

Joy To The World #2 - Find Joy Even When You Are Suffering

- All righty, Merry Christmas. Good to have you all. If you've got a Bible, go to the book of Philippians. We're takin' a little bit of time, study through this great book of the Bible and we're doing so heading into the biggest party that the world has ever known or ever thrown, and that's the birthday of Jesus, amen? Jesus is the biggest person in the history of the world and Christmas is the biggest party in the world. It's amazing that the whole world stops to celebrate one guy's birthday. That's how big he is. And what's curious is we know where he was born, in Bethlehem. We don't know exactly when he was born. The Bible doesn't tell us which month that Jesus was born in. We don't really know. All it says is shepherds were in the field. That's all it tells us. And so the way we got this particular date for Christmas, December 25, the early Christians were part of an empire called Rome and it was a pagan empire with lots of pagan holidays, one of them was called Saturnalia. And the Christians already had the day off and they figured well, we don't know when Jesus was born, let's use this day off to celebrate his birth. So that's how we got this particular date for the holiday. That being said, we don't know exactly when Jesus was born, but we know how he was born. We know that he was born of his mother, Mary. She was probably a teenage girl, think middle school, junior high age. She was a peasant gal, and she was given this amazing gift, she's a tremendous woman, to bring Jesus Christ, God, into human history. And this would have begun with this comfort. How many of you ladies are pregnant? Any pregnant ladies in the house? Some of you are gals that have never been pregnant. You're wondering what is gonna happen. Let me just tell you. I've seen it first hand five times. First thing that happens is you start to gain a little bit of weight, but you have a good excuse, unlike your husband. What happens then is, your center of gravity shifts. You can always tell a lady that's pregnant 'cause it looks like she's, you know, gettin' ready to, you know, what is it when you climb under one of those bars?

- [Crowd] Limbo.

- The limbo, yeah. So pregnant ladies walk like they're interning for the limbo. Their center of gravity shifts. And then all of a sudden, on occasion, the baby kicks. And what happens? You pee yourself. How do I know this? I'm not saying Grace did it. I'm not saying she didn't. I'm just sayin' I've heard that it happens. Baby kicks, you're like, I peed myself, really amazing. That's new. And then over time, it gets hard to breathe, right, 'cause the baby's all up in here. And it gets hard to sleep and then you get heartburn. And you're thinking, oh my gosh, can it get any worse. Yes, contractions. Contractions. Which, it's just very painful and they number them from one to infinity. And so they say where is your pain? You're like, it's infinity. It's such a big deal, your pain is increasing, then they bring in a legal drug doctor, we call them, what?

- [Crowd] Anesthesiologists.

- Anesthesiologists. I was gonna prepare this week, but I was busy, so I appreciate the help. Now the anesthesiologist comes in. They're like, would you like drugs? Yeah, and the husband's

like, me too. Just watching this, I need an epidural. Put the needle here, knock me out. And then, with great pain, the baby is born, and then there's great joy. There's great joy. This would've been the process that Mary went through, suffering that escalated with increasing pain, and it was used to birth joy. And here she is holding the baby Jesus, filled with an explicable joy. What's curious is Mary's process is something that the Bible mentions repeatedly, and that is that all of human history and your life has birth pains. There are things that are uncomfortable. They become painful. And you wonder, is there any purpose in this? Yes, God uses it to birth joy. So God uses suffering and pain to birth joy. And that's where we find ourselves in Philippians, find joy even when you are suffering. And the man who writes this treatise on joy, his name is Paul. His book, Philippians, is 104 verses, 19 times he says, joy or rejoice. His theme is joy and rejoicing in the midst of his suffering. His pain is being used of God to birth and do joy in him. And if you missed the first sermon, here's the little secret to Philippians: where's he writing from?

- [Crowd] Prison.

- Prison, he's in jail. He's been falsely accused. He's been arrested. He's been hauled off to another city, and he sits down to write a book about joy while he has shackles on his hand and he is chained to a Roman soldier. If that guy can have joy, there must be some secret to joy, and that's God's purpose in Philippians. So we're gonna start talking about some things that can bring joy, even in the midst of suffering. And here's the big idea. Your suffering, your hardships, your trials, your troubles, your temptations, they're so great. Don't waste them by getting bitter. Don't waste them by walking away from the Lord. Don't waste them by nursing a hurt. Invest them for joy. Don't waste whatever you're dealing with, invest it so that God can birth in, and through, you a brand new joy. And so Paul starts by saying that there's joy in speaking about Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, we should be constantly talking about testifying about the person and work of Jesus Christ. You could do that whether it's a good day or a bad day, whether you're rich or poor, whether you're healthy or dying there's always an opportunity to talk about Jesus. Philippians 1:15-18, he's gonna tell us about two kinds of people who talk about Jesus. I'll add two. Some indeed preach Christ. From, these are not very commending words, envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here, in jail, for the defense of the gospel. Sometimes you get in trouble for doing the right thing, not the wrong thing. He did the right thing and got in trouble. He was tellin' people about Jesus. If you tell people about Jesus, there will be a reaction. Some people don't like Jesus, and if you're talking about Jesus, they won't like you. But don't take it personal. If you take it personal, you make it personal, keep talking about Jesus because they need him. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then, only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that, I rejoice. He has joy. So he talks about, in this section, these first two. And think of it in terms of Bible teachers, pastors, ministry leaders, and also individual Christians that are talking to others about Jesus. First category says is they have a good message and a good motive. You need to know that God ultimately cares about, not just the words we speak and the deeds we do, but the motive we have for saying and doing those things. And what he's talking about here is those

