Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Elements of Joy, Part 2
Scripture: Philippians 1:6
Code: 50-3

We return this morning to our study of Philippians, so I invite you to take your Bible, if you will, and open to Philippians chapter 1. We are examining verses 3 through 8. We started last week, we'll finish next week, so this will be part 2 of what will turn out to be a three-part study. Let me read our text to you. Philippians chapter 1, beginning in verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, Since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

That's a joyous beginning to a wonderful epistle. After his opening salutation in verses 1 and 2, in which he identified himself and those to whom he wrote, the apostle Paul speaks about his joy. This has been called the epistle of joy, and it is called such because the expression of joy and rejoicing fills these brief four chapters. The apostle Paul knew the fullness of Holy Spirit-given joy, something that every believer should know and experience; but not all do. Before we dig into this passage, let me take you back, back many centuries, many books, to Psalm 42. I want to show you a man in distress, a man in depression, a man who knew he ought to have joy, but couldn't seem to grasp it.

Some suggest to us that the writer of Psalm 42 and 43 is David, and it has been suggested that David is writing during his exile, when he had to leave Jerusalem for his own life, because his son Absalom was leading a rebellion against him to usurp his throne. That might be the case, we cannot be certain. We do know this, that whoever wrote the Psalm was a depressed person, somewhat despairing. At the same time knowing that that wasn't the right way to be, he couldn't seem to crawl out of the pit that he was in. He introduces us to his depression in the first four verses of Psalm 42.

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go along with the throng and lead them in the procession to the house of God, With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival."

Now, there's a picture of sorrow, sadness, loneliness, alienation, separation. It all adds up to a depressed state, a state of despair. And what are the factors? Well, first of all, there was an unsatisfied longing for God. In writing this, the psalmist somehow feels cut off from God. And like a thirsty deer pants for the water brook, so his soul pants for God, his soul thirsts for God, for the living God. And he says, "When shall I come and appear before God?" The sense of loneliness, the sense of alienation, and he has an intense desire to be near God. He has an intense desire for God to come and deliver him from his present state. And so he is dealing with the unsatisfied longing for God. He feels alone. He feels as if God has abandoned him, as if God is not around, and wonders how long he'll have to wait before God finally shows up.

It's a pretty universal way to define people's sadness and depression. They feel separated from God, like God doesn't care and God's not around, and something in them thirsts desperately for the presence and intimacy of God who can deliver. And then also, he is dealing with the depressing sadness and loneliness that he feels in his own heart, which is intensified by his enemies. There he is, in verse 3, day and night feeding on his own tears, as they run down across his lips into his own mouth, and in the midst of his sadness, his enemies taunting, "Where is your God?" As if to rub in the indifference of God, as if to rub in the impotence of God, taunting him with the idea that either God is not able, or he is not worthy of God's attention. God has abandoned him. And he tends to feel that way, because he can't see any prospect of divine deliverance on the horizon. So he's dealing with an unsatisfied longing for God, a sense of aloneness, compounded by the reproach of his enemies.

And the third thing that compels his sadness is he remembers his privileges lost. He says in verse 4, "I remember, I pour out my soul within me, I used to go along with the throng. I used to be a part of the fellowship, I used to lead them in procession to the house of God, with the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival." He was out of Jerusalem, and away from the city, and away from the people, and there wasn't any time to worship and fellowship, to be in a festival, to enjoy what he had once enjoyed so greatly. His sadness, then, comes out of his circumstances. He is alone. He is being reproached by his enemies. And he is dispossessed from his people and his land, and in that situation he is sad. He is depressed.

But I want you to notice how he reacts to his depression with self-interrogation in verse 5. Look at it. This is honest. He speaks to his own heart, "Why are you in despair, O my soul?" As if to say, "Cut that out. Why are you acting like this? Why are you despairing? And why have you become disturbed within me?" It's almost as if he is conversing with his soul that is another entity. Why are you doing this? "Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence." And so this little soliloquy becomes very important, as he asks himself, "Why are you doing this?" As if to say there's no reason for this – there's no reason for this, you know God hasn't left you alone, you know your enemies are wrong, God is powerful and God is concerned. You know your privileges will be restored, you will worship again, you will fellowship again. Why are you doing this? Why are you behaving like this?

