

"Sorrowful, Yet Always Rejoicing"

2 Corinthians 6:10

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The optimist thinks the glass is half full. The pessimist thinks the glass is half empty. The engineer thinks the glass is twice as big as it needs to be. Folks, there are a lot of jokes out there about optimists and pessimists. I simply say, the optimist thinks the glass is half full, the pessimist thinks the glass is half empty, and the realist says it is both half full and half empty.

And I believe it is always best to be a realist. It is important to recognize pleasant and unpleasant aspects of life as it truly is. The Bible writers do as well. In Ecclesiastes, which we explored in recent months, Solomon sure seems like a realist. And I believe the Apostle Paul was as well. That is event in our text today.

For the next few weeks we will explore some favorite verses, just one verse each Sunday. Today we focus on a verse which I think is a realistic response to the world in which we live. Actually, it is just apart of **2 Corinthians 6:10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing**. For the Apostle Paul the glass was not half full or half empty, it was both, and that very realistic perspective enabled him to faithfully trust and follow Jesus each day. Thus, I believe that is a perspective every Christian, including those of us in this room, should want to have. Let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us here, be both encouraged and challenged by His Word today.

Just two parts today...

First, as Christians we should always be sorrowful. Now don't be discouraged, part 2 is "we should always be rejoicing." I would add that Christians should usually be cheerful, be quick to smile and laugh and have a good sense of humor. If we strive to take God more seriously and ourselves less seriously there will be plenty of reasons to laugh at the person we see in the mirror. Yet, we should always be sorrowful. Or as the NLT says, "our hearts should always ache." Let me explain.

In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul is recounting the hardship and persecution he faced as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He speaks of serving the Lord, **2 Corinthians 6:4b, 5 In troubles, hardships and**

distresses; I beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger. Certainly, those types of experiences cause sorrow. And when we encounter these types of difficulties our hearts will ache.

Now, beatings, imprisonments, riots and hunger are pretty rare for us as Christians in the United States, though plenty of Christians face these things in other parts of the world. But troubles, hardships, distresses, hard work and sleepless nights have probably been experienced by some of you in this room during this past week.

Undergoing chemotherapy, having a child struggling with addiction, being laid off from a job, are hardships being endured right now by Christians I know. Trusting and following Jesus does not mean we are immune from troubles. And when these types of things happen it hurts. Our heart aches. The Lord does not expect us to embrace our pain with a sweet smile and a "thank you Jesus." Tears and even cries of agony are appropriate when we experience the hardships this fallen world can bring.

When someone close to you dies, a spouse, another family member or a close friend, it is not only appropriate to express grief, but there is likely something wrong if you do not. Jesus wept when His friend Lazarus died. Yes, as Christians, we need not grieve as those who have no hope, but our hearts should ache when we are separated from someone we love.

But these are not the only reasons we are sorrowful. In **Romans 12:15** the Lord tells us **Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.** This is not describing some weird type of empathy where we experience another person's feelings. This is a normal compassion and concern for others. We weep because we feel pain because of how we see someone else suffering.

The Apostle Peter describes what our attitude should be in **1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble.**

Peter's focus is how we are to treat our brothers and sisters in Christ, believers in Jesus, who are part of the same church as we are. But our compassion should certainly extend to family members and friends who are not believers. There should even be a sense of compassion for people we don't know. When I hear about a woman in Africa watching her children starve to death because she cannot get any food, tears will sometime come to my eyes. That is a good thing.

My point is that we should not just be sorrowful when we experience pain, but also when we see other's pain. If you are a part of Chisholm Baptist Church you have spiritual brothers and sisters who are being treated for cancer, who are dealing with other serious illnesses, who have been laid off from their job, who are grieving the death of a spouse, who are going through a painful divorce, who have a child threatening suicide, who have a family member struggling with addiction. Those people are weeping. We should weep with them. If someone is weeping because their favorite football team is You don't have to weep with them but be nice.

