

Choose joy

Intro: It's great to be here with you again and visiting CHC is for us like being with our family. We always love to come here and have a great time of fellowship with brothers and sisters here. Thank you for your amazing hospitality. Everytime we come here, we need to start on an exercise program when we get back home.

It's a great honor for me to stand in front of you today. Thank you pastor Rick for your invitation to share the message today in the series on the theme of joy. Everyone who knows me can say that the theme of joy is close to my heart.

Do you know what my nickname was in my highschool years? "Sunshine"....Not bad like for a teenage guy. It could be worse...but people would call me that because they saw me smiling all the time. That became my trademark. No matter what happened around I would always have smile on my face. Moreover, the name "Wojciech" is a Slavic name and it means "Joyful warrior" :) There are no incidents in God's plans for our lives.

We as a family come to the US almost every summer and we never cease to learn new things. We celebrated 4th of July this year on a speed boat doing Ohio River cruise which was a birthday gift for my son Dawid. We really enjoyed it.

At some point the captain of the boat asked everyone a question: Where you guys from? So there were people from different states and when it came to us I said: "We are from Poland"....and the couple sitting next to us said: "You kidding me. We are from Poland too". Then I asked them: "Where in Poland are you from". And they said: "We are from Poland, Indiana" and then I said: "Oh, we are from Poland, Europe".

That was a very funny experience to us. Folks, just in case you are wondering there is a huge difference between small town called Poland in the state of Indiana, and a beautiful country of Poland placed right at the heart of Europe with a history that started in 966 AD.

Think about it for a moment. The same name, but 2 totally different places.

It's the same with joy. The world we live in offers many joys that you can indulge in.

- Many of them are connected with material things: the house you live in, the car you drive, the jewelery you wear. But have you notices there is never enough? There are always new things you can buy and marketing guys make sure you know how much you need them!
- Others seek their satisfaction in their job, their position, their influence, their status. There is nothing wrong with having a job you enjoy doing. What is wrong however is when your career becomes your sole priority. I don't know how about you, but I've met some very sucessful people who have great careers, but are unhappy.

- Yet others seek fulfillment in relationships - that's the way we've been created, we need close, love relationships in our lives. The problem is that nobody's perfect, we all fail from time to time, hurt one another, even the loved ones. So if your sole focus in finding joy is based on relationships with others, you can be sure that it won't work in a long distance, sooner or later other people will fail you.

That's why we live in a world full of broken people who seek fulfillment of their deepest desires in all the wrong places.

But there is another way of understanding and practicing joy.

Paul's prescription for anxieties of this world begins with a call to rejoice.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice" (Phil. 4:4).

Apostle Paul used every tool in the box to get our attention here.

First, he used *present imperative tense*, so his readers would hear him say, continually, habitually rejoice!

And if the verb wasn't enough, he removed the expiration date. "*Rejoice in the Lord always*". As if this wasn't enough, he repeated the command: "*Again I will say, rejoice!*"

Some people are probably thinking now: "Yeah, right?". It's easy for Paul to say these words. He was the apostle. He experienced God and his miracles in some amazing ways. After all he was the author of most of the books of the New Testament.

Let me make it clear. If anyone had a reason to be anxious at this point, it was Paul. At the moment of writing these words he was imprisoned in Rome. He was about 60 and endured many beatings, still felt the pain of scars caused by 39 lashes he received on five different occasions. He was deserted by friends, endured shipwrecks, storms and starvation before. What's more he is awaiting a trial before the Roman emperor Nero, who was known for the persecution of Christians.

Yes, Paul, had many reasons to be anxious, angry, hurt...he could complain and say: Where are you God? Why are you allowing this to happen to me? After all I endured for you!!!

Yet, there is no complaining here. Instead there is an encouragement:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice" (Phil. 4:4).

How is it possible to rejoice in circumstances like these? How can a person obey this command? Rejoice always? Is it possible for any person to maintain an uninterrupted spirit of gladness? Do you know anyone who would say: "*I love hard times*" or "*I just enjoy when it hurts*"...

