

Sunday Sermon

7/2/23

Series: Joy

Passage: Phil 4:4-9

Title: Joy That Defies Every Condition

Good morning, church! Please turn in your bibles to Phil 4. This morning we are going to be concluding our series on "Joy." I hope you have been able to put some of what we have been learning into practice.

You know, it's a funny thing, honesty time, things weren't really clicking for me on the joy front this week. Becky and I weren't really clicking. Emotionally I was just kinda spent. I wasn't really getting enough sleep. My schedule was such where I was just going from one thing to the next, and I sit down to work on the sermon for this week and God puts Phil 4 in front of me, and starts wrenching my heart. All week this divine wrestling match has been taking place.

Listen: God says, "My will for you is that you lay hold of my joy. And I'm going to show you how to leverage it in your life despite how you feel." That's what today's sermon is all about. Joy that defies every condition. When I think of defiance, I think of open resistance, bold disobedience. I think of that attitude of digging in the heels, setting your face against something. That is not laying hold of me! God wants to give us a JOY that defies every condition. Where we can say, "That's not laying hold of me. Ain't nothing is going to steal my joy – no power, no thing, no person."

So with that, let's jump into scripture, Phil 4:4-9. [Read/Pray]

This morning, God gives us six steps to joy that defies circumstances. We have six verses laid out for us and alongside those verses six steps that God gives us to laying hold of a joy that defies our circumstances. Let's get right into it:

Step #1: Recognizing the Command

Verse 4 – ***"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"***

Throughout the series we've been studying the variations of the word "joy" in scripture. The main word is the Greek word "Chara" – translated "joy," but the word itself is rooted in the idea of "grace recognized." We then have an iteration of the word "Chario" or rejoicing – this word is rooted in the concept of delighting in (being glad for) grace. Then we looked at "Soongchario" – "rejoice with me" – this was the concept of identifying with grace.

In our passage this morning we find another iteration of joy – the word "Chairéte." It's an imperative, a command – "(You) rejoice." The concept here is "to express or respond to grace."

Because here's the truth for every one of us: God's grace, his undeserved favor, is all over our lives. Do we recognize it? What are we doing with it? Some of us have health, not everyone has that. Some of us have wealth, not all of us have that. Many of us have jobs. How about kids? How about spouses? How about houses? How about food? How about friends? Education? Transportation? Safety? Possessions? A sound mind? Not everyone has any or many of those

things. What about a knowledge of the Lord? Do you understand anything about God this morning? The bible says that's God's grace that he's poured into your life.

2 Cor. 4:4 says that ***"The god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."***

You would not understand the light of the gospel this morning if God had not poured out his grace on you.

Eph. 2 says that ***"You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air (Satan)...living in the passions of the flesh, carrying out the desires of the body...you were by nature children of wrath...But God, being rich in mercy (not getting what we deserve)...made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one can boast. For we are (that's: who we are, what we are, how saved we are) that's his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."***

If you are living and breathing, if you are here this morning, God has poured his grace into your life. It doesn't matter if your life isn't awesome. It doesn't matter if you don't have it all together. It doesn't change anything if you don't have what the person next to you has. God has poured out on your life his amazing grace. You have been unbelievably blessed by him. What are you doing with it? How are you responding to it? *Chairete!* Rejoice! Rejoice...always rejoice.

Recognizing the command.

Step #2: Having the proper perspective

Verse 5 – ***"Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is near."***

For that word – "reasonableness" – you probably see a footnote in your bible. The NIV and KJV translate it "gentleness." It's the Greek word "ep-ee-i-kace." Literally, it's the word "appropriate." It's getting after the idea of having a reasonable response to a situation. See if you can relate: I have two daughters. Having children teaches us so much about our relationship with the Lord. Literally everything about children can be an illustration of the Christian life in some way. So those of you who have children, or have watched children, or have ever seen children can understand this: The concept of a reasonable or appropriate response. (Candy bar – wanting what I don't have, balloon – losing what I have)

Listen: To the child, the candy bar/the balloon is everything to them. This is not unlike us. Often when we want something or when we lose something that thing absorbs our focus. Instead of having a proper view of the forest, our focus is on the tree or trees around us. We lose the ability to express or respond to grace when our perspective becomes too narrow.

