

How to Enjoy Your Life

Philippians 1:1-2

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:1-2 NIV)

Introduction:

Let me ask you an all important question this morning.

Was life meant to be enjoyed or endured?

Well, to be honest, you might have to do a little bit of both.

The problem comes when the enduring is all you are doing.

Life should also bring some joy.

Don't you agree with me that it's easy to be "happy" when things are going well. It's another thing to be joyful.

You see – Joy is unaffected by circumstances.

But do you think that most people really enjoy life?

I really want to live the joyful life and I suspect you do too.

But what about you right now?

Do you enjoy your life?

Perhaps I ought to ask a more fundamental question.

What does it mean to enjoy life to have joy?

And if we are not enjoying our life, does the problem lie within us, with our situation, or with God?

What would bring joy?

Would things bring joy?

If we had more money or material possessions, would we enjoy our lives more?

Can poor people enjoy life?

Is there a secret that would enable us to rise above difficult circumstances and experience a joy that doesn't depend on our situation?

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Jesus said in John 10:10, "***The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.***"

Think about that. God wants you to have life in all its fullness.

In the King James Version it is called **abundant life**.

So if this Abundant Life is available to us - why don't we have it?

It has been my observation that many people are not happy because of their perspective on life.

They have been led to believe that life should be a certain way for them.

They have developed certain expectations concerning what a rewarding life should be like.

They have expectations concerning their standard of living, their marriage, their children, their career, and so on.

But the real question is whether these expectations are realistic.

You see, our expectations must be based on facts not fantasies.

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If we have false expectations, what we really have are illusions.

And illusion always leads to disillusion.

This is why it is so important to study the Bible.

The Bible is a Revelation of God's truth.

And it is this ***truth that will set you free.***

As we gain God's perspective on life our perspective will change and our level of enjoyment will rise.

The book we're beginning to study today is one of the most encouraging books in the Bible.

It focuses on our relationship with Christ and the joy that comes from knowing him.

I believe the book of Philippians tells us how to find this joy.

The word "**Joy**" is found in one form or another 15 times in the 104 verses of this short letter.

Philippians will give us a new perspective on life and help us appreciate what we have in Christ.

When Paul writes about Joy he is not writing dry

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theory ... he is writing from personal experience.

And we have to remember Paul is not writing this from a plush, wooden-paneled office, instead he is writing this from prison.

You see when Paul arrived in Rome he was warmly greeted and was able to visit with friends while he was under "house arrest".

But not everyone was happy with Paul.

Some criticized him and attacked him. And some of these were supposedly fellow Christians.

And it was in these circumstances that Paul rejoices.

This is not the first time. When Paul and Silas visited Philippi they were thrown in jail there too.

They were considered to be trouble makers.

While they were in jail they read Scriptures and sang hymns at midnight.

You see – Joy was just a companion of Paul in every circumstance.

Today we're going to look at the opening verses of this letter.

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In the first two verses we have the greeting or salutation.

Paul opened his letter in the fashion that was the standard of his day.

It was a familiar pattern: the name of the sender to the name of the recipient followed by a greeting.

They could be formal and complex or informal and simple.

In the book of Acts we see a couple of examples of this.

In Acts 15:23 we read: "***The apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.***"

Again in Acts 23:26 we read: "***Claudius Lycias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings.***"

That certainly is a long way from "Dear John."

When we look at Paul's greeting to the church, we are tempted to read right past it and miss the significance of what he is saying.

But what he says here is significant.

In fact, if we understand the implications of the words he uses in this opening paragraph, it might

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change how we see who we are *in Christ* and what we have *in Christ*.

It could very well alter our perspective and enable us to enjoy life the way we Christ meant for us to.

Within this opening paragraph, Paul describes who we are and what we have been given through Christ.

As we unpack these truths they will lead us to some actions we can take to increase our enjoyment of life.

Let's look at the first thing we must do.

1) Reaffirm Your Freedom and Fidelity

Reaffirm your freedom and fidelity.

Paul describes himself and Timothy as servants of Christ Jesus.

Actually, the word that is translated "servants" is more accurately translated in the Greek as "slaves."

He is saying that his relationship to Jesus Christ is one of total obedience and complete loyalty.

That was true for him and it should be true for every Christian.

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Paul saw himself as a person who was bound to Christ.

In Paul's day you could become a slave voluntarily or involuntarily

Paul had chosen to become a bond slave to Christ.

Would you think with me about how Paul's attitude is from the attitude we often live with?

We tend to view Christ as OUR servant rather than us His servant.

We ask Him to do our bidding.

If things don't go our way, we want an explanation.

We demand more than we submit to Him; we try to direct Him more than we follow Him.

You see – it's only when we submit to Jesus with a willingness to follow His leading and accept His ways do we find real and lasting Joy.

Joy is produced by the Lord, not by us.

Think about where you were before Christ and where you are now.

You've gone from bondage to sin to allegiance to the Savior. Hallelujah for that!

Listen to what is said of us in Romans 6:17-18,
"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

There's that word "**Slave**" again.

The truth is clear here.
 You were once a slave to sin.