who work, quote unquote, from good will, out of love, in the truth. These are people who love Jesus and they love Pastor Paul. Pastor Paul is off in prison, can't preach, teach, do the ministry. He's got a large ministry, it leaves a gaping hole in the early church. So many Christians say, we need to fill the hole. We need to stand in the gap. This is like your starting quarterback goes down and everybody on the sidelines is like, we're gonna have to up our game, our team needs to come together to make up this difference in deficit. That's their heart. They're sayin', we love team Jesus, we love our pastor. He can't do it, we're gonna step in and do it because we love him. We're gonna preach his message and our motive is to build on his ministry. That's great, Godly, and good. Number two, he says that there are some who have a good message but a bad motive. He uses the words envy, rivalry, selfish ambition, to afflict me, in pretense. Paul is for Jesus, they are for Jesus, but they are against Paul. Some of you ask, how could this possibly be? It happens all the time, right? This Bible teacher trash talks that Bible teacher, and the Bible says not to do that. So they should, as quickly as possible, teach those passages and self-correct their own problem. What he's talking about is, people who are for Jesus but against Paul, and it's because Paul had something today we would call a platform. That means he has a market share. We would call this today Paul was trending. He had gone viral. His YouTube channel blew up. Social media, everybody's following him. Instagram, it's, you know, hey, hashtag me and Jesus. And his books are selling and his conferences are selling out and he is doin' great. And then he goes to prison and some say, well, there's a market share opportunity to be grasped here. We could take his followers, make them our followers. We could take his donors, make them our donors. The message they're proclaiming is still good, but the motive that they're working with is bad. It's bad. So I would ask you, check your own heart. Is your message about Jesus Christ good, and is your motive for sharing it good or bad? And during this holiday season, who do you need to talk with regarding Jesus and have you guarded your heart going into the conversation so that your motive is good as well as your message? So here's what I would say. God wants Christian pastors, ministries, and churches to complete one another, not to compete with one another. Okay? So they're competing. So they'd be saying things like, you know, Paul started but we'll finish it. You know, Paul did his best, but we can do better. Paul's in prison, we're free. Which one do you think God blesses? Paul got a little too big for his britches. He went up a little too high, so God brought him down. They're trashing Paul and they don't need to. Ministries are not to compete with one another, they're to complete one another. Different churches do things differently. Have you noticed this? So you can show up at one church, you're like, you do it differently than ours. Great, those are completing one another, not competing with one another. We need to always guard our heart and not assume that the way we like it is the way that everyone should do it. There's a difference between your preferences and your prejudices. If you show up to church and you're like, yeah, you don't do it the way we do. You may be judgmental. Therefore you're doing it wrong. You may be proud. Just throwin' it out there, somethin' to pray about. If you show up and immediately have a critical spirit, you may be proud and you may be judgemental, and that's what they are doing. And let me just say this, we wanna be a church that does what God has called us to do and rejoices at other churches doing what God called them to do. There's lots of people to love and serve and so God has a lot of diversity because he wants to have as many people as possible hear about the good news of Jesus Christ. So we don't criticize, we

complete. We don't compete, we complete. Let me say this. Why it's so important to set this as a foundation here at our church, we're only a couple of years old. We're a new church. We're new to the Valley. Everything's new. When we showed up, a number of pastors welcomed us, laid hands and prayed over us. This church doesn't exist without the support of other churches, many of whom who do things very differently than we do. Over 40 churches in the Valley and world either sent us financial gifts or various things for our property. Kids ministry, the play toy, the outdoor cafe, stuff all over the property, local churches here in the Valley gave those to us, prayed for us, and love us. And they saw us as a completion, not a competitor. So we wanna have that same attitude for whomever or whatever God raises up next, amen? Amen. So don't talk negatively about churches. Some other people have already got that covered. Okay, that being said, in addition to these two categories, there are two more that are further in Philippians. One's in chapter four, one's in chapter three. This can be bad message, good motive. They love Jesus and they think that they're helping, but what they're saying is not helpful. This is the case with two women who are Godly, who love Paul and Jesus, and Paul and Jesus love them. He says this in chapter 4:2: "I entreat Euodia, I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord." These are two Godly gals who love Paul and love Jesus, but for one reason or another, they're frustrated with one another. Have you ever been in a church where two people had a little conflict? Welcome to church family, right? Every family's got an occasional head-on collision. And so what happens is Euodia and Syntyche, they have a conflict about something and now they're talking trash about each other in the church. They'd made it public, so he has to deal with it publicly and they think that they're helping, but they're not helping. Sometimes you could say, well my heart was good. Okay, the motive does matter, but the message also matters. And what Paul is saying is, I know you gals love the Lord, but when two grandmas are trash talkin' to each other at communion, it makes it awkward for everyone. So back off ladies, hug, you know, Jesus died, don't kill each other. And this same thing can happen with people who have good intentions and motives, but they've had bad instruction and teaching. I like to say that people are the product of their teaching just like children are the product of their diet. If you feed your kid garbage and they're sick, you don't need to rebuke them for being sick. You need to give them a different diet. Sometimes people have gotten really bad teaching. And as a result, they're sick and they say things that aren't that healthy. And they don't need to be rebuked, they need to be instructed. They need to be fed the Word of God. Category number four: bad message, bad motive. He speaks of, in chapter three, dogs, evil doers, enemies of the cross of Christ. And what he's saying is, Paul is saying here there are some people that don't just hate Paul, they hate Jesus. Some of you, the reason you get a strong reaction from family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers is you bring the presence of God and that is an offense. You bring the message of Jesus and that is an offense. And the reaction is not to you but to the Jesus who goes with you. So what you wanna do is love and serve and forgive and bless and demonstrate Christ's love and character as you're sharing Christ's love and character with them. But these are people here who have bad message, bad motive. They're speaking against Jesus and they're trying to break down all that God is trying to build up. And what this is, this is negative ministry. In a platform world, there are two ways to become famous, gain market share, and an audience, particularly with click bait and social media. Do something or criticize someone who has done something. The first is really hard. The second is really easy. And that's what they're doing here.

