

“An Unstoppable Kingdom”

Philippians

Downtown

May 16, 2021

Hey family, I'm Ant. I serve as the pastor of our Two Notch church in our Family of Churches. If you're not very familiar with our Two Notch church, we have a very specific focus of serving impoverished communities along Two Notch Road. I'm really encouraged about and I want you to really be encouraged about the ways you all as members in our family of churches enable us to continue serving and sharing Christ with our neighbors on Two Notch Rd.

We realized very early on that planting a church that focuses primarily on serving some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in our city wouldn't be sustainable financially over the long-term if we had to rely on the neighborhoods that we were primarily striving to serve for our income. In fact, oftentimes, churches and denominations don't plant churches in places of severe poverty because it takes money to run a church that is vibrant and growing and serving and meeting spiritual and physical needs in its community.

As a Family of Churches, our thought has been, “We're not going to let people's financial status or the neighborhood they live in dictate whether or not we plant a church in their area. We're not gonna tell people, we'll plant a church here if you can afford it.”

To date, we have been able to serve our neighbors on Two Notch Road for almost eight years, and our church is continuing to grow even in the pandemic, and the generosity of our Lex and Downtown churches have a lot to do with that because of all of the ways you all have graciously shared resources and facilities and even the staff of your churches with us.

I'm reminded of **Philippians 1:3-5** that we looked at during last week's sermon where the apostle writes: **I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.**

Much of that resonates with me as I think of our family of churches and how, even though we can't/don't always have a Sunday like this one where our oneness is on full display, I still have much joy in my heart about our partnership in the Gospel from literally the first day Midtown Two Notch got started until now.

And today, I want to talk about how we as the people of God, how we as members of the Midtown Family of Churches can continue to endure in being about God's work together over the long haul. If you're seeking to commit your life to joining Christ in His work to seek and save the lost, I'm confident that you have noticed that this is difficult work.

Today, we are blessed to be able to set our hearts and minds on God's word to find strength and joy and endurance to continue on in the good work He has called us to. Let's pick up in verse 12. I'll read through verse 18.

Philippians 1:12-18

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 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. Yes, and I will rejoice...

During the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta Georgia, the US Women's Gymnastics team was in first place going into the final event which was the vault. The team from Russia wasn't far behind them, and one of the two remaining competitors for the US team needed to attain a score of 9.430 to secure the gold Medal. The first US athlete was Dominique Moceanu, and she failed to stick the landing on her attempts and thus, didn't get the needed score to secure the gold medal.

Next up was Kerri Strug. On her first attempt, something went wrong. She missed her landing well, but not only that, when she stood up after falling, she stood up on only one leg. She heard a snap in her ankle and it was injured badly. She later learned that she had torn two ligaments in her ankle. She didn't get the score she needed to secure the goal, and she was in obvious pain.

In her career as a gymnast, she had already suffered through two or three years plagued with serious injuries. She knew well the pain of injury.

So what does she do? She walks back up to the beginning of that 82 foot runway and decides to try it again. She sprinted 82 feet down the runway and executed her vault perfectly and immediately after landing she picks up the injured foot and does her pose on one foot because of how painful it was to put weight on her injured ankle. She had won the gold medal for her team, and had to be carried off the mat in tears to make it to the medal ceremony.

In an interview years later, Strug was asked what those moments were like for her during that second vault after getting hurt and winning the gold medal. Here's what she said.

Kerri Strug

I had a mixture of emotions..., I felt pain, sacrifice, but more than those emotions...joy. The feeling of satisfaction I had knowing I achieved my lifelong dream was incredible!

I find it interesting that she didn't say that the adrenaline was rushing through her veins so much that she didn't feel the pain. She said that she felt the pain and the sacrifice she was making, but more than that, she felt joy and the feeling of satisfaction of what she was achieving by pushing through the pain was incredible.

Joy has the power to sustain us through suffering.

David Goggins is a retired Navy SEAL and is the only member of the U.S. Armed Forces to complete SEAL training (including two Hell Weeks), the U.S. Army Ranger School (where he graduated as Enlisted Honor Man) and Air Force Tactical Air Controller training.

He has placed in ultramarathons of 40 miles, 88 kilometers, a 50 kilometer race, and he also placed first in the McNaughton 150miler which he completed in 33hrs and 36min. He has the Guinness world record for most pull ups in 24hrs. He did 4,030 in 17 hours. He has many more accomplishments, but you get the picture.