No. This is not Paul's challenge. We are urged to "Rejoice in the LORD"

Let me share a little bit of my story to illustrate how it works in my life:

- My **dad was a seaman** (6 months at the sea 2 months at home) so my mom raised me. When I was 10 **my mom** suddenly passed away. It was a shock. She taught me to pray to God and she was in hospital I prayed and nothing happened. So I said I don't want to believe in that God. I was looking for fulfilment on all the wrong places...and the whole was still there. My brother became a Christian and he started sharing with me about God, but I wasn't interested. I went with him to church one time and saw some people really enjoying God. That was new to me. It begun a process in me that opened my eyes to God and I finally surrendered to Him. It was a totally new experience. I experienced what it means to "Rejoice in the Lord" and begun sharing it with others.
- Soon after that even as a young Christian I experienced a call to ministry - I begun preaching when I was 17 and have been in the ministry ever since then
- God took this shy boy from a small town in Poland to complete PhD at the University of Wales in Cardiff and continued to expand the horizons of ministry. I went back to Poland to become co-pastor of Second Baptist Church and I taught at the Seminary in my city.
- It seemed we are all doing great...however, God had something else in mind for us. It was at that time that we found ourselves in the desert of ministry. My wife faced some serious health issues for couple years. It was a time of taking some masks off and experiencing community of grace with God. We chose to trust the Lord despite the circumstances and it gave birth to Pastor2Pastors ministry.
- Later on I faced yet another desert. I taught at the Seminary for 11 years and it came to the point when the leadership did not share the same vision I had and there were some issues that I couldn't agree with anymore. I needed to make a choice. To stay there or move on to where the Lord is calling me. It wasn't easy decision. I have a family, mortgage, my health insurance was from there. But it became clear to me that I need to make a choice. It was very hard. And when I prayed through all this I chose to trust God. I chose to rejoice in the Lord in the midst of this circumstances and the Lord was ever so faithful. It felt like dying to myself.
- As a result of this we formed foundation Golden Apple Institute. We've seen a lot of amazing blessing that came out of this. To give you a glimpse of that we recently organized Renewal Festival in our city where Josh McDowell was a keynote speaker and over 5000 people from our city participated in that. We organized Leadership Forum at the City Hall of Wrocław and in October we are launching our own School of Biblical Discipleship.

What's the point? Why am I sharing all this with you? Because if you want to experience true joy in the Lord you need to choose joy which is not dependent on your circumstances, the color of your skin or how much money you have. It is dependent on your relationship with the Lord.

You need to choose to rejoice in the LORD

“Rejoice in the LORD” - Paul says

This verse is a call, *not to a feeling*, but to *a decision* and a deeply rooted confidence that *God exists*, that *he is in control* and that *he is good all the time*.

Belief always precedes behavior.

What you believe about God and yourself translates into the way you live.

What do you believe is the ultimate source of joy in your life?

Many people say they believe in God, but when storms come it seems like their faith evaporates.

So how can you choose to rejoice in the Lord?

“*Set your minds and keep them set on what is above*” (Col. 3:2 AMP).

When giants are in the land, when doubts swarn your mind, turn your thoughts to GOD.

Your best thoughts are God-thoughts.

He is above all this mess. He is: “*the Most High over all the earth*” (**Ps. 83:18 ESV**)
“Who is comparable to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the Lord?” (Ps. 89:6).

Pain does not affect him.

The economy does not faze him.

Storms do not stop him.

Elections do not define him.

Diseases do not infect him.

Death cannot claim him.

God is in control of the whole universe. He preserves and governs every element.

He has resources we do not have, wisdom we’ve never imagined. And he is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

Do you believe this? Joy is not just an emotion that comes and goes on the basis of your circumstances. Joy is the awareness of the presence of God with us at all times. And that changes everything.

So how can you remain joyful?

Conclusion: **Stare at the mountain less and at the Mountain Mover more**

Psalmist says: ***“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).***

As a young Christian I misundertood this passage. I thought it’s all about God fulfilling my desires. I quickly learned that it doesn’t work that way.

The word “delight” is really pleasant. When you think of “delight” you think of something good, something you really enjoy. And this is what the psalmist is saying here: as you learn to delight yourself in the Lord, as you grow deep in a relationship with Him, as you get to know him - your heart changes and you desire more of God’s things that only he can fulfill!!!

There are no shortcuts here. If you truly desire a fulfilled, joyful life you need to get connected to the true source of joy!

What does it mean in your everyday life? Start where you are and come to the Lord. Paul says: ***“...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).***

It’s all about your relationship with the Lord.

You know like there is a vast difference between small town called Poland in Indiana and the country of Poland in Europe, similarly there is a vast difference between joys these world has to offer and the joy of the Lord.

One of the Old Testament prophets addressing chosen people of God puts it this way: ***“The Lord your God is your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing” (Zeph. 3:17).***

It’s your decision whether you choose the joys of these world to fool you around or choose the Lord of lords, the source of everlasting joy to rejoice over you with gladness and loud signing!

I choose to rejoice in the Lord.

I choose to stare at the mountain less and focus on the Mountain Mover more.

How about you?