Now, I realize there are probably plenty of people in this church you don't know, but you don't have to know too many, before you encounter someone going through a very difficult time. As a pastor who knows almost all the people in this church, there are a lot of reasons for being sorrowful. I can relate well to what Paul said in **2 Corinthians 11:28, 29 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?**

That last part is one of my biggest heartaches. And even if you are not a pastor it should trouble you as well. When folks in this congregation get involved in sin from which they refuse to repent, it is troubling. When individuals who used to be an active part of the congregation stop coming to church, neglecting to meet with other Christians, it is concerning. When someone who once professed by trust and follow Jesus "deconstructs" and no longer considers him/herself a Christian, it is heartbreaking.

Yet, even more troubling than the sin I see out the window is the sin I see in the mirror, in my own

life. When Paul describes his own struggle with sin in Romans 7 how he finds himself doing the very things he doesn't want to do, and not doing what he wants to do, he says, verse 24, "What a wretched man I am." Failure to honor and obey the Lord as he knows he should cause him real sorrow. It is a good sorrow, because it leads to repentance, but it is still painful.

As I said earlier, I think we should usually be cheerful, but this rejoicing is something deeper and more solid. John Piper uses the word, "chipper" to describe an upbeat, optimistic attitude, which is oblivious to the hard realities of life that we and those around us face. That is not what we are talking about. This "joy," and that is probably the best word, certainly involves emotion, but it is much more than an emotion. And thus, it has the capacity to exist even when we are experiencing pain. We are sorrowful yet always rejoicing. So, what are the reasons for this joy? I will mention five.

#1 As Christians we should be able to step back and see God's goodness in the midst of pain. As human beings, pain often causes us to lose perspective. If you stub your toe and it really hurts, you don't really care about anything else at that moment. You may have just won half a million dollars in the lottery, or your favorite football team maybe just won the Super Bowl, but that happiness those events bring evaporate very quickly if your toe is intense pain.

But, as Christians, the Holy Spirit enables us to step back and see God's goodness in the midst of our pain. Yes, your toe may really hurt, or your heart may feel broken, but as you recognize that God is still providing for you in the midst of your pain, it fuels your joy. This may involve something as simple as being thankful for air to breathe, food to eat and water to drink. Or perhaps, it is recognizing how the Lord has blessed you with some wonderful people to stand beside you during a difficult time.

I think of two men here at Chisholm Baptist who have been dealing with cancer. Dana Koth just finished six months of treatment, and praise God, got a good report, and Mark McClellan, who is currently undergoing chemotherapy. It is no fun. There are plenty of reasons for sorrow, even when the treatments are effective.

But one reason for joy for both of these men, is that they each happen to be married to an incredible woman. Having Deb beside him enabled Dana to endure some very dark days. Having Carolyn beside him is helping Mark get through his treatments. In the midst of difficult trials, one of the reasons Dana and Mark can still have joy is because each of them has been blessed by the Lord with a wonderful wife.

Remembering that gives them joy, even in the midst of their sorrow. Being able to recognize the many blessings from the Lord we enjoy even in the midst of pain, helps us to be always rejoicing.

In the midst of adversity, our joy is fueled by the knowledge we are never alone, that the Lord is always with us. As I mentioned how Dana and Mark have been blessed with wonderful wives, some of you are thinking, "Must be nice. I am single and I am pretty much alone when I have to deal with health issues or other challenges." Or maybe, "With my spouse, (usually meaning my husband), I am pretty much alone when I have to deal with health issues or other challenges." It is no fun to be alone, especially when afflictions and adversities strike. That is one reason it is so important to be involved in a good church that becomes your spiritual family and provides support during the tough times.

But even when there is no other human being around, a Christian is never alone. In **Hebrews 13:5** we read **God has said, "I never leave you nor forsake you."** In **Isaiah 43:1b-3a** the Lord says **I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.**

Yes, these are words the Lord spoke to the people of Israel about 700 years before Christ, but they are words for all of God's people at all times, including those of us in this room today.

"Yes, Pastor Dan, I know the Bible says stuff like that, but I just don't feel like God is there a lot of times." Well, in most cases, God's presence is not experienced through our feelings, but through our faith. Believing God is with us as He promised, is

how we will usually feel His presence. It is good to pray, "Lord, I need you to increase my faith, so I might experience your presence." When that prayer is answered, you will have joy even in the midst of sorrow.

#3 We can rejoice when we realize God is using the trials and tragedies in our lives for our benefit. The verse in the Bible that speak to this directly is **Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.** Those "all things" include all the trials and tragedies that life may bring.

