

# UNBROKEN JOY

## THE GOSPEL

### Philippians 1:12-18

*I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

*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. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but 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.*

We have an opportunity today to look at the topic of **The Gospel**, an important foundational topic that we meet under the theme of Philippians, which has the theme of joy. We have entitled this series, “Unbroken Joy.” There is joy in Jesus Christ, unbroken, uncontainable, uninterrupted, unbounded joy. There is joy in Christ and that joy brings with it strength. It brings with it contentment, as Paul will celebrate in later chapters in Philippians. He writes, “I can do all things through him (through Christ) who gives me strength.” Again, rejoicing he will say, “I have learned the secret of contentment.” He describes for us a strength, an energy, a vitality, a hope, a contentment, a satisfaction in life that comes from a deep abiding joy that comes from knowing Christ. So joy is our theme. It is that which is to characterize us as Christians.

It is a surprising and curious thing when you find Christians who are without joy. In fact, I would suggest that unhappy Christians are not a very good advertisement for Christianity or for Christ. I don’t mean by that Christians who stumble in a moment and who fall into a time of discouragement or they go through a tough time. I am talking about sour Christians. They do exist, you know. In fact, we might even say they exist in troubling, large numbers.

This is a problem for the church as a whole because it is not a very good recommendation for Christ and it is really not what the scripture promises. It is a problem, I find, that is more prevalent (and I don’t want to get in trouble here, but I think that this is an accurate observation—I borrow it from Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones who made the same observation) that this particular problem is especially prevalent in individuals who are “born into Christian homes,” who grow up in Christianity.

## Unbroken Joy – The Gospel

Philippians 1:12-18 | Sunday, June 28, 2015 | By Brian Brookins



Isn't that interesting? Because would think that it would be the opposite. You would actually think that individuals born in Christian homes would have a leg up on the whole battle for joy and that their tenure as Christians is that the longer they live, the more joyful they become. But that's not always the case. Sometimes I think that that dynamic leads outsiders (those on the outside of the church looking in) to say, "Wow, I'm not sure this is really what I want. These people don't look all that happy." In fact, they might even be tempted to say at times that their religion makes them that way. I mean, after all, there are all these things they can't do, all these rules they have to keep. Maybe it's just their religion that's making them unhappy.

My kids have often told me that they are asked this question. They go to work, they meet people, and someone finds out that they are a pastor's son/daughter. Oh, what questions come as a result. "Are you allowed to do this?" "Can you do that?" "Are you allowed to do this?" I think that probably stems from this whole understanding or perception that that's what Christianity is about, and if that's what Christianity is about then pastors must really be about it. And they are poor, poor kids.

This is a case of mistaken identity, a case of false advertising, isn't it? Unhappy Christians—well we are misleading people. We are not giving them the clear biblical message that Jesus Christ brings joy and that sin brings misery. Ultimately, it brings destruction and death and misery. In the short term it may be pleasurable, but in the long term it brings loss and heartache. It often brings loss and heartache to the things that are most precious to us.

This passage and actually this chapter of scripture serve us because they bring us back to a foundation, a foundation that is often missing. It's the foundation of the gospel, the foundation of Christ that's presented in a message. That's what the gospel is. The gospel is good news. It's a message proclaiming that there is life in Jesus Christ. There is forgiveness in Jesus Christ. There is eternal life in Jesus Christ. Everything bad can be undone in Christ and will ultimately be undone for those who trust in him for all of eternity. There is a message of good news that is made known. The message is called the gospel.

We see it here in Paul's life. We see it illustrated vividly in this passage. The Apostle Paul is in prison. He is writing from prison to his close friends and here is what's interesting. Last week on Father's Day, we looked at the passage that follows this, so we are actually moving backwards now in the book of Philippians. And in the passage that follows, Paul does what we expect. He tells them about his potential fate. Will he die? Will he live? He is in prison and what will happen to him? Isn't it interesting that that's not where he begins? He begins by talking about how his imprisonment has impacted the advancement of the gospel. That makes a huge statement to us about the importance of this message, about the importance of the gospel and this message of good news. In the next verses he will report on what's happening with him. But before he does, he is more concerned about what is taking place and how it is affecting the gospel.

Why is that? Well, again, Paul is a great illustration of this because Paul was a man who tried to save himself. Paul was a man who was a rabbi and he had a great zeal for God. He was completely committed to doing what's right. He tried to keep God's law. He tried to keep God's rule. He really wanted to please God with his life. He completely, like probably no one you've ever met in your life, gave himself to that. He found that he failed, that no matter how good he tried to be, he was unable to be pure before God. Eventually, in that pursuit he found himself in a very dangerous place, where he was actually persecuting Christians and approving of their death and persecution, and doing it out of so-called worship to God. So he understood. He knew, like very few people, the futility of trying to find your way to God by just being good. He understood that he could not save himself.