They're trashing Jesus and they're trashing Paul to build their own anti-platform. So you need to know, as Christians, we need to be very careful to define ourselves by who and what we're for, not who or what we're against. Our message should be primarily a positive message. And I'll share a few things. Good news is not best shared through negative ministry. Right? Heaven's a party! It's awesome! And Jesus is good news that the price has been paid and you can go to the forever party for free, and it's really hard to say hey, I have good news. Do you wanna go to the party, with a negative ministry. It's hard to communicate that much positivity through a ministry that is negativity. In addition, last couple. Messages are best dealt with publicly. Messengers are best dealt with privately. If it's an idea in the market place, great. Let's kick it around. Let's get into it. But if it's a person, let's see if we can make that private, not public so that we're not just making a point, we're making a difference. We're not just beating the person up, we're building them up, hoping to course correct them. And this is the heart that Paul wants for his church. It's the heart that ultimately the Holy Spirit wants for our church. And the point is not running around judging people's motives, but celebrating whenever the message of Jesus goes out, amen? That's the whole point. So then he's gonna move on and he's gonna talk about there's joy in living or dying with Christ. Some of you, you're living. You can do that with Christ. Some of you, you're dying. You can do that with Christ. Philippians 1:18-26, here it is again. Yes, and I will, rejoice. He's gonna just keep throwin' parties in his heart. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance. He doesn't know if he's gonna be delivered from jail or delivered from this life, but there are three things that you need whether you're living or dying. They're right here. First, you gotta find a way to rejoice. You gotta find the joy in it. You gotta find God's joy to get you through it. Whatever you're in, find a way to rejoice. There's always something that is a cause of rejoicing, amen? Even if you're like this, the worst season of my life. Well, here's the good news. You're gonna die, go to heaven, it'll be over. This is as close to hell as you're gonna get, so hang in there. Rejoice. I know that through your prayers, so what we need, no matter what we're going through, good or bad, we need to find joy and also we need to pray for people and have them praying for us. Paul knows that they are praying for him. He is praying for them. And sometimes what we don't wanna do is burden people. But you know what, it's not a burden. It's an invitation to walk with us and to find joy with us through the journey. How can I pray for you? Here's how you need to be praying for me. Let's pray for each other. And what happens then is, you get help from the spirit of Jesus Christ. That is the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The third member of the trinity. He empowered the life of Jesus. He had Jesus rejoicing and he was present through Jesus weeping and then Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to the children of God because there are certainly days and ways that we all need help and the Holy Spirit comes as the helper as Jesus promised to help you. Don't feel bad needing help, amen? Don't feel bad needing help. God knows we need help and God is very joyful and rejoicing to send the Holy Spirit to empower you to either rejoice in what is happening or rejoice through what is happening. This is supernatural. This is inexplicable. This is solely the domain of the children of God. It's a joy and a power and a strength and a help that comes down from above, doesn't come in from the world. He goes on to say, I will turn out for my deliverance as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed, but that with full courage-- Do you know what courage is? When you encourage someone, it literally means to put courage in them. Paul says, I'm encouraged, let me give you

courage. Let me take the encouragement that is in me to put courage in you. Now, as always, Christ will be honored in my body, what I see, what I taste, what I touch, what I say, where I go, what I do. Whether by life or death. And Philippians has some of the most like Christian memory verses. I was at Starbucks this morning, and the barista gal, she asked, she's like, what are you preachin' on today? I said Philippians. She said, that's my favorite book of the Bible. For a lot of people it is because it has so many awesome little memory verses. Here's one. For me to live is Christ, to die is-- I promise you this, there's somebody here right now that has this as a tattoo. That's just a prophetic word. I don't know who, and if not, go get the tattoo, okay? For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. He says if I am to live in the flesh, keep living on the earth, that means fruitful labor for me, people to love, gospel to preach, churches to plant. Next line, please. Yet, which shall I choose, I cannot tell. Should I live or should I die? It's like a vice pressing in. I cannot tell. I'm hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ. Any of you there? Next year's an election year. I promise you, you're gonna be there. We're all gonna be there. Oh, Lord Jesus, come back now, amen. I'll hit the snooze button, I'm waitin' for ya, right? Please come back. To depart and be with Christ for that is how better? Far better. Far better. Far better for the Christian, death is far better, but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus because of my coming to you again. Ultimately what Paul says is, okay, I'm in prison. This could go one of two ways. I could live or I could die. See, we tend to think that there are seasons of our life, but actually this is the truth every day of our life. You could live today, you could die today. You could live tomorrow, you could die tomorrow. And they're asking Paul which do you prefer? Here's what he's sayin'. I could go either way. He must know something about death that we don't know. We avoid death at all costs, right? You need vitamins, you drink bottled water, you buckle up, and then you die, filled with bottled water and vitamins. Okay? Spoiler alert, it's coming, okay? And what he says is, okay, it's better for you if I stay, and get out of prison and come love you and give you a hug and preach the Bible to you. But it's better for me if I'm-- Just hit the eject button and go see Jesus. How many of you've been there? How many of you are there? You will all be there. It's better for them if I stay, but it'd be a lot better for me if I go. This is not the despair of suicide, this is the hope of the gospel. What Paul says is, I could do what's best for me, but I'm gonna do what's best for you. Here's the big idea. When you're suffering the most, do what is best for those that you love the most. He's not selfish, he's selfless. He's suffering, but he's not selfish, he's selfless. He says, better for me to do this, better for you for me to do that. I will do what is best for you, even though that is not best for me. Let me give you a story. I served communion at the first service to a good man. He gave his testimony right here on the stage at men's ministry here this last quarter. He was married for I think 20 plus years to his wife. They love Jesus, they love each other. They got kids, they're a beautiful family. And his wife gets diagnosed with a terminal illness. I think it was cancer. So she's fighting for her life and they're praying. She starts losing the fight and declining. Ultimately, she died. He buried his wife. And as he gave the testimony, it was amazing. He said, the last year of our marriage was the best year of our marriage. And he said, it caused me to start crying. He said it was such a joy and honor to walk her home. For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. There's a perspective for the believer that changes, not only how we live, but also how we

