

“Joy in Our Perseverance”

Philippians

Downtown

June 13, 2021

What’s up Midtown fam? It is so good to be with you all. If we haven’t met before my name is Tim and I currently serve as the Lead Pastor at a church called Citizens Church in Charlotte, NC. You guys sent us and a team to Charlotte a little over a year ago to plant a church in the middle of a global pandemic. Stupidest and best thing I’ve ever done.

But genuinely, the Lord has been very kind and gracious to us:

Grab a bible. Go to **Philippians 2:12-18**.

When my wife Lindsay and I first got started in ministry we were working with college students at the University of Louisville. I was trying to disciple and share the gospel with fraternity guys, she was working with sorority women. And there was one guy in particular who I was walking with who we’ll call Alex. During his sophomore year Alex had started coming around our church, we had started meeting weekly for lunch or coffee studying the Scriptures together. It seemed like he was growing a ton in his faith.

But one day I get a call out of the blue and Alex says hey, can we grab lunch tomorrow, we need to talk. So we head to Qdoba right off campus, order, sit down. The very first thing out of his mouth is this - “Hey man, I don’t want to keep meeting or coming to church.” Now of course this came like a shot from nowhere, hadn’t even taken a bite of my quesadilla yet. And all I could think to ask or say was - “Woah, why?” Alex then proceeded to spend the rest of our brief lunch telling about how he was about to enter into his junior year of college, he only had two years left in this prime season of his life and he just really wanted to enjoy them and not let “this God stuff” get in the way of him enjoying life to the fullest.

Somehow, his perception was that obeying God was not the way to live the fullest life. He thought his options were to either follow God or to enjoy his life. And I don't think he's close to the only American with this view. If we’re being honest, I’ve been tempted to think this way before...

But the problem is, that view is wildly different from how the Bible talks about obeying God.

Now, certainly the Christian life is one of sacrifice. One of hardship. One of suffering. One of dying to ourselves, our desires, our preferences, our wants out of love for God and others.

But also, what I want us to see today, is that **even in our sacrificial obedience to God there is joy and life to be found. Obedience leads to joy.**

So let’s read the passage together and then we’ll dive into it. One of the things we do at Citizens Church is stand for the initial reading of Scripture in the sermon. If you guys would be willing to do me a favor and make me feel a little more at home this morning, could we stand together as I read this passage for us?

Philippians 2:12-18

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Paul starts the beginning of this section, pointing back to all of the beauty he just showed us in the humility and sacrifice of Christ in Phil 2:1-11. Christ lowered himself, took on flesh, went to the cross, rose again and is now exalted above all - risen and ruling and reigning.

And Paul says in light of that, verse 12: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”

In light of the finished work of Christ on the cross - work out your own salvation. Notice - not *work for* your salvation, *work out* your salvation. In other words, get the gospel out of just the idea you affirm in your head or believed to start your life with Christ, and start working it into all aspects of how you live, think, love - all of that.

If you are in Christ, if you have trusted in Him for salvation, the Bible says so much about your new identity - chosen, redeemed, forgiven, sealed, adopted, a new creation with a new heart. So the call to work out your salvation is the call to live like the person you already are. To live like all of that is actually true.

It’s asking yourself - Ok if the tomb is empty, and the kingdom is coming, and my sin is forgiven, and the Spirit of God lives inside of me - what will i do differently today?

- How will my relationships look differently now? Who can I show the love of Jesus to?
- How will the way I spend my time and money be different now
- How will I parent? How will I work?

This is what the Bible means by **sanctification**. The process of learning to live more and more in line with your identity in Christ.

To not move past the gospel, but to continually push deeper into the gospel and outwork this most central and crucial reality of **life with God in the Spirit** into your everyday life.

Not on your own! Notice verse 13: “For it is God who works in you”

Work it out...as God works in you. Philippians 1:6 right? He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. **Much of Christian life and Christian growth and obedience is just us putting ourselves in a position for the Spirit of God to do the work of God to mature us in Christ.**

This is the call of obedience. To let Christ, who is Savior and Lord, be Savior and Lord.

Why? **FOR JOY**. Specifically **four** joys that I see in this passage.

