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Unshakable Joy in Uneasy Times; Philippians 1:1-11

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Introduction – Life is not as smooth as we hope and prepare and wish it would be. No matter how we try to avoid it, life gets uneasy at times. Conflict and confrontation, unforeseen turn of events, natural calamity, unexpected obstacles, unwanted heartache and hardship. The fact that we are sinners, living in a world filled with sinners, and the world itself corrupted by sin guarantees that life will not be smooth and trouble-free. In fact, the Bible tells us in Job life is short and filled with trouble.

Then when you add faith to the already certainty of difficulty in life, the chance of facing uneasy times multiplies. As believers we not only face the troubles of living in a world of sin, but we also face the pushback of going against the grain. Jesus said, “if the world hates me, it will hate you also.” Paul said, “through much tribulation will we enter the kingdom of God.”

One of the few things you can be absolutely certain of in this life is that there will be seasons of great difficulty. Life will not always be easy. In fact at times it will seem impossibly difficult. That fact of life is precisely why the letter of Paul to the church in Philippi is a treasure!

The second reason Philippians is such a treasure – it is for those who have lost their joy in the Lord. If all seems hopeless and dismal, Philippians will guide us on the path to rediscover and reignite true joy! To overview the letter of Philippians let's make two broad observations.

- I. The believer can experience a sure, unshakable joy that transcends all circumstances.
 - a. Notice that I said THE BELIEVER can experience a sure, unshakable joy that transcends all circumstances. Paul is writing as a believer, to believers. The temporary joys of this life ebb and flow, come and go, but the underlying joy of the believer is a constant, even in the middle of the most trying situations in life.
 - b. Joy is the most visible theme of this little book. The seasons of ease and comfort and the seasons of hardship and heartache immobilize

- and paralyze us when we lose our center – when we lose focus on our faith. And as believers, we need to hear this and hear it often.
- c. How can you have joy when you lose your job? Or when the people you work seem to live in order to make your life miserable? You lose your home? Financial stress seems impossible to make ends meet? You lose a loved-one? Face an illness? Are ridiculed for your adherence to biblical truth and steadfast affirmation of the gospel? How can you maintain joy in the difficulties of life? Now I'm not saying that Christians should always be bubbly and smiling and laughing no matter how hard life becomes. No, I believe Christian joy means that we can face trying times and not give up, and while enduring the unwanted and unthinkable can maintain a steady confidence in Christ and a peace and rest and satisfaction in our soul. This book will teach us how.
 - d. Philippians is filled with explanations of joy and exhortations to joy – 16 references to joy in 4 chapters. Now it is extremely important to be reminded of the context of this letter that is so full of joy. Paul constantly speaks of the joy that he has and that is available to us as well, and yet his present circumstances while penning this letter is far less than what we would consider as joyful. (1) He's in prison. (2) He's in prison for doing the right thing – living out his faith and sharing Christ. (3) He has enemies that are taking advantage of his imprisonment. From any human perspective the last thing we think will appear from Paul in such a state is joy – and yet, through all of this – he is able to find and enjoy an enduring joy!
 - i. He has joy in prayer – 1:4
 - ii. He has joy that the gospel is proclaimed – 1:18
 - iii. There is joy for Paul in knowing he is in the faith – 1:25
 - iv. There is joy for Paul in Christian fellowship and unity – 2:2
 - v. There is joy for Paul in laying down his life for brothers and sisters in Christ – 2:17-18
 - vi. There is joy for Paul in Christian reunion – 2:28-29
 - vii. There is joy for Paul in growing in holiness – 4:1
 - e. You see Paul is finding surprising joy in the most unexpected place – prison. Unshakable joy in uneasy times. How is Paul finding joy in prayer? In growing in holiness? In sacrificing for the good of fellow

believers? Such a joy that overrides his present joyless circumstances.