die. And that's what Paul is saying. Jesus is there when you're living. Jesus is there when you're dying. If you have Jesus, it only gets better when all is said and done. And let me just say this. I think that we don't tend to think of each eternal things 'cause we're so busy with current things. I think when you're young, you're just ambitious, right? Grade point, graduate, get married, buy a house. And then in the middle years, you're just exhausted. I mean how many of you have little kids? You're like they throw up, they stay up all night, they have nightmares, they drink Mt. Dew right at bed time. These kids are complicated, right? You're just exhausted, and then they got sports and they got activities and you're runnin' around. You're just busy. You don't have time to really think down the road. Everything in front of you is so consuming. And then you finally reach a point in your life, some of you older saints are there. You're closer to the finish line than the starting line. You've already started to see some of your friends die. You're now going to more funerals than weddings. And all of a sudden, you can sort of look into the future and there is Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God on the horizon. And as you get a little closer, you're like, okay, I love these people, but that looks pretty awesome. I'm gonna hang around as long as I can, but I'll see ya there. This is the hope of the believer. And then he's gonna tell us, and I just wanna revisit this quite briefly. What happens to a Christian after they die? He says in Philippians 1:21-23: To live is Christ, to die is gain. My desire is to depart and be with Christ. So death is going, not just to a place, but to a person named Jesus. You can be in a bad place and it can be okay if you're with a good person. It is a double blessing to be in a good place with a good person. Heaven is a good place with Jesus, a good person. So what happens when you die is this, if you belong to Jesus Christ. Here's my question. Do you belong to Jesus Christ? That's the most important decision you'll ever make. In Christmas, this is the gift exchange. Jesus takes your sin. He gives you his forgiveness and salvation. If you have not made this gift exchange with Jesus Christ, don't let the holiday season pass you by without giving him your sin and him giving you his salvation. And if you belong to Jesus when you die, your body goes into the ground, your soul goes into the presence of God. You're one person, two parts, they are separated upon death. And ultimately one day, Philippians 3:20 tells us what future awaits the children of God. Our citizenship is in heaven. That's why this place doesn't feel like home. The closer you get to Jesus, the more you read the Bible, the more you pray, the less this will feel like home. The more you sing songs about a King and a Kingdom, the more this ceases to feel like home. Our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He who came once is coming last, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. What he says is, Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose to conquer sin, forgive you, and give you a ticket to the party that never ends. And that ultimately when Jesus comes back, your soul and your body will reunite and rejoin at the resurrection of the dead, and you will be perfect, and you will be new, and you will be healthy, and you will be happy, and you will be in God's presence, and you'll be with God's people, and it'll be a party, and you'll be singing God's praises. And that's ultimately the hope of the believer. Both of you are excited, that's awesome. And what I love is it means that, I see heaven like a family reunion party. The first person that I love that I remember dying was my Grandpa George. He died when I was 10. And I miss him. He was awesome. He was so fun. He was a joyful guy. How many of you start the day joyful? How many of you are like I get there? He got up joyful. My Grandpa George was joyful. He's in the Kingdom of God right now. In

addition, my wife, Grace, had a miscarriage. We have five kids, but we're missing someone. There was a miscarriage. I believe that that child is in the presence of God. I trust God with their eternal fate. What that means is right now Grandpa George and our miscarried baby, I kinda think they're probably hangin' out, havin' fun, waitin' for the rest of us to get to the party. That's the picture of the Kingdom of God. When God talks about the Kingdom in the scriptures, particularly Jesus, a lot of the analogies he uses are parties. You wonder why? 'Cause God's awesome and heaven is awesome, and it's gonna be fun and there's zero people in heaven that are bummed to be there. There's zero. There's nobody in heaven right now goin', I miss the flu. I'm sad that I'm no longer in Apache Junction. I can hardly get-- There's nobody. I miss payin' taxes, oh, I miss it. Presidential election, I just long for the good old days. There's zero people in the presence of God that wanna trade places with you. And what I love is that the Bible talks about the eternal state as being a party. And what I love is, this is so awesome, Jesus comes to the earth, true or false, he gets invited to parties. He does. And they're like, you wanna come to the party, God? He's like, I do, and he goes. Now the religious people see this. How do they respond? Oh, there must be something wrong, I hear laughter. Those are religious people. Like they accuse them of being a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of sinners. The last one's true, that's why I get to be a Christian. The first two, he's not a drunkard, he's not a glutton. They're throwing parties, everybody throwing a party is ultimately looking for Jesus. Everyone throwing a party ultimately wants to go to heaven. Unless Jesus is at your party, it won't be a good party. And so they're throwin' parties and they invite Jesus. And the religious people get very, very, very frustrated. So let me talk about our Christmas Eve service. We're gonna throw a party. Hey, we're gonna throw a party. We're gonna have snow and sledding and s'mores and hot chocolate and Christmas carols and bouncy houses and every time we throw a party, religious people. Last year we put our little ad on social media, hey come have fun at the kids' carnival. And the first person to comment, religious guy. That's very sad that Christmas has been commercialized even in the church. Do we need to spend God's money on a bouncy house? Da da da da da da da da da. I was like, hashtag Lucifer. So I check. So I click on it. It's a single guy. Hey sir, I have a little insight onto why you may be single in the present and unless it's course corrected, well into the future. There are zero Christian women on the internet going, I'm looking for a man who publicly protests children's parties so that we could have offspring. There's zero women lookin' for that guy. So this year, we posted the, hey come to our Christmas Eve party. I kid you not, first comment, religious guy. This is very sad. No it's not. It's awesome. We believe in Jesus, s'mores, bouncy houses, hot chocolate, candy canes, maps, all of it. Why are you throwin' a party? 'Cause we're practicing. There's a party coming and we wanna make sure we're ready. We're sorta gettin' our game face on. This is a little practice for us. So here's what I think, I think that Bible teaching and Jesus should be in a fun environment.