He has a very simple yet profound quote that I want to share with you. When talking about enduring the pain of all of the training and competition, he said this

David Goggins

The pain that you are willing to endure is measured by how bad you want it.”

We are all willing to endure great suffering for what we want most. I think most people hear those stories and think that those are just special individuals, and to some degree that’s right, because it doesn’t matter what I do, there’s no way I’m doing 4,000 pull-ups or winning a gold medal on the vault. But, when it comes to their willingness to sacrifice, its also important to recognize that they’re just humans. There aren't certain rules or principles that apply to their lives that don’t apply to yours and mine.

When the joy of accomplishing the goal outweighs the pain you have to endure to accomplish the goal, you’ll endure it.

Just like you and I, they were willing to endure great pain because of how bad they wanted the prize. I am sure that for the vast majority of us, there are things that we’d be willing to suffer great pain for. Maybe it's to protect someone. Maybe it's to satisfy a desire you have.

Many of us know of people that have sacrificed necessary time with their families because they are putting in too much time at work. We often knowingly do ourselves great spiritual harm when we so deeply love things like our comfort and entertainment that we don’t prioritize spiritual disciplines.

Countless married people have put themselves and their families through great pain and strife and division and by engaging in an extramarital affair.

Many in our society have been willing to endure great physical pain and sickness because of our love for certain types of food that we just can’t get enough of.

We have an incredible capacity to sacrifice greatly for what we want the most.

As we’ll talk about throughout this sermon series, Paul is imprisoned. He’s not sure what’s going to happen to Him there. He knows the death penalty is on the table for him. All of this for being a leader in

the Christian movement and preaching salvation in Jesus Christ to those that need saving. He is enduring great suffering as he writes this, and notice the thing that is on his mind as he writes to his friends in Philippi in the midst of His suffering.

Philippians 1:12-14

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

In a way, he says “You know what fam, I been thinking... ya know, kinda got a lot of time on my hands... and you know what I’ve been really thinking about alot lately as I’ve been considering my imprisonment? The fact that God is really using my suffering to advance the Gospel! I mean, think about it, since I’m imprisoned for doing absolutely nothing wrong, the guards are finding out about Jesus... and my brothers on the outside are bolder than ever to share about Christ without being afraid.”

He’s like “Fam, God is really at work here.”

Paul is so able to rightly see the value, the importance, the beauty, and the glory of the Gospel of Jesus continuing to be spread that He’s able to appropriately perceive the different aspects of His life. The same is true for us. Valuing the Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ as our greatest treasure allows us to keep the main thing as the main thing. It allows us to remain focused on what’s most important even through immense pain.

Yall ever talk to people that love to lift weights? I’m talking about the **people that love leg day**. They almost sound crazy don’t they? They talk about the burn... that pain they feel in their muscles as they are pushing their bodies to the limit time and time again... they talk about it like they love it. They be like, “**Man my legs are killing me! That was an amazing workout!**”

They so love the gains that they’re accomplishing that pain is no longer an obstacle. Their joy in accomplishing the goal outweighs the pain they have to endure to accomplish the goal. So they endure it.

Family when you have a purpose that you love and are enamored by, pain often remains secondary to the thing you’re after most, and that’s what we see from Paul here in Philippians 1.

He’s able to focus on how his pain has resulted in:

- The spread of the Gospel of Jesus
- The guards where he is imprisoned are hearing about Christ
- Others becoming more bold and confident to share Christ with others because of His imprisonment

And because of that, he was unstoppable!

Because of Christ, who had:

- Died for His sins and rose again to new life
 - ... forgiving him for all of the wrong He'd done
 - Reconciling Him to God and making Him new
 - Adopting Him into the family of God
 - saving Him from His life of sin,
 - calling Him to join in the building of His Kingdom

Because of the sheer goodness and glory of this Christ whom He knows so well... He is able to appropriately view suffering for all of the brokenness that it is... without letting it hinder Him from continuing to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

PAUL IS UNSTOPPABLE

So, by the power of the Spirit of God, He's just unstoppable. He's unstoppable. You see the same thing in verses 15-18.

Philippians 1:15-18

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 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. Yes, and I will rejoice...

