

Series: Side by Side
Message Title: ***The Principle of Praise***
Date: Sunday, February 4, 2018
Scripture: Various passages from Philippians
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Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

I want us to begin with a confession today. True or false? "I've already griped about something today."

Do you feel eyes looking at you? I have a feeling I have a room full of first class complainers!

"The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works." —Augustine

"Confess your faults to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

We live in a world often given to venting, griping and complaining. More people find life annoying than those who live life enjoying it.

Why? Problems, frustrations, disappointments, expectations, demands, delays, circumstances,

bad experiences. Above all, they live in a sad world—even sadder future—because there is no hope without Christ!

As we open the pages of the book of Philippians, we immediately meet expressions and admonitions of a man who radiated contagious joy. Paul urged the first century and 21st century believers to choose joy in life. You could call this an “Epistle of Joy.” The Apostle Paul was not at some beach house when he wrote Philippians, but imprisoned in Rome. The chains on his body did not dampen the sails hoisted in his spirit.

Paul’s instruction is best summarized in Philippians 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.”

Let’s memorize that today! When are we to rejoice? Always and again!

The little three-letter word, *joy*, is at the heart of everything Paul wrote to the Philippian church. What is joy?

“Joy is that serene happiness, which is the result of conscious union with God and good

men, of conscious possession of eternal life... and which raises us above pain and sorrow and remorse." —Alfred Plummer

That sounds great for the church, but the truth is there are many joy-stealers in life. Let's name a few:

- **Circumstances**—standing where you are, but not wanting or understanding why or how you got there.
- **People**—There is a cynical little statement that goes around in pastors' circles: "The ministry would be great if it weren't for the people." (I'm kidding!) However, people create and cause many of our problems in life, especially people we love.
- **Things**—So many things cause us to lose our joy.

There is a story about Abraham Lincoln. He was walking down the street with two of his sons as the sons were crying and complaining. A friend passed by and said "What's the matter, boys?" Lincoln replied, "The same thing that is wrong with the whole world... I have three walnuts and each of the boys wants two!"

- **Anxiety/Worry**—So many of the physical, emotional and spiritual issues and concerns of life are complicated because of a mindset of anxiety rather than joy.

Much of what we see in this Book is a mindset, a life view, a perspective and the practice of a principle that changes us from the natural view to the spiritual view of life—moving from problems to praise. This is at the core of true worship.

“Worship is the total energy of my life focused on the glory of God in all things.”

Last week, we said worship is first an attitude, then an activity. The attitude is one focused on the worth of Christ, work of Christ and pursuing the will of Christ above all things in life.

...“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11 ESV).

Paul concludes (not just his prayer for the Philippian church, but the entire opening portion of the letter) with glory and praise! Why?

“God is glorified in His people when we offer praise in the midst of problems and pain.”

Today, I want to focus our attention on the principle of praise.

What is a principle? *A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.*

- **Praise is both a verb** (a word used to describe action) **and a noun** (a word used to describe people, places or things).

- **Praise is the primary activity of worship.**

- **Praise is perspective on any state of being in my life.**

“Praise of God is a frequent theme in the Psalms, the Hebrew title of which is *Praises*. Yet praise is a theme that pervades the whole of Scripture. Words that are often used as synonyms or in parallel with praise, and so help point to its meaning, are *bless, exalt, extol, glorify, magnify, thank, and confess*. To praise God is to call attention to His glory.”

—Baker Bible Dictionary

For Paul, it was an awareness of the sovereignty of God, the sufficiency of Christ and the security of his life by the Holy Spirit that caused him to give praise *always* and *in all things*.



Praise is Rooted in Who God is and Not Where I am in Life

Throughout this Book (but even more in the background to this entire story), there is an activity of joy expressed through praise to God.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas go to Philippi and end up in jail, but what were they doing in jail?

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened” (Acts 16:25-26 ESV).

Remember our verse today? “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4 ESV).

For the man who says, “For to me to live is Christ and die is gain,” joy is the outworking of such an attitude of worship—worship expressed in praise to God even in the midst of experience and circumstance that would make most people grip! Joy is not about getting what you want in life, but being grateful for all you have in Christ!

