

Elements of Joy, Part 2

Scripture: Philippians 1:6

Code: 50-3

INTRODUCTION

In Philippians 1:3-8 Paul says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

The epistle to the Philippians has a joyous beginning. In fact it has often been called the epistle of joy because that is the theme of all four chapters. Paul knew the fullness of joy given by the Holy Spirit--something that every believer should know and experience. Yet many do not.

A. Psalm 42

Psalm 42 was written centuries before the epistle to the Philippians and was written by a man in distress. He knew he ought have joy, but couldn't seem to grasp it. Some suggest Psalms 42 and 43 may have been written by David during Absalom's rebellion (2 Sam. 15-18). But regardless of the particular circumstances of the author, we do know he was depressed and despaired that he would ever crawl out of the pit he was in.

Psalm 42:1-4 says, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' These things I remember, and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival."

There were a number of factors that contributed to the author's despair.

1. The psalmist was lonely

He obviously felt cut off from God. Like a thirsty deer pants for water, his soul thirsted for God. In his loneliness and alienation he wondered, "When shall I come and appear before God?" (v. 2). He had an intense desire to be near God and for God to come and deliver him from his present state. Today many feel separated from God and wonder if He really cares. Something in them thirsts desperately for the presence and intimacy of the God who can deliver.

2. The psalmist had enemies

The depression of the psalmist was intensified by his enemies. Verse 3 tells us he fed on his own tears as his enemies taunted him, asking, "Where is your God?" They rubbed in the apparent indifference and impotence of God, taunting him with the idea that he was unworthy of God's attention.

3. The psalmist had lost privileges

The author's sadness was also caused by remembering the privileges he had lost. In verse 4 he recalls how he used to lead the throng in procession to the house of God. Now he was out of Jerusalem, away from the festive throng, and couldn't worship and fellowship the way he had enjoyed.

4. The psalmist was depressed

a) A moment's reflection

The psalmist's sadness arose from his focus on his circumstances. In verse 5 he reacts to his depression with honest self-interrogation. He asked, "Why are you in despair, O my soul?" It was as if he had said, "Cut that out. Why are you acting like this?" In reply he answered, "Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence." It's as if he was saying to himself, There's no reason for this: you know God hasn't left you alone. Your enemies are wrong and God is all powerful and loving. You know your privileges will be restored and you will worship and fellowship again. You may have found yourself in a state similar to the psalmist's. Sometimes in the middle of our complaining, when we feel alienated from God and attacked by the people who surround us, all of a sudden something in us says, Hold it right there--this is out of line! Why are you doing this? Put your trust in God--His help will come.

b) A return to despair

But then the psalmist returned to his depression. He knew the answer to his condition, but seemingly couldn't apply it. In verse 6 he says, "O my God, my soul is in despair within me; therefore I remember Thee from the land of the Jordan, and the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar." He remembered how God had worked in the land of promise, bringing to mind God's covenants, promises, and power. He continued, "Deep calls to deep at the sound of Thy waterfalls; all Thy breakers and Thy waves have rolled over me" (v. 7). The psalmist felt that trouble just kept on coming.

Often that's the way life is--just when you pick yourself up, something else knocks you down. Like a cascading waterfall, life can seem to rain down blow after blow. The psalmist was like someone caught in the surf--one breaker smashed him on the sand, then he was sucked in, tossed up, and pounded down again. He felt trapped.

c) A brief joy

Yet from that pit of depression the psalmist returned to a joyful perspective: "The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; and His song will be with me in the night, a prayer to the God of my life" (v. 8). That was where he had been in verse 5! Then he moved back into depression (vv. 9-10), and again confronted himself in verse 11 with the equivalent of, "Why are you acting like this?"

d) A continuing cycle

Psalm 43 continues the cycle of depression we see in Psalm 42. The psalmist wrote, "Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation; O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For Thou art the God of my strength; why hast Thou rejected me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out Thy light and Thy truth, let them lead me; let them bring me to Thy holy hill, and to Thy dwelling places. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God

my exceeding joy; and upon the lyre I shall praise Thee, O God, my God" (vv. 1-4). He knew the answer to his despondency was to find his joy in God and not his circumstances. Yet even though he knew that he went through the same up-and-down cycle: "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, the help of my countenance, and my God" (v. 5).