1. God's joy.

Honestly, this one's been blowing my mind the past few weeks. Look back at verse 12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Now if you have some familiarity with the Scriptures you might expect that to read - to will and to work for His glory. Our obedience, our sanctification is for God's glory. Which is certainly true. But that's not what Paul emphasizes here. **He says for God's good pleasure.**

God's delight, God's pleasure, God's joy is in our sanctification. Which is why He's so committed to it.

My wife and I had our first kid, Harper, March 10, 2020...aka 4 days before the world shut down. And being a dad is such a joy, I'm loving every second of it. Harper is around 15 months old, and her new favorite word, at least to say to me right now, is "no". Everything - Harper can you bring me that? NO. Harper, can you pick that up? NO. Harper time to go to sleep! NO. It's adorable and aggravating. The other day though, I had left my golf clubs out in the living room, and she had run over and was about to pick it up, which is a terrifying thought for a 15 mo old to be running around the house swinging a golf club wildly. And I look her in the eyes, and I said "Harper Beth, don't pick that up." And she actually listened! She set it down, she walked away, and she came and gave me a huge hug and kiss (ok I made that last part up). But seeing the toddler queen of "no's" actually listen to me - I didn't know how to handle it! I was so overjoyed! Parents - you know what this is like right? How much joy it brings when your kid actually obeys you?

Listen - you have a Father in heaven who loves you. Who adores you. Who wants to share His overflowing love with you. Who takes delight in your obedience to Him.

Ephesians 1:14 says that we, all who follow Jesus, are God's glorious inheritance. Another way you can say it is that we who are in Christ are **God's treasured possession**. If you're a follower of Jesus, you are an adopted son or daughter of God.

I'm so tempted, as a sinful perfectionist, to always think God is just a little bit frustrated with me. There's always something I need to be doing or not doing, there's always just a little bit of displeasure from God directed towards me. **But the gospel says that is simply not true!**

Does God desire, long for, move me towards sanctification? Absolutely.

But is He upset by my current level of progress? Absolutely not!

He loves me! And he loves you! Don't forget - If you are in Christ, if you are united to Him, God views you as He views Jesus - holy, righteous, blameless, spotless....**And His delight in you through Christ then pushes us to further obedience.**

Which means - as you think about obedience to God. As you think about outworking the gospel into your life, living congruent with your gospel identity → **Don't spend your life running from God's disappointment, instead run towards God's delight!**

- I'm gonna say "no" to sin, not because I don't want God to be mad at me, but because I want to experience the delight of my heavenly father.
- I'm gonna push back against laziness in my marriage, not because I don't want God to be mad at me, but because I want the delight of my heavenly father.

1. **God's joy.**
2. **The world's joy.**

Philippians 2:14-15

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world

You could honestly preach a whole sermon if not a whole series on **verse 14 - Do all things without grumbling or disputing**. All things. And then he connects the command to not grumble or dispute to being blameless and innocent, shining as lights in the world.

There's a part in the Exodus narrative in the Old Testament that I think Paul has in mind here, where this same idea of being a light is mentioned in relation to the Israelites. Some of Moses' final words to them before he dies. The Israelites - the Old Testament people of God who were supposed to point the rest of nations around them to God through how they lived. They were to be a light to the watching world of the goodness of God.

And yet if you read the book of Deuteronomy their story is not one of mission and redemption, it's one of nonstop grumbling and complaining.

- They hate their slavery in Egypt (rightly so), God delivers them brings them out.
- Now they're mad because they're stuck in the wilderness starving so they want to go back to Egypt.
- So God sends them literal bread from heaven. This is great. Now they're mad because it's bland and boring.
- Just over and over and over again - grumbling, complaining, grumbling, complaining.

Which says something about the God they claim to worship.

Paul says the same is true for us. Paul connects our mission in the world to a specific aspect of our sanctification and obedience - namely **gratitude**.

Your gratitude, or lack thereof, affects your mission.

When we complain, when we grumble, it says something to the watching world about our God.

God you're not looking after me or over me. God you don't love me. God it seems like you've forgotten about me so I need to take things into my own hands.

And yet Paul says our mission - to shine as lights to the world - is connected to our obedience and our gratitude. Your gratitude, in other words, affects your mission.

