

Finding Joy in Difficult Circumstances

Unstoppable Joy, Philippians 1:12-18

Introduction

- One of the most famous trees in the Bible is the Cedar of Lebanon, prized for its strength, size, and resistance to both rot and insects. King Solomon used the trees to build the first temple in Jerusalem. One of the things that makes them unique is their ability to thrive in harsh environments. Originally from the rocky, high-altitude slopes in and around Lebanon, the trees get most of their water from deep underground springs through their extra-long taproots and far-reaching root systems.
- Last week, Christian McNeilly did a wonderful job kicking off our series in the book of Philippians, called “Unstoppable Joy.”
 - He defined joy for us as *“A deep and abiding delight that springs from a heart and mind consumed with gospel truth and work.”*
 - He made the connection for us in the first 11 verses of ch. 1 between joy and the gospel, and between the gospel and Christian growth and maturity.
 - He laid out a pathway for all of us to experience significant and long-lasting joy, even if we struggle with C.J.D, or Circumstantial Joy Deflating syndrome.
- My main task as a preacher today is to prove to you that this vision of joy is true & possible based on the next passage, Phil. 1:11-20 (Read passage, v. 18)
 - On a basic level, Bible teachers have 1 of 3 jobs to do every time they exposit or explain a text of Scripture: to explain it, prove it, or apply it to life. (all 3?!)
 - The Apostle Paul uses his difficult circumstances to demonstrate a central truth: **Joy is possible in every situation because it springs from the gospel.**
 - We see here that he was beaten, jailed, & even persecuted by other Christians!
- How do you find joy in difficult circumstances?

Body

- I. TAKE THE OPPORTUNITIES YOU ARE GIVEN TO SHARE THE GOSPEL (1:12-13)**
- A.** Paul was in prison, so he shared Christ with the whole praetorian guard.
1. The praetorian guard was an elite unit in charge of keeping the emperor safe and managing political prisoners.
 2. He may have been chained to a soldier – a captive audience.
 3. He made it clear that his “chains” were because of Jesus Christ.
- B.** Many people have heard of D.L. Moody, the prominent evangelist, publisher, & planter of the Moody Church in Chicago. But few have heard of Edward Kimball, the Sunday School teacher at Mount Vernon Congregational Church who shared the gospel with Moody at his uncle’s shoe store.

- C.** You won’t always get the opportunities that you want, but that doesn’t mean you won’t get opportunities to share the gospel.

II. ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO SHARE THE GOSPEL (1:14)

- A.** Paul’s imprisonment encouraged others to overcome their fear
1. This may seem counterintuitive – encouraged by difficulties.
 2. Those who loved Paul and the gospel wanted to do their part.
- B.** Remember the Titans is the heart-warming story of how 2 football teams – 1 black & 1 white – came together to win the Virginia state football title in 1971. Just before the championship, star player Gerry Bertier is paralyzed in a car crash, and the whole team steps up to win the game in his honor.
- C.** Your difficulty could be someone else’s success
1. Look for ways to share your successes & even your failures.
 2. Look for ways to cheer others on, and pray for them.

III. STAND UP TO PERSONAL ATTACKS (1:15-20)

- A.** The people around Paul were preaching the gospel with various motives.
1. Some were sharing out of their partnership with the Apostle (v. 5)
 2. Some were sharing for their own selfish reasons.
 - a. They thought he would be jealous of their success.
 - b. They thought they could make him look bad while in prison.
 - c. They tried to use his difficulties for their own advantage, but in the end, they were still preaching the same message.
- B.** In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he wrote about a spiritual reality that may have been inspired by his time with the praetorian guard. He talked about being “strong in the Lord” – a strength that only comes from our union with Christ by faith.
- C.** This may not surprise you, but I’ve been attacked a few times in my Christian life and in my role as a pastor. Whenever it happens, I always try to remember that “It’s really not about me.”

Conclusion

- My goal today has been to prove that you can have joy, even in the most difficult of circumstances, because **joy springs from the gospel.**
 - Your situation may be different, but it may be just as difficult as Paul’s.
 - You may have a serious health diagnosis, your life direction may have ended up in a cul-de-sac, or you may have suffered in other ways for your walk with the Lord – the point is that you can still have joy.
- You may be able to use the same strategies that Paul used to find joy in his difficulties, or you may have to look for other ways, but the point is still the same – true joy only comes from gospel truth and gospel work.
- I can’t help but think this truth is part of the inspiration for Psalm 1. “Joy” is closely related to OT concept of “blessing” and both spring from God’s Word like a tree planted in connection with a spring of continual water.