I was griping to a mentor of mine a few weeks back about how Becky's cancer journey has affected me. And he said to me, "I bet it feels like God's given you the short end of life's stick, doesn't it?" I was like, "Yes!"

But then he said, “But that’s not truth, is it?” His point was that my perspective had gotten too narrow, too focused on the one tree instead of the broader picture of God’s grace and goodness in my life.

Because here’s the hard thing, church. What is an appropriate/reasonable response to circumstances in light of God’s grace? In light of his grace, what if he takes away my health? What is an appropriate response? What if my job is hard? What if my expectations aren’t met? Does not his grace still abound? I don’t have to be happy about the circumstances, but having a proper perspective still allows me to recognize and respond to the abundance of God’s grace in the midst of the circumstance. It allows me to see the forest. And when I can see the forest, I am reminded of this truth: (v.5) that the Lord is near. He has not abandoned. He does not give up on. He is not far off. He is near. His grace is all around us. If Christ is in us, and we are in Christ, and Christ is in the Father. Then in all things, God is near to us. He rejoices with us, and he suffers with us.

Hebrews tells us that ***“We do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet is without sin. Let us then draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.”*** – Heb. 4:15-16. When we need help, God is near. When we need more grace, God is near. Listen: He’s not going to make everything perfect – that comes later. But he will give you the power to be conformed into the image of his son. To respond like Jesus. To be content like Jesus. To love like Jesus. To be filled with joy like Jesus.

Recognizing the command

Having the proper perspective

Step #3: Focusing again on gratitude.

Verse 6 – ***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”***

You will notice that each one of these truths builds into the next. Recognizing the nearness of God allows us to trust him with the things that make us anxious. God has us. If we go back to Hebrews 4, we see that God wants us to enter into his rest. Rest is the opposite of striving. Rest is the opposite of worry. Rest is the opposite of fear. In Christ, God has us. Does he have you? Are you in Christ? Have you given your life to him? Do you follow him? Have you trusted Christ for your salvation? If you have, then you have been saved, and you have been seated. The work is finished. Now in all things, God has us. We can enter into that rest, but where we get restless is when we lose our gratitude.

I mentioned in the first week of our series that having an attitude of gratitude is going to be the difference between whether I can lay hold of joy or not. We get restless when the tree or trees become everything to us. It’s no longer about what I **have** been given, it becomes about what I **don’t have** or what has been taken from me. So when we come to God in prayer and supplication (supplication is the asking him for stuff – our petitions), if we come without thanksgiving/without gratitude, know that we come before him in idolatry. We have replaced

him at the center, and we've put something else there. "This, God, is what I need to be happy, to have a full life, to find joy."

But listen: gratitude shifts the conversation off of what I don't have to what I do have. Gratitude changes the game. Don't believe me? Let's do an exercise: If you're married, think of your spouse. If you're not married think of your parents or another significant relationship in your life. So often it is easy to focus on all the negative things about a person. Over 16 years of marriage, a couple of kids, a journey through cancer, you don't think I have a few negative things I can focus on as a husband concerning my wife? Gratitude changes the game. Let's talk about all the things about her I'm grateful for. Her heart for the Lord. Her character. Her trustworthiness. Her beauty. Her ability to mother our kids well. Her help in so many areas of life. I can focus on the negative, or I can choose gratitude.

We can do the same exercise with the church. No church is perfect. How can it be? It's full of imperfect people. So often in ministry I'm tempted to focus on all the negative – annoying people, lack of programming, a spirit of complacency, poor leadership – instead of choosing to have gratitude for all that God is doing and continuing to do in and through the people and ministries of our body. Gratitude changes the game and keep me in a place where I can still hold on to joy.

