
UNBROKEN JOY
A LIFE WORTH LIVING
Philippians 1:27-30

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

This little paragraph at the end of chapter one in many ways summarizes the themes for entire book of Philippians. It may not appear at first to be the case, but it actually is. If you understand these four verses, you will be well on your way to understanding what the book of Philippians is all about. It is about joy — that's Paul's theme. There is joy in Jesus Christ. Unbroken, uninterrupted, deep, lasting, eternal joy, regardless of the circumstances of your life. That joy is found in Jesus Christ.

Paul will celebrate in the letter of Philippians that he has a deep contentment. In fact, he tells us that he has learned a secret – it is the secret of learning how to be content in life. He says he has a phenomenal strength, that he can do all things in Christ. This is the character of joy itself. It is characterized by a satisfaction, a contentment, strength, energy, and vitality. And in this paragraph Paul begins to address his original audience by helping them to understand and identify some enemies to their joy. He is now really getting into his theme and he is going to deal with some negatives before he deals with the positives.

Now, when I say the positives, he is going to provide for us some very powerful, practical tools to help us cultivate, live in, maintain, and grow in true joy. He is going to talk to us about thinking the right thoughts. He is going to talk to us about prayer and how prayer is essential and exactly how to pray. He is going to talk to us about anxiety, various certain ways in Christ that we can develop these tools and grow in joy.

But before he does, he is going to deal with some negatives. He understands that there are some things in their lives that are blocking joy. There are some enemies to joy. That's not surprising. We

know by our own experience that there are certain obstacles at times, certain problems in life, and there is no use in trying to ignore them. We can't just make them go away. We can't pretend that they are not there. The reality is that they kind of inform all that's happening in our lives.

For the Philippians, it was first of all an external opposition. They were being opposed externally. They are in a Roman colony. Paul is in a Roman jail. He is in Rome, in jail. They are Roman citizens. They are there in this Roman colony and there is persecution now against the Church and it's coming against them. So he tells them in this paragraph, "Stand firm. Have courage. You suffer for Christ. Don't be frightened by your opponents." You can hear in the language that he is addressing this external opposition.

Then secondly, they are facing internal disunity, division. They are having some trouble getting along. Some of the prominent leaders in the Church are at one another and they are experiencing conflict, so external opposition, internal disunity. Think of it this way: your ex is making life difficult for you and fighting you at every turn, and your kids are driving you crazy. External opposition/internal disunity. Your business partner is robbing you, your clients won't pay you -- external opposition. Your wife is threatening to leave you - internal division.

Christians, black Christians are murdered just because they're black. The Supreme Court is redefining basic truth that we have lived with for thousands of years. Internally, the Church is seeing its leaders fall constantly. Almost on a weekly basis we hear of another moral failure. External opposition/internal disunity and division. We see it over and over again. This is the scheme of the evil one. Attacked from outside; factions, divisions, disunity within. This is what the Philippians were experiencing so Paul tells them "Stand firm. Have courage. But at the same time be of one mind. Be of the same spirit." He is addressing both of these issues.

I think of Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Before Samuel was born, she desired intently for a child. There was an emptiness. There was an internal division within her soul. But then she had a rival who mocked her and opposed her. The dynamic of these two together created tremendous problems and it was in that context that the great prophet Samuel was born. That's what we're seeing here in Philippi.

There was also a third problem that Paul addresses here in this paragraph, but it was the kind of problem that we are often not aware of. It was a problem that was, and is, of a different character, a third enemy of joy. It's an enemy that not only keeps us from joy, but one that keeps us from removing the other obstacles, and that is false teaching. There was a third problem. They were experiencing bad ideas, false teaching that was coming into the church, so Paul addresses it as well. These three problems are really dealt with starting in this verse, verse 27 of chapter one, and the

rest of the book in one way or another is addressing one of these three issues. He does it in one sense in terms of removing the negative, but then he will go on into a full positive attack, giving us tools to help us grow in joy.