- Amen.

- Amen. Okay, both of you. You're like, yay. Because there is joy in living with Christ. He says, chapter 1:27-30, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What he's saying is this. He says, no matter what, just keep thinkin' about Jesus, keep talkin' about Jesus. Remember that a lot of people are gonna make a decision about Christ by the behavior of the

Christian. You're a billboard. You're an advertisement. You're marketing for the Kingdom. Which means when you're suffering, more people are watching you and even in your hard times, there's a greater opportunity because what you believe can actually be lived out in how you behave. So that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear that you are standing firm in the spirit, the Holy Spirit, with one mind. They're in agreement. It's not division. They have one shared vision. Striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. This is like a military unit that is marching together or it is like a sports team that is working together. I'm a big college football fan. This is a great time of year if you're a college football fan. Unless you're a Baylor fan, or a Georgia fan, right? Hey, the joy of the Lord is your strength. So yesterday I'm watching college football, okay? And what I see is a team takes the field, everybody knows their position, and they all work together. There aren't certain people on the team who leave the field. That's it, I'm out. There are not people on the team who turn around and go to the other team. As Christians, we're not supposed to leave the field and we're not to work for the other team. We're to advance the Kingdom of God by striving together in unity and love. So what do you say? Yeah, I only get claps from the guys when I use football analogies, so I'm gonna write that down. I'm gonna use more football analogies. That you may not be frightened in anything by your opponent. Satan wants to work through fear. God wants to work through faith. Satan wants to work through division. God wants to work through unity. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation and that from God, for it has been granted to you for the sake of Christ that you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw that I had and here that I now still have. What he's saying is this. Christianity is about salvation and suffering. It's about pain that produces joy. That's exactly what he's saying. And what we do is sometimes we give people a really bad view of the gospel. We say, do you wanna go to heaven when you die? Yes. We never ask, and do you wanna suffer along the way? But Christianity is both. It's suffering until we're celebrating. This was the path of Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross. There was pain that birthed joy. There will be suffering that produces rejoicing. That's what he's saying. So let me say this. Two people can go through the exact same thing and respond in diametrically opposed ways. It's not what happens to you, it's how you respond to it. Paul here is in prison, writing a letter in joy, with a shackle around his wrist, and a guard watching over his writing. I'll give you an example. It's a testimony from this week. The funniest conversation where we laughed the most this week happened on Wednesday night. My wife, Grace, and I were up and we Facetime with some friends of ours that we love very much, and we talked to them 'til about midnight, and we were checking in on them. Let me tell you the story. They got four little kids, two of 'em have spina bifida, which if you know what that is, that is a complex assignment. Mom was an all-state athlete. She's just like maybe 40, 41. She has a defective heart. Went in for heart surgery, has a pacemaker that is now failing, and it's a potentially lethal situation, so she needs immediate heart surgery. Dad, my buddy, has three bulging, compressed discs, and a nerve is, he said flopping, which I think is the Greek word for ouch. It's flopping, and so he's in constant pain, can't sleep. He needs emergency back surgery. Some people thought, this family needs a puppy. So somebody gave 'em a puppy, that got some puppy disease that kills puppies, so the puppy's dying. Merry Christmas. Joy to the world. So we Facetime 'em. I kid you not, they come on, they're like hi. You're like, what the? Have you been drinking? You guys are way too happy for the

circumstances. They're like, oh yeah, it's so funny. The dog's dying and she gets surgery and I get surgery and the kids have spina bifida and we're broke and we're so blessed. What? How are you guys doin'? They're like, we're doin' awesome, how are you guys doin'? Uh, I was doin' bad until I heard your story, now I feel like I'm doin' pretty good 'cause, I was like I'm bloating, you know. Like, in comparison, I'm doin' great. How many of you when someone is suffering and rejoicing, you get around 'em and you're like, yeah, I gotta stop complaining. I gotta stop whining. So we talked to 'em. They're like, here's what God's teaching us and here's how God showed up and here's all the love and prayers that people are givin' us, and next thing we know, their kids come into the Facetime. It's past their bedtime, but they come into the Facetime. They're like hi. They're all smilin'. There is a joy that is inexplicable. There is a joy that is supernatural. There is a joy that is big enough for you to enjoy your life. The problem in our world, everyone's looking for joy out there in someone or something. It comes down from above so that we can enjoy whoever or whatever is out there. Says the guy from prison. Says the guy from prison. And here's his theme. He says it three times. Next line, please, just in this section. I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice. He means like, and I'm not done. I'm gonna keep throwin' a party. I'm gonna continue to celebrate with joy and gladness. I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith. 19 times he's gonna talk in the book about joy, but there are defeater beliefs. There are neutralizers, bad teaching, that comes in, that causes cheerless Christianity. You ever met a cheerless Christian? I've been one before. If you're a cheerless Christian, you're a hypocrite. That means you're not living up to who you are. That ultimately, there is false, bad, gross teaching that I wanna correct that causes some Christians to even read about rejoicing, yet not rejoice, to have information about rejoicing, but not an importation of joy. I'll give them to you. Number one, some will say God is not a happy God. Kind of the view of many religious people is this. God is angry. God is up in heaven. He's a mean old man. He has a lightning bolt in his hand and he's looking for naughty people. If that's your view of God, it's hard to rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. God is a happy God. Some of you are like, I don't think so. He is. The Father, Son, Holy Spirit, the Trinitarian God of the Bible before Satan and sin wreck everything. They're only happy, it's awesome, all the time. There are some things: sin, rebellion, falling, death that grieves the heart of God, but ultimately when all is said and done, heaven is gonna be-- happy place. My kids were little, they were askin', Dad, what's heaven gonna be like? I said the sun will always be shining. It's a kingdom. There's a king. All the nations are there. Everybody's glad. And my kids said, oh, it's like Disneyland. That's what my kids said. I was like you know what, actually Disneyland is what people who wanna go to heaven, but don't understand Jesus, do to try and meet that secret longing in the soul. The happiest place on earth. I got a happier place that's not on the earth. I got a King who's not a mouse. The churros are free, they don't cost 20 bucks. That party's better. The sun is shining and the nations are there. God is a happy God. God is happy to love you. God is happy to forgive you. God is happy to have a relationship with you. God's happy. You see, Godliness means like God. If you think that God is grumpy, then you're gonna think it's Godly to be grumpy. If God is angry, then you're gonna think it's Godly to be angry. If God is happy, then God wants you to be happy. Number two. Some will say God cares about your holiness, not your happiness. Think about that. What he is saying is that holiness and happiness are antithetical to one another. You can have one or the other. Let me tell ya, you can have both.

