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Paul's Joy

Philippians 1:1-6

Prayer: *Father, we just again thank you. I just thank you for the incredible privilege that we have that when the roll is called that we will be there not because of anything that we've done but because of what you've done. And Father, we praise you and thank you for the gift of salvation. We thank you for the cross, we thank you for what made it possible for us to be there. And Lord, this morning we're going to be opening up a new book, a new word. We're going to be looking at the book of Philippians; and again I just want to pray as we start this journey that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us, give us the ability to open up your word and to make it of living value. We pray this Jesus' name, amen.*

Well, if you were pressed to sum up in one single word the prevailing attitude of these days, I can imagine you would say such words as "distressing" or "fearful," "depressing," maybe even "terrifying." One of the words that you're least likely to hear from anyone claiming as their own response is the word "joyful."

It's probably the one response that most of us desperately need. Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians in part to encourage the church at Philippi but also to express his joy even though the letter was written from a Roman jail. We're going to be looking at the first part of the letter to see how we can capture joy in difficult circumstances just like Paul did. So let's get right to it by looking at Paul's opening statement.

This is Philippians 1:1-5: Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Paul says the church at Philippi is a source of great joy to him. As we've said Paul is writing this letter sitting in a jail cell in Rome, and it's not the first time that he's found himself imprisoned. Both Paul and Silas spent a good deal of time in a nasty Philippian jail at the very beginning of the church at Philippi and it all started when Paul received a vision. This is Acts 16:9. It says: *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: A man of Macedonia was standing there urging him and saying, "Come*

*over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. So after receiving the vision Paul journeys to Philippi hoping to bring the gospel to places that were previously without it. And he arrives in Philippi only to find out that there's absolutely no Jewish community there because there's not enough Jews to warrant a quorum. You see according to tradition there had to be at least ten male Jews in order to establish a community and lacking that the Jews that were there were instructed to go down to the river and seek out the company and fellowship of whatever Jews they could find. I mean it was reminiscent of the scripture that speaks of the lament of the Jews who had been scattered through Babylon. Psalm 137 says: *By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.**

So Paul goes to the riverside and he's looking to see if he can find some fellow Jews, and there he meets Lydia. She's a very wealthy seller of purple and also a committed Jew. And so he spends a good deal of time explaining the gospel to her and the scripture says that God opened her heart and that she became gloriously converted. Acts 16 says: *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had*

come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

So Paul and Silas, they decide to stay in Philippi to build up this brand new church. One day they're heading out to the river to meet with their group and they come upon a demon-possessed woman who says something startling about them. Again, this is Acts 16:17: *She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."* Well Paul was smart enough to recognize right off the bat what the enemy was doing. You see he knew that sometimes Satan himself will speak the truth if he sees a long term advantage in doing so. I mean why not have a fortuneteller proclaim the truth about Paul. Well for one it would serve to legitimize fortunetellers as purveyors of truth, and secondly it would be mixing the truth with a lie, which is exactly the way Satan operates. I mean how would you like the glowing endorsement of a demon-possessed woman? Jesus quickly identified the very same tactic when we were in the gospel of Mark. If you remember we were doing the life of Christ and he's casting out demons. And as he's casting out the demons, they're trying to

do the same thing. Jesus had this to say about that in *Mark 3*. It says: *And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.* You see the demons were clearly speaking truth, but Jesus, he would have none of it. Both Paul and Jesus recognized that the enemy loves to use a little bit of truth mixed in with his lies so that he can further deceive and spread his vision and neither Jesus nor Paul would tolerate it. But in Paul's case it caused a riot. You see, Paul himself had been constantly dealing with this woman. This wasn't just a one-time occurrence. Again *Acts 16:18*: *And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.* Well that meeting in the marketplace, to put it mildly, did not go well. You see the slave girl had made a fortune for her owners and they knew that that was now gone. Picking up in verse 20, it says: *And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."* They're saying Paul and Silas were agitators and needed to be dealt with. It goes on to say: *The crowd joined in*

attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Now this beating was designed to do two things. First of all it was designed to profoundly humiliate them, hence the idea of being stripped, and it was also designed to be profoundly painful. Paul and Silas get stripped and beaten with rods. And just so you know what that is like, just imagine being beaten with a long wooden dowel. I mean long thin strips of oak or ash or some other wood will be wielded by someone who was trained to yield the maximum amount of pain per lash. And this was not just a 39 lashes that the Jews gave, this is an unlimited number of lashes depending on the whim of the tormentor. So Paul and Silas, they're stripped and lashed repeatedly with flexible whips of wood, then they're taken bleeding and broken to a prison cell where they're put in stocks. And these stocks are not like the stocks you see in New England where people are sitting, they have their head and their hands in front of them. These were specifically designed to incapacitate you and to hold your feet at the widest possible angle in order to have this incredible agony of cramping. So I want you to pause for a minute. Just reflect on the kind of opposition that Paul and

Silas are dealing with versus the kind of opposition that we might deal with when we want to share the gospel. We get concerned that somebody might call us a bigot or intolerant if we attempt to share the gospel with someone. And given that I want you to picture Paul, I want you to picture them bloody and sitting there placed in these stocks and just imagine what is it they're doing after all of this has happened. Well, they're singing. Verse 25 says: *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.* I can't imagine what the other prisoners thought. I mean how could it be that these beaten and bloodied and now tormented prisoners are singing? Well, they were singing because they counted it a privilege to suffer for the kingdom. You see, there's a principle that's at work here. You see, life for all of us is going to consist of difficult times when you're challenged by circumstance to believe that God really does love and care for us. Each and every time we're challenged like that, we're faced with a scripture described as a binary choice. There's only two directions that you can go. There's a grace direction and there's a bitterness direction. *Hebrews 12:15 says: Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and by it, defiling many.* Paul and Silas have clearly opted to go in the direction of grace. Have you ever seen believers go through extraordinary difficult things while trusting in God's grace to get them through?

I mean have you ever seen people being brought into the kingdom by seeing this extraordinary grace extended by God giving people some kind of supernatural ability not to go around trials and difficulties but to walk right through them by his grace? That's exactly what the prisoners were seeing, or I should say hearing as Paul and Silas croaked out whatever hymns they were singing.

So we pick up at verse 26. It says: *And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here. And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them at the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God. And that, folks, is how the church at Philippi*

was started. I mean from Paul and Silas's perspective, the events of that day were pretty straightforward, I mean, they both stood up for the truths of God in his word and at the end of the day they were bloodied and beaten and sitting in a dank cell stretched out and tortured in stocks, but they still trusted in God. They still trusted that he knew what he was doing. And we find out that God's perspective of the events of the day formed a prelude to a miracle that he was about to do that would have a profound affect on the growth of the church. You see, Paul and Silas knew that they were in a war and they knew that the greatest weapon they had was the grace of God; and it was that grace that saved them, it saved the Philippian jailer, and it started the church.

Well, it's now ten years or so down the road. Guess where Paul is. He's back in jail. This time he's traded a Philippian jail for a Roman prison, one that affords him at least some visiting privileges. He's writing to the church in Philippi which has been a source of great, great joy to him. I suppose the trouble spots like the Corinthian church, the church in Philippi was an absolute joy to minister to. In fact in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church he talks about the incredible generosity of the churches, all the churches, the churches in Macedonia, among those was the church in Philippi. Paul said in *2 Corinthians 8:1*: *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been*

given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints -- and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. You see, every time Paul looked at the church at Philippi he saw good things, he saw blessings, he saw people transformed into a community determined to be Christ to those who were surrounding them.