Have you ever had such a process? Have you ever gone through such an interrogation of your own soul when you were in some kind of distress and negative circumstances, and you started complaining and moaning and feeling alienated from God, feeling attacked by the people around you, feeling like you had somehow been cut off from the pleasures you once knew, and all of a sudden something in you said, “Hold it right there, this is out of line? Why are you doing this? Hope in God, a time of praise will come, His help will come, His presence will come.”

Having said that, look at verse 6 – he goes right back into depression. He knows the answer, he just can’t apply it. “O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember Thee from the land of the Jordan and the peaks of Hermon,” he’s just remembering all the works of God in the land of promise, “from Mount Mizar.” We don’t know where that is. That’s not named anywhere else in Scripture. But he remembers the God of his land, and the God of covenant, and the God of promise, and the God of power. And then he says in verse 7, “Deep calls to deep at the sound of thy waterfalls; All thy breakers and thy waves have rolled over me.”

That’s a very fascinating verse, by the way; it is not an easy verse to interpret. I feel the best interpretation is simply to understand it as reflective of the fact that trouble keeps on coming. Deep calls to deep means blow follows blow – I mean you just get up off the mat, and something else knocks you down. Isn’t that life? Isn’t that the way it is? It’s like a cascading waterfall, just unending, blow after blow after blow after blow, and all thy breakers and thy waves have rolled over me. He’s like a guy caught in the surf, one breaker smashes him on the sand, only to be sucked back up, picked back out, and pounded down again. And he’s saying life is like this; it’s blow on blow like a cascading waterfall, it’s blow on blow like a rolling tide, I cannot get out of it.

Then he says, “The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime; And His song will be with me in the night, A prayer to the God of my life.” And again he says, “Hey, God’s still there, and He’s going to move, and He’s going to give me back a song. And “I will say to God my rock, ‘Why hast Thou forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?’ As a shattering of my bones, my adversaries revile me, while they say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” And he’s right back in depression again. And then he asks himself the same question, verse 11, “Why are you in despair, O my soul? Why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.” The one who puts a smile on my face, my God – he’ll yet act. He’ll yet help me. Why are you acting like this? You can see him in cycles, can’t you? He gets into depression, he pours out his depression, he says, “Why are you doing this – why don’t you hope in God?” Can’t do it, goes right back into depression. Says, “I know what I’ll do, I’ll pray, I’ll cry out to God, God will deliver me.” Goes right back into depression, then he says, “Why are you doing this?” again.

It would have been enough if it ended there, but look at Psalm 43. “Vindicate me, O God, plead my case against an ungodly nation; O deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man! For Thou art the God of my strength; why hast Thou rejected me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” This is getting a little much. He’s back in the same cycle of depression again. “O send out Thy light and Thy truth, let them lead me; Let them bring me to Thy holy hill And to Thy dwelling places. Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy.”

He knows the answer. To find his joy in God is the answer, not in his circumstances, to find his joy in God; there’s the line, “To God my exceeding joy. And on the lyre I’ll praise Thee, O God, my God.” That’s the answer, and so he goes right back to the same response. Look at verse 5, “Why are you in despair, O my soul?” Third time, “Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, the help of my countenance” – countenance means face, the one who puts a smile on my face – “and my God.” Now, here’s the thought I want you to grasp. Here is a man in depression. Here is a man who knows that he is wrongly focusing on his what? Circumstances. Here is a man who knows that his joy is found in his God, but he can’t seem to get himself from his circumstances to his God.

Well, Paul was one up on him. Let’s go to Philippians. Do you know where Paul was when he wrote Philippians? Where was he? Very likely chained to a Roman soldier. He was in a situation quite similar to that of the psalmist. He was lonely. And Timothy, who was the only one who really knew his heart, the only one who was of a kindred spirit, it says in chapter 2, verse 20, he was going to send away, so he would be really alone when Timothy left. Epaphroditus, who had brought him a gift from the Philippians and who prompted this letter, was going to go back to the Philippians, so he wouldn’t be there either. So he knew what it was to be lonely. He knew what it was to be isolated, separate. But there’s none of that wondering, “God, are You there? And when are You going to move? And when are You are going to act? And why am I moaning? And why am I groaning?” It isn’t there. Paul doesn’t look at that. He doesn’t look at his circumstance. He isn’t bemoaning his condition. He’s not concerned about his loneliness.