Chips and salsa. Peanut butter and jelly. Ice cream and hot fudge. A day off and a hammock. These things are not antithetical, they're related, right? God cares about your holiness and your happiness. How many of you, you were doing things that were unholy and they made you really unhappy? The sinning Christian is the miserable Christian. How many of you, you've done what God asked you to do and there's a joy and a contentment and a clear conscience that comes with that? There's an occasion in the book of Acts where some bold Christians go out and they're telling everybody about Jesus and they get in trouble. So they rile 'em up, they arrest 'em, they beat them. And it says they left praising God. Because they were counted worthy to be associated with Jesus. What are you guys doin'? We're tellin' people about Jesus. We hate Jesus. You need to shut up. No, Jesus loves you. You need Jesus. We're gonna beat you if you don't shut up. You can beat us and then we're gonna tell you about Jesus. So we're just gonna stay with our first point. We're talkin' about Jesus. And they beat 'em and they leave rejoicing. They were holy and they got a beating and they were still happy. Holiness and happiness oftentimes go together. Jesus, of course, is holy. He's also happy. Says in Luke 10:21, he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit that brought joy to Jesus comes to bring joy to the followers of Jesus so that we can share in God's joy. He cares about your holiness and your happiness. Both, you don't need to pick one or the other. Number three. Some will say joy is not an emotion or a feeling, but a mindset. Pray for those people. Date night stinks for them. Well, I love you. I mean, not emotionally. It just sounds weird, right? Look at your kid You're like, I love you, but in an emotional way. Look, you follow Jesus, not Spock. It is an emotion. It's a mindset and an emotion. And what happens is, people will say that ultimately, joy is not an emotion because you can't command your emotions. Sure you can. Your emotions are not sovereign. God is sovereign over your emotions and he gives you dominion over your emotions. This is why some of you are like, well, that's just how I feel. Well, change that. I feel sweaty. I'm gonna get a fan. I'm gonna fix it. Like, if you feel grumpy, get Jesus and fix it. Your emotions are not ultimately ruling over your life, you need to be ruling over your emotions. And it is a mindset that chooses joy, and then the Holy Spirit comes to give you the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy. Some of you are like, I can't do that. The Holy Spirit can. If you will welcome God into the circumstances, He will bring a joy that is supernatural and to give you the authority to command your emotions. No one could just say, that's how I feel. The question is, God, how should I feel? Number four. Some will say it's just selfish if all you do is seek happiness. Well, it can be. This is where a married couple's having a struggle and one leaves the other and says, I just wanna be happy. And that's a myth, they're not happy. But ultimately, it can be very selfish to be unhappy. Any of you know some cheerless, joyless people? You're havin' a good day and they're determined to wreck it. You're like, I'm doin' so good. They're like, I'm not. Oh gosh, here we go again. Okay, what's goin' on? Man, God really showed up. Not in my life. Oh geez. You're bein' selfish. The Bible says to rejoice with those who rejoice. If you can't rejoice with those who are joyful, you're being selfish. Because you can't find joy in their joy. You can only find joy in your joy. That's selfish. Gotcha. Write that down. Joy and happiness are very different things. So I'm a bit of a theological nerd. This is common Christian teaching that is erroneous. Well there's joy and there's happiness. And the world seeks happiness and God gives joy and joy and happiness are different. How many of you have heard that? That's my answer, okay. No, it's not like that. Joy and happiness go together. There's 100 Bible verses that mention joy and

