'll hang themselves. But when you step in and start defending yourself you lose the credibility. I think that's what Paul is doing. I know who I am. I know the truth.

Second thing he does. Drop down to verse 17. He looks through the offense, notice this, he looks through the offense to why they were offending. He looks through to their motive essentially. He says I see why you're doing what you're doing. They're doing it out of envy, out of rivalry which is another word for what? Jealousy. Why were they jealous over Paul? We don't know. Maybe it's because Paul was successful. Maybe it's because of Paul's giftedness. Maybe it's because of Paul's position. They were jealous maybe because more people were following Paul than themselves. We really don't know but their jealousy fed by their own insecurity prompted the attack. Did you hear that? You want to know often why we are attacked? It's out of jealousy, fed by a person's insecurity will prompt an attack. Paul understood that. He didn't retaliate. He didn't fight back. He understood the motive.

Now, what happens when you understand someone's motives? I'll tell you what happens. When you understand a person's motives you can react to whatever situation righteously. If you fail to understand their motives it's likely you're going to jump in and you're going to want to fight back. Paul took the time to look through the situation.

And then, thirdly – something we often don't think about doing. Verse 16, Paul focused on his friends. He focused on his allies. He focused on those he could trust. You can say in the midst of great negativity it's easy to forget our faithful friends, isn't it? It's as if the whole world is coming down on us. We forget those are just a small portion of people and that we have a much wider path of friends who would stand behind them. That's Paul's case and Paul reminds himself of his friends. In fact, he reminds himself what his friends knew. His friends

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knew what? That he was in prison for the defense of the Gospel. Defense is the word *apologia*. That's where we get the word apologetic. Paul was in prison for giving an answer for his faith. His friends knew he was legitimately in prison for the sake of the Gospel. Now, did this steal his joy? Obviously not. He starts with a question. Well what then? In other words, what am I going to do? What then? How should I settle this? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth Christ is proclaimed – in that I rejoice. Do you see what he does? He goes right back to the center of his life. Says, I'm here to glorify Christ. If I have to do that in the midst of persecution I'll do it to the best to the ability to glorify Christ. If I have to do that with someone who's opposing me, afflicting me I'll do it the best of my ability to glorify Christ.

So what do we see Paul? Paul's a model. Joy regardless of persecution. Joy regardless of people who might cause pain and then thirdly, the last thing I want us to look at – joy regardless of personal failings. Now, what I'm talking about here is our own struggle with our fleshly nature; our own struggle with sin. Paul demonstrates joy regardless of personal failing.

Now, let's push away from the book of Philippians for a moment. Let's think of Paul as a whole. You know, whenever I look at a person in scripture, someone like Paul they look bigger than life, don't they? Here's a person who doesn't seem to be able to do anything wrong. He's blessed. He's impassioned, powerful. God uses him in a great way and you look at him and you think I could never be like that. The reality is when you really start digging into scripture you find that scripture reveals it's heroes as real people just like us. They have real issues. I mean think about it – Noah who was used as a great man of faith after the flood, after standing up against criticism, after all of this he self indulged, finds himself in a drunken, intoxicated stupor before the Lord. He abandons his faith for a moment and you find yourself, you think here's this great champion of faith. You know what? He's just like us? Abraham. Abraham lied whenever he was in a difficult situation just to get out of the situation. You think about Jacob. In scripture he's called the deceiver. Moses was a murderer. David an adulterer. Jonah, the prophet was a disobedient prophet. He's running from God.

Listen, our heroes in scripture are real. The Apostle Paul was real. I think one of the best scriptures to take you to is found in the book of Romans. Romans, chapter 7. Whenever I think of the Apostle Paul I think of Romans, chapter 7. I'll tell you why because Paul is very transparent in this text. And I love this. I love this because I struggle like this. Paul is talking about his own personal failings. Paul is talking about his own sinful nature. Paul is talking about dealing with temptation – the real stuff of Christian life. And this is what he says, verse 19, he says I don't understand this for I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Can you relate to that? Look at verse 15, back up a little bit. He says I don't understand my own actions for I do not do what I want but I do the very thing I hate. I mean, have you ever found yourself there? Pulled into some kind of fleshly temptation? You know righteousness is and yet you caved on righteousness. You do what you do not want to do. Paul was saying this is what I experience.