The same is true in our relationship with the Lord. Choosing gratitude puts me above the noise and keeps my eyes and heart on him.

And in that place, we discover his sufficiency. (#4: Resting in the sufficiency of God)

Verse 7 – ***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."***

In 2 Cor. 12, Paul prays that the Lord would remove a "thorn" in his flesh - a circumstance from his life that he didn't like and didn't want. When he asked, the Lord said "No." So what does Paul do? He asks again! The Lord again said, "No." So like any person who doesn't like their life circumstances what does Paul do? He asks a third time. This time, the Lord still says, "No."

Maybe you can relate to that. You pray for some reality to leave you, some circumstance to change. You pray that the Lord would take something out of your life that you don't want, and God says, "No." How do we find joy in that? Step 4: By resting in the sufficiency of God. Paul tells us, "God said to me, ***'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'***" But here's the issue: we think we are strong. We think we don't need him. When life is good, we think we are in control. Hot stuff. Sufficient in ourselves. It's only in our weakness, we remember, "Ah! I'm frail! I'm weak!"

Listen: God often allows hard circumstances, and then, many times, keeps us in those realities, so that we don't – Paul says, "Become conceited." It's a word meaning "to exalt oneself." In this world, God allows trouble so that we won't exalt ourselves to the place that should be reserved only for God in our lives. God says, "MY grace is sufficient for you. MY power is made perfect in weakness." Remaining attached to the vine. And Paul says, "If that's the case, then,

for the sake of Christ, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

God's sufficiency no matter what's going on is what gives us peace that surpasses understanding. People ask, "How are you so happy? Why aren't you freaking out? Why don't you act like I would if I were in your situation?" God's peace is guarding my heart and mind because of his grace poured out on me in Christ Jesus. My identity is not in my circumstances. My hope is not in my circumstances. And neither is my joy.

Six steps to joy that defies circumstances:

- 1) Recognizing the command
- 2) Having a proper perspective
- 3) Focusing again on gratitude
- 4) Resting in the sufficiency of God

#5: Filling our minds with the "right" things (as opposed to wrong)

Verse 8 – ***"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if anything is worthy of praise, think about these things."***

If there is ever a point in the process that we tend to get stuck, it's this one.

Romans 12:2 tells us, as God's people, ***"Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."***

When we become Christians, our old patterns of living and of finding life, don't just fall off of us. That's why we need to put in the work of renewing our minds if we are going to continue to lay hold of more and more of what the Lord has for us.

Listen: In Christ, scripture tells us "all things are permissible (as in all your sin has been paid for), but not all things are helpful."

Filling my mind with pornography will teach me to become unhealthy in my sexuality.

Filling my life with gambling will teach me to have an unhealthy relationship with money.

Filling my heart with unforgiveness will harden my heart to a point of no longer being able or even willing to love others as I should.

These are examples of patterns of this world. Things that, if we were honest about what focusing our mind on them does to us, we would admit that they don't ultimately lead us to a place of joy – only judgement, frustration and discontent.

Instead, God says, "You want joy? Fill your mind with things that will be helpful in leading you to, *Chairete*, express and respond to grace."

This brings us to our final step this morning:

#6: Continually practicing the first 5 steps.

Verse 9 – ***"What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."***

In Psalm 16:11 David says, ***"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy."***

To bring our series full circle, joy is a durable and permeating gratitude rooted in these unchanging outcomes - in Christ, we have been saved and we have been seated. God's grace poured out in our lives. But we still need to choose it. To go after it. We need to fight for it. God gives us practical steps that will move us into joy - a joy that defies circumstances - if we practice them.

Did you know that Paul wrote this while he was in prison? There was nothing that Paul was going to allow to steal his joy. Church, do you have a joy that defies every condition? It's time to dig our heels in, and let our response be rooted in God's amazing grace.

Let's ready our hearts for communion.