happiness together. The Bible uses joy, rejoice, cheerful, glad hearts, feasting, celebration 2,700 verses, not even including the verses that talk about blessing, and God's using all the words interchangeably. So let's say it's your wedding day or it's our Christmas Eve party, it's your birthday. You're like, it was awesome. It was so fun. We laughed so much. It was such an awesome party. They're like, which is it? All of that. Because joy is so big, we need a lot of words to explain it 'cause joy is so great. There's not a difference between joy and happiness. That's weird. It's just weird. 'Cause it gets Christians all up in their head. I'm so happy. You're not supposed to be happy. What the heck? I'm getting rebuked for being happy? Have joy, all right. Shouldn't have done that, okay. Number six. To choose joy when life is hard is disingenuous and faking it. So this is my point for all the indie rockers and the punk rockers. You need to be authentic, genuine, depressed, sad, angry, grumpy, protesting. Or not. Not everybody who's happy's faking it, right? Some people are happy. Some people are happy, and what we do, we rebuke them rather than receive them. We want them to change how they feel rather than them inviting us to change how we feel. I did ministry for the first part of my life, literally in the grunge era. You know why we didn't have grunge worship? There's no joy in it. It's always Good Friday and a funeral. There's nothing good happening. Life sucks, my dad's horrible, I'm doin' heroin, it'll be over soon. Now that's the grunge movement, okay. And then the thought is like, if you're happy listening to pop music, you're disingenuous, you're fakin' it. Or maybe you have the Holy Spirit and a secret, that there is a joy that is big enough to enjoy your life. How 'bout this one, number seven. Joy is not for all personality types. Oh, I'm gonna enjoy this. This is great. So what happens is we take these personality types, like yeah, I took it. I'm a D-O-W-N, I'm down, that's my personality type. I'm a J-E-R-K, that's just how I is. Your personality type tells you how you are. The Bible tells you how you should be. And what personality types can do. Some of you are like, where's he at on the Enneagram? Is he an A? Knock it off, okay, stick with me. What happens with a personality type, it can excuse ungodly emotional living and decision making. I don't do the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, self control, 'cause that's not my personality type. That's the personality of Jesus, the Holy Spirit wants to do a personality transplant with you. He wants to take out how you feel, and he wants to give you the feelings of Jesus. I'm not saying you don't have a personality, but I'm saying it's not an excuse to not choose to rejoice and pursue joy. Happens all the time, right? All right. If you're angry about that, I forgive you. How 'bout this one? Cheerfulness is childish. Some people think this way and they talk this way. Well, you know kids, they just laugh and play and frolic and have fun. We got bills, taxes, and hemorrhoids. We're busy, we got serious things to worry about. Children laugh 400 times a day. Adults laugh 15 times a day. The older you get, the less you laugh, statistically. Jesus shows up. Who runs to him? Kids. You know why? He's fun. And they know he's fun. So here's Jesus and then there's kids and then there's religious guys, no kids. You don't see all the children running to the religious guys. Nice clipboard, you know. I really like your wooden spoon. Your furrowed brow welcomed me, right. They don't get children, 'cause children wanna go where there's fun. It's what they do. They wanna laugh. The children come to Jesus. The religious guys, how do they respond? We gotta get rid of these kids. They're laughin', makin' noise. There's fishy crackers and juice. This needs to end. What Jesus says is, the Kingdom of God was made for such as these. To have joy is not childish, to have joy is to be childlike. God doesn't want you to be

childish, but he wants you to be childlike. Run to Jesus, have fun, smile. Laugh, enjoy him. It's not childish, it's childlike. There's a big difference. How 'bout this one? We should enjoy the giver not the gift. God, all I need is you, which is weird, 'cause like, I'm thirsty, you know, people would appreciate it if I wore clothes. I feel like I should get some. Like there's some other stuff I need too, amen? You agree with that? All you need is God, and water and pants and air and internet. I mean, you need some other stuff too. And what sometimes people say, no, no, no God. You are my joy. I don't need anything, just you. Which is weird. So imagine a kid, or your kid, your grandkid. For Christmas you buy 'em a bike. Hey, open it up, open it up, open it up. It's a bike. I don't need a bike, all I need is you. Weird kid. I know we're good. The bike's awesome, get on the bike, ride the bike. Come on, let's ride the bike. No, it might become an idol in my heart. I don't want an idol in my heart. All I need is you. Ride the bike. We're both supposed to be happy, now we're both unhappy. Ride the bike, you weird kid. Sometimes we enjoy the giver by enjoying the gift. Amen? Anybody ever baked you a cake and you're like I don't need the cake, all I need is you. Eat the cake and thank 'em. You can have both. How 'bout this one. Joy comes after this life, not in this life. Well, it's both. Now when we die, to live is Christ, to die is gain. It is far better. It's gonna be awesome, the party that never ends. But along the way, there are moments of joy that God drops joy into our life. Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. And what we're doing is we are practicing kingdom down, joy down, God down living until we get into the presence of God to have joy forevermore. And what happens is the Bible often connects joy in the presence of God and rejoicing in the presence of God. So as long as we are in the presence of God, heading to the kingdom of God, there can be rejoicing along the journey, 'cause heaven doesn't start the day you die. It starts the day you meet Jesus, that's when the joy starts. And then lastly, some will say, joy is impossible in this fallen, broken, hurting, anxious, stressed out world. Pastor Mark, it's a dark world. Do you not check the news? I have, it's all bad news so I wake up every morning, read Philippians to start with good news. If you want an excuse to be cheerless, you can always find one. If you want a self-justifying reason to be joyless, you can always find one. And if you want joy, you can find it. So this was my pledge to God this week. Okay, God, I'm preaching on joy, give me joy. I pledged to God, I'm gonna enjoy everything ever day. That's what I'm gonna try to do. So then on Thursday I went to one of my favorite countries. I got on a plane and I went to Texas. It's a great country. So I land in Texas and I jump in, I got a truck. I go to the cheapest compact and there's a truck there. The joy of the Lord is my strength. I'm not driving a Kia, I'm driving a Chevy, okay? And so I'm in it and I'm driving and I grab my phone and I hit the button to take me to my hotel. And I drive for like an hour, hour and 1/2, I kid you not. This is not even making it up. I'm at the end of a dead end road surrounded with cows and some lying woman says, you've arrived at your destination, which was not true. And I'm like, I hope I'm not staying here. So then I finally figure out where the hotel is. It's like another hour and 1/2 away. And I'm like, okay, Lord, I choose joy. So I roll the windows down. I'm like, I'm sure there's a country station here. I mean there's cows, so there's cowboys. So I turn on the country. Okay, Lord, I've accepted Jason Aldean in my heart. I'm gonna drive to the hotel. This is gonna be okay, I'm gonna enjoy the fresh air. Then I get in traffic. Not just Phoenix traffic, liberal city Austin traffic. 'Cause those people are like, everybody should ride a bike. I have five kids. I'm gonna drive. You're ruining the earth. Jesus is gonna, well anyways. He's gonna set it on fire and do it over, so I know, okay. Shouldn't have said that,

