

Joy 2: Contentment: Being IN God

(preached 11/21/21)

Please turn to *Philippians 4:1*

LAST WEEK:

- Are we lookin' for joy in all the wrong places?
- NEHEMIAH: wall was finished, released from captivity, temple rebuilt—time to celebrate!
- Pastor Ezra reads the Law: people now full of sorrow.
- Levites tell people “the Joy of the Lord is your strength” and people are happy again.
- What happened? They relied upon external circumstances for their joy or lack thereof.
- JOY: wall built, etc. LACK: reading of the Law & seeing they deserved destruction of city/Temple and 70 years of slavery.
- LASTING JOY came about due to finding it in God and not just circumstances.

Please let me repeat: **it's NOT a sin to rejoice in external blessings!**

When the work day is over, your kid gets an A, you pay off your car, vacation just started, it's Christmas...by all means be happy! The point of last week's message was that if we've lost our joy and have been battling depression and anxiety, perhaps we've been looking exclusively to outward circumstances to find a reason to be happy.

Example: **Kyle Rittenhouse** was just acquitted. Some are glad and some are mad—they found either joy or lack thereof in the verdict. If my joy relies mostly upon the Lord, however, I might still have a positive or negative emotional response to the verdict, but I won't lose my joy.

TODAY let's explore the “how” and please turn to our Bible reading:

Philippians 4:1-4 (AMP)

¹ THEREFORE, MY brethren, whom I love and yearn to see, my delight and crown (wreath of victory), thus stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

² I entreat *and* advise Euodia and I entreat *and* advise Syntyche to agree *and* to work in harmony in the Lord.

³ And I exhort you too, [my] genuine yokefellow, help these [two women to keep on cooperating], for they have toiled along with me in [the spreading of] the good news (the Gospel), as have Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the Book of Life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always [delight, gladden yourselves in Him]; again I say, Rejoice!

Verse 4 is another oft-quoted Scripture that bears witness to last week's message: **enduring** delight, gladness, and happiness are found in God. I repeat: we can and should find joy in blessings here on earth, but they're temporary, fleeting, and will go away quickly. Even when our favorite team wins the championship, how long does the "high" last? Not long and then "same-old same-old" reinserts itself, doesn't it? Next thing you know we're up, then down, then up, then down.

We need a joy that endures through the ups and downs of life—that remains steadfast.

GLAD IN HIM. Paul tells us in verse 4 that God Himself is the only gladness which endures and remains. The word "rejoice" is a verb that translates to making ourselves glad IN Him.

"How?!" you're asking. Let's keep reading God's Word to find out.

Philippians 4:5-7 (AMP)

⁵ Let all men know *and* perceive *and* recognize your unselfishness (your considerateness, your forbearing spirit). The Lord is near [He is coming soon].

⁶ Do not fret *or* have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance *and* in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God.

⁷ And God's peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison *and* mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

CONTEXT IS KING. Remember that context is king and we should never take one verse alone. When we try to separate out a single verse, we'll insert a personal desire and interpretation when, in fact, the verses surrounding it provide the correct way to read it. Such is the case with these verses so let's go through it.

Verse 5: the context is ministry to others—both within the Church and without. Paul is giving them a sense of urgency that the Lord Jesus is going to return soon and therefore to speak and act so that others see the Jesus inside the people of the Philippian Church. Everyone will see this light if, verse 4, the congregation is rejoicing in the Lord.

Unbelievers need to see a hope that goes beyond what they know, which is only the circumstances of the world...good or bad. If they perceive that Christians are just like them—up and down depending on how things are going—then what inspires them to invite Jesus into their lives? What they need to see in us is a joy that endures through how things are going and remains steadfast.

Verse 6: stop worrying. I know prices are inflated in the US right now with little sign of slowing down. There's still plenty of fighting, division, pollution, pandemic, tyranny, and injustice going on and it will only continue right up until Jesus comes back. Unbelievers are up and down because of all this, because they aren't God's Temple and He doesn't live inside them.