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Look at verse 21, he says so I find it to be a law that when I want to do right evil lies close at hand. I'm in verse 22. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. And then as if he's with an exclamation says in verse 24 oh, wretched man that I am, who's going to deliver me from this body of death? Have you ever felt that way? You're really embattled. You're really in a struggle with what's going on internally. And it's clear if you choose that path it's a path of unrighteousness. You know what the path of righteousness is but it seems like you can not help yourself. You're constantly pulled there. You're doing what you don't want to do. This is the Apostle Paul.

I tell you, nothing will steal my joy faster than my own personal failings; my own struggle with the flesh. Yielding to the flesh destroys my joy.

I'm wondering if Paul wasn't thinking of David's struggle when he wrote this. I'm wondering if he wasn't actually thinking about Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is that great confessional statement in the Psalm by David after he committed adultery. In fact, in Psalm 51, you can turn there if you like. In fact, you might want to turn there just to mark it because I find myself coming here on occasions when I'm frustrated with the struggle and I cry out. This is a great prayer by the way to pray back to God. But just listen. Listen to it in context. Here's David. He's sinned with Bathsheba. He's had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah murdered. It's been upwards to a year since this has happened. Nathan, the prophet shows up. Confronts David. David knows it in his heart. Have you ever concealed a sin for a long period of time? What do you feel like? You feel like you're about ready to burst, don't you? You feel like you just want to unload this. I think David's joy had just wasted away. And when he came public about it he went before the Lord in great repentance. He says, have mercy upon me, oh God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant kindness blot out my transgressions. In other words, have mercy on me not for what I deserve but for out of your love. He's asking for mercy. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. He says, I know my transgression or my sin is ever before me against you and you only have I sinned. He has a proper understanding of sin. He sinned with Bathsheba. He sinned against Uriah but ultimately he sinned against God. He's confessing this.

Drop down to verse 9, he says, hide your face from my sins, blot out my transgressions. Verse 10. Create in me a clean heart oh God, renew a right spirit. In other words, make everything right. That's what he's saying. Bring my joy back to me. And that's exactly what he says in verse 12. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. I tell you, when you're clinging to unrighteousness and personal failing I can guarantee you your joy is evaporating.

Well, how did Paul deal with this? How did Paul deal with this? We're in chapter 7 in the book of Romans and he's confessing himself. There's almost this cathartic sense of saying this is who I really am. But he really doesn't bring a conclusion until you get to chapter 8.

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And in chapter 8, verse 1 you get a sense of Paul's mind, of where he's thinking and he says this. There is therefore now, no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. He's just talking about his own personal failing. He's talking about his own struggle and it's as if he goes over to Romans 8:1 and he says, yeah, but I'm going to remind you, I'm going to remind myself there is therefore now no condemnation. Nothing I've done can condemn me before God.

You know what Paul does? Paul moves into grace. That's what he reminds himself of grace. He runs to grace – the unmerited favor of God. Do you know why Paul's joy can be so unconditional? It's because he served a God whose grace is unconditional. Did Paul fall into sin? Absolutely. Did he struggle with the flesh? Absolutely. Did he stay there? No. He poured himself out before the God of grace.

You see, if you're struggling with some kind of personal defeat, some sin don't hold onto it. Don't fear coming to God. Rush to God in his grace. Confess it to him. What will he do? He will return to you the joy of salvation.

Listen, every week, practically every week I meet with somebody over lunch, in my office, at my house, at their house – every week of ministry I meet with some person from our church who struggles with something they've done and they've been holding onto it and their guilt ridden. They feel a sense of almost imprisonment by their own sin. And my advice to them is the same. Come before the Lord. He's a gracious, good, merciful God and they're always saying I can not. I can't imagine that he would forgive me for this. Yet, again, my response is the same. Yes, he will forgive you, yet again. That's his grace. Listen, if I'm meeting with individuals like that then I know we have a room of people, people here that when I talk about personal failings something immediately comes to your mind. What do you do? If you hold on to it you will erode your joy. Rush to God's grace and what does he do? He restores the joy of the salvation that he's given you.

How can we be people of joy? Follow the Apostle Paul – joy regardless of troubles in his life because his joy is anchored to something that won't move. Joy regardless of people in his life. Why? Because he sees everything as an opportunity to glorify Christ. Joy regardless of personal failings. Because he was quick to run to God unconditional grace. We need to be the same way. People of joy.

Now pray with me.