And so now some historical perspective. Let me just repeat the opening of Paul's letter to the Philippians. He says this: *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Well, Paul says he thinks of the Philippians and he's both thankful and joyful. He sees the work of the gospel going forward in Philippi and he states*

something that's become a staple of our understanding of what it means to be sanctified. He says, *"He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

When I was a brand new believer in Jesus Christ, I attended a Plymouth Brethren Church in San Francisco. And there was an older man there, a man by the name of Othniel Marion. Many of the people there regarded him as a saint not only because he was way up in years but because of his behavior, because of his countenance, everything about him was just sweet and godly. He struck me as the most godly person I had ever met and really what a Christian was supposed to be especially towards the end of his life. And I remember, I remember sitting down with him one day. And I asked him what's it like to be so close to God and to be so, what I considered, saintly. And he shook his head at what I now perceive to be my naivete and he described to me something that I could not understand until I had been a Christian for some time. He said the closer that he had drawn to Christ, the more overwhelmed he was with his own wickedness. I was absolutely flabbergasted at his response because to me he was someone who was as close to being Christ-like as I could imagine. But he went on to say that the closer you draw to God, the more intense the light of his being, the more intensely that light shines on you, the more it illuminates parts of you that you never recognized as sinful or

fallen. He went on to say the wonderful thing for me is that the closer I drew to God, the more I begin to appreciate his perfection and recognize my own sin, and all that does for me is to make me realize how deeply God loves me. Othniel was reflecting on a process that we call sanctification. It begins the moment that you're saved and it continues straight on through to eternity. *2 Corinthians 3:18* says: *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed to the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* You see it's only believers, it's only believers who are the ones who are able to look with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord as we are being transformed into his very image. As Paul puts it, *from one degree of glory to another.* I was introduced to Othniel at the end of his life. I got to see some of the last degrees of glory that he had been transformed into, having never met him at the beginning of his journey with Christ. But what the scripture says is that when you're born again, when the Spirit of Christ enters into you, he begins a process of transforming you into the very image of Jesus Christ, literally from one degree of glory to another. That means that the Christ in you having been saved a week should be different from the Christ in you after you've been saved a year or ten years or fifty years, because in each case his transformation is moving us from one degree of glory to another. And Paul says exactly who the author

of that is. He says: *This comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* When you become a believer in Christ, God's Holy Spirit enters into your spirit and begins changing every single aspect of your life. Paul's actually summing up for us what sanctification really is, what it means when God says *he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.* And what Paul is telling us is that God views us as a work in progress, something he intends to finish in the day of Christ Jesus.

You see, one of the things I don't think we fully realize, one of the primary reasons why we humans were created is that we, just like all of creation, are an expression of the glory of God. We just happen to be at the very top of the created things that do just that, and that includes stars and planets and oceans and mountains and every created creatures. The psalmist says in *Psalm 19: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Psalm 8 says: When I look at the heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the Son of Man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.* See, the amazing thing here, the glorious thing, perhaps the most glorious thing is that of all the things that God has made to bring him honor and glory in his creation, at the very

top is you and me. I mean think about what God says in Philippians 1:3. What God is saying is that the very start of our entry into the kingdom, God is beginning a work in you. That means that we're not just a creation by God, we are an ongoing work of God. And God makes that explicit in *Ephesians 2:10*, he says: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* describes what being a work of God's art is really like. He says this: "We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again we come up against what I have called the 'intolerable compliment.' Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: He may be content to let it go even though it's not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life -- the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child -- he will take endless trouble -- and would doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture after being rubbed and scraped and re-commenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumbnail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural

for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less."

I'm sure many of us having been rubbed and scraped and re-commenced for the tenth time are wishing for a far less glorious destiny. But if you pull back and understand just what God is doing in this time frame and what he's doing it for, it will give you the ability to handle what may be a highly confusing process. You know, if God loves me why is he allowing...fill in the blank. Why is he allowing blank to happen in my life? I mean have you ever thought or asked that question? Of course, everybody does. I mean I just look back at some of the people whose lives that we've studied in scripture and I'm certain they've asked those very same questions. I mean I picture a completely innocent Joseph, he's sitting in a jail cell accused of rape. I see an Abraham contemplating his childlessness twenty-five years after God had promised him a son. I think of John the Baptist and he's sending a message from his jail cell, he's practically begging Jesus if he's really the one John thought he was. I see David running for his life from his own son. I see Daniel in a lions' den. I see Gideon complaining to God himself that God has abandoned them. Or more recently we think of Ruth. Think of the journey that she went on after the death of Orpah's husband and her two sons. You see the Bible, it's

literally filled with case histories of God rubbing and scraping and re-commencing his art. And every one of those people experienced genuine misery. They're there in scripture illustrating just how the master artist works. It was very easy for us to look at these folks at the ten thousand-foot level, see it all worked out very neat and tidy all tied up with a bow. Then we look back at our own lives when nothing is neat and nothing is tidy and there doesn't seem to be anything tying up anything.