B. The Book of Philippians

1. Paul was lonely

When Paul wrote the epistle to the Philippians, it is likely he was chained to a Roman soldier--certainly a depressing situation. Paul was about to send Timothy--the only one "of kindred spirit" to him--to the Philippians (Phil. 2:20). Epaphroditus, who brought Paul a gift from the Philippians and thus prompted his letter, would soon return to Philippi. So Paul would soon be all alone. But Paul didn't bemoan his condition and circumstances.

2. Paul had lost privileges

Paul had also lost privileges. Like the psalmist, he couldn't join in worship with the throng anymore. He couldn't be a part of the celebration of the Lord's table with other believers. He couldn't lead a group of believers in the joy of fellowship.

3. Paul had enemies

At the time he wrote Philippians Paul was being mercilessly criticized by his enemies. They included not only those in the pagan culture that held him prisoner, but also those in the church. He was criticized for everything he did, and some said his imprisonment was God's punishment and for his miserable failure in the ministry.

In spite of all that Paul could honestly say, "The fruit of the Spirit is . . . joy" (Gal. 5:22) and "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). He knew from experience that spiritual joy is not related to circumstances. Rather, it's a gift from God to those who believe the gospel and is produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they receive and obey God's Word. It is mixed with trials and maintained by focusing centered on the eternal glory to come.

The psalmist knew better than to be despondent, but nevertheless drifted back to focusing on his circumstances. Paul, in similar circumstances, was full of joy because he was lost in the wonder of a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

REVIEW

I. THE JOY OF RECOLLECTION (v. 3)

II. THE JOY OF INTERCESSION (v. 4)

III. THE JOY OF PARTICIPATION (v. 5)

LESSON

IV. THE JOY OF ANTICIPATION (v. 6)

"I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

One of the great joys of the ministry is the anticipation of what the church will ultimately become. A look at the church today can be discouraging, but a look at what the church is going to be is exciting. That was Paul's focus.

A. Paul's Confidence

The Greek verb translated "confident" (peitho) means "to be persuaded," "sure," or "absolutely convinced." Paul was absolutely convinced regarding the work God had begun in the Philippians. The Greek verb translated "began" (enarchomai) is used only twice in the New Testament: here in verse 6 and in Galatians 3:3. In both cases it describes the beginning of new life in Christ. Here the good work begun by God refers to salvation itself. In Galatians 3:3 Paul asks the Galatians, "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" Taken together Paul was teaching that salvation, which is begun by the Spirit, is also perfected by the Spirit. In Philippi Paul gave the gospel, but it was the Lord who opened Lydia's heart so she could become saved (Acts 16:14).

B. Paul's Understanding

1. Salvation means a divine work

It is essential that believers understand that salvation is a work of God.

- a) Philippians 1:29--"To you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Christians are the passive recipients of two gifts from God: faith and suffering.
- b) Philippians 2:13--"It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."
- c) John 1:12--"As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."
- d) Acts 11:18--When the church in Jerusalem heard Peter's report of Gentile conversions "they . . . glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.' " God grants repentance to those He chose before the foundation of the world. That's the book of Acts says, "As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (13:48).
- e) 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14--"We should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation. . . . And it was for this He called you through our gospel."

- f) Titus 3:4--"When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy."
e) James 1:18--"In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth."

2. Salvation is a noble work

In Philippians 1:6 Paul expresses absolute assurance that the God who had begun His work of salvation in the Philippians would perfect it. He referred to that salvation as a "good work." The Greek word *agathon* ("good") can also be translated "noble." Salvation is a noble work because it starts the process of sanctification and brings the believer to glorification. Paul had confidence that God would bring the Philippians' salvation to its full conclusion.

