

I. Intro:

A. Good morning. Great to see you. It's been a few weeks. A lot has been going on – mostly good.

1. Renew / LLI / Digital / Staff doing good things. Very talented. / Sheri and I got a bit of time as a grandparents – not enough.
2. I did not preach during the last three weeks.
3. Fraternity brothers – who have long congratulated me on landing a job where I only work one hour a week – and who watch the services, have been dissing me for not even working one hour a week.
4. Sheri has fielded some questions about my health.
5. And I had two people say they were convinced that I stepped up to pray for Alex and Michelle last week that I was stepping up to announce my retirement.

B. No. No. No. My health is fine and I am giving no thought to retirement. I have been working to finish the book. Alas, I am a slow writer.

1. I was supposed to have it done three months ago. I have tried noting that JRR Tolkien was 17 years late turning in *The Lord of the Rings* to the publisher. Remarkably, no one found that helpful or funny. They did point out that I was not Tolkien.
2. By the way, when people ask about my retirement plans. I am never sure if people are wanting me to retire. So, not sure if this is good news or bad in your world, but .

II. So, anyway, my name is Mike. And today we are in Philippians 4, and the topic is joy – which, as Lewis noted, “is the serious business of heaven.”

A. This is week three of our four-week Advent series.

B. In January we will start in with twenty-week series on John. That will be followed by a shorter series on Isaiah.

C. At the moment, we are walking through Advent - which is the time in the church calendar set aside to focus on the arrival of Christ.

D. There are all kinds of calendars out there that shape our lives. These are moral documents The seasons do as well, but on top of that we choose who and how the cadence of our lives will be dictated.

1. There are academic calendars and work calendars.
2. Sports schedules – with the sports we play and the sport's we watch. Super Bowl Sunday is now a holiday. In some parts of the country, it's the Sunday of Memorial Day – which is The Indy 500, or the start of the hunting season.
3. There are other national holidays: President's Day, the fourth of July, MLK holiday, Veterans Day and Memorial Day.
4. There are other nationally dictated events: elections and Tax Day
5. Increasingly there are consumer holidays: it's Prime Day, it's Black Friday, it's Cyber Monday.
6. And there are entertainment holidays: it's the Grammys; the new season for XYZ TV Show

E. There are lots of calendars out there – all of which shape us. Shape our soul. They are moral documents. They compete with each other.

1. The church has long had one. Over a thousand years ago it was decided that it would be best for Christ followers to go through all the big events in Christ's life every year. The invasion of the incarnation. The gracious – and all-changing sacrificial and substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. The glorious and triumphal resurrection

2. So, every year, the calendar starts with Advent – it starts on the Sunday closest to Nov. 30th – with the announcement of the angel that Mary was going to give birth to the Messiah.

a) This period of four weeks represents her nine-month pregnancy

b) And it is a period of waiting.

c) It is supposed to be dark – capturing the long period of waiting for the Messiah and the Roman oppression of the Jews and our desperate situation without Christ.

(1) As we've discussed, Israel's people had been enduring 400 years of silence from God — four desolate centuries with no Hebrew prophet to bring a fresh word of revelation, encouragement or reassurance that the plan is still in place.

(2) Meanwhile, Rome is grinding Israel under her imperial heel. They are being humiliated and oppressed.

(3) To add insult to injury, Julius Caesar taxes his distant Jewish subjects mercilessly for the privilege of his rough “protection.”— Furthermore, the guy is a megalomaniac with a divinity complex:— Rome's pagan dictator insists that his subjects worship him.

(4) Given this predicament, you can understand why Jews are not happy.

3. The four weeks are represented by four candles – which stand for Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

F. Advent is four-week segment of the church calendar.

G. And each of the four weeks have a theme – which are captured by the four candles. Today's theme is joy.

III. Which, of course, is a big theme in the Bible.

A. Joy is an attribute of God. He is the most joyful being in the universe.

B. Joy is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit

C. Joy is one of the reasons Jesus showed up the first time. In John 15:11, he says that **He came so that His joy may be in us and so that our joy may be full.**

D. Joy is a big theme.

IV. Today our text is Philippians 4:4

A. Paul is writing from a prison cell in Rome to his friends in Philippi. A group of young believers in a small house church who are a bit upset that their friend and spiritual leader is in prison.