LIVE "IN" GOD. You and I are God's Temple and God the Holy Spirit lives right inside of us. We have something the rest of the world doesn't and it's more than just "a tool." He is God! He's not just inside of us, we are inside of Him. That's why Paul says to rejoice IN Him...just as if He were a tower of strength and a place of refuge...which He is.

SHELTER FROM WEATHER. It's cold, snowy, and windy out right now. Yet we have shelter inside this Church building that stops the wind, keeps us dry, and is warm. The same applies to our homes and even our cars—we are IN them despite external circumstances being cold, blustery, and even dangerous.

WE ARE IN GOD. Even during times of inflated prices and everything else going on right now, God REMAINS everything He's been since the beginning: love, joy, peace, just, and righteous.

What are we truly worried about? Worry focuses on bad or potentially bad circumstances for which we can't control the outcome.

WHAT SHOULD OUR RESPONSE BE? The rest of verse 6 tells us—how about we ask God?

Question: *how often do we REALLY speak with God about this stuff?* How often do we ask Him to help us out? Here's the litmus test for you and I which is verse 7:

⁷ And God's peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison *and* mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

PEACE VS. ANXIETY. If we truly talked to God frequently, asking Him for help in our time of need, we would experience more peace and less anxiety. Does this mean we get everything we want and ask for? Not necessarily. Or... our prayers might be answered in a different way than we thought. The AMP version expands verse 7 and lays the foundation of our Salvation to affect our state of peace or lack thereof.

A person whose assured of their Salvation has nothing to fear from God AND is content with his/her earthly lot.

FREEDOM IN CONTENTMENT. Imagine the internal freedom to be content no matter the external circumstances. Whether gas prices are \$1.50 or \$4.00, a democrat or republican in charge, snowy or sunny weather, etc. *Instead of being tossed around to and fro, emotionally speaking, but the winds of change you and I remain steadfast.*

- Contentment is not emotionless like a robot.
- Contentment doesn't mean you just sit back and let life happen all around you, doing nothing.

Contentment is an enduring joy and sense of gladness that we're going to be OK no matter what's happening in the world.

CAN'T BREAK IN. That there's nothing in our circumstances that can break through Who we're IN—God, our Tower of refuge, strength, and joy. The devil is certainly behind, manipulating, and outright controlling the evil going on in the world...but he cannot steal, corrupt, or diminish God in any way. God is not only in us, we are in Him.

GARRISONED. Look at verse 7 AMP version one more time: when we're living in God something happens with our hearts: it's GARRISONED which is a term of war. A fort with strong, high walls is good...but then it needs to be garrisoned with troops to defend it. In other words, Jesus is both the fort we're living in and He fights for us.

PHYSICAL VS SPIRIT. Our bodies may or may not be protected because a servant isn't greater than their Master, Who is Christ. Christ came in physical form and was hit, beaten, cut, wounded, got too hot and cold, took on the diseases of the world, and eventually died. The Apostles and many 1st century Christians picked up their own crosses and followed Jesus down this same path. We're not guaranteed protection and provision for our bodies.

Philippians 4 is about the heart. When the Holy Spirit produces Joy, the heart is the first to experience and be refreshed by it.

When we live in Christ just as if He were a home, He guards our hearts from the ravages of the devil and the world.

Philippians 4:8-9 (AMP)

⁸ For the rest, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of reverence *and* is honorable *and* seemly, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely *and* lovable, whatever is

kind *and* winsome *and* gracious, if there is any virtue *and* excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on *and* weigh *and* take account of these things [fix your minds on them].

⁹ Practice what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, *and* model your way of living on it, and the God of peace (of untroubled, undisturbed well-being) will be with you.

The reason we're depressed or anxious is because we dwell on negative things.