Let's get practical and start by dealing with the last of these problems: The problem of false teaching, the problem of bad thinking. We will try to lay out in response to these three problems, three tools to remove the joy blockers of your life. If you're taking notes, that's our outline:

Three Tools to Remove the Joy Blockers in Your Life

I. The first is clear gospel thinking.

In response to false doctrine, bad ideas, bad thinking, we are going to talk about clear gospel thinking. This is the reality. Any time we have external opposition, forces on the outside opposing us, internal division, our thinking gets off, and it gets off quickly as these pressures increase in our lives. So Paul begins in verse 27 by saying to us, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel..." Here's what's interesting. We've seen in chapter one how the gospel is this reoccurring theme. He is telling them, "Listen, you are partakers of God's grace. The gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, tells us that salvation is a gift. It's grace. You are partakers of that grace and we are partners in the gospel together. I am defending the gospel and confirming the gospel and we are a mission to advance the gospel." He has been focusing on this message about Jesus Christ, the theme that life and joy and peace are found in Christ.

He comes to this point now in verse 27, where he is going to talk about how to behave, how to live. He is going to talk about ethics, how to walk. He wants to connect it to everything he has said. He says, "In light of the gospel, live this way. Live a life that is worthy." Actually, the exact language is, "Only behave as citizens worthy of the gospel." Unfortunately, most translations don't capture that. We have said it already. This is a Roman colony. This citizenship was a big part of who they were and their own identity. He will do it twice in this letter, where he uses that theme to make an appeal to them. Here, as he sets up everything that's going to follow, he is saying, "Live as citizens of the gospel. Live as citizens of the kingdom. Live as worthy citizens where your lives connect back to this message of the gospel."

The point is: It matters what we believe, it matters what we think. What we believe and what we think inform our behavior. For us, as Christians, that starts with the gospel. It starts with the message that we have all sinned, that we need a savior, and that Jesus Christ is that Savior. From that message, our thinking develops. Our patterns of thought are informed and directed, and our behavior follows.

There are some individuals, some teachers today that falsely teach that as Christians it's really not important for us to talk about doing the right thing. Their message would be: "We are saved by the gospel. We are saved by grace. It's a gift. That's all we need to focus on and if we just teach that message people will inevitably do the right thing."

Paul didn't do that and we shouldn't do it. We should teach the gospel. We should proclaim it. It should be the center of everything. But it informs us in how we are to live and follow the biblical instruction, because Paul now wants to tell us what a life looks like that's worthy of the gospel. I want to just caution you. I think that this is a dangerous teaching. It is prevalent in the church. It says, "We just teach the gospel. We don't talk about how to live." No, we teach the gospel, and out of the gospel we talk about, we teach, we preach, we fight for a life that honors God through and in the power of the gospel, informed by the gospel. If we don't, we have enemies of our souls and they will come after us. This doesn't mean we live in fear, but it's just the reality.

So, Paul lays out his instruction. Everything that follows for the next chapter or two is set up by this statement: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel." Do you remember Paul's prayer in the beginning? He says, "Ah, I'm praying that you will abound in love. I am praying that you will abound in love with knowledge, with discernment." We will typically see these at times as separated, as opposed. Some individuals will say, "Okay, we don't really need doctrine. What we need to do is just love one another. It may sound appealing, but in reality that's not a biblical perspective. The bible doesn't play love and truth against one another. It doesn't see them as opposed, as enemies of one another. It doesn't for a moment think that you can only have one and not the other. In fact, scripture teaches that they go together and that they should grow together and direct one another. That's what Paul is praying for the Philippians, so we are not surprised that when he goes to address these areas he begins by addressing their thinking. He wants to build the right actions on a platform of solid truth. So, #1 is clear gospel thinking.

II. Our second tool is the tool of courage.

As Christians, we have peace in Christ and we seek peace in relationship. It's a virtue for us. It's a promise for those who are in Christ. But it's not an idol. By that I mean there are occasions where we can want an absence of conflict so desperately that we will tolerate all forms of evil just to have it. Have you ever found yourself saying, "I just want peace"? If we are not careful, we miss the biblical message that tells us, "We must stand firm against opposition to the truth of Jesus Christ." Paul looks directly at the Philippians and he tells them, "You are suffering opposition. You are in the beginning stages of persecution. I am writing you from jail and here is my message to you: stand firm."

There are times when you just frankly have to be strong. You have to say, “I will not be frightened by my opponents.” That’s what Paul says in verse 28. “Don’t be frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.” When I read that verse I am thinking, “Wait a minute. Is Paul saying they are opposing the church in Philippi and that is a sign of their destruction? The fact that they are opposing the church?”

