

Paul in Philippi—Joy That Just Won't Quit  
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We are going to be looking at Acts 16 today, and in particular we're going to be looking at Paul and Silas' time in Philippi. And as we look at this, what we're gonna see is that there is a joy that Paul displays in Philippi. It's this joy that just won't quit—I mean, it cannot be stopped.

And just a little bit of background here as you're turning there. Philippi...we talked a little bit about it last week. Paul left Antioch on his second missionary journey, and before long he ended up in Philippi. This was the first town in Europe where Paul was able to really preach and plant a church. Before long...he had been there, and before long there was a small group of followers of Christ that were starting to form. And Paul made some enemies pretty quickly, because one of the things that happened is there was this young slave girl who was demon-possessed. And this demon allowed her to be a seer, a teller of fortunes, an oracle, those sorts of things. And Paul ends up casting the demon out of this young girl. Of course, her masters are not very happy because now their source of income with this girl is gone. She can no longer...the demon's gone, so she can no longer tell people all the fun little answers they want to know. And so they start deciding that they will go ahead and cause some trouble for Paul.

So what they do is they gather up this crowd, and they hunt Paul down. And they find Paul and Silas, and they haul them before the officials of the church city. And the officials go along with it, and they strip off Paul and Silas' clothes; and they take some sticks, some rods, and they start beating 'em. And after they had beat 'em up, and they were just this bloody mess, they go ahead and they give them to the jailor. And the jailor throws them into prison. And they're put in the prison; they have stocks placed on their feet. And Paul and Silas...they haven't received any medical attention or anything else; and what do they do? They start praying and singing hymns of praise to God. And they're doing this through the night. And somewhere around midnight they're praying and they're singing hymns of praise to God, and these other prisoners are listening to 'em.

And I'm gonna stop right here in this story, in the narrative of this story, because the thing that I ask is how does Paul have that sort of joy? I mean, this is not the sort of joy that he just says, 'Ok, here's a nice little...', you know, like the Wal-Mart welcome stickers that have the little smiley face, and here you go, just slap it on you, don't worry, be happy, put a smile on your face... That's not this kind of joy. Paul was wrongfully imprisoned. He didn't even have a trial, which was guaranteed to him by law. He had been beaten, he had no medical attention, he's thrown in this prison, has no idea what is going to happen to him. And still yet, he and Silas, they start prayin' and praising God! How? Why? What gives them this sort of joy?

What we're gonna do to see this, is we're actually going to pull out of this story for a minute, ok? And what we're going to do is we are going to go over here to Philippians. Now, here's the reason. What gives Paul this sort of joy? We're gonna look at a few places in Philippians. So feel free, put your finger there in Acts, and flip to the right just, I don't know, a few pages. It's not very far to the book of Philippians. It's just a couple pages long. Here is why—because Philippians is a book that is all about joy, and it was a letter that was written by Paul a few years later to these very people where he's at in Philippi, these young believers who had seen him go through this time and they had been a witness to the joy that he had. And he's telling them, 'Listen, if you want that sort of joy, that sort of joy that you saw in me and in Silas back when we were in prison, this is it.' And so we're just going to, real briefly, hit on a couple of different places in Philippians that give insight into Paul's joy.

The first is in Philippians 3:4-11. I put this first not because it comes first in the order of the book, but because, as I understand it, this is...if you grasp this, all these other things start falling in place. And we'll see why. In Philippians 3:4-6, Paul basically gives his resumé, ok? This is his resumé—he is circumcised on the eighth day; he's of the nation of Israel, tribe of Judah; he has a heritage that is something to be proud of...tribe of Benjamin, I mean. They were...the first king came from there; they were the only tribe that didn't turn their backs on David when Absalom rebelled. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He grew up in a Hebrew home, being trained in all the proper schools by Hebrew teachers; he had a great schooling. He was a Pharisee, which in our day Pharisees have a very negative connotation. In his day, this was like saying he was a very highly-respected lawyer, and judge, and scribe, philosopher, thinker, politician, who was very moral and upright. He was on the fast track to becoming one of the leaders of his nation.

It goes on and he talks about his extreme sincerity, his motives. He was so sincere and so believed in what he was doing, he was willing to hunt down and throw in jail anybody that he saw, these people that he saw threatening his society, these Christians who were tearing it apart at the seams, from his mind.

And finally, according to Jewish Law he was blameless. He was blameless; he was a very religious man. This was Paul's reason for confidence right here. It was all the stuff that he could look at in his past and say, 'I am a good person. I've got all the right schooling; I come from the right family background; I have the right friends; I keep the right rules. I have it all put together.' But then he goes on, in verse 8, and he says, 'I count it all as scubala.' Your translation probably says 'rubbish.' That's what it is, but that's also probably the most G-rated translation available, because it's dung, it's manure, it's scubala, ok? It's the stuff that you would scoop out of a stall and throw away. It's rubbish. It's something that counts for nothing. Paul says, 'All that stuff that I thought was so good is worth nothing. It's scubala.'