We set our minds upon them and the Biblical concept for this is “meditating upon” or “chew upon” like a cow chewing its cud. Dwelling on this stuff is like standing outside into a windy snowstorm and being afraid of catching a cold or freezing to death.

OUTDOORS IN COLD. If you saw me outdoors in a t-shirt what would you say? Especially if I were doing so next to my house or our church. Wouldn't you ask me why I was standing in a snowstorm with only a t-shirt? Wouldn't you wonder why I don't go into my house or the church building?

TOO HARD? Suppose I respond “because it's just so hard!” [to go into the house or church building]? Whenever I quote Phil 4:8 that's the response I get—as if it's harder to meditate on good things vs. bad.

CHEWING ON BAD. Meditating on bad things has negative effects on our physical bodies and our emotions, not to mention making it harder to hear God's voice and experience His presence. It injects “fight or flight” chemicals into our bodies, causing stress, anxiety, and if left alone long enough: panic attacks. It causes us to lash out at those we love even if they haven't done anything wrong. We'll age faster and be miserable, ruin relationships, and are more susceptible to harmful addictions in the effort to stop the stress.

EASIER? Yet that is “easier” than meditating on what's good? Easier on who?

CHEWING ON GOOD. Meditating on good things brings us all the amazing things we just read as we've been going through Philippians 4 today: a peace that defies circumstances and drives out worry & anxiety. A joy that comes directly from God and cannot be stolen, defiled, or diminished. The effects on both body and mind have been documented in studies: a greater sense of contentment, increased immune system, more energy, better relationships with each other, and a closer experience with God.

HARDER? Yet that is “harder” than dwelling on bad stuff? Harder on who? Choose your hard.

DIET VS. LIFESTYLE. I hate the word “diet” because I think it's misleading—it makes me think of a fix rather than a lifestyle. I did Keto a few years back and lost 25 lbs—it was great! I also got rid of heartburn & acid reflux which had been plaguing me for years. Guess what

happened next? I went off this “diet” and everything came back: the weight, heartburn, and acid reflux.

A “diet” needs to be a long term lifestyle and not a temporary fix.

When we go on one, we should resolve we’re going to be on it for the rest of our lives.

Now let’s reread verse 9 of Phil 4:

⁹ Practice what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, *and* model your way of living on it, and the God of peace (of untroubled, undisturbed well-being) will be with you.

PRACTICE. TRAINING. Look at the first word: PRACTICE. Meditating on good stuff is a lifestyle and not a temporary “diet” we go on to lose some spiritual weight. The reason dwelling on bad stuff seems “easier” is because we’ve trained both our minds, hearts & bodies over the years to do so. We think about bad things and our heart responds immediately with the appropriate emotion whether anger, worry, or depression. Our bodies follow up by taking all this stress upon itself and begins to break down.

THE DETAILS. Now it’s time to practice thinking good things. My wife told me something fascinating recently: when in conflict with someone else, our instinct is not only to highlight the bad more than the good, but to get into DETAILS about the bad. If we were to draw this up as a written list with 2 columns, good on one side and bad on the other, its not just that the bad would be longer...it would contain great details. Whereas the good list would be both short and brief.

There are two worldly sayings which are appropriate for this sermon:

- “God is in the details.”
- “The Devil is in the details.”

Whatever we chew upon in our minds will include details, every time, and show where our eyes are focused. Meditate like this upon a person long enough, like a spouse for example, and soon we’re making statements like we’re not on love with them anymore and that all that’s left is bitterness, resentment, and even hatred.

- So what if we trained our mind to do the opposite?
- How would our hearts respond?
- How would our bodies react?
- What would our relationship with God be like?

THE JOY OF GOD IS FOUND IN THE DETAILS.

PUBLISHER'S CLEARING HOUSE. I'll start you off by giving you something to chew upon: Publisher's Clearing House. They show up at your home with the TV cameras, balloons, and the big check. After lots of pictures and confetti, they reassure you that you will receive \$7000 per week for life and will send said check each week, to arrive every Friday.

