

12/15/19 - Advent of Joy (Dwelling)

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[0 : 00] Well, as we continue our series for Advent this week, as Brent announced, we are looking at joy, and I specifically want to look at joy dwelling.

So I don't normally start my sermon with a little bit of exposition, but today I felt like I would just talk a little bit about the process of writing this sermon.

For me, when I write a sermon, I like to look at the text, read the text, pray through the text, read it again, and see what it really says. But for this sermon, I also like to, as I'm writing a sermon, to think back about the prayer requests that I've heard from the congregation throughout the weeks and the months and think, how does this text affect the people in our congregation?

And I don't go out of my way to put statements in my sermon that are specifically geared towards a person's prayer. I don't mean to say that. I mean to say that when I'm writing the text, sometimes it's on my heart what us as a congregation are going through and how this text really has a deeper meaning and a different meaning for people depending on where they are in their lives.

And so the reason I took a moment to say that is this text for me this week was a huge encouragement. This was a busy week for me and just getting to spend some time in the evenings each day looking at joy was a huge encouragement to carry me through this week.

[1 : 42] And so I hope you will agree as we study what joy means, what joy actually is, that you will find it an encouragement as well. So I'll start by saying that God, at least to the best of my knowledge, doesn't promise happiness in scripture.

I don't think we can find a verse that says you will be happy in this life. However, he does command our joy.

There are commands in scripture that say we must rejoice always. And actually the text we're going to look at today says rejoice always. So what is the difference then between joy and happiness?

What is joy? What does it mean to have joy? Is joy related to happiness? Is it giddiness, contentment, right? I think if we ask a child, a child's definition of joy would be vastly different than our own definition of joy.

The longer we live, the more meaningful the word joy becomes to us and the more different it becomes from the word happiness. And so I want to look at some of Paul's words in the New Testament, specifically Philippians, where he teaches on joy.

[3 : 05] And I want to look at why does he command or exhort the early church with the command, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice, right?

And rejoice comes from the same Greek word joy. So when we see rejoice, it's also meaning joy. So applying this passage to our lives, how are we to be continuously rejoicing in the Lord?

Regardless of circumstance, how can we always rejoice? Life has its ups and downs, and yet we're commanded to always rejoice. So why is this biblical command so important?

And why are there so many examples given in scripture? Those are the questions I want to look at as we think about joy. So joy comes from the Greek word, I believe it's pronounced kara, C-H-A-R-A, meaning joy or gladness.

And it also comes from the closely related verb form, kairo, meaning to rejoice or to be glad. And from this, we can start to unfold the meaning of joy, the imperative to rejoice.

[4 : 15] As Christians, we're called to have gladness, another way of saying joy, gladness in the Lord always. And we see examples of this in one of my favorite examples of joy is Job, right?

We see him go through massive loss of everything, save for his wife, which may not have been, he may have preferred to have lost at that point.

But save for his wife, we also see an example in David who suffers loss due to his sin of his son.

And he prays continually that God would spare his son. However, God decides to take his son. And David's immediate response is to stand up, wash himself off, rejoice and worship the Lord.

And that's what joy begins to look like as we look through scripture. We also see examples of joy throughout the Psalms. That's as I looked at the word joy where it's most prevalent in the Bible.

[5 : 21] Surprisingly, the second most prevalent place we find the words for joy are in Isaiah, right? We don't typically think of the book of Isaiah as a book of joy, but it shows up more times in Isaiah than any other books save for Psalms.

And then as we get into the New Testament, we see joy at the birth, the baptism, the resurrection and at the teachings of Christ, especially in the book of Luke.

It shows up plenty of times in Luke. And so being an academic, it was difficult for me not to be academic about the word joy. And so as I looked into it, there's actually 203 uses of the word kara and cairo in the New Testament and 233 uses of words, Hebrew words, 11 of them that are translated to joy in the Old Testament.

