

Victory of the Lamb // June 27-28, 2020 // Ben Sadler
Finding Joy series // Theme: The Joy of Teamwork

Philippians 1:1-11

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

When I was a young boy, I used to have terrible nightmares. For a while, I was afraid to go to sleep at night because I was so scared. My parents told me one thing that seemed to help. They said, "Your bad dreams are just your thoughts. So try and think about something really positive and it will change what you dream about." So I thought of the most positive thing I could think of, playing with my dog Ginger. I would picture her running through an open field with her tongue hanging out. And for a while these positive thoughts help stop my nightmares.

This is what psychologists call "Cognitive Behavioral therapy", replacing bad thoughts with good thoughts.

In the Harry Potter series, JK Rowling had characters called "dementors" that were supposed to personify feelings of dread and sadness. And the only way to keep the dementors from sucking the joy of life from your body was through a spell called a "Patronus". To cast the Patronus spell, a person needed to have a completely joyful and positive thought and the dementors would vanish away.

That's all very good advice. But more and more it seems like our nightmares are becoming realities. And it is getting harder and harder to find joy. We have been social distancing and isolated for more than 3 months. And more recently our country has become more social and racially divided than ever. Isolation and division are like dementors swooping into our country.

That's why I'm looking forward to this sermon series **Finding Joy**. In this series we will be walking with Paul's letter to the Philippians. In this letter Paul talks about how he finds joy no matter what the circumstance. So let's dive in and see if we can learn how we can find joy even in our situation.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at **Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

³ I **thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with **joy** ⁵ because of your **partnership** in the **gospel** from the first day until now... (Philippians 1:1-5)**

Paul begins this letter with a prayer of thanksgiving to God. What could Paul possibly be thankful for in prison? Paul was thankful to God, in fact, he always prays with JOY. Why? What fills Paul with such joy?

Because the Philippians are partners with him in the Gospel. They share in this story of good news together.

Well, who was the Philippian congregation? We know of at least two of them. Lydia, a wealthy business owner from Thyatira. And a Roman Jailer. We can read their back stories in Acts 16. In Acts 16 we hear that Paul has a vision that he is supposed to go to Macedonia to share the gospel. So he goes there and meets a woman named Lydia. It says that God opens her heart to respond to Paul's message. And not only did she open her heart, but then she opened her home to Paul, and shared a meal with him.

Later, Paul finds himself in prison in Philippi. God sends an earthquake and his chains fall off. The Jailer comes down to see the jail cells unlocked and he panics and is about to kill himself. But Paul says don't hurt yourself we are all here. Then the Jailer asks, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul told him to believe in Jesus and he would be saved. God opened the jailer's heart, and then the Jailer opened his home for Paul to come in. The jailer even washed his wounds.

Not only that, but when the congregation in Philippi heard that Paul was in prison, the Lord moved them to send Epaphroditus with a gift for Paul to take care of his needs. So while he was in prison he was taken care of. He saw that he was not alone. But that his brothers and sisters in the Lord were still his partners in the gospel.

1. God is gathering this group around the Gospel.

Paul says, **...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:5)** Paul was convinced that God had more for the Philippians to do. Yes, God brought people like Lydia and the Jailer to faith. But he was not done with them yet. He had more work for them to complete together.

God's not done with you yet. He has more work for us to do together. He is calling us to the joy of partnering with God and partnering with each other to further his kingdom. And as we fulfill this work, we will be filled with joy.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:7-8)

Paul acknowledges that they are not together like he wished they were. He wants to be there in Philippi with his brothers and sisters. But he still carries them in his heart. And so even if he is in chains or whether he is out hitting the streets, he believes that he will continue to share in God's grace with the people.

We are not in the circumstances that we were hoping for. I think most of us just want life to go back to what it was like in 2019. But regardless of the circumstances, look at what God is doing. He is still bringing us together Through this pandemic and in the middle of all the division and anger and hatred in our nation, we can feel isolated and hopeless. But look at how many people are joining you online! Those are gifts of God to you all. God is bringing together this group of partners in the gospel. You who are here in person. Look around. Look what God is still doing! He is gathering a group of partners in the gospel!

We are different in so many ways, but God is bringing us together around his story. His story of how he created a good world. And how we walked away from him. But then how he chose Israel and brought a savior into the world through the nation of Israel. How that Savior lived, died and rose, and now is king and is coming back again. God is bringing together around that story.

Because God is gathering a group together around the gospel, what does he want us to do? Paul has another prayer. He began praying to God about the Philippians. Now he wants to pray for them. And what is his prayer?

⁹ And this is my prayer: that **your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes **through Jesus Christ**—to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)**

God has brought them together, to partner with him and his word. They have already showed love for Paul, welcoming him into their homes and sending him a gift. And they are known for loving each other. But he prays that they would grow more and more in their love for each other through Jesus Christ.

And that is my prayer for all of us. Right now, our world is so divided. There is so much rage and hatred and division. Paul prayed that there would be love for one another. And that's what I pray for us. I pray that we would love one another more deeply. That we would create deeper friendships and deeper fellowship in our congregation. And also with our community. We might be a friendly church, but now let's continue to be vulnerable enough to be a church of friends.

Here is your takeaway point:

2. Grow your commitment to one another.

Commit to loving the people that God places in your path. God placed Lydia and the jailer in his path and because of the gospel, they became devoted to each other. God has placed you in this congregation. Let's be more devoted to one another. God has placed you in your community. Let's, with God's help, be devoted to our neighbors.

I think one reason that I had nightmares, is that this was the only time of the day when I felt completely alone. I was alone in my bedroom. Alone by myself. And I could make sense of reality. One of the hardest things about being a Christian is the feeling that we are all alone. But look around. We are not alone. These are our partners in the gospel. These people sitting next to you and the people in the chatroom online, these are your partners in the gospel. You are not alone. Thank you, God for the joy of all these partners in the gospel. Amen.