

## 1 Thessalonians 5:16-How to Rejoice in Suffering

9.7.22

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The world we live in today is full of pain, sorrow and anxiety, isn't it? How many of you are like me and you don't even like watching the news anymore. We just continue to see how bad things are and if we aren't careful, we can really get to a place where we're down and out. Without question life is full of situations and circumstances that can cause us all to despair. That despair can lead to suffering. Suffering that can be emotional, physical, relational, financial, mental...whatever it is is...it's suffering and suffering comes to us all. So, how do we deal with it?

Well, tonight, I want to look at just two words...two words that the Holy Spirit gave to the Apostle Paul as he was writing to the church at Thessalonica.

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### **1 Thessalonians 5:16**

<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always.

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Now think about what those words mean: REJOICE ALWAYS. It's written as a command. We are simply told to rejoice... How often? ALWAYS. In the Greek the verse is written "Always rejoice." Same thing...rejoice always!

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It's interesting when you begin to study the word "rejoice" in Scripture or to look at the idea of rejoicing in Scripture...we're told over and over to rejoice. Paul told the Philippian church...

### **Philippians 4:4**

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

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Paul said...rejoice and then rejoice some more! How often? ALWAYS! The Apostle Peter said the same thing to Christians who had been dispersed and run out of Israel because of the tremendous persecution under the reign of Nero...

### **1 Peter 4:12-13**

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

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Jesus would tell the searching souls at the beginning of His public ministry from a mountainside in Galilee, when He preached the Sermon on the Mount...

### **Matthew 5:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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So, we see the commands of the Apostles and Jesus Himself that we should rejoice... When? In all circumstances...even in terrible persecution and pain, but HOW in the world do we do this? Tonight, I want us to look at the example of the Apostle Paul's life. Because, in my mind at least, there is no greater example outside of Jesus of someone who rejoiced in suffering. You will be making your way down to verse 22. As you are doing so, let me set the scene.

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The Apostle Paul is in Philippi on his second missionary journey and he and Silas have been arrested for casting out a demon from a slave girl and it's getting bad. After being arrested, the owners of the slave girl stirred up the crowd into a riot and they're about to get beaten...

### **Acts 16:22-25**

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup> Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

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Take a look at this picture:



Think about that! How awful that would have been; and yet, they're singing in those conditions with their legs in stocks. What are stocks? A better picture...these:



Can you imagine not being able to move? Your feet and legs go numb...and there are no bathroom breaks... Do you understand what that means? They sit in their own urine and excrement and yet they're singing!!

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Now I don't know about you...but, I look at this scene and see all that Paul and Silas have been through and I ask myself, "How can they be singing hymns in this awful place?" In fact, verse 25 actually says, (in the Greek), "singing hymns of praise." Interestingly, if you look up the Greek word for "hymns," which is **Hum-ne-o**...it refers to very specific hymns.

Something called "paschal hymns." The word "paschal" is associated with Easter and the resurrection. These paschal hymns...there are 7 of them, are found in Psalms 113-118, and Psalm 136. **Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 118.** As you are turning, I'll tell you that these seven (7) hymns

are what the Jews call the "Great Hallel" [hallelujah]. They sing these to honor God. Remember they sang these hymns during the Feast of Booths (we just studied this in John 7-8).

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Let me show you just a few verses of what Paul and Silas were singing. Jump down to verse 5.

**Psalm 118:5-8**

<sup>5</sup> Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free. <sup>6</sup> The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? <sup>7</sup> The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. <sup>8</sup> It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.

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You are the Lord's...it's a mindset...whatever you are dealing with...it's a mindset...remember whose you are! Watch verse 24. The Hallel says:

**Psalm 118:24**

<sup>24</sup> This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

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There it is again: rejoice!! Do you know that little song? It's old.

**This is the day  
This is the day  
That the Lord has made  
That the Lord has made**

**We will rejoice  
We will rejoice  
And be glad in it  
And be glad in it**

**This is the day  
That the Lord has made  
We will rejoice and be glad in it**

**This is the day  
This is the day  
That the Lord has made**

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That gives me joy just singing those words. Well, the Hallel closes with these words...