Years ago Bible expositor F. B. Meyer wrote, "We go into the artist's studio and find there unfinished pictures covering large canvas, and suggesting great designs, but which have been left, either because the genius was not competent to complete the work, or because paralysis laid the hand low in death; but as we go into God's great workshop we find nothing that bears the mark of haste or insufficiency of power to finish, and we are sure that the work which His grace has begun, the arm of His strength will complete" (The Epistle to the Philippians [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952], p. 28).

3. Salvation is a powerful work

What God begins He is able to complete. That reality is what gives meaning to the perseverance, preservation, or eternal security of the believer. The God who saves by His power also keeps and perfects by His power.

- a) Romans 5:10--"If while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Since Christ's death saves us who were enemies of God, then certainly His living will keep us saved.
b) Hebrews 7:25--"He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."
c) Romans 8:29-39--"Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Regardless of problems, anxieties, difficulties, and failures in the church, Paul affirmed that the God who saves us will also glorify us.
d) John 6:37-39--Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."

4. Salvation anticipates perfection

Philippians 1:6 tells us God will perfect our salvation on "the day of Christ Jesus."

a) The Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord is a common phrase in the Old Testament. It always refers to divine judgment

and the outpouring of God's wrath on sinners. The ultimate realization of the Day of the Lord will occur with the return of Jesus Christ, when God pours out His wrath on the ungodly of all the ages. In the New Testament Paul referred to Christ's second coming as "the day" (1 Thess. 5:4) and "that day" (2 Thess. 1:10). In both cases he was referring to a day of judgment, wrath, vengeance, and punishment for sinners.

b) The Day of Christ Jesus

Philippians 1:6, however, does not refer to judgment. "The day of Christ Jesus" refers to the time when believers will be glorified. We will be fully perfected--our salvation will be fully completed--on "the day of Christ Jesus." That is when our justification and sanctification will become glorification.

(1) Philippians 1:10--We are to "approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ." At that time believers will be presented blameless to God.

(2) Philippians 2:16--Like the Philippians we're to be "holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ [there may be] may have cause to glory."

(3) 1 Corinthians 1:7-8--"You are . . . awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

(4) 2 Corinthians 1:14--Paul said to the Corinthian church "We are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus."

(5) 1 Corinthians 5:5--In a discipline situation, a sinning believer was delivered to Satan "for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Each of those verses refers to the time when the saints will be glorified.

The Day of the Lord always refers to judgment on sinners, whereas the Day of Christ, Christ Jesus, the Lord Jesus, or the Lord Jesus Christ refers to the time of reward for glorified saints. In His Word the Lord distinguished between the two by introducing the personal name of Jesus Christ. That celebrates the intimacy and unique relationship we have to God through Christ.

5. Salvation assures preservation

When God begins a work of grace He completes it. William Hendriksen said, "God . . . is not like men. Men conduct experiments, but God carries out a plan" (Philippians, Colossians and Philemon [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962], p. 55). The Bible repeatedly affirms that believers are divinely preserved.

a) Psalm 89:33--"I will not break off My lovingkindness from [David], nor deal falsely in My faithfulness."

b) John 3:16--"Whoever believes in [Jesus Christ] shall not perish but have eternal life" (NIV).

c) John 4:14--The water Christ gives a believer "shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

d) John 10:28--Of His sheep Christ said, "I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand."

e) Romans 11:29--"The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable."

f) 2 Timothy 2:19--"The firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His.'"

g) 1 Peter 1:4-5--The inheritance of believers "is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for [them], who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Paul's joy of anticipation was like the affirmation of Jude, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" (v. 24). A practical implication of that great theological truth is if you focus on what's wrong with the church now, you may get depressed; but if you focus on what the church is going to become, you will get excited. And an exciting truth about what the church will become is that no true believer will be lost.