So that's 436 times in the Bible that we see the word joy used. So it's an important topic. And therefore, as Christians, we need to know what joy means and what it means to rejoice always.

So I know this is Christmas season and I don't want to be the person that preaches a somber message on the word joy. However, I think we can find deeper meaning to the word joy as we really look into what it means to have joy always and to rejoice always.

[6 : 45] And from that, we can gain a greater perspective of what joy we really have in Christ. So although there are many places in scripture we could look at and study the word joy, I want to focus today specifically on a passage in Philippians chapter 4, verses 4 through 13.

And so Paul is ending his letter. This is kind of the second ending to his letter as any good pastor. He says he's going to end and then he keeps talking and then he finally starts to end his letter a second time.

And so I want to read Philippians 4, 4 through 13 and look at what Paul writes about joy and why he says that he has the secret to contentment and joy in this passage.

So I'm going to read starting in Philippians chapter 4, verses 4. If you want to read along, I believe we'll have it up on the screen and also in your Bibles.

Paul begins in verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

[7 : 56] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty in hunger, abundance in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Let's pray before we move into the text.

[9 : 03] Father, thank you for this Sunday morning to gather, to read from, and to study your word. And I pray that you would prepare our hearts to receive from your word, to grow in our love for you.

And Lord, I pray that it would find deeper meaning in our hearts, Lord, as we study what it means to have lasting and perpetual joy in you.

I pray this in your holy name. Amen. So first, I want to look at verses four through seven, where Paul begins with this imperative to rejoice, right?

I started in my introduction with these words, rejoice in the Lord always. He literally means always, at all times, no matter what, to rejoice, right?

So as I said before, Paul is closing his letter to the Philippians, and this is actually the end of his closing. This is the very end of Philippians.

[10 : 07] However, he begins this closing argument back up in Philippians three with, finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. And this isn't the only place in scripture that Paul exhorts and commends his brothers in Christ to rejoice.

He also says in first Thessalonians five, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

So he, if he didn't make clear in Philippians that he means always, he clears it up in Thessalonians. Rejoice, rejoice always. So Paul, if we look at the stories of Paul, we know, or we'll soon know that he can't have meant this lightly.

Of all people, Paul knew a lot of trials and suffering, and yet he himself thought it necessary to say rejoice always. So coming from him, there must be some reason he has to rejoice always, and some reason why he tells us to rejoice always.

And so that's what I want to look at. How do we apply this to our lives? How can we today have joy regardless of our circumstances? As we continue through this passage, Paul unfolds a secret, as he calls it, to lasting and constant joy.

[11 : 32] So in the next few verses, he starts talking about anxiety. And so it wasn't my intention for this sermon to be on anxiety, but it seems, at least in Paul's eyes, that anxiety, contentment, and joy are interrelated.

And so to understand one, it helps to understand the other. He says, do not be anxious about anything. This comes from another command, be patient, establish your heart, for the coming of the Lord is at hand, right?

These commands that he's giving about anxiety, they actually come straight from the words of Jesus. However, Paul condenses them. And so one place Jesus teaches about anxiety is Luke 12, verses 23 through 26.

And I'll read a little bit of that. In verse 22, Jesus says to his disciples, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.

And then a little bit later on in verse 25, Jesus says, which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to a span of life? If then you are not able to do a small thing as this, why are you anxious about the rest?

[12 : 40] Right? Right? And so Paul is just reiterating the teachings of Jesus about anxiety. He's taken many parables. There are quite a few of them in that section of Luke that he's summarizing into a few words and saying, do not be anxious about anything.

And Jesus, he gives more examples. However, Paul, one thing we need to make clear is he's not saying there's no place for anxiety in the Christian life.

Indeed, we all face it. And as we'll see in a moment, even Paul himself faced anxiety. However, as Christians, we are called to escape anxiety, not to live or dwell in anxiety.

And we are called to escape by, in Paul's words, allowing the peace of God to guard our hearts. We might go further and say that to live in anxiety is to doubt God.