There are people preaching the Gospel for bad reasons during Paul's imprisonment. It's not completely clear what their motives were, but somehow some were preaching because they **were envious of Paul** and they **wanted to afflict Paul** in some way. **Perhaps they just wanted to be seen as a greater preacher of the Gospel than Paul**, so they saw Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to gain a higher status in the Church than Him...

There are people who seem to be brothers in the faith that are adding insult to injury while he is in prison for proclaiming the Gospel! But, regardless, Paul says that he rejoices because Christ is being proclaimed. He had such a love for Christ and admiration for Christ that he was gonna be happy so long as the news about Christ was being proclaimed. **No matter what was happening to him inside the prison and no matter what people were doing against Paul outside of the prison**, Paul was going to rejoice because he could see that nothing was more important than the good News of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ being shared with others.

His right knowledge and admiration of Christ made him unstoppable. It allowed him to experience suffering and difficulty, but not be mastered or controlled by it, and for those of us that desire to see God's Kingdom grow, this is incredibly inspiring.

"Hey Paul, stop preachin the Gospel."

- "No"

"We'll, throw you in jail"

- “Cool, cool, cool, if you do that, I’m going to make sure every guard at your prison hears about Christ, and the family is going to become more bold to preach Christ”

“Well, other people are going to see your imprisonment as an opportunity to afflict you by preaching while you’re in prison”

- “That just means I’ll be proclaiming Jesus in the prison, while they get to proclaim Christ outside of the prison. I rejoice over that!”

His joy in accomplishing the goal outweighed the pain he had to endure to accomplish the goal, so he was able to endure it.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, because he saw and valued Jesus rightly, he was unstoppable. **He was unstoppable.** The difficulty that he experienced didn’t stop Him from continuing in following in the footsteps of Jesus. His joy in Christ sustained Him through the difficulty.

And even though we don’t live **in an age and place where we’re thrown in jail** for preaching the Gospel... it is still incredibly important that we don’t let suffering **or difficulty** stop us from joining God in His mission!... and some of you in our Family of Churches are examples for us in how you don’t let the difficulty of the mission stop you from following in the footsteps of Jesus.

The Suffering Of Walking In The Mess. Our family of churches is so greatly benefited by the fact that some of you so love Christ and admire Him so much and so want others to know Him that you have stepped into some messy situations in your LG to get people to turn from sin and turn to Christ, and the Kingdom of God is better for it! There are situations so messy and dark that others wouldn’t touch it with a 10ft pole, but b/c you love Christ and you so want others to know and experience Him that you move towards the mess and the drama... because by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are unstoppable! You don’t let the difficulty/suffering control you or keep you from walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

Social Suffering. Some of you because you love Christ, and you want to see Him glorified and made much of, you are willing to, in the name of Christ, confront and rebuke brothers and sisters in the faith that do not respond well when you confront and rebuke them. You know they’re likely to lash out at you and maybe be a little standoffish with you for a period of time, and you know that’s going to hurt, but because the Holy Spirit is empowering you and you love to see Christ being made much of more than you love your own comfort, you continue to press on and lovingly call people to turn to and submit to the Lordship of Christ Jesus! because by the power of the Holy Spirit, when it comes to calling people away from sin and to God, you are unstoppable! You don’t let the difficulty/suffering control you or keep you from walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

For some of you, participating with your LifeGroup on a weeknight is often very difficult. Maybe you had a very difficult day, week, month, or year, and you’re exhausted from everything on your plate right now. Maybe you struggle with clinical anxiety and the thought of actively engaging and participating in a LifeGroup meeting when you really don’t feel like you can deal with people, just causes your anxiety to rise up in you.... but you press on clinging to God’s presence and power in your life, because you value Christ and the spiritual work that He is doing in and through you in your LifeGroup more than you value your relief in the moment... and because of the power of God’s Spirit in you and because of your love for

Christ, you are unstoppable. And you participate and pray for your brothers and sisters and you encourage them in their faith through the Word of God because you don't let the difficulty/suffering control you or keep you from walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

For some of us giving financially to the work of God through the local church has been a little more difficult during the financial uncertainty of the pandemic. But many of you have continued to give faithfully and it shows that you value God and his work, and the uncertainty of the future does not rule and control you! And we are better for it! Our neighbors, in the impoverished communities along Two Notch Road that I get to serve are better for it because your giving allows our Family of Churches to continue to do ministry at Midtown Two Notch. I don't know what we'd do if we didn't have the financial and staff backing that comes from your generosity! Your valuing of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit more than you value the comfort and security of holding tightly to your money as you continue to give generously shows that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are unstoppable! You don't let the difficulty/suffering control you or keep you from walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

And because of your faithfulness, as a Family of Churches, we are putting on display the unstoppable power of God because we're saying, "God wherever you send us, even if its to places where there's great poverty and elevated crime rates where many would say, 'its not wise to plant a church there', we'll go there with the Gospel of Jesus because we know that the Kingdom of God is worth sacrificing for!"