- f. Here is the answer. Listen carefully. Paul's joy is rooted in his relationship with Christ! All of these examples of joy in Paul's life – not a single one comes from the world. That's why when Paul's world turns upside down, his joy doesn't evaporate. Paul's examples of joy are springing from his ultimate joy which resides in the Lord. 3 times Paul commands his readers to rejoice – in the Lord! In other words, Paul's life is radically centered on Christ. Everything he faces comes from Christ, revolves around Christ, and is for Christ. For Paul, Christ is ALL! That's why he writes in 1:21 – for me, to live, is Christ.
 - i. If we've lost our joy, what have we been living for?
- g. Joy that is unshakable by the strong winds of change and unmoved by the upheaval of persecution is rooted in Christ when He is our life, our treasure, our everything.
- h. Listen how Paul describes how his life is so radically Christ-centered.
 - i. He says his imprisonment is for Christ – 1:13
 - ii. His preaching is for Christ – 1:18
 - iii. His body – whether in life or in death – is for Christ – 1:20
 - iv. The way we live is to be for Christ – 1:27
 - v. Faith and suffering are both gifts to us that enable us to glorify Christ – 1:29
 - vi. True ministry takes place as we surrender to the interests of Christ – 2:21
 - vii. Whatever we sacrifice in life is given for the sake of Christ – 3:7
- i. But there's more. There is something even more fundamental at work here in Paul. Underneath Paul's unshakable joy is his unwavering life in Christ, and underneath his life in Christ is the bedrock, ultimate foundation of all – the glory of God! Christ is Paul's life – the glory of God is his universe! Listen to these foundational statements from Paul.
 - i. Paul knows we exist for the glory of God – 1:11
 - ii. The exaltation of Christ is for the glory of God – 2:11
 - iii. Our salvation is ultimately God's work for His glory – 2:13
 - iv. And everything exists for the glory of God – 4:20
- j. Paul knows a deep, abiding joy no matter what happens in this life because Christ is his treasure, and whatever may come, he can't lose

his treasure. He knows somehow everything works in some way for the glory of God. Even his chains. Even his wrongful chains. Even the triumph of his enemies.

- k. So here is the application for us. If our joy is easily shaken and often lost, we need to go back to our foundation and back to what we've made our life. You see Paul stood on the foundation of the glory of God, which drew him to treasure Christ, which enabled him to always find joy. We lose our joy when we build our lives on lesser things.

II. Difficult, trying circumstances are gospel opportunities.

- a. Sometimes the greatest gospel opportunities are veiled in dark, troubling, uneasy times. This book is going to teach us as believers how to be the church in touch times. How to give and sacrifice for the sake of brothers and sisters in Christ. How to live out the gospel we profess.
- b. Philippians is essentially a thank you letter. When the church at Philippi heard Paul was in prison in Rome, they immediately took up a substantial, sacrificial love offering to provide for his needs. They sent his friend, Epaphroditus, to deliver it personally to Paul. They wanted him to know how much they loved him as a minister of the gospel. He was not alone. They stood with him. They ministered to him in his time of crisis. In this case, the ministry was financial.
- c. That monetary blessing freed Paul to focus on ministry rather than being distracted by daily necessities. He wrote letters. He encouraged believers who visited him. He shared the gospel with the guards. His imprisonment, meant to put bars on the gospel, was turned into an open door for the gospel. Why? The church stepped up to encourage him.
- d. You see God uses us to help one another rediscover that unshakable joy in uneasy times.

Conclusion

1. True joy is only in the Lord – not in trinkets or trips, material prosperity or financial security, or social media followers or relationships. You see when we lose those things through difficulty or persecution and yet still have joy, we demonstrate to the world that true joy is only in the Lord.

2. When the hardship of my brother becomes my concern such that it moves me to sacrificial acts of service and love, we bless that brother and we show the world the bond of faith runs deeper than any other earthly bond.
3. If we've lost our joy, we've lost our foundation of God's glory and our life is in Christ. Return to Him today and reignite your joy.
4. If you've never known the joy of the Lord, you can know it today if you trust in Him and make Him your treasure! You may have come here today burdened by sin, heavy of heart with life, confused or disillusioned in life, or so spiritually numb you don't even care, but you can leave with the joy of the Lord!