To doubt that God who provides in his own words for the raven and the lilies of the field could provide for his own children. Right? And so Paul, he's saying, yes, we will face anxiety, but we're not to live in anxiety.

[13 : 53] And as he continues, he shows how joy is the effective treatment for anxiety. He doesn't leave us without a solution.

He continues with the imperative to pray and to let our requests be made known to God, all with thanksgiving. To ask God for peace and to trust on his promise to deliver.

This teaching of Paul is reiterated in Colossians 3, where Paul says, and I believe Brent just read this a moment ago, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful.

Let the words of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your heart to God.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him. And so for me, for us, this teaching is especially true today.

[14 : 57] We live in a very fast-paced world. For me, this week was pretty fast-paced, and so I faced quite a bit of anxiety. However, this passage was a reminder that the solution to that is to be patient, to set my heart and my mind on God, on the peace that comes from him, and also to set my heart and mind on eternity, to be focused on the promises of Christ.

So for me, the promises of Christ or the words of God that dwell richly in our heart, that means that I should in my heart at all times have available a list of promises of God.

And throughout Scripture, there's hundreds of these. I could find 600 just in a quick search. But I know most of us who have been Christians for a season, we have a few of them tucked away in our hearts that we go to in times of anxiety, of doubt.

And these, they're meant to bring us joy. And I don't want to overwhelm you by reading a bunch of them, but just a few of them that came to mind as I was preparing my sermon. Some that speak specifically on joy.

Psalms 16:11 says, You make known to me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. All right? That alone is a great encouraging reminder to have joy.

[16 : 30] Psalm 30, His anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Psalm 68, 3, The righteous shall be glad.

They shall exalt before God. They shall be jubilant with joy. Psalm 23, We all know this one. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Proverbs 3, Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Or Mark 11, 24, Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Philippians 4, My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Or 1 John 1, 9, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And then as we move into Isaiah 49, the Lord says, Sing for joy, O heavens, and exalt, O earth.

[17 : 42] Break forth, O mountains, into singing, for the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted. And those are just a few examples, and that's just really from mostly the Old Testament.

As you look through Scripture, as you meditate on Scripture, there are many that you can dwell on, and let the words of Christ dwell in you richly, so that at any moment, you can rely on those promises, you can overcome anxiety, and you can rest in joy.

So these promises should serve as a reminder of the love, the hope, the joy, and the peace we have as followers of Christ. The more promises we have in our heart to dwell on in times of trial and anxiety, the more reason we have to rejoice always.

So as we continue looking through Paul's words, he continues with a promise about peace. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And this also is reiterated in Romans 15, where Paul says, May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope.

[18 : 56] So I don't want to spend too much time talking about peace, because that's the topic for next week, and Brent is going to preach on peace next week. But it's included in this passage twice.

Peace is part of the solution to always having joy. And so we can't just skip over it. We have to talk about it for a moment. And here we find that it is God who puts peace in our hearts, peace between us and God, right?

It's not always just peace, meaning rest and calm. It's also peace, literally, between us and God. We are no longer at enmity with God. He also gives us peace from anxiety.

And note that it says his peace will guard both your heart and your mind. It's not just peace in your mind or peace in your heart, but it's both.

In Isaiah 26, we read, you keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.

[20 : 03] So from this, we have peace with God through Emmanuel, literally God with us. We have peace. We're no longer at enmity with God. And that alone is the greatest reason to rejoice.

However, more than that, we have peace in our hearts because God guards us. He physically guards us. Rejoice. The peace that overcomes anxiety and brings a lasting joy has come.

So the second point I want to make as we look at verses 8 through 9 are to follow Paul's example. He says it in his own words. We are to follow his example.

And he means follow his example as he follows the example set by Christ. He tells us first to think. I like that when he says think.

It reminds me of my dad always saying to me, think before you act or think before you speak. Right? He tells us to slow down and think. Think about whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, whatever is excellent, whatever is worthy of praise.