The Scriptures say that through our obedience, through our joy, through our working out our salvation day in and day out - when we do this slowly over time, we shine brighter and brighter to the world around us, showing them what true joy and true life is like.

Let me give you a really beautiful example of this:

A few months ago I had the opportunity to officiate the wedding of a couple who's in the membership process at our church. The Lord has just been doing a work in their hearts over the past 6 months or so, it's been so beautiful to watch. And so when they asked me to do the wedding I said yep, of course, but we gotta do some premarital counseling first. So we sat down for our first counseling session about 2 months before the wedding. And I knew from being friends with them that they were living together. And so I was gonna have to have a hard conversation, show them from the Scriptures why that's off, and challenge one of them to move out for the next 2 months. Not a fun convo. Was honestly expecting the worst.

To my surprise a few days after the convo they called me and said - "Hey, Taylor is going to move out and go move back in with her dad until we get married. We want to take the gospel seriously and our obedience to Christ seriously and so we're gonna do it." Now, that in and of itself is worth celebrating. But it gets even better.

They decided they weren't just going to begrudgingly follow through, but actually do so joyfully, to choose joyful obedience to Christ. Taylor for those two months moved back in with her dad who's not a believer. And actually through her counter cultural obedience in this way was able to have so many incredible gospel conversations with her dad because of their joyful obedience.

What might it look like for you to bring the joy of obedience into your mission so that the world might see and hear the gospel?

- If in your **workplace**, whenever everyone's complaining about the hard hours or the taxing boss you say, "Yeah it is hard and yea we've got a tough boss, and I'm glad to be here. I'm thankful to have a job. I'm thankful God's put that boss in my life."
- Or when you're with **other parents** and everyone's complaining about their kids - hypothetically speaking of course - you can say, "Yea I don't sleep much either. And yeah I don't have a lot of free time anymore, and God is good and my kids are a gift. And I'm thankful that in my weakness He is strong."
- Or when you're with **your friends**, it's easy to complain about your spouse or roommate and make a comment at their expense and yet because of the joy set before you, you can choose to speak words of honor and encouragement towards them because you're thankful to have them in your life.

As followers of Jesus **we choose gratitude over grumbling**. Putting the gospel on display in our words and our attitudes to make much of Jesus for the joy of the world.

1. **God's joy.**
2. **The world's joy.**
3. **Your leaders' joy.**

Philippians 2:16-17

Holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Paul says - I'm pouring myself out as a drink offering. A drink offering was used both in Jewish and Greco-Roman culture where someone would pour out wine on the ground or on altar, typically on top of the

animal sacrifice. It's this picture Paul uses to say - "I'm spent. I'm giving it my all, I'm giving all of me to see your faith built up. And I want you to hold fast to God, to the Word, so that on that day when Christ returns I know it wasn't in vain."

That all the sacrifices he made to plant churches, to preach the gospel, to labor in ministry through suffering and sacrifice on behalf of the churches would all be worth it. Through this sacrificial leader Paul aims for their obedience and steadfastness which would lead to his joy.

This has been by far the hardest year of my life. I'm a new dad, in a new city, planting a new church - all in the midst of a global pandemic. Lindsay and I joke - I used to not be a crier. At all. I cry at least once a month now.. Which I'm aware, is still not a lot, but it's a lot for me alright? I'll be sitting in a coffee shop reading and just like - bam, waterworks.

And the Lord has been kind, and gracious, and good to our family and our church - and it's been incredibly difficult. And then I think about Paul's words here - poured out as a drink offering. That's the call for any of us in any form of ministry - Pastoral ministry, group leadership, sunday directors - we sacrifice for the good of others.

And then I read about Paul's rejoicing, his joy, in their faith. And I think about Kenan. The guy getting baptized in the video y'all saw at the beginning. Kenan who moved to Charlotte back in July. Got connected through a friend to our church family. The Spirit worked and he started walking with the Lord for the first time, reading His Bible for the first time, started changing a lot of his sinful habits, started saying no to sin and yes to God. I mean just an incredible gospel work in his life.

And we got to baptize him on easter. And I can't do anything but smile with the biggest idiot grin ever as I look across the sanctuary at all the different folks who are crying, celebrating the goodness of God, thinking back on all the sacrifices they made to move to Charlotte and plant this church.

