



“The Key to Joy “ | Rev. Brent Baker | January 16, 2022

Old Testament reading

Exodus 14:30-15:3

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses. 15:1 Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, “I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. 2 The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. 3 The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name.

Epistles reading

Philippians 1:18-30

Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. 27 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, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of

Summary:

Remembrance of the visit of the Magi this second Sunday in Epiphany brings to mind a picture of old, wizened, travel-weary men adoring a tiny child, their eyes focused on something magnificent, their hearts enlightened. The growth paradigm the picture suggests for all people is to grow less childish, yet remain child-like—inquisitive, awe-filled, innocent. The picture also reminds us of the death to come and the promise of resurrection. We need to discuss death in our daily lives, keeping in mind that death has a way of reorienting life.

Most of us only focus on the future to be anxious, but Paul’s focus on the future gives him great joy. In Phil. 1, Paul in prison faces possible imminent death, yet he is speaking about joy and rejoicing from the start of the letter. This passage, Paul’s soliloquy as he contemplates uncertainty, suffering, and execution, somehow produces this joy. We see eager expectation and a change in mindset pictured in the language of the text.

Eager Expectation

The change in verb tense in vs 18 from present to future reminds us that we, too, must refocus. We must move from fond memories of a happy past or present sorrows of a life out of control to a joy-filled future in Christ. Paul’s prescription for whatever endangers your peace now is to look forward eagerly. His own situation seems bleak and uncertain. It may hold release, or it may hold death; so, it is not his earthly expectation that gives him joy. Verse 20 communicates that “whether by life or death” Paul looks forward in eager expectation to being with Christ through faith. This key promise brings guaranteed joy. Tomorrow is uncertain, but eternity is guaranteed.

The turning point, “Set your minds on things above,” borrows from a guaranteed reality to bring joy into the present. Three passages in Philippians set the framework for Paul’s counsel:

Phil1:6 “...He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion in the day of Christ Jesus.”

Phil. 3:10,11 “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

your salvation, and that from God. 29 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, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Gospel reading

Luke 9:18-27 Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" 19 And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." 20 Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God." 21 And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." 23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? 26 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. 27 But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

Phil. 4:4-7 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Every week we repeat the only certainty: "Christ has died. Christ is risen, Christ will come again." The Christian's hope is not attached to potential, but to a promise. To those who don't know Christ, joy is temporary, and suffering and uncertainty are forever. To a Christian, the opposite is true—a win/win. Suffering is temporary, and joy is forever.

Change in Mindset

Vs. 21 "To live is Christ, to die is gain." Paul returns momentarily to the present tense to bring the certain future into an uncertain present. For some, Christ is only a way of risk management, disaster insurance. This belief does not do justice to the power of the resurrection of Christ for living today.

Paul preaches a better way—Jesus is not the appetizer to life. He is the entree. "To live" means to do fruitful labor where God has placed us. "To die is gain" means that death becomes the front door to real life. The world cannot kill a man who has died to the world. Death is disarmed by Jesus's death, and the beautified prospect invigorates our earthly lives.

I Cor. 15:51-58 begins with the mystery of Jesus's victory over death and the power of the resurrection and ends with an exhortation to fruitful labor. Therefore, "Stand firm."

Discussion:

1. Read I Corinthians 15:51-58 and discuss the similarities and differences between the messages of these verses and Phil. 1:18-30. Consider the differences between the audiences for the two passages, and imagine how each church would react to the counsel.
2. Now imagine that both chapters were written to you. How should your life change in the present? How would your life change in the future?
3. What elements in your world do you identify that endanger a mindset of hopeful expectation of joy? Are there some circumstances you need to bring before God in prayer?
4. After you pray for elements that threaten your joy, ask God to show you the fruitful labor He has for you.
5. Do you see someone else in your life that needs your prayers or encouragement to "Stand firm"?
6. Read again the three passages in Philippians that set up the framework for this joy. What comfort do you find there?