

“All for Your Joy”

Isaiah 12:1-6 • 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11

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When you think about your life, the things you do every day, every week, would you say that your life is defined by joy or something else. It seems to me that many people today are desperately searching for joy but rarely finding it. In fact, this search for joy has become big business. If you search the book section of Amazon for the word “joy,” you will get over 50,000 books. There’s classics like *The Joy of Cooking*, and more recent titles like *The Joy of Photoshop*, and *The Joy of Basketball*. Maybe you would like this one: *The Joy of Being Selfish*. Of course, after you’ve finished that one you may find yourself a little lonely so you will probably need to read *The Joy of Missing Out: Live More By Doing Less*. Many of the books about joy are self-help books meant to help you create your own joy. These have titles like *Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to Happiness*, and *40 Days to a Joy Filled Life*.

The thing is, despite what the self-help books want you to believe, you probably won’t find real joy simply by trying harder. So the question for us today is “where does true joy come from?” As we make our way into chapter 2 of Second Corinthians, there are two words that stand out in this passage – pain and joy. Paul writes, “For I made up my mind not to make another *painful* visit to you. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained?” He goes on to say that he loves them so much that their pain is his pain and their joy is his joy.

We don’t have a lot of details about the issue that Paul is addressing. We know from First Corinthians that there were some serious issues in the church in Corinth. The church was divided into factions who were fighting with each other. On Paul’s previous visit he had to rebuke some of the leaders in the church for their behavior. They responded by calling Paul’s apostleship into question. This is why he refers to it as a painful visit. Not only was it

painful for the Corinthians, but it was equally painful for Paul. If you are a parent you have probably experienced the pain that comes from having to discipline your child. And if you don’t discipline your child you will experience more pain later on.

As we talked about last week, Paul had planned to visit Corinth at least two more times as he travelled. The reason is that he felt a special bond with the church there. So for someone to question his apostleship was extremely painful. Apparently that was made worse because the church didn’t do anything about the person making the false accusations. At least not at first. Paul agonized over the situation and decided that the best thing for the Corinthian church would be for him not to visit again but instead to write a letter about the situation. We don’t know what that letter said. It has not survived but I’m sure it was very emotional, much like Second Corinthians is.

Here Paul acknowledges the pain that his previous visit and previous letter caused them and him. But he’s not really apologizing because he wants them to see that the pain they felt was actually for their benefit. They repented of their errors. Their relationship with Paul was restored and the result is that they experienced joy. Paul says that everything he did was for the Corinthian Christians’ joy. It was to spare them pain that he didn’t visit in person again. He says he wrote the letter the way he did so that when he does visit it won’t be painful but instead they can all rejoice.

When we get to verse 5 we learn that the Corinthian Christians did eventually deal with the person who had questioned Paul’s authority. In fact, they had gone too far in their punishment. Paul expresses his love for the offending person and reminds the church of their love for him as well. They need to forgive and comfort the man. The goal of any kind of

church discipline should always be restoration, bringing the person back into the family of faith so that they can all experience joy.

So that brings us back to how we experience joy. Too often we confuse joy with happiness. Happiness is the product of our circumstances. If things are going well, we may be happy. We say, "If I could just get that new car or that new job, then I'd be happy." But that kind of happiness is fleeting. It won't last. Joy, on the other hand, is not something we create ourselves. Joy is our response to God's activity in our lives and in the world. Joy is actually the result of love – God's love. Joy comes from God's salvation. Isaiah 12 contains a couple of prophecies that are also songs of praise. Isaiah is filled with joy because of God's salvation that will come through Jesus. Verse 3 says, "With *joy* you will draw water from the wells of salvation." And in verse 6 he says, "Shout, and sing for joy...for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

Now I want to give you the secret to experiencing real joy. Some of you may have heard this before but I think you're going to want to write this down because it will save you a lot of money on self-help books about making joy. Ready? The secret to joy is JOY. J-O-Y. That stands for Jesus, Others, and You. When you put your priorities in this order you unlock the secret to joy regardless of your happiness. Let's look at each of these.

The first thing to understand about joy is that it's the result of being loved by Jesus. When His undeserved grace and forgiveness are finally able to penetrate through the thick layers of self-doubt that we create, we begin to feel the surge of joy. Of course this is not easy for us. We find it difficult to let Christ love us and change us. For some of us, it's hard to imagine that God could possibly love us in spite of all the things we've done wrong.

Or we try to earn God's favor. We feel like if we can just *do* the right things or at least *think* the right thoughts, then we deserve God's favor. But when we think that way we completely miss

the meaning of grace. The last thing we want from God is what we deserve. That's where grace comes in. Grace is unmerited favor. In other words, grace means we get something we don't deserve at all – namely salvation. The Bible tells us to make Jesus the number one priority in our lives. That's hard. It's hard because it means that whatever we've made most important has to move. It's usually ourselves. You have to get off the throne of your life and let Jesus take His rightful place.

So if the first key to unlocking joy in your life is Jesus, the second key is "others." Romans 12:3 says, "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think." Joy is the result of love. Real love is not a feeling or an emotion. Real love is an act of the will. What Jesus demonstrated for us is that true love involves sacrifice. To love someone you must put that person's needs and interests ahead of your own. That's how it works in marriage and in friendship and in the church.

That brings us to *you*. In Luke 6 Jesus said, "forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

If you love Jesus enough to put Him first in your life, and love other people enough to put serving them second, you will find that you have more joy by being in third place than you would have by trying to take care of yourself first. That's because love and joy can't be bought and it can't be made. The irony is that the more you try to make yourself love or have joy, the less of each you will have because you will be focused on what you don't have. But the more you sacrificially love and give, the more love and joy you will experience. That's what it means to stand firm in your faith.

Amen.