B. His message to them is: be joyful. Specifically, he says,

1. **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

C. I want to focus on verse 4: **Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say Rejoice.**

V. Under the heading of Joy 101 there are a few things to note: some basic and non-controversial points.

A. First, we all want to be happy.

1. Two weeks ago I was at a conference in which Curt Thompson spoke. He is a thoughtful psychiatrist, Christ follower, and author of three books – most famously one on shame. His latest is on desire. And he spends a lot of time talking about beauty -

2. It is not a quick read but it is helping me see myself a bit more objectively – which is not always a fun thing. He makes much of the fact that we do not know what we want. But, I do think I can still say, we all want to be happy.

B. Second, happiness and joy are not exactly the same thing.

1. We didn't light the happy candle this morning. And Paul didn't sing Bobby McFerrin's late 80s tune, "Don't worry. Be happy." He said "rejoice in the Lord"

2. Happiness is understood to be more circumstantial and superficial; whereas joy is more spiritual and transcendent. Happiness is more of an emotion and joy is more of a character quality or a decision or even a gift from God.

3. One of the ways we see them as being different is that joy and grief are not mutually exclusive whereas happiness and grief are.

a) Paul will claim to be full of joy while in prison.

b) Jesus is known as a being joyful even as passages like Isaiah 53 describe him as the suffering servant.

4. Biblically speaking, this distinction is harder to make than I previously thought.

a) There are different words in the Greek. Happy is *eudaemonia* and joy is *charis*.

b) But much depends on context. So I'm going to use them interchangeably today.

5. There are some differences, but if this end of the spectrum is where we put words like: depressed, morose, angry and frustrated, then we want to be at the other end, where words like happy and joyful collect. Everyone wants to be happy

C. It is worth noting that we spend a lot of time and energy pursuing happiness and joy. We do things we think will make us happy.

1. Some think pleasure is the way to happiness – we call them hedonists. They focus on wine and women and song. It doesn't work. It sets up the hedonic treadmill. We just need more to be baseline happy. That is why billionaires are not any happier than others.

2. Many people come to believe that other things – besides pleasure – will bring them joy: money, power and fame are popular. Some give these no thought. Other's realize that these are not ultimate goals. We do not want power or money alone, we want them because we think they will make us happy. If we thought those things would make us miserable we would not want them.
 3. Some think happiness comes through self-mastery – perhaps by killing desire.
 4. Some think drugs will make them happy – or at least deaden the pain of their lack of joy.
 5. My third point is, we tend to do what we think will make us happy.
- D. Finally, point four: It is worth stating that joy is illusive. It is worth noting that a lot of people who are not happy or joyful.
1. Consequently, happiness studies are now a big business
 2. You can read all kinds of books on this.
 3. There are all kinds of studies – charts and graphs about which countries are happiest. Which professions make people happy.
 4. A few years ago, Arthur Brooks – who I have read for about ten years – became a professor at HBS - And he came out with [this chart](#).
- E. We could spend a lot of time here thinking about what we think will make us happy – what we want.

VI. With these things in place, I want to reflect on Paul's command in Philippians 4. **Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.**

- A. Observation # 1 – Everyone wants to be happy
- B. Obs # 2 – There is some daylight between happiness and joy, but they are related.
- C. Observation 3, people do what they think will make them happy.
- D. But, Observation 4 – a lot of people are not happy.
- E. What I want you to see is that, writing from prison, Paul commands us to be joyful in the Lord. **“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say Rejoice.”**

VII. Is this realistic? To be joyful at this moment?

- A. Given inflation, Putin, Xi,
- B. Given the failures of so much of public life. Last week I was in Portland - .
- C. Is joy possible given the collapse of cities.
- D. Is it possible given the normal assaults of life in a broken world.
 1. In the last few months I have had some people close to me suffer some serious health or professional set backs.

VIII. So:

- A. Writing from prison – where most people are not happy. They are not writing books about joy, they are writing appeals to get out of prison.
- B. But, writing from prison – indeed, a first century Roman prison, where Paul could count on the basics we expect – little things like food, basic sanitation, anything resembling privacy or basic human rights.