Furthermore, he was dispossessed. He couldn’t join the throng any more, either. He couldn’t go with the believers to the worship of the true God through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. He couldn’t be a part of the Christian celebration of the Lord’s table. He couldn’t lead the people in the wonderful joy of fellowship. He too was dispossessed. Furthermore, he was mercilessly criticized by his enemies. Not only his enemies in the pagan culture who had him prisoner, but his enemies in the church, who were criticizing everything he did and saying God was punishing him because he had failed so miserably in the ministry. So he was right where the psalmist was; the difference was the psalmist was struggling with his circumstances, and Paul was rejoicing in his God. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, Galatians 5, says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy.” Romans 14:17 says that we have in the Kingdom “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Now, do you remember

that I gave you a definition or a theology of joy condensed? Let me give it to you again. Here is a theology of joy condensed into one statement. True spiritual joy is not related to circumstances. It is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel of Christ, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit, because they receive and obey the Word of God mixed with trials, and keep their focus on eternal glory. Now, that's the theology of joy. It is not related to circumstances, it is a gift from God to those who believe in Jesus Christ, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit, as they obey the Word of God mixed with trials, and keep their focus on eternal glory.

So you have one man focusing on his circumstances and having to do triple soliloquies with himself to tell himself he has no business feeling like that. He knows better, but he can't seem to pull himself out of it. And then you have another man in a very similar situation, who is literally gushing joy because he has lost sight of his circumstance and is lost in the wonder of his living relationship with the true God through Christ. This is the epistle of joy. And as Paul writes, his joy spills all over the place.

Now, as we look at these verses before us, we notice five elements of his joy that overflow. The first was the joy of recollection. You remember that in verse 3? "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." It's as if to say the Holy Spirit-produced joy has sweet memories. And I suggested to you last time that you can usually tell a person who is filled with the Spirit because of their joy, and their joy will be manifest in the fact that somehow, the tape has been erased when it comes to negative things, and they remember all the best about people. That's what joy produces – the joy of recollection. The heart where the Holy Spirit produces joy is a heart that thinks of people's goodness, kindness, love, care, sacrifice, compassion, and forgets the rest. Joy has a way of forgetting wounds and hurts; it's like love covering a multitude of sins, as Peter put it. And joy has a way of only approaching and attaching itself to memories that are delightful. And since memories control attitudes, it's crucial that we let the Spirit of God produce this joy in us, the joy of recollection, the heart that cultivates good memories of God's people.

Secondly, the joy of intercession, verse 4. "Always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." Two times he uses the word "prayer," *desis,* which means petition. His joy was expressed in the joy of intercession. Holy Spirit-generated joy finds its highest expression in the delight that it receives from praying for others' needs; it is selfless – it is selfless. It is consumed with prayer on behalf of others. It is not concerned about its own things, and its own happiness, and its own comfort, and its own fulfillment, and its own satisfaction. It is lost in the thrill and the delight of praying that others' needs would be met. The privilege to petition on behalf of others, that is joy. Joy spends its energies on others, not itself – the joy of intercession.

And then thirdly, last time we looked at the joy of participation in verse 5. He says, "I thank God with joy in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." Participation is the word *koinnia,* your fellowship. He knew the joy of fellowship. He just exulted in the reality that these people

had come alongside him to love him, share life with him, facilitate ministry with him – that was the joy of participation. A joyful person is delighted to be a part of the fellowship, delighted to be among the faithful. And we talked about that at length last time. We asked if we were faithful enough to do a little inventory on our own lives to find out if we have true joy.