This is true for everyone who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Bible teaches that all of us are born with a nature that has a sinful bent. The Bible teaches us,
"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

We sin because that is what we want to do.
 But the truth is that we can't quit sinning.
 We are slaves to sin.
 We are in bondage to sin.

Until Jesus Christ sets us free from sin and sinning.

Go back that look at the Scripture we just read in verse 18 where it says that we have been set free from sin.

But our freedom brings us to another allegiance.

Our allegiance has been transferred from our former master, the devil; to a new master, Jesus Christ.

So, you are now a servant or slave of Christ Jesus.

We must constantly reaffirm our freedom from sin and our faithfulness to Christ.

How do you see yourself?

Do you see yourself as a servant/slave of Christ?

A friend of mine, a pastor, preached a sermon to his congregation recently in which he made the point that most people see themselves, not as servants, but as volunteers.

The church needs to stop using this term – volunteers when people do ministry. We're not volunteers – we are servants doing ministry for Jesus!

You see - A volunteer gets to choose the agenda. A servant does not.

A volunteer gets to define the terms of his or her service.

A true servant must be obedient to the will of the master.

Do you see yourself as a volunteer for Christ or a servant of Christ?

Paul saw himself as a willing slave to Christ.

That is where we begin. But there is something else we must do.

2) We must Realize our Position and Purpose

Realize your position and purpose.

We began by understanding our freedom from sin and our faithfulness to Christ.

But we don't stop there.

You see, becoming a servant of Christ brings us into a new position before God.

We are now, not just servants, but saints.

In the Greek language the definition of a "Saint" is literally a "**Set-apart one**".

Both Paul and Timothy had what we would call **Set-Apart Hearts**.

This term "saint" is very closely linked with the term we use in "sanctification" To sanctified means we are "Set apart".

Paul addresses his letter to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.

He also mentions the **overseers and deacons**, who served as spiritual leaders in the congregation, but they are also saints.

I wish I had time to flesh out this thought here this morning on overseers and deacons.

One very important aspect of our future church growth depends on our Overseers Ministry.

Let me quickly give you who Paul is referring to when he addresses this letter to the "**Overseers and the deacons**"

There were spiritual leaders in the church Who were deacons/overseers of the believers.

It was there giftedness and they were equipped to have oversight of families within the church.

If there was a need or a problem they either handled it or they brought to their leaders.

The point is that those of us who have surrendered to Christ are now placed in the position of being saints and Paul refers to those who are Overseers and Deacons.

Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 2:19 (NAS): "**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household....**"

The word that is translated saints here could be literally translated as "***holy ones.***"

It refers to those who have been consecrated or set apart for God.

Most of us are familiar with the Roman Catholic view of saints.

But insofar as the Bible is concerned, every Christian is a saint.

A saint is not someone who has performed three miracles and been canonized by the church.

A saint is someone who has been set apart and chosen by God to be part of his forever family.

You are a saint if you know Jesus.

That is who you are now. You are a saint!

You may be saying, "Well, I don't feel like a saint."

To that I would reply, "Thank God that you don't have to feel like a saint to be a saint."

The way that you start to feel like a saint is to begin to realize that you are a saint.

What I want you to see is that this is a position of honor. We are set – apart for a special task ... we are specially chosen to serve the Lord.

We must realize that we have been extended a tremendous privilege in being called His children.

You'll never begin to feel like a saint and live like a saint unless you start to see yourself as a saint.

Illustration:

Some time ago I saw the sad clips of a military honor guard moving a casket into a waiting hearse. Those men who served in that capacity were men specially chosen.

They were specially trained.

And I would think that they did not grumble about their assignment, instead they work hard to represent their country and to honor those they serve in the best way possible.

These soldiers are servants, yes . . . but they are servants who serve with special honor.

And folks, that's the way it is with us.

We are voluntary servants of Jesus Christ who live their lives conscious of the great privilege and honor to serve as "***Saints of God.***"

Remember, you are not a saint because you are perfect.

You are a saint because God has said that you are. It's really as simple as that.

The great part is that an amazing transformation begins to take place when you see yourself from this new perspective.

You see, we tend to live up to our own image of ourselves.

If we have a poor self-image, we will live down to that.

If we have a good self-image, we will live up to that.

The problem is always in who we let define us.

And most people let the wrong people define them.

If I am going to be defined by anybody, I want to be defined by God.

Remind yourself that we are children of the most High King.

But we not only have a position in Christ, we have a purpose in Christ.

Notice that he is writing to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.

The implication is not simply that they happened to be at that specific location but that they were there for a reason.

God had placed them there. They were there to do God's work in that place.

Do you see this?

Do you see that you are placed in a specific location by divine Providence?

God has a purpose for your life in this place.

Where are you now? You are in this place.

You are where God wants you to be.

The real question is what are you going to do here?

So many Christians just sit and wait.

What are you waiting for?

Do you think that God is going to hit you over the head? I've been there before and believe me when I say this – I've asked God to make it easier on me and He doesn't have to hit me over the head with a ballbat.

Are you waiting for the lightning to strike?

