

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

I Found Joy

PART

4

TITLE

I Found Joy In Uncertainty

SCRIPTURE

Philippians 1:18-26



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Well, good morning. My name is Daniel Savage, I'm one of the pastors here. It's my privilege to get to be in the word with you this morning.

If you have your Bible, we'll be in Philippians 1, we'll look at verses 18 through 26 this morning. If you don't have a Bible, you should be able to find one in the bottom of the chairs around you somewhere. If you don't have a Bible, we'd love for you to keep that Bible and read it.

Let me pray as you're turning there and then we'll get started this morning.

Heavenly Father, we are dependent upon you even now. As we open your word, we do not presume to be able to understand it just because we can read, but we need you to help us. And so, God, would you reveal yourself through your word. I pray even now that your Spirit would attend to our hearts and to this message and that you would use it to reveal yourself to us. God, we want to see you. We want to be reminded of your greatness and your glory, we are so often distracted. God, help us. Help us to see Jesus high and lifted up. And I pray that he would draw us to himself. I pray these things in his name, amen.

We're working through the book of Philippians. Philippians is a letter that is in the New Testament. It was a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi in the middle of the first century. So it's an old letter, and yet it is surprisingly relevant.

The title of the series, as we're making our way through this book, has been, "I Found Joy." The reason for that title is because joy and rejoicing is like this resounding theme, this chorus that comes out of the book of Philippians. Over and over again, Paul talks about joy. He talks about rejoicing. He talks about his own joy. He talks about the joy of the Philippians. And he's commanding them and instructing them in joy.

Now the interesting thing about that is that as Paul is writing this letter about joy and rejoicing, he is experiencing very dark and uncertain circumstances. He's writing to the church in Philippi from jail. And his future, as we will find in this text, is completely uncertain, and even seems a little dark to Paul.

And yet, he is writing to them about joy. In fact, he wrote, last week Brian was taking us through the verses before this, verses 12 to 18, where he was talking about how he has been rejoicing and how he is rejoicing. And what he's going to talk about this morning in these verses is how he is going to continue to rejoice.

And the title of this particular sermon is, "Joy In Uncertainty." Because Paul is confessing to us here that he is very uncertain about what is going to happen. And yet, he is confident, "I will rejoice. I will have joy. Regardless of what's going to happen, regardless of how uncertain the future might be for me, I am going to rejoice." And we need to learn about this this morning, because you and I live in a world that is very uncertain.

Something that is true for all of us in the room this morning is that we do not know what the future holds for us. The future is very uncertain. And life has a way of lulling us to sleep on this idea. Because we can string together several days or dozens or hundreds of days where they're all the same, and we can be tricked into thinking that because so many days in the past have been one just like the other, that the days in front of me are going to be just like that.

One day after another is just going to keep happening the way it always does, but then there are these little things that come along and remind us that that is not true. Every day you go out to your car and the car starts when you turn the key. Until that one day when you go out to the car and someone left a dome light on in the back and your car does not start like it's supposed to. You didn't know that was going to happen because life is uncertain.

Or you're driving along that same route you drive every day to go to work, and every day it goes just fine until this day when your tire blows out and you didn't know that was going to happen because life is uncertain.

Or even weightier than that, many of you in the room have experienced a day or a phone call that came that changed everything about your life and you did not know that was coming. In fact, dozens or hundreds of days before that had happened one after the other, just like the one before. And then something happens that reminds us that life is completely uncertain for us.

We do not know what is going to happen and so we have to know, how am I supposed to have joy? How am I supposed to continue rejoicing the way that God commands me to if I do not know what the future holds. Paul is going to instruct us this morning on that.

Look in your Bible, Philippians 1, starting at the end of verse 18. He says, "Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which shall I choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that 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."

The first thing I want to think about here in this text is Paul's joy in the unfading hope of salvation. Paul's joy in the unfading hope of salvation, so like I said, the context here is these verses moving into the end of this verse 18, is that he's been talking about how he had joy, he has joy, and he will have joy.

