

## The Difference Between Joy and Happiness [Slide 1]

A five year old was once asked to quote John 3:16. He said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have ever-laughing life. Ever-laughing life is not a bad description for the kind of joy we should possess. Today we begin a sermon series I have entitled: Living With Joy. The Christmas season is a joyful time, but wouldn’t you want to live joyfully year round? Would you want to know how to have joy even in the midst of difficult or tragic circumstances? What is joy? Why do some people seem to always have it while others seem to never find it? In the next four weeks we are going to learn how to live with joy all the time.

First, we need to understand what joy is and how it differs from happiness. The two often feel the same but one is harder than the other. Joy can thrive where happiness wilts. The American Heritage Dictionary defines happiness as characterized by good luck, fortunate. Enjoying, showing or marked by pleasure or joy. It defines joy as a condition or feeling of great pleasure or happiness, delight. The dictionary treats them as synonyms and it is difficult to distinguish between joy and happiness from the dictionary definitions.

Both happiness and joy involve taking delight or pleasure in something. What I think distinguishes the two is the source of that delight. People become happy because of the situation in which they find themselves. They are happy if they get a new raise or if their beloved agrees to marry them. They are happy if their favorite sports team wins the World Series such as when the Astros won. They are happy when their kids do well in school. They are happy when they are accepted to the College of their choice.

However, if the opposite happens, then they are not happy. If they don’t get a raise and instead get a cut in salary, they are not very happy. If they are a Dodgers fan this year, they are not so happy. If their child flunks eighth grade, they are not happy. If they don’t get accepted to the College of their choice, they are not happy. Happiness is a state that is dependent upon outside circumstances.

Joy is not dependent upon circumstances. In fact, joy can exist under very difficult circumstances because the source of joy is independent of our circumstances. The apostle Paul found himself in prison in Rome, but experienced great joy in the midst of hardship. By studying his example we can learn how to have joy even when we suffer.

I invite you to turn to Philippians 1:12-26. Philippians is in the NT. It is the eleventh book in the NT after the Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians. Philippians 1:12-26. We are going to start with verses 12-20 which I will read. Read.

Paul provides an incredible example for us to follow. Let’s see what we can learn from it.

Paul was imprisoned in Rome, probably under house arrest and guarded by the Praetorian Guard. The Praetorian Guard was the group of soldiers who protected Caesar and his household and maintained security in Rome. The Praetorian Guard consisted of about 9,000 soldiers. Guardsmen would have guarded Paul around the clock and would have watched him in four hour shifts. So, Paul would have come in contact with a sizable number of soldiers.

Now when Paul looked at his circumstances and considered his imprisonment what did he perceive in the situation? What was his focus? He was confined to quarters, dependent on others to bring him food, unable to travel or to worship with the local church. He awaited trial

on trumped up charges. He was vulnerable to mistreatment from the guards, the target of false accusers, and a man whose reputation was sullied.

Paul had faithfully served God; did he feel like God had abandoned him? Did he feel like he had missed the will of God, resulting in his incarceration? Did he chafe at his loss of freedom and how his ministry had been greatly hindered and curtailed? If that had been your situation how would you have felt? Would you have been happy?

When Paul looked at his situation what did he see? According to verse 12 what he saw was that his imprisonment had turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel. Jail time was a big win for the Gospel.

The Gospel had been advanced by his imprisonment. First, the reason for Paul's imprisonment, his proclamation of the Gospel, had become known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard. Paul probably shared the Gospel with every guard assigned to him. After all, you have long hours of doing nothing in prison for both the guard and the prisoner so Paul used these opportunities to proclaim the Gospel to a captive audience. Thank about it. That situation was probably a dream come true for an evangelist. Every four hours God plopped a new captive audience in with Paul and he had four hours to talk to them about Christ and they could not leave. Caesar was paying for those guards to listen to Paul.

The second reason the Gospel had spread was because the believers in Rome were emboldened by Paul's example to speak the Word of God without fear. God used Paul's imprisonment to give them courage.

The news was not all good, however. Paul somehow knew that his fellow Christians were preaching with differing motives. In verses 15-17 Paul acknowledges that some Christians were proclaiming the Gospel out of good motives and some were proclaiming the Gospel out of bad motives. Some were preaching the Gospel out of love. Some were preaching the Gospel out of jealousy against Paul and out of selfish ambition. They thought their success in proclaiming the Gospel would cause Paul distress.

The depth of Paul's character and his spiritual discernment are seen in verse 18. Read. Paul was able to look at even those who were preaching the Gospel for the purpose of trying to hurt him and could rejoice in the fact that they were preaching the Gospel. He said, "In this I rejoice and I will rejoice." I am rejoicing and I will continue to rejoice.

Paul was rejoicing in prison because what he most cared about: Jesus and the Gospel were being proclaimed through his circumstances. If Jesus was being honored and the Gospel proclaimed because he was in prison, then he could rejoice. Paul was so passionate about Jesus and the Gospel being proclaimed that he was able to rejoice in persecution from outside the church and opposition from within the church.

**[Slide 2] Here then is a big key to having joy.** If you can become more passionate about Jesus and his Gospel than anything else and if you can look at your situation with the eyes of faith, then you can experience joy in some of the most wretched situations.

How about you? If you were locked away in prison right now and some of your fellow brothers and sisters were trying to cause you distress, could you delight in that situation? Could you take pleasure in that situation?