[21 : 09] I like how it's translated there with whatever all of those times. It makes you slow down and read it more carefully. Dwell, meditate on the things that are worthy of praise.

Let them be on your mind as a reminder and an encouragement. For me, this is a reminder that sometimes I, sometimes we have to preach the gospel to ourselves.

Sometimes we have to slow down and remember the gospel. When we're living in a fast-paced life in a fast-paced world, sometimes we need to be reminded of the gospel. It's kind of like telling a child to eat their food because there are other less fortunate children who don't have food to eat.

Right? When we tell a child that, we're putting things in perspective. Christ is the propitiation for our sins.

Because of his sacrifice, we gain eternal life. Sometimes we need to be reminded and put in perspective of who we are and what we've received. Sometimes I need to stop looking in the mirror at myself and my anxieties, my discontent, and I need to look to those around me.

[22 : 22] I need to look to the things that are commendable, excellent, worthy of praise. To me, that means looking to the lives of missionaries, pastors, our brothers and sisters in Christ, to Paul, to Peter, to Jesus, to looking to the lives of those who are living out the gospel, living it out in joy, and to put my own life back in perspective, to stop focusing on me, what I need, what I want, and to really see the joy that is in Christ.

When I shift focus from myself to those doing the work of the kingdom and ultimately to Christ crucified and risen, my battles look small. Maybe not all of your battles look small.

Some of you do face mighty battles, but they begin to look smaller in light of God. More importantly, they look like battles as in Psalm 23 that a loving Father can lead us through.

And in that, we rejoice. So Paul is saying to dwell on the things of God, to spend time reading and meditating on scripture, to look to the example set for us, and to think on these things.

What we find from this is that joy is not passive. We can't have joy living passive lives. We find joy when we are actively seeking, following, and obeying God.

[23 : 52] Joy is active. And that is why Paul says to rejoice always. He continues by telling us to practice. Right? He says, practice what you have learned, what you have received and heard and seen in me.

Look to my example as I follow the example of Christ. And so we're called not only to think, but then to practice what we've seen others do. His own life is an example for the Philippians as it is an example for us.

He's forsaken the world's joy, Paul has, as Christ did, because he found a genuine and a lasting joy in Christ. He encourages the Philippians to practice what they've learned, not just the idea or the state of mind of joy, but exercised, practiced mind of rejoicing.

They're to be seeking first the kingdom of God, following and obeying his commands. And we too, today, especially, must actively practice what we've seen lived out by Christ.

we must be obeying the word of God and living a life that depends on him. For myself, I find that without practice, I grow cold, sluggish, and ultimately discontented.

[25 : 06] And that is the enemy of my joy. So the last point I want to make is to rejoice in the Lord's provision as we look at verses 10 through 13.

Paul ends his letter by encouraging the church not to worry about him, but to rejoice in the Lord's provision. He tells them not to let their concerns lead to anxiety and distract them from their joy.

This is kind of interesting if we note at the time that Paul is writing this. He's in jail in Rome. He probably has a lot of concern, a lot of anxiety, but he's writing about joy despite these circumstances.

Interestingly, the Philippians sent Epaphroditus, one of their church members, to Paul to encourage him and to bring him provision while he's in jail. And Epaphroditus himself became deathly ill.

He nearly died from his illness. And the Philippians are worried for him. And so Paul knows that they're worried. And he writes this letter and he knows Epaphroditus is the person to bring the letter rather than Timothy because he wants to encourage the Philippians and show them that Epaphroditus is doing well.

[26 : 31] And he writes to them I have sent Epaphroditus to Philippi with this letter so that in his words now you may rejoice at seeing him again and so that I may be less anxious.

He's anxious because the Philippian church is anxious. And so he sends Epaphroditus to encourage them in their anxiety and also to keep himself from being anxious for them.

Right? He reminds them not to let their concern for him lead to anxiety because they didn't have opportunity to send more aid. They were concerned for him.