Do you remember how we said that this curious thing of Christians not having joy—it seems to afflict those who are born into Christian homes at a disproportionate rate? I think it's because they have not always gone through what Paul went through, where they come to the place where they understand, "I cannot save myself." They grow up, rightly so, being confronted with right and wrong, and trying to do what's right. But they seem to lack at times that distinct "before and after," before Christ and after Christ came into their lives.

It's not hopeless and the message is not, if you're a parent, go act like non-Christians and your children will be better. That's not the message. The message is: "The hope for your children is the gospel." It's not their behavior. It's not ultimately your behavior. It is the gospel. And it's the foundation.

So, we come back to this message and the example of Paul. I want to just lay out for you this foundation of the gospel in three simple points. The first one we have already started to make is this:

### I. **The gospel is the cure for joyless living. The gospel is the cure for living without joy.**

Here is the Apostle Paul in prison. He is continually expressing his joy and this joy is because of this message of good news—Jesus Christ. We have seen it throughout chapter one. It's really the theme of chapter one. We read it as we started today's passage, where he talks about **advancing the gospel**. "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to **advance the gospel...**" That's what he is about. He is about **advancing the gospel**. He speaks about **defending the gospel**, that he knows that he is in prison **to defend the gospel** in verse 16. He said the same thing or something similar in verse 7. Just look at this: verse 12, verse 16, verse 7. In verse 7 we read earlier, "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and (look at this) in the **defense and confirmation of the gospel.**"

In verse 5 he calls them **partners in the gospel**. Next week we will look at verse 27 and following where he begins that exhortation with these words, "Only let your manner of life be **worthy of the gospel of Christ.**" Do you

hear the language? He is saying, “Philippians, we are all partners in the gospel. We have all partaken of the grace of God. What we care about is that this gospel message advances. I am in prison. You are suffering persecution because we want to defend the gospel. Ultimately, what we really desire is for our lives to be worthy of this message. This message is that there is life in Jesus Christ. There is forgiveness. There is new life.”

This is his joy, and he gives us some insight into the definition of the gospel. Look at verses 17-18 where we read, “The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in the truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.” That’s the message. What is the message? **Christ is proclaimed.** The Apostle Paul’s testimony is, “I tried to do what’s right. I sinned. I needed a savior. Christ saved me. The message of my life is that I am **proclaiming Jesus Christ.**” In verse 7 he speaks of grace. He says we are all partakers of God’s grace. It’s God’s gift. We receive salvation as a gift. Joy is found in Jesus Christ. We proclaim Christ, not ourselves. It is grace, not works. It is the gift of God. It is not our doing. We are partakers of God’s favor, of his grace. We have received grace, but not only have we received it in that God has been merciful to us, but we actually partake of God’s grace. The letter begins in verse 2, “Grace to you.” The letter ends with the Apostle Paul saying, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.” We live in this place of God’s favor, God’s acceptance, God’s delight because of what Jesus Christ has done in our place. The gospel is the cure for joyless living. Point #1.

### II. **The gospel acknowledges and confronts the darkness in our lives and in our world.**

The gospel acknowledges and confronts the darkness in our lives and in our world. There have been three troubling events for me in recent days, three events which have taken me to a place of prayer and just seeking the Lord. The first was in Charleston. In a local church prayer meeting, nine people were murdered by a young man 21 years of age. He murdered them because of the color of their skin. These acts of racism, bigotry, hatred, and violence are troubling.

The second one was the Supreme Court decision this past week, essentially redefining marriage. We find ourselves in a place where the scriptural message is that God has made you, God loves you, and God lays claim to your whole life, including your sex life, and that there is a right and there is a wrong. We have always been in this place as Christians where what scripture defines as behavior which pleases him and is right is very narrow compared to the way our world defines it. We have always been in a place of bringing an unpopular message, of saying that God calls fornication, sex before or outside of marriage: sin. Adultery, sex with someone other than your marriage partner: sin. Homosexuality: sin. Divorce without biblical grounds: sin.

Scripture is very clear. When the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians he says as much. He says this was basically all of us. We all came to Christ needing to be saved, needing our sex lives to be redeemed. We don’t stand in a place

of pointing a condemning finger in the sense of “we are better.” It’s not “us” and “them.” We are all “them,” right? Nor is this a message of, “If you do certain things you don’t have basic human rights.” Not at all. No, we understand that that’s completely incorrect. Nor are we in a place where we are saying we believe our religion is a religion that the government should impose on people.