Now, you can look at your own heart and know whether you have the joy of recollection, whether when you think about people, all the things you think about are good; whether you have the joy of intercession, whether it's the greatest pleasure for you to pray for others rather than for yourself; whether you have the joy of participation, you're exhilarated just to realize how many folks come alongside you and become a part of the fellowship which you enjoy. Are you thrilled with the privilege of being in God's people? Being a part of His church? The joy of participation. He rejoiced because the Philippians had participated in the extension of the gospel from the time they were saved until the present moment, some ten or eleven years later, when he writes this letter. Such a happy heart; happy to remember, happy to pray, happy to fellowship.

That brings us to a fourth point. And we're just going to talk about this one this morning, our time is shorter than usual. The joy of anticipation, and this is a great verse; the joy of anticipation. You know one of the great joys of the ministry? Let me give you a little hint. It's the joy in the heart that knows what the church will ultimately become. You want to know something? If you look at what the church is, you can get very discouraged. If you look at what the church is going to be, you can get very excited. That's the perspective Paul has. His joy pulls him to the future, verse 6, great verse. "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." What a tremendous verse; I memorized that as a little child.

Look, "I am confident." The verb *peith* means to be persuaded, to be sure, to be absolutely convinced, and that's what he's saying. "I am absolutely convinced of this very thing." What is it, Paul? What is it? "That He who began a work in you," who's that? God – God began the work. That's who began it. The verb "began" is interesting – it's only used two times in the New Testament, *enarchomai* – it's a rare word. It's used here and Galatians 3:3. In both cases, it has reference to salvation. God began the good work when He saved you, right? Galatians 3:3 says to the Galatians Christians, "Have you begun in the Spirit and are now made perfect in the flesh?" again pointing back to their salvation as the point at which they began by the power of the Spirit. So it's a verb that's used only twice in the New Testament, both times with reference to salvation. So he says God began a good work, and it was true. It is always true. Salvation is a work of God.

And the church at Philippi was begun when God, it says, "Opened the heart of Lydia," Acts 16:14. She was the first convert in Philippi, the first convert in Europe, and it says the Lord opened her heart. It's a work of God. Paul gave the gospel, the Lord opened her heart, she was saved, and that's the way the church began. God began the work. And then God saved some other folks that day by the riverside, and then God saved the Philippian jailer, shook his whole jail, burst loose all the chains and

the stocks, and all the prisoners were free. And in that context, God granted the jailer faith, and his household, and God started the church in Philippi. It refers, then, to the time of salvation. Paul says, “I am absolutely persuaded of this very thing, that God who saved you – began the work.”

Now, let me say a little more about that. It is important that you understand that salvation is a work of God. It is essential that you understand that. He who began a good work is God. Look at verse 29 of chapter 1. Paul says to these same Philippians, “For to you it has been granted,” or “it has been given” – you are the passive recipient of a gift from God – “for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” In other words, God gave you faith, and God has given you suffering. It has been granted for Christ’s sake that you should believe.

Chapter 2, verse 13, to the same Philippians, “It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” It is God who saves sovereignly. Listen to John 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe on His name” – listen – “who were born” – born again – “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Salvation is God’s work, God’s work. In Acts 11, very, very important statement is made in verse 18. “And when they heard this” – the report of Gentile conversions – “the people quieted down and they glorified God, saying” – listen to this statement – “Well then, God has granted,” or given, “to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”

God gave them the repentance, God gave them the faith, God gave them the salvation, God opened their heart; and as we’re learning in 1 Peter, because He chose them before the foundation of the world. That’s why in Acts it says, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” It’s a work of God. It’s where God works out His eternal plan. Listen to 2 Thessalonians 2:13. “We should always give thanks to God for you, always.” Why give thanks to God? “Because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.” Can’t be any clearer than that. And verse 14, “And it was for this He called you through our gospel.” God chose you. God called you. God gave you repentance. God gave you faith. God saved you. It’s all His work.

Titus 3, “But when the kindness,” verse 4, “of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,” verse 5 says, “He saved us.” That’s it. Did you get that? When the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us. “Not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy.” He saved us. James tells us in chapter 1, and I think it’s verse 18, “By the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth.” It was His will, His work. He did it, He saved us, He redeemed us.

