

## “JOY IN PRAYER, PREACHING, and LIFE”

### Philippians 1

The word “joy” is used frequently in the Bible and in our hymns – “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee”, “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts”, and “Joy To The World.” One of Bach’s most enduring works is “Jesu, Thou Joy of Man’s Desiring.” In Paul’s list of nine fruits of the Spirit, Joy comes second, after Love, and before Peace.

The word “joy” occurs 150 times in the Bible as a noun, the verb “rejoice” occurs 186 times, and the adjective “joyful” occurs 25 times.

Joy is not an exclusively religious term. The standard cookbook is titled “The Joy of Cooking.” I don’t know how it came to be attached to the onerous task of washing dishes, but one of the dishwashing liquids is named Joy.

What does the word mean? How is it different from happiness, delight, or bliss? I think the difference may be a matter of duration. I like to think of joy as a spark or a sparkle.

William Blake wrote,

“He who binds to himself a joy  
Does the winged life destroy;  
But he who kisses the joy as it flies  
Lives in eternity’s sunrise.”

Wordsworth has a poem which begins “Surprised by joy...” C. S.

Lewis used that as the title of a novel which is partly autobiographical.

1.) I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your

love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:3-11 NKJV)

Joy is that sparkle for one brief moment when a person sees someone they love or are reminded of that person by a memory, by someone mentioning that person, by some object associated with that person. You see it in a mother's eye for just an instant when she mentions the name of one of her children. Or it may be a smile that passes across her lips. Joy and love are closely related. If love is a steady burning fire, joy is a spark that shoots out of the fire.

In this passage Paul tells of some of the occasions when the Philippians bring him joy. Every time he remembers them, it brings him joy. Every time he prays for them each request he makes brings another joy. Paul's love for them is so great that he says "I have you in my heart." "...how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ." It is love that motivates him to pray for the Philippians. Then as he begins to pray, the love produces joy at every remembrance.

Paul prays for the love that the Philippians have for him and others that it might abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment. He prays that they might approve things that are excellent, that they might be sincere and without offense. This suggests that as he prayed for them he thought of things that were less than perfect, errors, faults that the Philippians had as a church or that individuals in the church had. But because he loved them, even their faults and idiosyncracies, even the persons who flatter or are devious, the ones so blunt they sometimes caused hurt brought a smile to his face, a moment of joy.

2.) But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. (Philippians 1:12-18 NKJV)

In his epistle James exhorts us “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” (James 1:2) That is what we see occurring in this passage.

Paul is not just a prisoner, he is in chains. Further there were Christians who were jealous of Paul’s standing and the authority he had been given – he was an apostle of Christ. These wannabe leaders sought to create strife around Paul. They preached out of vanity and pride trying to attract a large following.

There were others who looked up to Paul. The fact that he was in chains emboldened them to carry the Gospel he preached to those places he could not go because he was imprisoned.

Meanwhile, he was able to witness to the soldiers who were assigned to guard him. They in turn talked to other members of the palace guard about this message of God’s love and forgiveness through Christ.

Twice Paul uses the verb “rejoice.” “Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” Every time that word reached Paul of the Gospel being preached whether by the proud, self-seeking bombasts or by the humble servants of Christ, or by one soldier telling another, each time was like poking a fire and seeing the sparks fly upward. Joy is brief, but each instance of hearing the Gospel proclaimed Paul’s joy renewed.

3.) For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again. Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me. (Philippians 1:19-30 NKJV)

These words by Paul in this passage could just as well have been written by a Christian father or mother lying in a hospital bed with a potentially fatal form of cancer. Paul does not know whether he will be put to death or exonerated. He believes that the prayers of Christians on his behalf and the Spirit of Jesus Christ can work his deliverance. He knows also that it could be God's will to magnify Himself by Paul's death. Paul is content that if he lives it will be for continuing to do the work of Christ and if he dies it means he will go to heaven, which is far better.

It is joy for Paul when he hears of their joy as they believe and progress in faith. He will see their joy if he is able to come to them again. This joy is like sparks from two burning sticks rubbed together. Paul alone in his prison cell can find joy in memories and the accounts of what is happening outside his cell. How many more moments of joy can come to two or more Christians sharing their faith and joys?