Somehow even these things will be used for God's glory and our ultimate good. That really should not come as a surprise when we keep in mind two very basic truths that the Bible teaches. First, God is sovereign. As **Ephesians 1:11b** says **(He) works all things according to the counsel of his will**, which means, as Jesus tells us. **Matthew 10:29b**, that **Not one sparrow falls to the ground outside of your Father's will.** Nothing happens in our lives unless the Lord chooses to allow it to happen. Disease, debt, divorce, depression, death, defeat, discouragement cannot touch us, unless God chooses to allow it.

The second truth the Bible teaches is that God is always good to His children. He loves us. **1 John 4:10 This is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** In Matthew 7 Jesus tells us that a father would never give a hungry child a stone to eat instead of bread. He then adds if a sinful human father treats a child well, we can be even more confident that our heavenly Father will give us only good gifts to us as His children.

When we keep God's sovereignty and goodness in mind, it means that whenever He chooses to allow trials and tragedies into our lives it is ultimately a good thing for us. It almost never seems like a good thing. We may insist it is not a good thing. But the Bible tells us that whatever our sovereign Father allows in our lives is ultimately for our good.

How can that be? Darrel, a 33-year-old Christian, father of two, is in a car accident because a drunk driver swerves into the wrong lane. As a result, Darrel will apparently be in a wheelchair for the

rest of his life. Now, the accident itself, especially the drunk driver part, is not a good thing, it is evil. Yet, I think the Bible says that God could have acted in all sorts of ways and prevented that accident, if He had chosen to do so.

But He didn't and as a Christian, Darrel can be confident that because God allowed the accident to happen, it will be sued for good in his life. Will the accident make Darrel's life easier? Probably not. Will it help Darrel be a better husband and father? I don't know.

But, most likely the reason God allowed that accident is because it will ultimately, in the end, help Darrel become more like Jesus in his character. More than anything else, God wants Darrel to grow in his love for God and for other people. Though we may not understand how, apparently God knows the wheelchair is going to help Darrel down that path.

In **Romans 5:3,4** we read, **We also glory in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.** Will Darrel find more joy because of the accident? Yes, I believe so. It is even possible his joy during his life here on earth will be greater than it would have been otherwise. Those who have a lot of love for God and other people tend to be pretty happy.

But God's promise involves ultimate joy, eternal joy. It is in heaven where the greatest portion of Darrel's joy will be experienced. It is there that his love for God and other people will reap its true reward. Because, though heaven will be a wonderful home for everyone, I believe greater love for God and others here on earth, will mean greater joy in heaven.

#4 No matter how painful the trials and tragedies of life may be, as believers in Jesus we have an eternal hope. We look forward to heaven. Now, this certainly is connected with point number 3, but I am thinking of the fact that our pain and suffering in temporary, while our eternal home, in God's presence, heaven, is permanent.

It is described this way, **Revelation 21:3,4** **"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them**

as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Knowing this is what is ahead for those who trust and follow Jesus, enables Christians to have the attitude the Apostle Paul describes in **2 Corinthians 4:17,18** **For this light momentary affliction** (that is how Paul describes trials and tragedies of life – "Light and momentary affliction) **is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 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** (or temporary), **but the things that are unseen are eternal.**

The average life expectancy in the United States is 78.4 years. I don't know if that seems like a long time to you, but compared to eternity, where a trillion years is like a split second, that 78.4 years is just a sliver of time. Even a lifetime of suffering is clearly worth it if it leads to eternal joy! If you have the hope that this is what is ahead, it is a reason to rejoice, even in the midst of suffering.

Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Friends, that is to be the normal Christian experience. Oh, not every day. Sometimes we will likely find the trials and tragedies of life overwhelming. But when you have a time to get a little perspective, you, as believers in Jesus, should be able to rejoice because of blessing the Lord provides even in the midst of your pain, because you know you are never alone, the Lord is always with you, because you believe the Lord will use the trials and tragedies in your life for your ultimate good, and because of the hope you have of eternal joy in heaven.

In the week ahead, there will no doubt be reasons for you to be sorrowful. That is reality. But as a believer in Jesus there will be reasons for you to rejoice, even in the midst of your sorrow. That is reality as well and it is a reason for you to join as we praise God as we sing.