Well, he goes on and what we end up seeing here is this resumé...this is what Paul used to place his confidence in. This is what used to make him feel righteous and acceptable. This is what, if somebody wanted to know why they should put Paul in their list of friends or acceptable society, this is what he would have used to point to. This is what he would have pointed to. It was what made him feel acceptable to other people; it is what made him feel acceptable to himself; and ultimately, it was what he thought would make him acceptable to God.

But he goes on, and now his confidence is found in Christ. He looks at all that stuff and he says, 'All this stuff in my background? It's not worth anything. Now the only thing that gives me confidence, the only thing that I trust in, is not any works that I can do. It's what Christ has done. My confidence—the sense that I am confident, that I am accepted by myself, and by God most importantly—it's found in Christ, because God has given me this righteousness, this acceptability. My sense of acceptability comes from God. It's not based on anything that I can do, and it's not based on any good points that somebody gives me because of my background. My confidence comes in God, and in God alone.'

He goes on, and there's another place that we'll look at here in Philippians. What gives Paul this sort of joy? Let's look at his attitude and his words, what makes Paul stick out; and his joy and attitude come out here in his attitude and words. In Philippians 2: 13-15 he says this; we'll look at 14 and 15 first. He says, 'Do all things without grumbling so that you can show that you are children of God, you're above reproach in the midst of this evil generation...'

*...among whom you appear as lights in the world.*

"Do all things without grumbling." Notice, he isn't saying, 'Put on a smile and go ahead and start encouraging everybody around you.' All he's saying is stop grumbling and disputing so that you can show that you are lights in a dark world. If you wanna be a witness, if you want people to know that you are a child of God, if you want to be a light in a dark world, all you have to do is stop grumbling and arguing. Paul isn't even saying, 'Be nice to people.' He's saying just stop grumbling and arguing. I mean, think about it. We find all kinds of things to grumble about or argue about—the music's too loud, it's too quiet, it's too fast, it's too slow. The preacher boy up here said scubala...I don't know, whatever it is. I mean, we can find all kinds of things to grumble about and argue about—about how people treat us at our jobs, about how they don't treat us the way that we think that we should be treated, they aren't doing things the way that we think they should be done, we aren't getting our fair representation. And what Paul says is just stop! Just stop grumbling, stop disputing. If nothing else, just keep your mouth shut; and if you can do that you will show...you will totally distinguish yourself from the world around you and show that you are a child of God.

But here's the thing—it's not just something that we do under our own power. Because what happens in the verse before that is he says, 'Here is how it's possible.' He says because it is God who is at work within you, and in verse 12 just before that, that's why he says, "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling." It's not that you're figuring out your salvation; it's that God has already buried His soul, His Spirit, His power, inside of you in your soul. He has placed His Holy Spirit inside of you, and His Spirit is working inside of you. Now, if you would just uncover all this stuff and if you would let this come to the surface, God Himself is at work within you if you are a child of God. He will give you the power to stop grumbling and stop arguing with all the people around you, just because you don't agree with the way things are going. If you wanna be a light in a dark world, that's how you do it.

Paul goes on, there's another place and it's in chapter 4 verses 4-7. And this gives us an insight into his outlook on the future. As he's telling these people in Philippi how he views the future, this is what he says. He says,

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*

*...Be anxious for nothing, but in everything with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Rejoice! He's saying, 'Listen, you don't have to be anxious about what the future holds.' That's where I like in gospels where Jesus says, 'Hey, don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow has got enough trouble of its own.' I look at it and I say, 'I know. That's why I'm worried. I know tomorrow has enough trouble of its own, and I'm trying to stay afloat today.' What Jesus says is 'Guess what? You don't have to worry about it. Why? Because I am here today, and I am carrying you through today, aren't I? And I'm gonna be here tomorrow, too. I have your future in My hands. It's on My shoulders to make sure that I make sure that everything ends up right, and when finally you see me face to face that you are taken care of, and that you know that all things will be made right. It's not on your shoulders, it's on Mine. You don't have to worry about the future. You don't have to be anxious. And so go ahead and just rejoice, because you don't have to carry that load.' And what he says is God will pour out this peace on you that gives you a peace that cannot be stripped away and is beyond all human comprehension. It's this gift of God that is found just in Christ Jesus.

That's how Paul looked at things when he went into that prison. That's why Paul could have joy in this prison. As we look at the impact of joy on suffering in Paul's life back in Acts 16:25, how this impacts Paul's life—we'll see that there's just a couple things here, and what we see is that Paul and Silas...they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. How? Why? Because what we see in Philippians is first of all...suffering and rejection, it's not a verdict on him. It is no longer a verdict on him. When we go through suffering and we start asking why when I face a hard time, and I faced hard times...have not been able to find jobs to support my family, when I have one child and another on the way and I'm sittin' here and I'm asking God why? I'm willing to work wherever; why? The real thing that's behind me asking why is because I feel like, 'You know what, God? I've got enough stuff in my background...You owe this to me! C'mon, haven't I earned this?' And so when I feel like I'm going through hard times I feel like it's a condemnation, it's a rejection, it's a sentence, it's a verdict on me, that all this stuff that I've done in my history hasn't been good enough. 'What, this isn't good enough for You? I'm not good enough for You? Haven't I earned it?' Paul says no. That's not it. It's no longer...God has already accepted him undeservedly, so whatever he's going through it's not because there is some verdict on him. It's simply because God is allowing Himself to be glorified through Paul's life. And so Paul is able to look at it as something that's not a condemnation or a verdict on him.