He says, “Yes, and I will rejoice.” He’s going to continue rejoicing, and then he explains to us how that can be true. Why is that, Paul? Verse 19, he says, “For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Now, what stands out here is that Paul is certain that he will continue to rejoice. “Yes, and I will rejoice.” The question is, what gives him this confidence? And that is what he is explaining. It certainly isn’t because he knows what’s going to happen. It’s certainly not because he knows that he’s going to live, or he knows that everything is going to be okay. In fact, it’s clear that he doesn’t know that. He’s uncertain about what’s going to happen.

In fact, it seems as if he’s sort of expecting the worst. “Whether I live or I die,” he’s sort of looking at this spectrum of possibilities, “Here are all the things that can happen to me and my time in prison. And it can either end this way or it could end this way. And regardless of where it ends up on this spectrum, I will rejoice.”

He says, “Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.” He is prepared for the worst case scenario, “Even if I die, Christ will be honored.” And so how can he rejoice? What is he really looking to? While he’s very uncertain about some things, even about whether or not he’s going to live or die, there are some things that he is certain about.

He is certain that through their prayers and the help of the Spirit, all of this is going to turn out for his deliverance. He is sure of that. Now when he’s talking about deliverance here, he’s not talking about deliverance from these bad circumstances. He’s not sure about that. He doesn’t know what’s going to happen there. The word deliverance is the same word that’s used for salvation. He is certain that it’s going to result in his salvation, or his sanctification.

So when Paul talks about salvation, he talks about how he has been saved, how he’s being saved, and how he will be saved. In Paul’s mind, so a lot of times we think of salvation as this thing in the past, “I was saved at this point.” Paul thinks about salvation as this ongoing reality, “I was saved, I am being saved, I will be saved.” Paul saw it as this ongoing thing and that’s the way he’s talking about it here. “It’s going to turn out for my deliverance, it’s going to turn out for my salvation. This is part of God’s ongoing work in my life to save me.”

This is exactly what he was talking about in chapter one, verse six. When he talks about how God started this work in them and he will be faithful to complete it. It’s the same idea. Paul is confident that the work that God started in him will be completed. And while Paul is uncertain about what’s going to happen, he is certain about God’s activity in the midst of it. He knows that God is going to use these circumstances of his life as they unfold to bring about his salvation and his good. And ultimately, to bring about glory for his name.

This is what he's explaining in verse 20, when he says it will turn out for my deliverance, verse 20, "As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but Christ is going to be honored in my life, whether I live or I die." Either way, Paul gets Christ. And he says, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Regardless of what happens, Paul gets more of Christ.

If Paul lives on, if he continues on in the flesh, God will continue the work that he started in Paul, Philippians 1:6, and Paul will be sanctified. He's going to be saved, he's going to look more like Jesus, he's going to bring more honor to Jesus. And if he dies, he gets to see Christ face to face. Either way, Paul gets Christ. And so he knows he can rejoice.

The first truth I think that we need to apply to our own lives and hearts this morning is that while our lives are uncertain and the circumstances of the future are unknown, God is in control and God can be trusted.

We see Paul leaning on that truth here, that he is sure that because of their prayers and because of the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, these things are going to turn out for his deliverance. He doesn't know how, he doesn't know how God is going to do it, but he knows God can and God will.

James talks about looking into the text like a mirror. And as we see God reveal, and it reveals things about our own heart, I was looking into this text all week like a mirror and I see Paul in this text rejoicing, as he is facing these really dark, gloomy circumstances. He's in prison, he's facing death, and I look into this mirror and I see my own heart and I'm left asking myself, why am I not always rejoicing?