Are you waiting for some miraculous sign?

Quit waiting! Start acting.

God doesn't steer parked cars. Do you know what I mean?

When you get moving, God will start guiding.

The point is that God has a purpose for your life –
– a ministry for you.

If you want to enjoy your life, you must reaffirm your freedom from sin and your fidelity to Christ; you must realize your position as a saint and your purpose to do God's will.

But there is one more thing you must do.

3) Recognize Your Blessings and Benefits

Recognize your blessings and benefits.

The reason you are who you are is because of what God has given you.

You are the recipient of so many blessings and benefits through Christ.

Paul mentions two extremely important ones —
grace and peace.

Listen to what he says in verse two:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't read past this. If you do, you will miss some life changing truth.

We have been given grace.

But what is grace?

It has been defined as God's unmerited favor.

In other words, grace is getting God's blessing when we deserve God's curse.

Grace is being forgiven when we deserve to be punished.

Grace is getting God's love when we deserve God's wrath.

There is a verse in Romans 5:8 that describes grace: ***But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** (NIV)

The fact that Christ would die for us while we were yet sinners is a picture of grace.

He didn't wait for us to clean ourselves up, to make things right, to get our act together.

He made the first move.

While we were shaking our fist at him, he was reaching out to us.

There is a familiar acrostic for grace:
God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

In reading some of the comments of James Boice this past week, I was reminded of the life of John Newton.

Although John Newton began his life in a Christian home, he was orphaned at age six.

He ended up in a very undesirable living arrangement with a non-Christian relative.

To escape he ran away and joined the British Navy. He eventually deserted and ended up in Africa where he wanted to "sin his fill."

But things got worse for Newton.

He ended up with a Portuguese slave trader in whose home he was treated very cruelly.

At one point the slave trader's wife, who hated white men, compelled him to eat his food off the floor like a dog.

He eventually escaped to the coast and lit a signal fire and was picked up by ship on the way to England.

While on board he stole some rum from the ship's supply and got so drunk he fell into the sea and almost drowned.

Later in the voyage the ship encountered a storm and began to sink.

He was sent down into the hold to man the pumps.

He was sure he would drown and was terrified.

As he worked he remembered Bible verses he had been taught as a child.

He began to call out to God and was born again. John Newton went on to become one of the greatest preachers in England. He also wrote a song or two. One of his songs begins like this:

**Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.**

We are not only blessed with grace, we are also blessed with the benefits of grace.

One of the important benefits is peace.

And we receive this peace in two different ways.

In other words, there are two different kinds of peace through Christ.

The first kind of peace is peace with God.

Look at Romans 5:1-2 (NIV): ***Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace***

with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Peace with God means that the struggle is over.

We have surrendered.

We're now on God's team.

And we have peace because we are not fighting against God anymore.

Our sins have been forgiven and we can finally relax.

The second kind of peace is the peace of God.

Look at Philippians 4:7 (NIV): ***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

The peace of God comes as a result of having peace with God.

It is the peace that transcends all understanding.

In other words, it's the peace that we shouldn't have in the midst of the storm but that we do have anyway.

It's the peace that allows us to trust in God when everything around us is shaking.

You can't explain this peace.

Only God can give a person this kind of peace.

And you have it.

So, do you see who you are?

You are a servant of God.

You are a saint of God.

You have been blessed by God!

To quote Jimmy Stewart, "It's a wonderful life!" And it really is, **if you know Christ**.

You see, to put this in perspective we must point out that it all centers **in Christ**.

Indeed, the book of Philippians is focused on Christ.

We have entitled this series "**All things through Christ**" because Philippians points out that all of these blessings depend upon Christ.

Later in the letter Paul will declare that he can do all things through Christ.

But it is only through Christ that he can do all things. Christ is the key to everything!

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If you want to enjoy your life, you must focus on Christ and what he has done for you.

He has set you free from sin.

You now have the privilege to serve him.

He has made you a saint.

He has given you a purpose for life.

He has blessed you with his amazing grace.

He has given you his peace.

And all of this is just the beginning.

Do you long for joy in your life? Do you want an anchor for the storms that you are facing?

If you do, then Jesus is who you should be looking to.

I read a great illustration this week.

If three birds are on a log and two decide to fly away, how many are left?

You would think the answer is one. But it's not!

The answer is really three.

Just deciding to fly away is not the same as doing so.

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There are so many people . . . and I suspect some of you are among them . . . who have decided that Christianity is true.

But deciding that it is true and actually committing yourself to Christ are two different things.

There is no joy in deciding . . . the real Joy comes in trusting.

How do you begin?

You begin by making a sincere declaration to Jesus.

Could you say a prayer like this: "Father, I have done many things wrong in my life. I cannot do anything to make myself right before you. I realize now that Jesus came to earth to die in my place and for my sin. I understand that His resurrection is the proof that the sacrifice was acceptable. Today, I declare that I believe your promise of forgiveness and life eternal and I receive that gift of life.

Cleanse me, fill me, and make me new. I place my life in your hands. Amen.

That's where joy begins.

There is so much more still ahead.