“... God our Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2 ESV).

He is **faithful**—who does not abandon us.

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6 ESV).

He is **sacrificial**—who gave His best for us.

“Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11 ESV).

He is **protective**—who gives His people peace

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7 ESV).

He is **good**—who supplies our needs.

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19 ESV).

Praise is Reinforced Through Fellowship With One Another

One of the reasons you need to gather in church (and not simply listen to sermons) is in order to be prompted toward joy through fellow believers.

Go back to the opening portion of Philippians:

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now... Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:3-5, 27 ESV).

Paul's joy was focused on the fact that *we are better together*.

And in Paul's prayer (Philippians 1:9-11), he made it clear he wanted them to excel in their faith being, "filled with the fruits of righteousness through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, 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.

There was joy in a partnership of life that brought praise and glory to God" (Philippians 1:9-11 ESV).

Many of you know I just returned from a trip to South Africa. When we take mission trips like these, we always take a day to refresh and get acclimated to the new time before we begin our work. We took a day to go on a safari. One of the biggest points the guide makes is that predators always hunt prey that are isolated from their herd. They are unprotected, vulnerable, sometimes sickly.

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8 ESV).

We need the fellowship of encouragement and comfort with other believers to keep us strong and steadfast in the faith.

"So 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" (Philippians 2:1-2 ESV).

Paul was pointing to the need for a symphony of souls standing, sharing and supporting together. Because life has so many places where we can lose our joy, we need to rekindle joy through the fellowship of worship. It is like a fire. When the logs are together in a fireplace, they can create a good, robust fire. But once the logs are separated, they are reduced to ambers, and burn out.

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27 ESV).

Praise is Recognition that God Works Grace and Glory Through Our Pain

The church in Philippi was not trouble free; it was burden-laden—so many challenges for the new converts to faith.

“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake, engaged

in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (Philippians 1:29-30 ESV).

But in their trial, Paul wanted to make it known that his trial had been for good.

"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... Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. 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" (Philippians 1:12-14,18b-21 ESV).

Paul said (paraphrased), "I am living proof of God's grace and glory through suffering."

To this end, Paul reinforces hope toward joy.

Are you hurting today? If so, you have a reason to gripe and complain by every human standard, but because of who God is and because of who your brothers and sisters are, you can face pain with praise. Pride is the opposite of praise. Pride is self-focused and self-entitled, but praise is humble and grateful.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:6-11 ESV).

One of the lingering impacts of any mission trip is the recognition of how many suffer around the world and how often my suffering cannot compare to the sufferings of others. Seeing the pain of others helps us to get a grip on the pain of our lives and turns us from pride to praise.

Praise is the Reliance of Faith Turned Inside Out

When we offer praise to God, we are simply expressing what we believe inwardly. This is why Paul repeatedly expressed his joy in the Lord although his journey through life was hard.

The attitude and the experience don't match up, but faith changes how we see and respond in life. Forcing praise when we want to complain is a way we battle the prevailing spirit of failure in our world.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 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” (Philippians 4:4-7 ESV).

“Guard” in this passage is like a military guard posted for security.

This is not something in which we cannot comprehend, but something we cannot manufacture or explain in the way God works in the hearts of His people—we choose joy.

2 Chronicles 20 is one of my favorite Old Testament stories:

20:1-2 Approaching armies—impending doom

20:3 Faith Activated

20:7 Reviewed God’s promise—Abraham

20:12 Confessed his vulnerability

“O our God, will You not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You” (2 Chronicles 20:12 ESV).

- 20:18 Jehoshaphat worshiped
20:21-22 God moved in and the armies fell
 down, and grace and glory
 abounded through the practice of
 praise!
20:25 God provided abundantly where
 the people feared great adversity.

This is the principle of praise in battle and it is a principle for our practice as we live to worship and bring glory to the name of our great God.

How's your joy? George Mueller, evangelist and director of the Ashley Down Orphanage in Bristol, England, cared for 10,024 orphans in his lifetime and established 117 schools, offering Christian education for 120,000 children. He said this:

"The first great and primary business... every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord."
—George Mueller