And he says don't worry for me. Although I'm in prison and have many practical needs he affirms them with the secret to contentment. He tells them he has the secret. He reminds them of Christ's promise to provide our every need to guard our hearts.

And he's reminded and reminds them to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and that all these other things will be added to them as in Matthew 6. So how do we what do we take away from this?

[27 : 40] What do we learn from this? Well first of all we are to rightfully have concern for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul is not saying as the wording may seem at first that we shouldn't send aid or we shouldn't be concerned.

That's not the point he's making. the point he's making here is that to have genuine concern without faith that God will provide leads to a lack of joy.

And so yes we have concern for our brothers and sisters but we pray with thanksgiving knowing that God will provide. Whatever his answer he will provide.

As in James 1 6 let him ask in faith with no doubting for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. And so although we face many battles we find joy trusting in God and trusting in his promises.

So as Paul ends his letter he next speaks on contentment. He says we are to be content. I, Paul am to be content in every situation.

[28 : 49] And so he's saying that he's learned to be content regardless of his circumstances. Not just joyful but content with what he has. The Lord has tested and tried him and Paul has learned to be content.

No matter what God calls him to Paul will be glad and rejoice. Earlier on in this letter he says 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. And so no matter what God calls Paul to even if it's his death which ultimately it was he will rejoice in God.

We too are to be content in every situation whether God sees fit to provide what we're praying for or to say no he has given us life everlasting.

We don't need anything else. We make our requests known to God with thanksgiving because he is already provided. Indeed contentment as we see in Paul go hand in hand or goes hand in hand with joy.

[30 : 01] We can't rejoice always if we're discontent. Our joy is to be unshakable founded on the unshakable rock of God not on the shakable circumstances of our life or the world around us.

So lastly Paul says he finds strength in Christ. I can do all things this is one of the promises many of us probably know in our hearts somewhere.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. And so it is Christ in Paul who strengthens him to do all things whether in wealth or poverty famine or plenty as he says to Timothy I thank him who has given me strength Christ Jesus our Lord because he judged me faithful appointing me to his service.

And so we see that Paul finds his strength in Christ who is the example he's looking to. If we look back in Philippians 2 Paul says Christ who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

So it is Christ that gives us strength as he did Paul no matter how much excess or lack we have no matter our circumstances to count it all joy and to remain focused on him and indeed in both circumstances as Paul is saying whether we have excess or lack whether we have plenty or famine we are to be content in both circumstances indeed when we are not content when we are tempted to focus on our circumstances when we become distracted by our circumstances and when we rely on our own strength that's when we lose sight of our joy so in closing my conclusion how do we complete our joy reflecting on Philippians 4 what is the secret to joy to rejoice always so I know I covered a lot of examples so let's summarize them first we are to overcome anxiety by the power of God who guards our hearts and our minds second we are to keep our minds on

[32 : 33] God on his promises we are to think reflect meditate on whatever is lovely commendable and excellent we are to practice these things to live them out and to have the peace of God in our hearts we must look past the circumstances of this life and focus on the promises of God and finally in every circumstance we are to find strength in Christ and rejoice so what does that mean as followers of Christ we are to rejoice always why is this so important that we rejoice always well our rejoicing is part of our witness as Christians think about what it looks like to this world around us when we rejoice despite our circumstances think about the first time you read the story of Job or David what that looked like and how that in your life lived out looks to the world around you it is our witness to have joy always especially in this season how much different can we be with a little bit of joy in the world that's in its chaos so as we close

I want to read Philippians 2 1 through 5 Christ is our example of humility contentment and joy if there is any encouragement in Christ any comfort from love any participation in the spirit any affection and sympathy complete my joy by being of the same mind having the same love being in full accord and of one mind do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves let each of you look not only to his own interest but also to the interest of others having this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus let's pray father thank you for this time to study your word to study the word joy what it means to rejoice always and I pray that as we