The Lord Never Fumbles

Salvation isn't like when I played football. I would go in the locker room after a game and the coach might say, "Hey, you are the reason we lost the game. You fumbled the ball on the three-yard line, the ball popped up, and that guy ran for a touchdown. It was your fault! Hold on to the ball!" That's never going to happen to me in heaven. The Lord is never going to say, "Do you realize that because of what you did 250 people didn't get here?" Salvation means the Lord picks you up and carries you from justification to glorification--and He never fumbles!

CONCLUSION

The church isn't what it ought to be. You and I are not what we ought to be, and the church is made up of a whole lot of people just like us.

We have a choice: we can focus on what the church isn't or rejoice in what it's going to be. Everyone who loves Christ and belongs to Him will be glorified. Paul knew that and it brought him great joy. There's no sense spending your life depressed over what the church isn't when you can spend your life rejoicing in what the church is going to be.

I would never want the responsibility of getting people saved and maintaining them in their salvation. And who would want the responsibility of keeping your children saved once they came to a saving knowledge of Christ? Both are frightening responsibilities. Happily we have neither because it's the Lord who will perfect His church.

The church isn't a place for perfect people. It's a hospital for those who know they're sick and want the cure. To those who say, "I don't want to be a part of the church because there are too many hypocrites," I'm apt to, "Come on in; you'll feel right at home!" There's an old saying, "Be patient--God's not finished with me yet." It's true. God isn't finished with us. When He is we'll be perfect. That should take the pressure off so you can enjoy your ministry and church. It also means that instead of viewing your service to God as a trying responsibility, you will begin to love the thought that He's using you as a part of the whole process. You will obey Him as you rest secure knowing that responsibility for the results rests on His shoulders--not yours.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why is Philippians often called the epistle of joy"?
2. What caused the depression of the psalmist in Psalm 42?
3. The psalmist's sadness arose from his focus on _____ .

4. Psalm 42 shows a man who went through what kind of cycle?
5. The psalmist knew the answer to his despondency was to find his joy in _____ and not his _____.
6. How did Paul's circumstances parallel the psalmist's?
7. What was different about the focus of Paul and the psalmist?
8. Define spiritual joy.
9. What does the Greek verb enarchomai describe in Philippians 1:6 and Galatians 3:3?
10. What begins the work of salvation--the work of the believer or the work of God? Support your answer with Scripture.
11. Why may we say that salvation is God's noble work?
12. What biblical assurance is there that the God who saved you by His power will also keep and perfect you by His power?
13. Explain the difference between the Day of the Lord and the Day of Christ Jesus.
14. What is one practical implication of the great theological truth that believers are divinely preserved?
15. Whose responsibility is it to bring the church to fulfillment? Support your answer with Scripture?
16. When will the church be all that it ought to be? What are the implications of the answer to that question for us today?

Pondering the Principles

1. Are Christians saved according to God's sovereign will or by accident? Many Christians seem to think their salvation was an accident in a life filled with accidents, so their salvation affords them no joy as the purposed will of God. The Puritan Thomas Watson, commenting on Ephesians 1:11 ("We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestinated according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will"), wrote, "This purpose, or decree of God, is the fountain-head of our spiritual blessings. . . . We must resolve all into God's purpose. The signs of salvation are in the saints, but the cause of salvation is in God" (Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986], p. 124). Take time to rejoice and give thanks to the sovereign God who purposed to bless you with the free gift of salvation.

2. In our time God is often viewed as well-intentioned but inept. Many say that God is the God of the powerless because He Himself has no power. Consider the power of God in salvation compared to the creation of the world: "When God made the world, he met with no opposition; as he had nothing to help him, so he had nothing to hinder him; but when he converts a sinner, he meets with opposition. Satan opposes him, and the heart opposes him. . . . In the creation, God wrought but one miracle, he [spoke] the word; but, in conversion, he works many miracles; the blind is made to see, the dead is raised, the deaf hears the voice of the Son of God" (Thomas Watson, A Body of Divinity [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980], p. 78). Christian, have you considered the joy that is yours because you belong to an all-powerful God who has worked mightily in you?

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