but you know. But these are all facts So I'm in traffic and I get to a mile from the hotel and it says it'll be 19 minutes, to go a mile. There's a woman and a stroller passing me like sorry, sorry. She's killin' me. Okay, Lord, I'm gonna have joy. I choose joy. I'm gonna have joy, you know. And so then I get to the hotel and did some ministry that night. All was well, I go to bed, I'm like okay, Lord, give me a good night's sleep. At about five o'clock in the morning, right outside of my room, some cowboy yahoo in a Ford F-250, it's a Ford, you know it's gonna be a bad guy. A guy in a Ford F-250, his alarm is goin off, boop, boop, boop, boop, for 20 minutes. I finally opened the window, some cowboy comes out in his pajamas. He's like click, click. I'm like. You know, 20 minutes is now I'm up. The joy of the Lord is my strength, Holy Sprit, bring me joy. It's not to be found in the cowboy or the Ford F-250. So then, I finish my work and I drive to the airport and as I'm pulling in, they send me an alert saying your flight has been delayed a few hours. If you can have joy at the airport, it's a supernatural joy, amen? I'm like, okay Lord, I like things that are sequenced and orderly and work. Here I am at the airport with a two hour delay. I was like, okay Lord, I choose joy. Let me find the joy. I walk out before I enter the terminal, the sun is shining, it's a beautiful day. I find a chair and I pull it over to sit in the sun so Jesus can see that I'm choosing joy. And next thing I know, I'm feelin' real comfy, and I fell asleep. So some of you'd be like, yeah, that's weird when men sleep. No, no, no, it's a super power that God only gives to men who are mature enough to handle it. Sleeping in a chair is a super power, right, men? When you're a kid you're like, I didn't have this super power, it was too strong. Now that I'm a grown man , I can do this, okay. So I am sleeping outside at the Austin airport, and I kid you not, I'm asleep and then I get woken up by someone who's snoring. I'm like, who's snoring? Me. All of that to say, this is my one little weird experiment for the week. Look for joy, seek joy, invite joy, enjoy whatever God sets before you. So let me close with a little bit of good news. Why'd he tell that story? 'Cause it was funny. What was the theological point? You're a nerd. Let me close with this. Seven reasons for Christians to be cheerful. Number one, God is happy, amen? God is a happy God. God is a joyful God. God is a cheerful God. God is a good God. Number two, God made us for happiness, which is why everybody's lookin' for it. Rather than saying you should stop looking for happiness, say I'll tell ya where to find it. His name is Jesus. Eden, where we were originally created and placed, it's a garden, it literally means delight. That's Eden means, delight. When you're in the presence of God and in the will of God, it's delightful, that's what it is. Number three, the pursuit of happiness can lead to God. It can lead you away from God, but it can lead you to God. We baptized a guy here a few weeks ago, drug and alcohol-- Man, I punched my ring and made myself bleed. That's joyful. This just happens. What was I saying? Oh, so a guy was right here. I went to public school. I lose my way once in awhile. There was a guy gave his testimony right here and what he said was, I've been seeking happiness my whole life in drugs and alcohol and I was miserable. He said, and I recently met Jesus and I found happiness. What I wouldn't do is say, shame on you. I'd say congratulations. God made you for joy and you found it in Christ. How 'bout this one, okay. The message of Christianity is good news, not just true news like the phone book. It's good news. There's a party, it's free. Jesus paid your way. Please join us in the party. God's Kingdom is a happy one. No more tears, no more mourning. God and happiness go together. In eternity, you'll have God and happiness or no God and no happiness. God and happiness are not opposed, they are together. One comes with the other. Number six, a cheerless Christian is a bad advertisement for the good news of

Jesus Christ. My life sucks. I'm bitter, man, I'm frustrated. Wanna join my team? Not really. Team , I don't wanna join that team. Hey, you know what? I'm forgiving, God loves me, I have hope for my future. I'm headin' to a party that never ends, and Jesus is with me every step of the journey. Do you wanna join my team? Yes! 'Cause team Jesus is awesome. And lastly, number seven, God has joy big enough for you to enjoy your life. Big enough for you to enjoy your life. Again, we seek joy in people and things. It comes from God so we can enjoy people and things even prison and prison guards. Luke 2: The angel said, I bring you good news of how much joy? Great joy. This is about Jesus. That'll be for all the people, despite their personality types. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. When Jesus came down, he brought joy with him. When the Holy Spirit comes down, he brings joy with him. When the Kingdom of God comes down, it brings joy with it. Amen? Then you can enjoy your life. That's my prayer for you this holiday season. Whoever or whatever is in front of you, if the Spirit is in you, for the joy set before you, you can enjoy whatever or whomever God puts in front of you. Father God, I pray for us all to unwrap this great gift of joy. Not just to sing Joy to the World, but to receive the joy of Jesus Christ that comes into the world. And God, I thank you for the testimony of Paul. If a guy in prison, while shackled, can write about joy, he's got a secret that we all need to learn. And that is that joy is in Jesus, that joy in in the Holy Spirit, that joy is in holiness, that joy is in ministry, and that joy never ends for those who belong to the Lord. God, I pray favor and blessing and joy upon these dear people during this holiday season. In Jesus' good name, amen.