Sometimes I can't rejoice because my weekend plans don't work out the way I wanted them to. Sometimes I can't rejoice because my evening falls apart and the kids need something that I wasn't planning on. Sometimes I can't rejoice because my lower back hurts. These little things, they can steal, they can take my joy away and I'm left looking into the text thinking, I want to be able to say with Paul, "I will rejoice."

So how do we do that? I find myself asking all the time what David asks in Psalm 42 and 43, "Why are you downcast, O my soul?" What is the matter with you? And over and over again in those Psalms, in 42 and 43, David asks that question, "O my soul, my are you so downcast?" And he gives himself the answer, "Put your hope in God." He rightly diagnoses his own heart and he sees that his heart is hoping in something else, which is why it is downcast. And he says, "Wake up, self. Put your hope in God. Put your hope in something that cannot fade or leave."

The first thing that we must do is find the joy of the unfading hope of our salvation, if we're going to be joyful in the midst of uncertainty. Our salvation found in the Gospel, this good news that we all share. Good news about Jesus Christ seeing us in our great need, taking on flesh, living the life that we could not live. Dying the death that we deserved to die, so that we could be forgiven of our sins, washed clean, and accepted by God the Father.

Peter describes this in 1 Peter 1 as our unfading, this imperishable hope kept in heaven by God for us. It doesn't change with our circumstances. It cannot be taken from you, it does not deteriorate, it doesn't change. It's unwavering. In Christ, in what he has done for us, can be enjoyed in all circumstances.

Paul wants to expand on what he has just said. He just said this incredible thing, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain." And he's going to explain further what he means by that. Verse 22, he says, "If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me." So we've looked at this joy of our unfading hope in salvation, now I want to think about joy in fruitful ministry.

Verse 22, "If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me." So what is Paul saying? When he says to live is Christ, this is what he means, fruitful labor. Fruitful labor for Christ is the same thing he's saying when he says Christ will be honored in my body. Paul is seeing all of his life as being about exalting Jesus Christ. To live is Christ, Christ will be honored in my body.

One commentator said, and I love this, "His task," talking about Paul, "whatever the future turns out to be is not to carry a snapshot of Christ in his wallet for occasional sharing with chosen people. But to show an enlarged life-sized Christ to all who care to look. A Christ displayed in Paul's every dimension and every capacity." Paul saw that his joy was tied together with his ability to magnify Christ with his life. They're connected for Paul, he saw them running together, my joy is attached to my ability to make much of Christ with my life.

But you see him wrestling. He's caught between the longing that he has to magnify Christ with his life and this longing to see the face of Jesus face to face. He talks about how he doesn't know which one he's going to choose. He comes back in verse 24 to explain more about what it means that Christ is magnified in his life. He says in verse 24, "But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account." It's very much like Paul to be thinking about our account rather than his own. "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and will 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."

So what is fruitful labor for Paul? It's to serve the church. It is meaningful investment, this continuing on with the church so that they can have progress and joy in the faith. He wants them to have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus.

So what does that mean? What does it mean, progress in the faith? He wants them to grow. Look what he says back in verse nine of this chapter. Philippians 1, starting in verse nine, he talks about his desire for them. This is what he is wanting, this is progress in the faith to Paul. Verse nine, "It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more," this love is growing, it's increasing, "with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

This is progress in the faith. Love abounding more and more with knowledge, learning more and more about God so that your love for him is more and more overflowing. And you're loving him, and you're loving others, it fills you with the fruit of righteousness to the glory and praise of God. This is progress in the faith. These things that he's describing, and these are the things that bring us joy.

And Paul wants it for them, and he wants it for us. God wants it for us. He wants our progress and joy in the faith. And if you are attaching your joy to anything other than magnifying Christ with your every dimension and every capacity, then your joy is going to be fleeting.

But you have to think, what is your joy attached to? What is it connected to and why does it waver the way it does? When you find your joy evaporate, it's an indicator to you that it was connected to the wrong thing. Attaching your joy to something other than Christ's glory is like holding the leash of a giant dog that weighs more than you do. Like this video right here.

