

JOY TO THE WORLD

So, one of the things the Elders have tried to do in this quarantine is make weekly phone calls to all our members – just to check on them and remind them that they are loved. And, as you can imagine, a lot of the people we talk to – they’re not doing so well. This is a really difficult time for most people. Lot of people are really hurting right now. Let me say this as clearly as I can: When things are difficult – when you are hurting – this is exactly the right place to be. Sometimes people think that church is the place where you’re supposed to be happy and smiling all the time. Let me just tell you the truth about this church – we’re all messed up. We’re all going through something. We all hurt. We all struggle. That’s why we’re here. That’s why we come to church. Because we’re all messed up. And this is the place where it’s okay to be messed up. It’s okay to be hurting here. And to all of you who are hurting this morning – God has this message for you – **Ps 30:5 – “Weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”** Weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

Well, there’s a lot of weeping going on in our world today. But it’s not the weeping I’ll be preaching about today. I’m going to preach about the joy. Weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning. So I’m going to preach about the joy. I know there is struggle today. I know there is loneliness today. I know there is fear today. I know there is weeping today. But I also know that joy is coming – because that’s what God’s Word says. So I want to talk about joy this morning. If you watched the morning news before you came to church – you’ve probably already heard a lot of doom and gloom. Well, I want to talk about joy. Is that okay with you? Can we just talk about some joy today?

If you were to make a list of the characteristics of a God- honoring – Spirit-filled

church – what would you put on that list? What are the characteristics of a church like that? No doubt a church like that would have great Elders and Deacons – a great preacher – a church like that would be committed to prayer - a church like that would invest in the youth –and disciple the adults – and support missions – and take care of the community. Those are some of the things that kind of define a Spirit-filled church. But you know what else I would put right near the top of that list? I'd put joy on that list. A God- honoring – Spirit-filled church will always be a place of joy – and the people of that church will be people of joy.

Now, that doesn't mean they won't go through trials – doesn't mean they won't be quarantined and hungry and lonely sometimes. But even during those times – they will still know joy – because they know Jesus – they know what Jesus has done for them. See, we have this advantage over most of the world – we know how the story ends. We know why Jesus died. We know what His death means to us when we stand before God to be judged. We know that weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Amen? So a God- honoring – Spirit filled church – will always be a place of joy – because we know how the story ends.

Now think about our church – SLCC. People are hurting here all the time. I mean, we're all hurting right now – but people here are hurting all the time. And yet, we have joy here all the time. We have visitors every week – and they don't know what to expect here – and sometimes they're all messed up inside – but when they come here – you know what they almost always say? They came here and felt loved. They came here and felt our joy.

The Holy Bible has a lot to say about joy. Of all the authors in the Bible – none talk about joy more than the Apostle Paul. Which is kind of interesting – because few people in the Bible suffered like the Apostle Paul did. The Apostle Paul – this was a man who was often arrested –

and beaten – and imprisoned for his faith. He was often hungry and cold and lonely. He was often rejected. And yet, no one in the Bible talks about joy more than this man. And nowhere does he talk about joy more than in his letter to the Philippian Church.

The Book of Philippians is a very short book - just 4 chapters – and 14 times in those 4 chapters, Paul uses the words “joy” – or “rejoice.” Paul can’t stop talking about joy in this little letter. Now, here’s what’s so amazing about that – when Paul wrote this letter to the Philippian Church – he was in prison. He had been arrested for preaching the gospel – and locked in a prison in Rome. He was in chains when he wrote this letter. Cold and hungry when he wrote this letter – doesn’t know if he is going to live or die when he wrote this letter– and, yet, he can’t stop talking about joy in this letter.

Philippians 1: 1-4 – Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you.

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy. There’s the first time we see that word “joy” – “*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.*” Isn’t that a beautiful thought? But back up a little bit to that first verse there – because there’s a surprising truth

about the joyful life that I want to make sure you see. ***Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ***

Jesus. Paul wrote many letters to the churches he established. This is just one of them. And in each of those letters, Paul always begins by introducing himself as an apostle of Jesus. Over and over he introduces himself as an apostle. But not here. Here he introduces himself as a servant. Not as an apostle – but as a servant - Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.

Now Paul did that for a reason. You see, to the Philippian people - life was all about honor and

advancement – and climbing the ladder of success. To them, joy was all about your position in life – it was all about your title. And yet, Paul uses a title for himself that nobody would want to have. He says, “I’m a servant.” To be a servant – that was as far down the ladder as you can go. To these people who are all about status and titles, Paul starts his letter by saying “I have no status at all. I’m a servant.” And yet, he keeps talking about joy. There’s

a secret to uncover here – joy doesn’t come when I spend my life pursuing joy. Joy comes when I spend my life pursuing something else – something bigger – something better. We tend to think, “I’ll have joy as long as things go well for me. I’ll have joy if I have enough money in the bank. I’ll have joy if everybody likes me. I’ll have joy if I can avoid any trials.” And so people pursue those things. Only joy doesn’t come from those things. Real joy doesn’t come from pursuing a joyful life - real joy comes from pursuing a meaningful life. God has made us so that we have real joy when there is real meaning in our lives. So the life we should be aiming for is not the wealthy life – or the happy life – or the life that has no trials. The life we should be aiming for is the meaningful life – because that’s where real joy comes in.

So, you’re probably all sitting on the edge of your seats right now thinking, “Well, pastor, please tell me some meaningful things I can do to add joy to my life.” Okay. I will. And here’s the first one...