I'll pour myself out over and over and over again for that joy.

Your leaders pour themselves out for you to hold fast to Christ. Don't let their labor be in vain. Work out your salvation. Be sanctified in the Lord. They are after rejoicing - they long to rejoice in you walking with Jesus, trusting in Jesus - they want to celebrate with you in eternity.

Can I give you one really easy way to do this? **Encourage your leaders and pastors.**

Sometimes we can just assume they know. They don't. Ministry of any sort - vocational, pastor, lifegroup leader - it can be so discouraging. Encourage them.

Knowing that God is using their efforts is what brings your leaders joy. Make sure they know. Don't assume they know...I can tell you for a fact that they mostly don't know. The main thing they hear is actually criticism and critique. You serve your leaders and pastors when you let them know how God is using them. That fuels them and helps them deal with discouragement and helps them persevere. It allows joy to drive their ministry. Tell them why you're thankful for them. Don't be shy with praise and gratitude and thankfulness. They need it!

A few weeks ago I had probably the worst week so far in church planting. Just took a lot of lumps, some tough meetings, ws feeling a ton of discouragement about our church, my leadership.

And I was sharing some discouragement with the guys in our group. And one of them, in such a Holy Spirit moment, looked me right in the face and said, "Hey man, I want you to know you're a sinner and you mess up sometimes. And since we joined this church in November - my marriage is stronger, I am more in love with Jesus, and more committed to His mission. Because of your leadership and your friendship."

Your leaders need that from you. Send the email. Send the text. Make the phone call. Grab them after the gathering. Hug them and tell them you're thankful for them.

They are after their joy in Christ - you be after it too. And they aren't just after their own joy,,, they are pouring themselves out like a drink offering for your joy in Christ, which is our last point.

1. **God's joy.**
2. **The world's joy.**
3. **Your leaders' joy.**
4. **Your joy.**

Philippians 2:18

Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

You see, in our world today, we hate restrictions. We hate being told what to do. And one of the greatest lies Satan has used to deceive the world is to make us think that God's commands are simply because God is withholding something from us. That we're supposed to do x, y, or z or not do a, b, or c, because God doesn't want us to be happy or enjoy our lives.

But Midtown, hear me, God is not trying to take something from you for the sake of just being restrictive.

Through His commands he's trying to give something to you. God's commands, all of them, are for our good. They are for our joy. Always. He's created us and He's created and designed life to operate according to His good purposes and for your deeper joy.

Our obedience leads to joy and when we understand this and live this out, we actually experience a deeper victory and power over sin. Because you begin to learn and see that God's not out to get you, or withhold from you. In His commands, there's an opportunity to grab and take hold of life to the full and everlasting all the more.

And yes obedience might be painful, and hard, and it might lead to deeper suffering, but because the tomb is empty - you know what's on the other side of that obedience? More and more joy in store for you. More and more life now and forever.

This is the way of Jesus. This is the life that He's called us to. To pick up our own cross. To give away lives away. To die to ourselves and give our lives away because that's what Jesus has done for us.

Hebrews 12:1-2 puts it like this:

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely

Whether that's our complaining or our grumbling or our apathy or our pride, or whatever - let's lay it aside

and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

Let's be a people who run after joy, who run after obedience with endurance! For the long haul. Who say yes to Jesus and no to the things of this world. Encouraging our leaders, being in community together, pressing more and more into Jesus and..

looking to 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.

- For the joy set before Him, Christ went to the cross.
- For the joy set before Him, Christ endured our suffering.
- For the joy set before Him, Christ bore our sins.
- For the joy set before Him, Christ was forsaken by the Father.
- For the joy set before Him, Christ walked out of the grave
- For the joy set before Him, Christ defeated satan, sin, and death.
- For the joy set before Him, He is now exalted and has entered into the eternal joy of His Heavenly Father forever and ever

And this is the same path we're called to follow. **For the joy set before us.**

For the joy set before us, to pick up our cross.

For the joy set before us, to die to ourselves.

For the joy set before us, to give our lives away in obedience.

So that in the process we might be people of light, living out of joy in Columbia or in Charlotte now and in the life to come with God.