**Psalm 118:28-29**

<sup>28</sup> You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. <sup>29</sup> Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

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Give thanks?! For being in stocks...battered and beaten with rods, in prison... How? How can Paul and Silas do this? How can they sing praises and rejoice in the Lord and give thanks! It seems impossible and it is...from a human perspective. This type of joy is not natural. It is SUPERNATURAL!

You see, we're not talking about happiness which comes from happenings or happenstance or because something just happens to be good. **This is not about circumstances.** We're not talking about some kind of shallow, superficial, emotional response to your circumstances. We're talking about something on an entirely different level altogether! **A divine level.**

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The kind of joy that can only come by way of the Spirit of God. And I want to describe that to you. It's called the **fruit of the Spirit**... See the screens. The 2nd FLAVOR of the fruit of the Spirit (because it's just one fruit with 9 flavors). Like Willy Wonka's chewing gum that's a 3-course meal.

**Galatians 5:22-23**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

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Listen: Joy is spiritual. Happiness is human. Joy is supernatural: "Holy Spirit joy." A joy that comes from the Holy Spirit bearing witness with your spirit (Romans 8:26). It's unexplainable.

So you have a choice tonight...as a believer whether or not you choose joy. You can choose NOT to have joy. You can choose defeat...pain...self-pity...bitterness. Or you can look to Jesus and say, "By your grace, give me joy!" Joy doesn't rise out of our humanness...we have to depend on the Spirit of God to produce it.

Listen, to have this joy, you and I must exercise operate in the Spirit, not the flesh. Joy only comes into our lives when we choose to trust Jesus and know that whatever He is allowing, He has a purpose for it. Even in stocks...even in cancer...even in poverty...even in heartbreak...even in pain!

Christian joy? Is there a way to define it? Yes, I believe there is...

**Christian Joy: is the knowledge that comes from the confidence that God is in complete and perfect control of everything in your life and He will bring you good in time and bring you glory in eternity.**

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Listen carefully, Christian joy is not an emotion that springs out of positive circumstances. It's not a feeling that comes from everything being perfect in your life... It's a confidence in the character of God. It's a confidence in the promises of God. Christian joy is an emotion that wells upside inside our soul from that which we know to be true about our Heavenly Father and His inexhaustible love for us!

Oh, He loves you! He love you more than you love you! He loved you enough to slaughter His own Son on the altar of His holiness so that you might not experience the horrors of Hell for all eternity. He loves you enough to give you a Bible to read-to guide your life and the Holy Spirit to equip you for all that life has to offer. And knowing all that should bring you joy- unspeakable!

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This is why the Psalmist said...

**Psalm 28:6-7**

<sup>6</sup> Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. <sup>7</sup> The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

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Can I tell you another reason why Paul and Silas could sing praises and "rejoice always," even in their horrible circumstances? See if you can grasp, they can rejoice because they weren't there in their spirit. Oh, their bodies were in that awful cell...but, there spirits were in the heavens. You see, joy is all about perspective. They had the right perspective...like flying in an airplane...



Flying in a plane gives us perspective over the landscape, right?

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The same is true for our suffering! Paul saw the long game...not the short game. He saw his life as a tool of God...and so is yours and so is mine. Paul said in...

**Acts 20:24**

<sup>24</sup> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

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Paul knew something powerful! It wasn't the jail cell that held him captive...it wasn't the Philippian jailer that held him captive...no...God that had him there... Do you know why? Because that prison warden needed to be saved and he would cry out later that night "Sirs, what must I do to be saved..." and he and his entire household would come to Christ. That was the long game! Romans 8:28...

**Romans 8:28**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

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Can you see your circumstances from that higher perspective? If you do...you will have Christian joy!

BTW...this is so good...can I tell you the last time the word "rejoice" appears in the New Testament? Talk about perspective!! It appears for the last time in Revelation 19:7.

**Revelation 19:7**

<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.

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Talk about awesome perspective? Oh church, it doesn't matter what we're going through in this life right now. It's going to pass. No what your problems or difficulties are...this too shall pass. Church, we have an eternal salvation that was bought for us by the wonderful work of Jesus Christ on the



cross...so we can rejoice because these are only light and momentary troubles. That's what Paul told the Corinthian church.