Nonetheless, we come to the Supreme Court decision and it is troubling because it redefines marriage, the definition which has existed for thousands of years. And we find ourselves in a place where now we have moved beyond an understanding where we are proclaiming, “This is what God says about sexuality.” We have confronted a message before that says, “Oh come on, that’s so restraining, that’s so confining, that’s so dated. We need to be liberated. We need to experience.” That’s been the context of the argument before. There has always been plenty of evidence to say that liberating one’s sex life is not fulfilling. We have all experienced the destruction that comes through sexual sin.

But now the argument has gone to a new place where now it’s not just, “Well you are so confining.” Now it’s, “You are a bigot. You are a hater.” Now the church wants to bring a message that says, “We believe this is sin and we love you.” It will be harder now to bring that message. Those that don’t bring both parts of that message are not bringing the Christian message. We do not bring a message of, “We hate you.” This is not true. It’s not biblical. It’s not right. It’s not Christian. But because we love you, we want to speak the clear word of God about what God says regarding our sexuality.

The third event, which I think should impact how we see the second event, is that here in our city a prominent pastor fell again. In just over a year, we hear in the national news of a second prominent pastor, of his moral failure. He had an affair and his wife had an affair and we grieve over these events. I’m not saying anything that is unknown in the national news. But it is grieving and it gives us reason, doesn’t it, to be humble in the way we approach these things? Again, that we have a bible that **confronts darkness**.

Look at Paul. He is in prison for telling people, “God loves you and Jesus Christ saves you.” He is in prison for it. And we say, “How is that even possible?” Well, it’s very simple. In his day, there was widespread immorality. The message to repent of your sin and trust in Christ, the message to live a life where you honor God with everything you are was not a popular message. Even more than that, there was a message that said, “You have to worship the emperor,” that deified him. So he is coming now as a threat to all of those systems and behaviors and values and practices with just a simple message of God’s love, God’s salvation.

We are not taking over Rome, nor are we taking over Washington. This is not about a political battle. But Paul brought that message of light into darkness and he was in prison for it. There he is, “Hey, I’m in prison. Not only am I in prison (this is befuddling, troubling) but there are Christians who are preaching Christ hoping to get me in trouble.

There are people out there who are stirring things up, hoping that things will get worse for me in prison.” How is that possible? If that’s you or me, I would suggest that we are going to in that moment feel so betrayed. But you know what? Paul just puts it out there. He is very transparent about the darkness that surrounds us and that is a part of the human condition.

**The gospel begins with a conviction of sin.** The gospel begins with the knowledge, “I have sinned. I live in a world where sin is present, where it is prevalent.” I am grieved when a pastor falls. I am grieved when someone in my family hurts me deeply. I am grieved when I am betrayed even by other Christians, but I understand the bible is real. It tells me that we have sinned. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all capable of acts of sin and we all need a savior. This is our human condition. In one sense we are not undone by the reality of it, because scripture has taught us and our own experience has taught us that this is what we face. It is in this very real, very honest, very authentic presentation that the gospel comes in speaking words of life.

**So, the gospel is the cure to joylessness and it confronts the darkness. The third point then is it overcomes the darkness.**

### III. The gospel overcomes the darkness.

The Apostle Paul would probably not have said this about himself, but we can say it now 2000 years later. He was God’s #1 strategy for spreading the gospel. He is travelling throughout Europe planting churches. He is the Apostle Paul. Isn’t Satan’s strategy to take Paul and put him in prison? Isn’t that ingenious? Won’t that stop the growth of the church? And what does Paul say in response to this? He says, “Hey this is great! God is using this to spread and advance the gospel! Everyone knows that I am here because I proclaim Christ. Everyone! And the guards are talking about it. The news is everywhere. And Christians are getting bold! They are saying, ‘Look, Paul is in prison. Let’s tell people.’ Listen, what’s the worst that can happen? We get put in prison, we die, we go to heaven! Let’s speak the Word! Let’s advance the gospel!” The next thing you know, Paul is celebrating the advancement of the gospel *because* he is in prison, not *in spite of* him being in prison.