Real meaning and real joy always come when you see other people as being more important than yourself. Joy always comes when I practice kindness and generosity. See, the world thinks that joy comes when people do for me what I want – but the truth is, joy comes when I do for other people what they need. This is the point that Paul is making to those ladder-climbing Philippians. They think they have to keep elevating themselves to find joy – but Paul tells them

that they've gotten the whole thing backwards. **Philippians 2: 3-7** – **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.** He uses Jesus as the example. He says Jesus didn't climb up the ladder – He climbed down the ladder – and that's where meaning is – that's where real joy is. Open hands. Reaching hands. Serving hands. That's where meaning is. That's where joy is.

There's this strange truth about us – we think joy is all about what we get – but it turns out joy is all about what we give. So, this week – as a kind of homework assignment – do an act of kindness for somebody. Doesn't have to be dramatic. Doesn't have to be big or costly. Small stuff. Make a few phone calls to check on your church family. Run an errand for somebody if you can. Knock on a neighbor's door. There is meaning in those things – and then joy comes. Here's the second thing you need to know – and this is especially important today: Suffering cannot stop the joyful life. It's really important we talk for a moment about suffering. There's no shortage of suffering out there. Even before this whole coronavirus – there was still no shortage of suffering out there. You remember that, right? Even before all of this we had people losing jobs and losing homes and losing loved ones and losing hope. We've never had a shortage of suffering. But when you look in the pages of this book - when you look at the Gospel – you will discover great joy even in the middle of great suffering. Paul teaches us about joy – even while he sits in a prison cell. These pages are filled with stories of unstoppable joy. When Paul went to the city of Philippi – the Philippians didn't treat

him very well. He was arrested. He was stripped of his clothes. He was beaten. He was imprisoned. Think about that happening to you. What would you do if you were stripped and beaten and thrown in jail? What would you do? This is what Paul did- **Acts 16:25 – About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God...** Arrested – stripped – beaten – jailed – and they are singing hymns to God! He is a servant – he is a prisoner – and he has joy.

Some of you are suffering deeply right now. I understand. I do. I am so glad you are here. I'm so proud of you that you are here – even in the middle of your suffering. And I want to repeat something I said earlier – everybody here is messed up. It's not just you. We're all messed up. We're all trying to figure it out. That's why we're here. That's why this place exists. And I want to repeat something else I said earlier –

Weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning. This is a promise that joy is going to win. So you hold on.

One more thing I want to say about the joyful life: The joyful life is not based on where you are physically – or where you are financially – or where you are educationally; the joyful life is based on where you are spiritually. Now, let me connect these dots for you – this is so important to see. The joyful life is based on where you are spiritually – and where you are spiritually is based on your relationship with God – and your relationship with God is based on your relationships with people. What matters more than anything else to God – is people.

1 John 4: 19-21 – If anyone says, “I love God”, yet hates his brother, he is a liar. Whoever loves God must also love his brother. People matter to God more than anything else. And we will have joy when people matter to us more than anything else.

Paul understood this. That's why he said - **1:3 – I thank my God every time I remember you.** I get that. You know why?

Because I thank my God every time I remember you. All of you. You bring so much joy into my life. Mostly, life is about relationships. You can't have bad relationships and have a joyful life. But if you have joyful relationships – you can't help but have a joyful life. Paul was a man who was dirt poor. He had the clothes on his back – and not much more. He often went hungry - often had no place to sleep. He was dirt poor. But when it came to relationships – he was rich! “I thank my God every time I remember you.” That's what Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippian church. If you were writing a letter to SLCC – would your words sound like Paul's words? Would you tell people here, “I thank my God every time I remember you?” I ask that because it's very easy to focus on what's wrong with everybody here. It's very easy to complain about people. And as I've already said – we're all messed up here. That's why we come here in the first place. And you can choose to focus on what's wrong with people here – and complain about people here. Or you can say, “I thank my God every time I remember you.”

And look what

Paul says in **1:5 - I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel.** This is the greatest meaning of all – this is the greatest joy of all – our partnership in the gospel. The Kingdom of God – transforming broken lives – and you get to be a partner in that. The Philippians got to be partners in that with Paul – and so Paul says, “Thank you for partnering with me in the gospel. Thank you for the relationships. Thank you for the joy that has brought me.” They were partners in the gospel. And, by the way, that's what we are. All of us here. Our whole church. Partners in the gospel. And so I want to say to you the same thing Paul said – “Thank you for partnering with me in the gospel. Thank you for the relationships. Thank you for the joy that has brought me.”

Philippi was a place that measured joy by your status – by your title – by your wealth. And Paul says, “Don’t do that. There’s no joy in that.” For Paul, it doesn’t matter whether you’re in a palace in Philippi or in a prison in Rome – it doesn’t matter whether you’re in the pews or in your home – what matters is that you are in Christ Jesus. It’s not where you are; it’s whose you are. It’s not what you have – but who has you. That’s where real joy is. That means Jesus is it for me. Jesus is with me. Jesus is for me. He always stands beside me. Always goes before me. Always watches over me. He has my back. He’s has my heart. I may be in trouble – in debt – in prison – or quarantined in my home – but if I’m in Christ Jesus – I’m good – and I have joy.

Hebrews 12:2 – **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the JOY set before him endured the cross.** For the joy set before Him – Jesus came to our world. And we put Him on trial – and we crucified Him – and we buried Him. But on the 3rd day, God gave us something to be joyful about forever. And that tomb where we buried Jesus became the most joyful place on earth.

I’m going to turn this service over to Jason now – and he’s going to lead us in some praise and worship. And I’m going to ask all of you to stand up for this – we always stand in the sanctuary when we sing. So let’s all stand – and sing with joy. And let our joy testify to the world that we will not be defeated by this trial – in fact, we will grow stronger through this trial. Let our joy testify to the world that weeping may last for the night – but joy comes in the morning. Amen? So right now – we’re going to sing this song of joy to God – kind of as a stake in the ground – we are going to proclaim our joy in Jesus no matter what.

God’s very best to you today.