Now, let’s go back to Philippians. The point that Paul is making in verse 6 is this. “I am confident, assured, persuaded, absolutely convinced of this very thing, that God who saved you and started a noble work” – the word good means noble, and it is a noble work, salvation starts the process of sanctification and brings it to glorification – “the God who started that good work in you” – here it

comes – “will” – what – “perfect it.” Tremendous thought, *epitele*, really perfect it, it’s a compound, completed, bring it to its full conclusion. Hang on to this – bring it to its complete end.

Now, Paul doesn’t say, “I hope this works out.” He says, “I’m confident of this. I am assured of this. I am absolutely convinced of this. I am fully persuaded of this one thing, that God who saved you and began the noble sanctifying work will complete it.” It’s a great statement. That’s a great statement. God who began the work of salvation and sanctification will bring it to full completion. He’ll bring it to full completion. F.B. Meyer years ago wrote, “We go into the artist’s studio, and find there unfinished pictures covering large canvas and suggesting great designs, but which have been left, either because the genius was not competent to complete the work, or because paralysis laid the hand low in death. But as we go into God’s great workshop, we find nothing that bears the mark of haste of insufficiency of power to finish, and we are sure that the work which His grace has begun, the arm of His strength will complete.” Isn’t that great?

It’s true. It’s true. What God begins He completes. This is the perseverance, or the preservation of the saints, this is what we call eternal security; that the God who saved you by His power will keep you by His power. Romans 5 has a marvelous insight into that. Paul says this – listen. “If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be being saved by His life.” You say, “What does that mean?” Just this – listen. If when you were an enemy you could be saved by Christ’s death, how much more once you are a son can you be kept by His life? Tremendous thought – tremendous thought. If His death can save you, then His living can keep you. And He ever lives to intercede for us.

So Paul says, “Look, I have the joy of anticipation. You may have problems in the church, you may have anxieties in the church, you may have difficulties in the church, there may be failures in the church, but this very thing will not be altered, that the God who saves is the God who glorifies.” In Romans, chapter 8, Paul says it in marvelous terminology that is very familiar to us. “Whom He foreknew He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called these He also justified; whom He justified these He also glorified.”

And “who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him that loved us. I am convinced neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Nothing going to change that. The one who saved us will perfect us – the perseverance of the people of God, the preservation of the people of God, the reality that salvation or justification leads to glorification. Jesus said in John 6:37, “All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me, and I have lost none of them, but shall raise him up at the last day.” Nobody is lost in the process. And then he says this, “Until the day of Christ

Jesus." Until the day of Christ Jesus, what does that mean? To what does that have reference? Listen carefully, this is an interesting thing.

"The day of the Lord" is a common Old Testament term; I think it's used about 19 or 20 times in the Old Testament. "The day of the Lord" always refers to divine judgment on sinners. It always refers to the outpouring of wrath. The ultimate expression of the day of the Lord will be at the return of Jesus Christ, when God pours out His wrath on the ungodly of all the ages. But in the Old Testament, there were other days of the Lord; any day in which God moved in severe judgment on sinners could be called a day of the Lord. The final day of the Lord is the day when He comes to judge the ungodly at the second coming of Christ. It is also called in 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 4, "the day." It is called in 2 Thessalonians 1:10, "that day." And in both cases refers to the day of judgment: the day of wrath, the day of vengeance, the day of punishment of sinners.

But this is different. This doesn't say "the day of the Lord," it says "the day of Christ Jesus." How does that differ? Well, it's interesting. If you do a study of it, as I did, you'll discover some fascinating things. In this verse, the day of Christ Jesus obviously refers to some time when believers will be glorified, right? He's going to perfect you in the day of Christ Jesus. It speaks of a day when believers will become perfect, when salvation will become complete, when justification and sanctification will become glorification. You will notice also verse 10, please, at the end of the verse. He says that believers are going to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ. And again it's talking about believers. In verse 6 it was the day of Christ Jesus, in verse 10 it's the day of Christ. And that too is a time when believers will be presented to God as blameless.