And that brings us back to this letter that Paul has written to the Philippian church from a jail cell. He's writing to a church that was started by him and Silas having been beaten to a bloody pulp and thrown into stocks in a dungeon and their reaction is to sing songs of praise. Ten years later we find Paul writing this letter to the solid and still standing testimony to God's workmanship that was known as the Philippian church. Paul uses this strange three-letter word to describe how he responds to God's rubbing and scraping. It's kind of the secret sauce that undergirds and powers every single believer who has to go through this life being rubbed and scraped and re-commenced over and over again. It's the word "joy." *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.* Paul, do I need to remind you you are sitting in a jail cell? You're sitting in a place is like nothing we can imagine here in the

United States. Chuck Swindoll described it this way: "The Mamertine Prison could have been called the 'House of Darkness.' Few prisons were as dim, dank and dirty as the lower chamber Paul occupied. Known in earlier times as the Tullianum dungeon, its 'neglect, darkness and stench,' gave it, 'a hideous and terrifying appearance' according to the Roman historian Sallust. Welcome to Paul's world. This was not some minor side road that Paul was on, this was to be in fact the end of the road for Paul. I mean he didn't realize -- well, maybe he even did that within a fairly short time he was going to be beheaded. He can look back on a life in which trials and trauma were par for the course. This is how he described it in *2 Corinthians 11*. He said: *Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*

We just heard what it was like to be beaten with rods. Paul says

that happened to me not once, not twice, but three times. And then he mentions that he was stoned. What it doesn't mention about that incident, it's described in *Acts 14*, it says: *Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and when they had won over the crowds and stoned Paul, they dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead.* What kind of physical shape do you have to be in for a hostile crowd that's just stoned you to leave you and figuring he's dead? It's amazing how *Acts* describes what happened next. The very next verse, it says: *After the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.* I understand the idea of picking yourself up and dusting yourself off but not when some murderous crowd has left you because they're convinced you're dead. It's just the kind of life that Paul lived. And that's just the physical aspects of the struggles that he endured. In addition there's this enormous amount of psychological trauma that Paul also endured. I mean we think of the church going through this tough time with COVID-19 but we're actually standing on the shoulders of people who have gone before us for thousands and thousands of years. Think about Paul. He had none of that. Everything was brand new. I mean the church that Paul established, the churches that he was tending to were the very first expressions of the mustard seed that Christ had spoken to his disciples about. I mean I can't imagine what it must have been like for Paul to struggle with the astonishingly misbehaving

Corinthian church or the highly persecuted Thessalonian church or the poverty-stricken church of Jerusalem. And we know that the weight of it pressed heavily in on him. In his description of all of his earthly persecution, Paul ends with this statement. He says: *And, apart from all other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.* And yet in spite of all of this overwhelming physical trauma and this overwhelming anxiety he faced, he has this incredible amount of joy. How do you figure that? How is such a thing possible? And wouldn't you want to tap into that source of joy? Wouldn't you want to be kept joyful when everything around you is screaming the opposite?

Well here's Paul's own words describing how he was able to capture and hang on to joy. This is *2 Corinthians 4:16*. He says: *Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* See, Paul was able to focus in on this split screen vision of life as he lived it. If you watch TV news at all these days you know that nowadays it almost always consists of split screens with the newscaster on one side and because of

COVID-19 his interviewee is on a different screen. Well Paul lived a split screen life, except his two screens consisted of the life that he was living here on earth and the life that he knew was awaiting him in eternity. And it may well be that Paul had an advantage here because it does say at one point that he was taken up to heaven and given a tiny glimpse of that very eternity.