We wonder why our joy is so fleeting sometimes. And when we find that our joy vanishes in a moment, it's an indicator to us that it was attached to the wrong thing. To attach your joy to anything other than Christ and his glory, is to attach your joy to something fleeting.

So what can we do? Well, we can fight for joy by using our lives to magnify Christ in fruitful ministry. We have the ability to pursue this joy. We can fight for joy by using our lives to magnify Christ in fruitful ministry.

Here are three practical ways that you could do that this week. One, by using your life to introduce all people to Jesus Christ. Who do you know that needs the hope of the Gospel that you have received? There is no greater joy than sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. And seeing someone come from darkness to light. Share the joy of the good news of Jesus Christ and your joy will increase.

The second thing you can do is pray for the progress and joy in the faith of others. Labor for other people in prayer. Pour yourself out in intercession. Two easy ways for you to do that, maybe you struggle to be disciplined and to give yourself to devoted times of prayer. You could be a part of our Upper Room Prayer ministry here. You could sign up every week for one hour to come into a room where there's nothing to do but pray and you can pour yourself out for other people. I can tell you as a testimony, there's no greater joy than coming out of that room, knowing that you have spent the last hour pouring yourself out before the Lord, asking him to move and knowing that he hears you and he will move.

The third thing, use your gifts for the progress and the joy of the faith of others. Find a place to plug in, serve. God has given you a gift and he gave it to you for his glory and for the progress of the faith and joy of other people around you, so use it. These are the things that lead to joy, no matter what your circumstances might turn out to be.

Finally, I want to think together about one last thing that Paul says in this text. He's completely uncertain about how all of this is going to work out. He doesn't know whether he's going to live or die, and yet he is confident that he will be rejoicing. I want to think together about how Paul can have joy in the face of death.

He says in verse 21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and to be with Christ, for that is far better." Now this is a striking thing for him to say. And for some of us, it's hard to imagine thinking about death as an equal or better option than life. But that's exactly what Paul is saying. He's saying it would be better to depart, to be with Christ is far better, he says.

And so, we ask, how is it that Paul can say that? What is he saying? Well, Paul looks at everything through a very particular lens. He looks at it through the lens of Jesus Christ and his glory. So when he's thinking about living, he thinks about the glory of Jesus Christ. To live is Christ. He thinks about making much of the glory of Jesus Christ and pointing people to him and helping them to see how glorious Jesus is, because he knows it will lead to his joy and theirs. He knows it's what we were designed to see. He dwells on that glory and the glory of his salvation, because it gives him joy, no matter what his circumstances are.

Whether he is in prison, he has joy. If he is being beaten, he has joy. If he's shipwrecked, he has joy. Why? Because he is always thinking about the glory of Jesus Christ. He's seeing every circumstance and every wind of change through this lens. And when he thinks about death, he thinks too about the glory of Jesus Christ.

He thinks about how he will finally be done with the trials of this life and he will see Jesus face to face. He'll see his radiant, unending, never fading glory. And the view of the glory of Jesus Christ will be his eternal reward. To depart and to see the face of Jesus Christ is going to be a glorious thing.

I have to give a warning here though, and for those who depart from this life and have not found the redemption of Jesus Christ, when they see him face to face it will not be far better. In fact, the Bible tells us that there should be this expectation of judgment. Because there's a universal truth about us that we all know deep down inside and it's that we have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

And to meet God, having this sin in our hearts and lives, this record of sin and rebellion will mean judgment for us. That's not what we want. In fact, it's why God has made us ambassadors of this good news. It's our job to tell as many people as we can about the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. That he saw us in this peril, he saw that we were headed towards judgment because of the sin in our lives and he sent a redeemer to save us. Jesus left heaven, left his throne and humbled himself and took on flesh and became a man and lived a sinless life, the life that you and I were supposed to live, he lived it for us.