You are part of God's plan to advance his kingdom and to win people to faith in his son. Can you trust that nothing that happens to you is an accident, that God is sovereignly using everything in your life to glorify him and to reach lost people? When Paul later on writes in 1 Thessalonians that we should rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything, the only way we can do that is if we are absolutely convinced that God sovereignly

rules in everything and everything he does proceeds from motives of love and goodness. If God is sovereign then it matters not whether my circumstances are pleasant or unpleasant, God is working out his perfect will for my ultimate good as well as for the ultimate benefit of everyone else.

**[Slide 3] This is why I can have joy in all circumstances, because I trust God's goodness and sovereignty.** God is working all things together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. Faith in God's wisdom and goodness is the soil out of which joy grows. I put it to you this way. God is too sovereign to fail you and too good to cheat you. If you hold fast to the character of God, you can possess the joy of God.

Paul was so convinced that he could trust God's goodness and sovereignty that he proclaims in verse 20, "Read." Paul was convinced that God would not let him down. Whether in this life or in the life to come, Paul would not be ashamed of his hope in Jesus Christ.

Paul was awaiting trial. He would appear before some Roman judge at some point where he would then explain his ministry as an apostle and answer the judge's questions about his Christian faith and his missionary activity. Paul intended to give a defense for the Gospel at that hearing. The result of that hearing could either be that Paul was freed or executed or possibly some kind of punishment in between. He could catch pneumonia or disease while stuck in prison. He expected Christ to be exalted in his body by life or by death. He was exalting Christ in his life by witnessing to all those guards. Now he turns to the topic of his death in verses 21-26. Let's read those verses. Read.

Paul believes that he is going to be released. Paul explains part of his reason for rejoicing in verse 19. He knows that through their prayers and God's provision of the Holy Spirit that he will be released from prison.

Paul's hope and expectation according to verse 20 was that he would not do anything in prison or the court room which would bring disgrace upon Jesus or upon the Gospel. Paul's desire was that Jesus be exalted or honored through his life or his death.

Paul sums up his whole attitude toward life and death in verse 21. Read. To live is Christ. The sum total of my life, what matters more to me than anything is to know Jesus and to live a life pleasing to him. Paul's life was totally devoted to Christ. His mind was set on Christ. His purpose in life was to proclaim Jesus. His whole life centered around Jesus and so he could say "to live is Christ and to die is gain." What happens when I die? Then I go to be with Jesus in a way far more intimate and close than I will ever have here on the earth. When I die I lose nothing and I gain everything. When you have that attitude toward death then you don't fear death.

Could you say along with Paul that to live is Christ? Is Jesus the focus of your life, the reason you exist, and the object of your affection?

Could you say that to die is gain? Do you really believe that your death is the best thing that could happen to you?

Let me ask you a question about how you feel about your own death? Do you want to die? Or you eager to die and go to be with Christ? I must confess that I am not at the level Paul was at. I'm not eager to die. I don't feel that way. The affections for the things of this life and the people of this life still have a hold on me. I hope someday to reach the point where I'm eager to die, but that day has not come yet. Paul had a very mature faith and for most of us it is a goal for us to reach the point where we are eager to die.

But at least I can say, "I'm not afraid to die." Oh, there are certain processes of dying that I would like to avoid. But I'm not afraid of the end result of death. I fully believe that Jesus is on the other side and that what I find there will be far superior to what I have here.

Are you afraid to die? Do you find the idea of your own death frightening and terrifying? If you do, then something is missing in your faith. Jesus came to set us free from the fear of death. Can you be joyful at the prospect of dying? Only if you are absolutely convinced that Jesus is waiting to escort you to a better life.

Paul's eagerness to die and be with Christ was not due to being suicidal and tired of living. Paul knew that God had a reason for him being on the Earth and that it was God's decision when Paul was to leave the Earth, not Paul's decision. In fact, Paul was so convinced that God's will was for him to stay and continue his ministry that he told the Philippians in verse 25 that he was convinced of this that he would remain and continue in ministry to help them to progress in the faith.

We die when we finish what God wants to do in our life. God has things for us to do and he has a level of Christlikeness that he wants us to achieve in this lifetime. Both are important, doing and becoming. Since you are still alive today that means, God still has things for you to do and a level of Christ-likeness you are to reach, before it is time for you to go home. In fact, we are invincible and incapable of dying until God is finished with us here on the Earth and when he finishes with us here on the Earth, what is the point of hanging around?

**You can joyfully persevere through persecution and opposition to the Gospel and even death when you care most about Christ and the Gospel, when you think: to live is Christ and to die is gain.** Here then is a significant key to having a joyful life. You have to get to the point where what you most care about is Christ and the Gospel and you are able to see things from God's perspective of how they either advance the Gospel or build Christ-likeness in you. That is what Paul models for us here. He cared more about Jesus and the Gospel than anything else and he could see with the eyes of faith how his circumstances advanced the Gospel and that gave him great joy.

Read University of Wisconsin story. Even though it looks like we're getting beat in our present circumstances, we can still have joy if our attention is focused on the game we are winning. God will accomplish his purposes. His Kingdom will be advanced.

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, you have already won. God has forgiven you and declared you righteous in his eyes. Jesus will come back for you and take you to this wonderful place he has been preparing for you in Heaven. God will wipe every tear from your eyes and will free you from the presence and power of sin. He will give you a new body. You will reign with Christ and your fellow saints while God makes all things new. We rejoice because we have already won and nothing can change that.

Read Happiness Obsession. However, pursue Jesus and you will find joy and ever laughing life. Close in prayer.