This is a great lesson for us, because I think, frankly, that this is a part of the condition of the church which ails us. We want to make pastors celebrities. We want to find those gifted people and those people that can accumulate the masses. We elevate those people then we get in trouble, don’t we? It’s not biblical. No man saves us. Christian men, pastors, are to walk in humility and accountability and they need help. They need your prayer, but they don’t need you to exalt them to celebrity status. That’s a temptation that none of us really wants to face. Thank you for not doing that. I know, I make it rather easy on you, but thank you! It’s a dreadful condition in the American church. And the Apostle Paul is saying, “This is great! I am in here! Everyone out there is telling people about Christ. You don’t need me. You go!” It’s glorious. Why? Because **the gospel overcomes darkness.** The message cannot be

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stopped, because Jesus overcomes through love. He overcomes by laying down his life for his enemies. He overcomes by giving himself to save us from our sin. He cannot be stopped. You say, “Brian, are you sure?” I’m sure! They killed him, they killed our Savior, and he rose from the dead! He cannot be stopped. **The gospel overcomes the darkness.**

So, he is in prison. The message is going forth, but now comes the twist. What is the twist? So-called Christians (maybe they’re real, maybe they’re not) are trying to get him killed! They are jealous. They are speaking out of a spirit of rivalry. Do you know what that is? That’s the factions that we even see today in the church. You know, *my* ministry, *our* group, *our* group is larger, or *our* group is better, or *our* group is this or that. Rather than pointing people strictly and solely to Christ, we try to garner our own little factions of power and influence. Surely Paul would have been tempted to feel betrayed in that moment, but he said, “Wow – look at this! Even though some people are doing it for the wrong motives, even now the gospel is going forward and people are getting saved.”

God vividly illustrated this to me when I was in seminary. There was a man who had a national TV ministry and it was dreadful. It was the worst of bad ministries in that he was exposed through various news programs, just preaching a horrible, self-promoting, materialistic message. I had been praying for a friend’s brother, one of my seminary friends. I was praying for his brother and this brother got saved by this man’s dreadful ministry. I’m like, “Lord, this is amazing. How could you use that message to save anyone?” But he did.

We sometimes look at the church and think, “Wow, those motives may be off, and this person is acting like a celebrity, and this looks more like some kind of crazy show and more like the world than the world does.” But in it all we still can celebrate, somehow, that the message of Christ is advancing. I find this tremendously encouraging. Paul is saying that even though the messengers are bad, the message is still getting out there. That’s helpful when you are a messenger.

**The gospel overcomes. Our call is to advance the gospel.** It seems hard for me to understand that in many ways it seems like the issue of racism is not only as alive as ever, but more divisive than ever in our nation. Certainly, I wouldn’t be comfortable saying, “Oh wow, we’ve got this licked. This is done.”

And then the courts are changing laws which could ultimately affect (who knows the future?) what pastors can say and can’t say. There will certainly be battles that follow over that. But there is a climate that’s changing morally in the country. The church is not immune. Leaders are falling. In every situation I want to say to you: **The gospel is the answer.** And our call is to *advance* this message of Jesus Christ. Our call is to *proclaim it, to live it, to advance it.* We don’t have to have all of the answers to everything. We have Christ, who is ultimately the answer to everything.

I would conclude by going back to something that I think I provoked in us in our introduction, for Christian parents. I

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certainly, with my kids, my wife and I certainly worked hard to lay in a moral foundation of what's right and what's wrong. And I believe that we should do that as parents. Am I setting them up for joyless living down the road? Will they be unhappy because they will ultimately be unable to keep that moral code? What is the solution? What is the cure? Because I'm going to teach them right from wrong, correct? The cure is that they will hear and see in my life and in you as their church that the gospel is the main thing, that the gospel is the foundation, that the foundation is compelling; that every time I feel condemned, the gospel is there to say, "You are not condemned in Jesus Christ. He has paid for that sin."

"Yes, yes, yes, yes, but you don't understand. I've committed that sin over and over and over again. And I've asked God to forgive me over and over!" Yes, and Jesus has died for that sin. You were helplessly, hopelessly trapped in sin, an enemy of God, and Jesus said, "I will die for you as my enemy to pay the price of your sin, to eternally set you free." The pure blood of Jesus Christ has paid the price of your sin and you are free. He is greater than your condemnation. He is greater than the power of sin. He is your hope. So we proclaim not how well I've done, not how much I've grown. I won't get to heaven and get "The Most Improved" award. **I celebrate and proclaim Jesus Christ.** This is our hope. So that if our children emerge somehow, scarred though they will be, from childhood and adolescence, knowing, "**my hope is in Christ, my hope is in the gospel.**" I would suggest that is the foundation they ultimately will find irresistible. Irresistible. Because it is the power of God unto salvation.