DISSIPATION. Your initial joy is through the roof! Yet it will likely come down off that high after a day or two as life resumes, and several months and years later you certainly won't be flowing in the same level of ecstasy and celebration as you did on day 1.

EVERY FRIDAY.... However...every Friday when you go to your mailbox, see the PCH envelope, open it, and see the check for 7 grand a sense of gratitude, security, and peace...contentment. You don't have to worry about paying your bills, working, or many of the things that consume people. You're set. It doesn't mean you're happy all the time, doesn't mean there still aren't ups and downs, but this enduring, steadfast deposit into your account has a built a firm foundation underneath you that won't be rocked.

LOTTO VS. CONTINUAL DEPOSIT. Salvation wasn't winning the Mega Millions Lottery, it's more like PCH. Jesus' work on the Cross, His Resurrection, and His intercession in Heaven wasn't a lump sum payment. It's a continual deposit into our spiritual accounts that never stops. It's better than winning PCH—the difference is like comparing the heavens to earth.

Our inheritance is God. In the OT the Lord split up Israel into 12 parts and gave a portion of the land to each of the 12 tribes. Each piece of land had its own blessings: one had easy access to water, another had great hunting game, another was good for growing crops, etc. The Levites, who were the priests, received no physical inheritance. Instead the Lord told them "I am your inheritance."

LEVITES CLOSER TO GOD. The American mind doesn't like that—we like physical hands on blessings like PCH. Yet consider this: the Levites were the only ones who got to go into the inner parts of the Temple. They were the one who experienced God on the highest level.

When we live in God we have joy instead of sorrow. We have peace instead of anxiety.

We are content.

Philippians 4:10-13 (AMP)

¹⁰ I was made very happy in the Lord that now you have revived your interest in my welfare after so long a time; you were indeed thinking of me, but you had no opportunity to show it.

¹¹ Not that I am implying that I was in any personal want, for I have learned how to be content (satisfied to the point where I am not disturbed or disquieted) in whatever state I am.

¹² I know how to be abased *and* live humbly in straitened circumstances, and I know also how to enjoy plenty *and* live in abundance. I have learned in any and all circumstances the secret of facing every situation, whether well-fed or going hungry, having a sufficiency *and* enough to spare or going without *and* being in want.

¹³ I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency].

Verse 10: the Philippians sent Paul an offering of some sort, whether food, clothing, or money and he's happy about it!

Verse 11: he knows how to be content in WHATEVER state he's in.

Godly Contentment isn't weak or lacking ambition. It doesn't mean a person sitting on the couch with no ambition—Paul was (in my opinion) the most ambitious of all the Apostles in his efforts to preach God's Kingdom Gospel. He gave up everything for Jesus and endured a lot of persecution from beatings to years of imprisonment for the Lord.

Godly contentment isn't to numb one's emotions to some “even keel” state of being—just read the epistles and you continually hear Paul's great passions!

Godly contentment is the key to have the strength of the joy of the Lord at all times regardless of the circumstances. He reveals it in verse 13: he lives in Christ, just as if Jesus was his home.

“How?!” you're asking, yet the question has already been answered in this sermon.

We cannot constantly meditate on bad things and have joy and peace. We can't just wait for a sovereign act of God to change our circumstances, our spouse, things at work, our kids, or in the country so we can finally experience some hope and joy.

DEPOSITS. Jesus lives inside of us, now it's time to start living inside of Him. If we view the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension as a lotto win we got 2000 years ago we'll stop being grateful. If we see it instead as constantly making deposits into our accounts, for the rest of our lives, something different will happen.

Make a list and get into the details. Write it down if you need to.

- You and I have been more than forgiven of our sins—we have inherited God Himself.
- The old temple is obsolete and we are the new one. God Himself lives within.
- He's set us forth in a destiny right now, and He's completely secured our future in His Kingdom.