- C. Paul commands – he does not suggest or encourage. He uses the imperative mode to command that we rejoice.
- D. This flies in the face of a lot of modern thinking. You can't tell me how to feel.
1. We are up for commands from God to pray, serve, give, help, fast – things like that. But rejoice? Be joyful?
 2. Yes. We are told to tell our heart to rejoice.
- E. Paul commands his readers (us) to be joyful...in the Lord...at all times. (Not in all things)
- IX. I think this passage should lead us to ask, “What are we missing?”
- A. Paul is the last person we'd expect to be a spokesperson for happy. If you look at the magazine racks you don't find poor, unattractive middle-aged men in questionable health writing from prison and offering advice about how to be happy.
- B. What we generally have are 30-year-old celebrities – who are famously good looking and who make more money a year than the GDP of some countries. People who are impossibly thin and have washboard abs and good hair and great teeth and big contracts – telling us about joy.
- X. What gives? Let me highlight three things for you – and me.
- A. God is joyful. I think it's very fair to argue that He is the most joyful being anywhere.
1. In Psalm 116:11 we are told that: **in God's presence there is fullness of joy.**
 2. In Zephaniah 3 we are told that our God is “**mighty to save and that He rejoices over us with singing.** God rejoices over us...singing. God, full of joy, rejoices over us singing.
 3. In Luke 15 we are told that **the angels in his presence rejoice** when someone comes to faith
 4. In Luke 10 we are told that Jesus – who showed up at weddings and parties – was full of joy through the Holy Spirit
- B. One: God is joyful. Two: God wants us to be joyful.
1. We are his children. He wants us to share in his joy.
 2. And though we have made a mess of things, He has made provision for us.
 - a) He has promised us that He has plans to perfect us and to provide for us and to bring us into His presence.
 - b) And he has showered us with things to enjoy: Food, Friends, Beauty, Music, Love, Laughter
 - c) And He does not want to see us get all worked up about things that really do not matter.
- C. And three: God commands us to be joyful.
- XI. But.... A command?
- A. Have you ever tried to force your kids to have fun? We used to. We would occasionally announce – on Friday we are having forced family fun. We are going to do something together. You will be seen with us in public. And you will enjoy it.

1. And sometimes it worked. Although when it did, I was inclined to believe that the reason they were having fun was because what we are doing is fun and not because we ordered them to be happy.
- B. I can understand that you still wonder: can we be ordered to rejoice? Yes. We are commanded to be joyful.
1. That's what we find in Philippians 4 and there are other commands to rejoice in the Book as well. For instance, in Psalm 33:1-3 we are told to:
 2. **Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy.**
 3. So, the command can be made.
- C. The question is: does it work? And the answer is, yes it does.
1. As I noted, there are all sorts of studies out there about happiness
 - a) How to maximize it
 - b) What to do to get it
 - c) Which countries has the highest happiness quotient
 - d) How much money you need to make to be happy
 - e) The happiest places to live in the US
 2. And in these studies they explored the question, can we do something that will make us happy. It turns out, the simple act of writing out happy thoughts, Or counting your blessings can put you in a better mood
 3. I remember a few years ago getting hung up in the Seattle Airport when I was trying to fly home.
 - a) We have flown up past Bellingham and circled for about an hour but it was foggy and we couldn't land
 - b) So we headed back to Seattle – a two hour car drive away
 4. And when we got there – at 2:00 A.M. – we were told that a bus had been ordered and they were trying to wake a driver and we were going to be bussed home, arriving at about 5:00 AM
 5. No one was in a happy place.
 6. And then this guy jumped up and said – it's 2:00 AM in a dark and closed terminal – Hey, everybody, smile. Come on. We can be happy. Let's have a joke, who knows a good joke.
 - a) And he turns to the stewardess and he says, "If you can get me some coffee and donuts I will be sure that we are all happy when you get back.
 7. I looked at this guy and I thought, buddy, you have got to be kidding.
 8. And then he launches into this:
 - a) Here is why you should be in a good mood speech
 - b) And despite my commitment to remain in a bad mood, it worked.
- D. Here's the key point: We have been commanded to rejoice in the Lord. It can be done.
- E. We can be filled with joy – and should be as we grow in Christ.
1. To the extent that we are being conformed to the image of Christ.
 2. To the extent that we are yielding our lives to the Holy Spirit

3. To the extent that we are obeying the commands that we find in this book, we will experience joy
 - a) Peace
 - F. It may be from a prison cell
 1. It may be in the midst of a lot of trying circumstances – b/c this is a fallen world.
 - G. But joy, even in the midst of pain, is possible when we rejoice in the Lord.
- XII. May I give you an assignment?. Again? Count our blessings.
- A. Include your spiritual blessings
 - B. Name them one by one.
 - C. And add the things you might be moving too fast to appreciate:
 1. A child's laugh.
 2. A good meal.
 3. A quiet moment.
 4. Time with friends.
 5. An entertaining book.
 - D. There are a number of people who do not think we should be joyful. Or that no alert person can be.