Speaking of himself, Paul said in *2 Corinthians 12:2*: *I know a man in Christ who was caught up into the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether he was in the body or out of the body, I don't know, God knows. I know that this man -- whether in the body or out of the body I don't know, God knows -- was caught up into paradise. He heard inexpressible words, which a man is not allowed to speak.*

Paul goes on to say that he received such extraordinary revelations there that he was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. You see Paul had received a vision of heaven on one side of his split screen that he had for his entire redeemed life, and it empowered him to suffer through unimaginably difficult circumstances with a joy that just could not be extinguished. And on the other side of his split screen he saw the unfolding of God's plan right before his eyes. He saw the church as growing just like Christ said it would, like a mustard seed, he also began to see birds nesting in their branches, that the advancing of the kingdom of God was literally starting to change the world. Paul got to see that his vision of Christ was actually taking shape right within

his own life. And everywhere Paul looked, he saw the same split screen vision of *Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. And it was that split screen vision that enabled him to squeeze joy out of anything that was happening to him.

Well, it's 2,000 years later. The war is continuing. Believers back then numbered in the thousands. Now they number in the billions. Back then the church only existed in the east, now it's in all four corners of the earth. And 2,000 years of warfare by the prince of this world has not slowed down the advance of the kingdom of God one iota. So why is it that we don't have the joy that Paul had sitting beaten and bloodied, stretched out on a torture device in a dungeon? Could it be that we don't have his split screen vision? Could it be that we don't have a future vision of the inheritance that awaits us or a present day vision of the power that God has promised us? And because we don't have that split screen vision we're as terrified as everybody else of what our future holds. Paul's concern was for the churches that he cared for. My concern is for the church in America, which most closely resembles the church of Laodicea. This is what Jesus said about them. He said: *"You say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't know that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked."* We are all of those things because our split screen vision is almost nonexistent. I mean

instead of focusing in on the wonder and the blessing we received as children of the kingdom, we focus only on what we can see and virtually ignore what is unseen. Paul tells us that his joy comes from recognizing that the seen is only temporary and the unseen is what is eternal. Again C.S. Lewis says it well. He says: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased."

See, it's pretty obvious from looking at Paul's life that God's main concern for Paul did not revolve around his comfort, his wealth, or his health. I mean all of those were secondary to God's concern for his eternity, and they have to become secondary to us. I mean God was actually looking to Paul's future five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand years from those days that he spent sitting in a prison cell. I mean he was there for a decade or so. He's been in glory for over two thousand years now and he still hasn't scratched the surface of what God had prepared for him. See, God wants the very best for us but he wants far more for us in eternity. And until we get to the place where we can see that split screen vision of eternity balanced against this temporary mist of a life, that joy is going to escape us. Paul was so

thoroughly convinced of the joy that awaiting him, he was able to count everything in this life, the good, the bad and the ugly, as nothing. He says: *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.* That's where his joy came from.

You see, without that split screen vision we are locked into this world and we are terrified that it's not going to turn out like we hope. Our present day terror is the upcoming election. I mean somehow I think we think that God is up in heaven right now just biting his nails, "Oh, I hope this works." He's not. This is all part of the seeing world that is temporary and passing. And when we recognize that God is one hundred percent in charge of whoever comes to power next month, then we can, like Paul, rejoice. We can rejoice with a joy no one and nothing can take away from us, whether we're sitting in the driver's seat politically or beaten, bloodied or still singing sitting in stocks in a prison cell *because we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* Let's pray.

Father, I just again, I get the strong sense that people are paralyzed and terrified about our circumstances, our politics and

all of these things, and it's just so easy to forget how much you are in charge, how glorious you are, how much you love us and how much you care for us. I think of Paul and Silas, Lord, they are beaten and bloody and sitting in a cell singing. Lord, I pray that you would give us the ability to focus on you and your kingdom and your power and your love and your grace and your glory so that no matter what happens, we too can be singing. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.