And then he died on a cross and he absorbed the wrath of God, the wrath of God that is meant for us because of our sin. And he stood in our place. And the Bible says that if you will believe in him, that you will be saved. If you will put your trust in him, if you will turn from every other hope, turn from hope in your own righteousness and turn instead to his righteousness, and say, "God, I know that I deserve judgment, but I believe that Jesus lived on my behalf and that he died in my place. And because of him, I am asking for you to forgive me."

The Bible says that if we will believe in him and confess him as the Lord of our life, if we will put our trust in him and follow him, that we will be saved. And then going to meet him will be a glorious thing.

If you're a believer here this morning, do you ever think about what it will be like to see his face? In Revelation 5, John is having this vision of the Throne Room. And he turns in the Throne Room and it says that he sees a Lamb as if it had been slain. Giving us this indication that Jesus is forever somehow going to bear the marks of his suffering, so that as we look upon him we will know that is a Lamb who was slain on my behalf.

What will it be like to see the marks of his suffering? And to know that he suffered in my place? This glorious one, this beautiful one. In Revelation 1, John talks about seeing the resurrected Christ. And he's so glorious that John lays down before him as though dead. And Jesus, in all of his radiance, in all of his glory, instead of keeping his distance from John, this sinful man, he approaches him and he puts his hand on him and he says, "Do not be afraid."

This glory, this power, and yet this intimacy. What will it be like to see him?

The last thing that I think we should apply to our hearts and lives this morning is that we need to be reminded that we should rest in the hope that we will one day see his face. Rest in the hope that we will one day see his face. And two practical encouragements from that, one is that some of you in the room, in fact many of you, have lost someone who is very dear to you. And you need to be reminded this morning that if they were in Christ, that it is far better to depart and be with him.

And so, we can mourn and we can grieve, and there's a pain that comes with death. It's a real pain. But we don't grieve as those who have no hope. We rest in the hope that we will one day see his face. And the second thing is that we can hope for the future. As we taste the brokenness of this world and the pain that it is constantly dealing out, we can rest in this hope that we will one day see his face.

And one of the privileges that I have had being a pastor, it's sort of a unique experience, is to be able to go and visit people who know that they are about to die. And some of you have experienced that before, I have experienced it a couple of times and it is this thing that remarkably sad and remarkably encouraging all at the same time.

To go and meet someone who is in Christ and is preparing for death and there is this perspective that they have. And it's sad because you're thinking about the loss, right? That there's going to be this temporary separation and it's going to be immensely painful. Even if everybody's ready for it, and even if everyone's expecting it, it's going to be hard and it's going to be painful. But there is this encouragement at the same time, because they have this laser like focus, this incredible perspective.

In fact, a couple of years ago I went to visit this elderly gentleman in the hospital. And it was clear to everyone that he was going to die soon. It was clear to the doctors, it was clear to him. And so I just asked him, I said, "Are you ready to die? Are you ready to see Jesus face to face?" And he said, "I am so ready." He said, "I think about it so much that I've started to dream about it."

He had been having this recurring dream where he was waking up in the presence of Jesus and he was describing it to me and it was incredible. And I left there thinking, oh, how different my life would be if I thought so much about seeing the face of Jesus that it became the content of my dreams.

How differently we would live. How unfading our hope would be, regardless of the circumstances that we might encounter this week or the week after, or the year after that. If we would spend more time resting in the hope that one day we will see his face.

Let's turn our eyes to the day that we will see him. Let's pray and then we'll sing.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the truth of your word. The reminder that it gives us that we can rejoice. No matter what happens, no matter how uncertain life will be, we can be assured that there is joy to be found in you. That we can enjoy Christ, regardless of our circumstances. We can rest in this hope of our unfading salvation.

God, now as we sing, as we respond, as we give, I pray that you would continue to work and move in our hearts. That these truths would sink deep in us, that more and more each day we would set our hope in you. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.



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