Chapter 2, verse 16, Paul says, "Holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory." Here the day of Christ has to do with some positive event where a believer will rejoice. So in Philippians alone "day of Christ," "day of Christ Jesus" have positive reference to a believer's glorification. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, let's go back to verse 7, "We are awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless" – here it comes – "in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." That's interesting. So now we have "the day of Christ Jesus," "the day of Christ," twice in Philippians, and now "the day of the Lord Jesus Christ." And this one also refers to believers being blameless, obviously referring to their glory, a time of reward for them, a time of blessing for them.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 14, it says, "We are your reason to be proud, as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus." Here's another term. First "the day of Christ," then "the day of Christ Jesus," then "the day of the Lord Jesus Christ," and now "the day of the Lord Jesus," and again it's referring to a time of joy – a time to proud, a time to rejoice. And there's one other reference that ought to be drawn to your mind. First Corinthians 5:5, and this is a discipline situation; a sinning believer is delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, "that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Now, here's what you have: "the day of Christ," "the day of Christ Jesus," "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ," "the day of our Lord Jesus," and "the day of the Lord Jesus." In every one of those places it refers to a time of the glorification of saints. So whenever you see "the day of the Lord," you know you're talking about judgment on sinners. Whenever you see "the day of Christ, Christ Jesus, the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ," you're talking about the glorification of saints. And the Lord makes a distinguishing characteristic clear by introducing the personal names of Jesus Christ, celebrating intimacy and the unique relationship we have to God through Christ.

Now, with that in mind go back to Philippians chapter 1. "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will fulfill it," bring it to completion, "in the day of Christ Jesus." He's going to carry you right on out to the time when we meet Christ. Tremendous thought. God will finish His work of grace. Beloved, that is such a great truth. "God is not like men," William Hendriksen said. "Men conduct experiments, but God carries out a plan" – end quote. We are divinely preserved, isn't that wonderful? That is so exciting – we are divinely preserved.

Psalm 89:33 says we are under a divine faithfulness that will never be removed. John 3:16 says we have an eternal life that will never end, and we will never perish. John 4:14 says we drink from a spring of water that will forever bubble up. John 6:37 and 39 says we have taken a gift that can't be lost. John 10:28 says we are in the hand of the Good Shepherd, out of which hand we can never be snatched. Romans 8:29 and 30 says we are bound by a chain that cannot be broken. Romans 8:39, we are loved with a love from which we can never be separated. Romans 11:29, we are the recipients of a calling which can never be revoked. Second Timothy 2:19, we are built on a foundation which can never be destroyed. First Peter 1:4 and 5, we have an inheritance that can never fade. That's confidence.

And what Paul is saying here is this: "Here's my joy, folks: my joy is that no matter what goes on in your church, the work that God began He will complete." And so he has the joy of anticipation. It's very much like those marvelous words of Jude, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." God's going to get you all there. You say, "What's the implication?" Listen to this, will you please? If you focus on what's wrong with the church, now you can get depressed. "Oh, our church isn't what it ought to be – oh, we're not doing – oh." But if you focus on what the church is going to become, you can get excited.

Now, you can take your choice. You can moan, and groan, and mumble around about what isn't the way it ought to be, or you can just look at what is going to happen. You know what's first exciting about that? Nobody is going to get lost. It's not like when I was playing football and you went into the locker room after the game, the coach said, "Hey, you are the reason we lost the game. You fumbled the ball on the three-yard line, the ball popped up, guy ran for a touchdown – hold on to the ball, it's your fault." That's never going to happen to me in heaven. The Lord is never going to say, "Do you

realize that because of your unfaithfulness, 250 people didn't get here? Do you realize a lot of those folks in Grace Church started out good, and you lost them?" Hey, that would put you in the funny farm if you thought you had that responsibility. And you can get really distressed about the church; you can get really worked up. "Oh, it's not what it ought to be." We know that. You're not what you ought to be – so a whole lot of you that aren't what you ought to be make a church that isn't what it ought to be. Then you've got to add to that leaders that aren't what they ought to be, and you wonder why it's like it is. This is it, folks.