Why does he tell them that and what is the implication of that? It seems that what Paul is saying is that within their own hearts there is a knowledge and an awareness that what they are doing is wrong. Paul teaches us in Romans, chapter one, that the truth about God is evident in creation. He teaches us in Romans 2 that God has written his law upon our hearts, so that we can say that our own experience over and over and over again validates that we are not just the result of some evolutionary series of random events. We understand intuitively that murder is wrong. When we hear about a man going into a prayer meeting with other individuals, he is white, they are black, and he prays with them for a period of time then he murders nine people, there is an outrage in our souls that says, “This is not right! I want justice! I want this to be dealt with!” There is a place when that man sits in the courtroom and is found guilty, we are waiting to hear the verdict because we want the verdict to be commensurate with the crime. That’s just in us. There is this place when we see certain evil, there is a cry that comes out of our soul. That’s because we are made in the image of God and we reflect his moral character. Paul seems to be carrying that idea to say, “Listen, when individuals persecute you because you follow Christ, it’s a sign of their own destruction. They are pushing down this message that says, “This is not right, this is not right.”

So it’s a sign of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. You were saved, not because you’ve got it all figured out or you pulled yourself up and got your life together. It’s because God saved you. When we are opposed there is a temptation to be afraid. Where will this lead? Will I be overcome? Paul is saying don’t be afraid. Let this remind you of their destruction and your salvation so as to provoke within us sympathy, a place of compassion for those who need salvation.

There is a security that we should experience that says, “No, no, no. God has saved me. I am safe in him. He is directing my life.” These problems will not ultimately overcome us. Church, we live in an age where we are experiencing cultural change rapidly. Our response should not be fear. Our response should be confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is his Church. He is risen.

One more thought here on this call to courage. Paul tells us that God gives us grace to suffer for his sake. When we are called upon to suffer, there is a specific grace. He tells the Philippians: “It

has been granted to you” verse 29, “that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.” The word “granted” there has as its root the word “charis,” the word that we know for “grace.” He is saying that God has graced you, God has gifted you, God is granting to you this noble and high calling. He will enable you. He will give you the grace to go through this, and this is an honor for you to be identified with Christ in this way. He suffered, and at times he calls on you to suffer for his name’s sake.

So if you are being opposed in a terribly ugly way, in a way that’s all-out evil, Paul would give you this instruction -- to see this as a sign of their destruction, to see it as a reminder of your own salvation. Trust in God. If it leads to a point where it is much more than just an irritation, and that you feel there is real danger, he wants to remind you that your salvation is from God. Live for his name and honor him.

III. The third tool that he wants to provide us with is the tool of unity.

He tells the Philippians to be of one mind, to strive together in one spirit, striving side by side. Stand firm. Stand firm in the faith. Hold on to correct teaching. Value the truth. Let it be your foundation for right living. Be courageous in the face of opposition, but at the same time, fight for unity within.

Beth and I have discovered in our own journey, in our own marriage of 27+ years, that the goal of marriage biblically is a oneness, a unity. In the moments of friction, we need to remind ourselves that the goal is unity, the goal is oneness — physical and emotional intimacy and oneness. We need to see that there is an enemy of our souls who is an enemy of our marriages, and he wants to separate and divide us. I know it may sound like a cliché, but your spouse is not the enemy. But there are spiritual enemies that affect us.

To our eldership at Riverside: We fight and need to remind ourselves that we fight for unity. There is a goal of plurality, many functioning as one. It doesn’t mean that we don’t each have our own opinions. It doesn’t mean that we don’t disagree or disagree strongly. We do, and that’s why we have a board. That’s why there is more than one. Together we can work it out. But God is honored by unity. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.” There is a certain power, a certain momentum that we experience.

I believe that we are in a day where, as the culture changes around us, we will increasingly see just how important it is for the Church to be united, for the Church to graciously love one another and work together. There are some exciting things happening in our city. We have been working with some other churches behind the scenes. There are some forces at work saying, “Listen, how can

we together reach the college campuses with the message of Christ?” “How can we together address the issue of orphans and widows in our city, working together to address homelessness and other issues that are facing us?”

Let us live worthy of the gospel. We remind ourselves when we are facing internal disunity and opposition from the outside that we have been saved by the grace of God. We remind ourselves when we are desperately frustrated, we are hurt, we are experiencing very real division, that we are all sinners in need of a savior, so we are not undone. We are not undone when a pastor morally falls. We pray that doesn't happen. But we understand that these are signs to us of our need for a savior, our need to know the gospel, our need to keep it close, and our need to care for one another as we courageously together walk out that truth.