He goes on, and suffering is also...here's another way that it impacts him. Suffering allows him to know more of God. It strips away all confidence that he has in these things that would have made him, in his mind, acceptable to God. It takes away all confidence that he has in his powers, in his abilities, in his skills, in his mind, in his legal prowess...whatever it is, it takes away all confidence that he has in that, and it gives him an opportunity to say, 'I can't carry myself through this, and my accomplishments and my background cannot carry me through this situation. They just aren't strong enough, and I'm not strong enough. But I know the One who is.' And so he throws himself into Christ's arms, and he allows God to just carry him through this situation. And he gets to know God more deeply because of it.

Third thing that is pulled out of Philippians, how this applies to suffering—it lets him be a light in a dark world. It highlights the fact that Paul is in here; he's praying and singing hymns of praise to God. That...ok. First of all, he just went through prison without...he's wrongfully imprisoned and he goes through it without grumbling and disputing. That's pretty huge. But this only highlights the fact that he's not a grumbler. It only brings...it accentuates the fact that he is actually able to rejoice in the middle of this situation. It highlights the fact that he is not a grumbler, and so he is a light in a dark world as these other prisoners and this jailor are listening to him and Silas pray and sing praises to God.

Fourth thing that we see is that suffering gives an opportunity to trust God. He didn't have to worry about whether or not it was all gonna work out. He didn't have to worry about whether or not he would get a fair trial. He didn't have to worry about any of those things. Why? Because he knew the God who holds his future in His hands, and he had complete trust in Him. And so he was able to go into it without anxiety, and he was able to go into it and just entrust himself to God and begin rejoicing; and God would then pour out that peace that is beyond comprehension in his life and in Silas' life there in that very jail cell.

What ends up happening after this is they...as we go on through Acts 16...an earthquake comes around midnight and all of a sudden all of the jail cells are busted open. The shackles come off. It's this miracle. And the jailor, he sees that this has happened, and he's about to kill himself; because if these prisoners escape, his life is forfeit anyway, 'so I might as well end it.' Paul and Silas stop him, and they say, 'No, we're still here. Don't worry. You don't have to kill yourself.' And this totally amazes the jailor. Think about this for a second. Paul and Silas had an opportunity to end their own suffering—it was wrong, it was not fair, that they did not ask for, and was actually against the law. They could have run, but they didn't. Why? Because they didn't have to worry about it. They had that perspective of what suffering was for, of pointing people towards God and towards Christ. And so they end up sharing the gospel here with this jailor and his family. He takes them home and he goes ahead and he gives them medical attention and starts dressing their wounds. And they tell him and his family about Jesus Christ, about the gospel, about how there is someone who died for them. They don't have to be 'good enough' any more. They can't be good enough to earn God's favor, but there is somebody who died for them, who was perfect.

Jesus Christ—He was perfect; He lived a perfect, sinless life. And He died the death that I should have died. And He died it wrongfully so that He could step into my place. And this person, this man who is a hundred percent God and a hundred percent man—He died in my place, and then He came back alive. And because He is alive we can know, I can know, Paul can know, that jailor can know, you can know that Jesus Christ has defeated sin and death. And so if I am willing to trust Him like this jailor did, like Paul did...if I am willing to say, and I am willing to acknowledge the fact that I can never earn God's favor, then what happens is God goes ahead and He says, 'Guess what? That resume' that you thought was all that, but it also includes all those messed up, sinful things that you have done, those things that you were ashamed of, the reasons that you think you have to earn favor, because you have to make up for something that you did back here? Guess what? All those things—you and Jesus, you're gonna switch resumés.'

And now I get to carry that record of a perfect, blameless past—not because I've done it, but because He has done it. And I'm acceptable to God not because of me, but because of Him.

And this jailor and his family—they end up becoming followers of Christ, and they end up getting baptized. But this also brings us to the last thing in Philippians that I think of that gives us insight into Paul's outlook. See, when he wrote Philippians he was in jail again. When he writes this letter to the Philippians he's in jail in another town. He's in the midst of suffering again. And people are slandering him and saying all kinds of things about him, and people are preaching and they're sharing the gospel, and he's going through suffering. And he is in some hard times where it is just rough. And what he ends up saying is, 'Guess what? What does it matter? It doesn't matter anything. Why? Because whether things are true or whether it's false, these people have true motives, false motives, whatever is going on, whether I'm suffering rightfully or wrongfully, whatever it is it doesn't matter. Why? Because Christ is proclaimed. There are people who are hearing the gospel because of this suffering and this stuff that is going on. And there are people who are coming to know Christ, and this is a cause for me to rejoice.'

That gives him excitement more than anything else, because he realizes that there are people who are stepping out of the darkness and into the light. And so it makes it worthwhile, every bit of it.

Let's stand.

[Congregation sings blessing song.]

Go in grace.