But you can decide you're just going to focus on what it isn't, or you can rejoice in what it's going to be. I choose to do that latter. You want to know what's wonderful? You're all going to get there if you love Christ. If you belong to Him, we're all going to get there. And Paul has this sense of joy, this overwhelming triumphant joy that says, in the end, the church is going to be exactly what God wants it to be. That takes a lot of pressure off. Boy, no sense in spending your whole life in a state of depression over what the church is not, when you could spend your whole life in a state of joy over what the church will be, right? You're going to be all you're supposed to be in God's plan. So if you look at what the church can become, it's exciting, thrilling, exhilarating. That's the joy of anticipation.

I don't know why it is that some people want to mumble around all the time about what isn't the way they like it, when we can sit back and wait till it's going to be the way God wants it to be in eternal glory. I'll tell you, that does take a lot of pressure off. If I thought that I had to be the basic tool and generator of salvation, if I was responsible to get people saved, and then once they were saved if I, along with the other pastors and the rest of us, were responsible to keep people saved, how would you like to have that responsibility? How would you like the responsibility, for example, for your children who have come to Christ, and if God said to you, "Hey, by the way, I saved them, but you better keep them saved," want that responsibility? That's frightening. You don't have that responsibility.

You want to know something? The Lord's going to bring His church to fulfillment. Marvelous, isn't it? So why not enjoy the process? Sure, we're not all that we are supposed to be, but this isn't a place for perfect people; this is a hospital for people who at least know they're sick, and they know where the cure is. People say, "Ah, I don't want to be in the church, there are too many hypocrites." Come on in, you'll feel right at home. It's just us, this is it. But listen, remember the little deal, "Thank God, He's not finished with me yet – be patient?" That's right, I mean, we're not done. When we are done, we're going to be perfect. That takes all the pressure out, so that you can enjoy your ministry, and you can enjoy your church, and you can love what you do.

You say, "Well then, why do you do it? I mean, if God saves them, and God keeps them, and God gets them to heaven, why are you doing it?" Because I love the thought that He's using me as a part of the whole process. And I can serve Him out of joy, and out of gratitude, and because He's called me to, and I love Him, and I obey Him, but it doesn't rest on my shoulders. All He wants me to do is

share in the joy. And why should I let my joy be stolen because I've become unable to focus on what the church will become? So Paul has the joy of anticipation. I understand that. I understand that.

I look at my children sometimes, when I realize that they're a lot like their parents – they're not all they're supposed to be either. And I could fret, and worry, and fuss, but I know they all love Christ, and the thing is, I know what they will ultimately become. They'll ultimately be like Christ. You realize how satisfying that is? So I might as well enjoy my ministry, I might as well enjoy life. I might as well pour my heart out in service out of sheer joy, and gratitude, and obedience, and love for Christ, and be thrilled to be a part of the process, but I'm not going to become a basket case because I'm worried that somebody who is supposed to get there might not make it because I'm not doing my job. I don't take that responsibility, and neither should you.

So enjoy it, enjoy the church. It will never be all that it ought to be, it will never be all that you want it to be until we get to glory. And sometimes I think there will be – the only disappointment in heaven will be people who can't find anything negative. They may frustrate themselves through all eternity. But hey, you ought to be so thrilled that this is so temporary and you ought to have the joy of anticipation. There's one other element of joy, the joy of affection, verses 7 and 8, but we don't have time for that, so come back next time. Let's bow together in prayer.

We love You, Lord, and we count it a great privilege to serve You. And we work hard. Paul said he worked to the point of sweat and exhaustion. Paul said that he worked mightily, but it was really Your Spirit working in him. He said that he counted everything in this life as garbage in the pursuit of the fulfillment of his gifts, and his ministry, and his calling. He gave everything he had, all his energy, all his heart, all his soul, and all the time, down deep in his life was the motive of love. He loved You so much he wanted to obey You. And this perfect peace and joy that says, "I'll give my all, but I know the results are going to turn out right because You're the God You are." What joy, what joy to be able to give our whole heart to an effort, and know we can't lose at all. How exhilarating.

Thank You for the joy of anticipation. Help us to live that joy as we live out the joy of participation as we enjoy one another, as we live out the joy of intercession as we pray on behalf of one another, and the joy of recollection as we lift up the good that we remember. O God, produce in us the joy of the Spirit that we might rejoice, that we might delight, that we might be satisfied in whatever circumstance with You and with Your work in our lives. And we thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2016 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).