God has constructed His Kingdom to be unstoppable and together we get to put that on display through your relentless generosity, even in times of financial uncertainty.

When you appropriately value and admire Christ, you are empowered to appropriately value the most important things, like the eternal work of God in people's lives, over your own comfort.

On the other hand, that necessarily means that our unwillingness to endure suffering or difficulty for the cause of Christ very much exposes how little we often value Christ

Our unwillingness to:

- Walk with and care for our brothers and sisters in the faith through tough and difficult issues.
- Bear with one another and continue on in deep fellowship with one another because of the unity we have in Christ when we are wronged or sinned against...
 - Or even when we just feel like or suspect that someone has something against us when we have no real evidence to back that up
- Confront and rebuke a brother or sister in the faith because we're afraid of how they might respond
- Encourage and uplift someone by encouraging them by the ways we see God at work in them because we're afraid we might not do it right
- As parents, push through the fatigue and be intentional about consistently sharing Christ with our children
- Share Christ with our friends and loved ones who don't love Jesus because we are afraid of what they might say or do

These things reveal to us that we don't appropriately see and value and admire Christ our Savior!

And if we are to lay hold of a joy in Christ that is so strong that it empowers us to endure whatever pain or difficulty that comes our way, I'm convinced that a great place to start is remembering His Joy in us.

I'm reminded of Hebrews 12:1-3 that shows us how we can endure as followers of Jesus!

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

Endurance - steadfastness, patience. It speaks to the capacity to tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without giving up.

The author is saying, let's:

- run the race God has for us
- Live how He has called us to live
- Love our neighbors the way we love ourselves
- Walk in the footsteps of Jesus

... without letting anything stop us and cause us to quit!

And the question is, how do we do this? How do we find the strength to run with this endurance?

Pause right there. You probably saw this one coming. No tricks. No gimmicks. No bait and switch. If you want the ability to endure with joy whatever comes your way as you follow Jesus, you need to keep your eyes on Jesus! There are no shortcuts! There are no other options! It begins and ends with you looking to Him! Seeking Him. Meditating on Him and His Goodness! If you don't do that, you have no shot at this!

Now let's look at how the author describes Jesus!

the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

I don't know if you caught this or not, but the author of Hebrews just made it clear that it was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross! The joy of glorifying the Father and the joy of bringing salvation to His creation and more specifically to us is what allowed Him to endure!

Let me say it another way, carrying the sustaining joy of what He was accomplishing as He died for us deep in His heart, our God and Savior, Jesus Christ was unstoppable as He was on His mission to save you and me!

He was unstoppable:

- In the wilderness when the devil told Him, "if you just bow down and worship me, I'll give this world over to you"
 - He didn't let His desire for comfort stop Him from fulfilling the mission He was called to
- Throughout His life when the book of Hebrews tells us that He was "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

- He didn't let temptation to sin stop Him from fulfilling His mission to save us!
- In the garden of Gethsemane when in anticipation of the pain and suffering of the cross, His sweat was as blood falling from His face
 - He didn't let the fear and anxiety stop Him from fulfilling His mission to save us!
- From Gethsemane to Calvary's Hill where He died for our sin, when He could have asked the Father to send 12 legions of angels to rescue Him, but instead He stayed the course
 - He didn't let the physical pain of torture and crucifixion stop Him!
 - The joy of accomplishing the goal outweighed the pain He endured on the cross to save you and me!
- Even in the grave, because three days later He was raised from the grave with all power in His
 - Not even death itself could stop Him

Our God was unstoppable!... And when we look to Him and seek Him and find our hope and our joy in Him, by the power of God, we will be unstoppable too!

As you grow in finding your joy in Jesus, you will find yourself more and more willing to endure suffering and difficulty as you follow in His footsteps, and if your eyes are open to it, I'd be willing to bet you'll see more and more how He's using your sacrifice for His purposes.

Let's Pray.