### **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

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But you say, "Pastor Kevin, this has all been really good...but I'm not Paul and Silas...you don't know my circumstances!" You are right...I don't, but God does. Dear brother, dear sister, are you wanting me to believe that the Holy Spirit is powerless to help you in your circumstances? That it's too hard! Are you wanting me to believe that God can't work in your life? Are you wanting me to believe that His Spirit and His power aren't strong enough to get you through your troubles? That's simply impossible in the light of what we've just seen and heard!

Tell Satan to get behind you, because he's trying to bring you down with thinking from the pit! And that's the problem...so many Christians have a wrong understanding of how to rejoice in suffering.

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I want to quickly show you three (3) things that cause us to struggle to have joy.

### **What Causes Us to Struggle to Have Joy?**

1. **Bad Doctrine**
2. **Ingratitude**
3. **Our Feeling/Emotions**

#### **#1 Bad Doctrine**

Oh there is so much bad theology/doctrine out there today. So many have an inadequate grasp of God's sovereignty. We've been listening to way too many prosperity Gospel preachers who tell us if you're following God (which includes sending in your \$50 every month to their ministry), you will never have a bad day. They say, "God owes you! It's your destiny." No, that's bad theology! That wouldn't fit for Paul and Silas, would it?

Listen church, God has not promised to make your life happy, rich, successful or healthy. He's promised to be with you and never forsake you. No, Jesus is not some divine butler or divine therapist who exists to make us happy. That's bad theology...bad doctrine... and it will lead us to false expectations about God that just because we follow Jesus everything is going to always be good and everybody we pray for will always be headed, and if we just follow Jesus we're not going to have any major problems. That's false doctrine and it destroys joy. Jesus has a better plan and here it is:

### **John 16:33**

<sup>33</sup> I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

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#### **#2 Ingratitude**

This is the attitude of a person who **never** has enough and can't ever seem to be satisfied, thus they have no joy. Here's the issue. If you are an ungrateful person, meaning: you lack an "attitude of gratitude," then you are **not** going to experience joy. The person who never has enough, always expects more, always wants more, always demands more, no matter what the Lord does. It's never enough, no matter how much they have...

The Lord gives them a job, and it's not the right job. The Lord gives them a partner for life, it's not the right one. No matter what the Lord does it's never enough. So, there's no reverence for God, there's no humility, there's no thankfulness. Only **ingratitude**. These people are TAKERS and not GIVERS and that's a recipe for a miserable life. Which are you: a giver or taker?

Yes, ingratitude kills joy because you never have enough, but Christian joy comes when we're content:

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The last reason you might be struggling to have joy is your struggle with...

### **What Causes Us to Struggle to Have Joy?**

- 1. Bad Doctrine**
- 2. Ingratitude**
- 3. Our Feeling/Emotions**

### **#3 Our Feelings/Emotions**

Some of you tonight may be being victimized by your emotions...by your feelings. Many Christians lack the discipline to operate their lives on the truth of God's Word; and instead, they plunge headlong into the undisciplined sea of emotions and feelings. They say, "Well, how can I rejoice when I don't feel like it? How am I supposed to feel good about what I'm going through?"

Oh church, our feelings are controllable. Think about that last 40 minutes. You've controlled yourself. You've been here for a pretty good while and you have controlled yourself pretty well. That's **self-control**, the last flavor of the fruit of the Spirit. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can control our emotions.

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Listen, one of the purposes of the new birth/salvation was to restore our feelings to their God-intended role. When you and I were saved we got a new nature. We were regenerated, therefore, our feelings can be controlled by the Holy Spirit, but we **MUST LET HIM!!!**

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We simply can't give in to our natural feelings. If we did that all the time, we wouldn't have any friends and our family life would be a wreck! In fact, if every person did exactly what he felt like doing and said exactly what he felt like saying it would be the end of society as we know it.

If you're struggling with your feelings tonight...understand...sooner or later you're going to have to surrender those emotions to the Holy Spirit to have joy. And that's what the Apostle Paul and Silas knew in that nasty, stinking, filthy Philippian jail and that's why they could sing! And you see, dear Christian, when you live like that, the command: "rejoice always," not only becomes possible, it becomes the joyful life of the believer! What is Christian joy? See it...

**Christian Joy: is the knowledge that comes from the confidence that God is in complete and perfect control of everything and He will bring you good in time and bring you glory in eternity.**