

## “Find Joy In the Coming Year” - (Philippians)

### **FOCUS**

How many here made a resolution for the past year and actually kept it?

Before you make any resolution for the coming year – here’s some example of how resolutions tend to work out in reality:

2011: I will read at least 10 books this year

2012: I will try to finish the book I started last year.

2013: I will read most of my email this year

2014: I will sometimes read the comic section of the Sunday paper

Or for those of us who are constantly worrying about weight:

2012: I will work out 5 days a week and eat 500 calories a day until I lose 20 pounds

2013: I will work out 3 days a week and try to lose the 5 pounds I gained last year

2014: I will walk my dog and throw out that box of Twinkies next week.

Or for those of you with money issues:

2011: By next year I will be completely out of debt

2012: By next year I will pay the interest on my credit card

2013: By next year I will transfer my debt to a new credit card.

2014: Next year I will get out of the country

It reminds me of the man who said, At the end of my life, I hope many people will say of me:  
*"Boy, that guy sure did owe me a lot of money."*

The past year was filled with all kinds of good and bad events around the world.

Probably the #1 good news event of the past year – at least based on all the media attention it received - was the birth of Prince George to William and Kate.

Probably the #1 bad event of 2013 was the typhoon that hit the Philippines in November. The typhoon flattened the area of Tacloban, killed thousands and left hundreds of thousands of people displaced and destitute. Continue to be in prayer for these people in the Philippines.

No doubt the past year for you was also filled with good things and maybe some not so good things. We of course don't know what may be ahead for us in the coming year, but I believe that we can find joy – no matter what. This is the message Paul wrote to the church at Philippi back in around AD 60.

Prior to Christmas we spent some time in the book of Philippians focusing on joy. I want to come back to this little letter by Paul because it teaches us some valuable principles about how we can find joy in the coming year no matter what is ahead.

The letter to the Philippians has been called the “*Epistle of Joy*”. Joy and rejoicing permeate this little letter. It exudes with joy. Some 16 times the words joy or rejoicing occur in its 4 chapters. This is particularly amazing because this letter was written by Paul - *from where?*

In prison – probably from Rome. Paul was in prison in Rome for about 2 years. He probably wrote this letter toward the end of his incarceration there.

I've been in jail before – as a visitor, counselor, chaplain, and to do services anyway. I did not find it a particularly joyful environment. But here is Paul in the middle of his jail cell writing a letter expressing his overflowing and overwhelming joy.

I tried to analyze the 16 references Paul made to joy to get some clues about how we can find joy in the midst of our difficulties. Paul's words suggest there are a few places we can find joy.

### **1/ FIND JOY IN FELLOWSHIP**

You will notice as you read this letter the very personal and friendly tone. Paul is writing to those he loved and was filled with joy over. Take a look at how Paul expressed this in 1:3-5.

*I thank my God every time I remember you. <sup>4</sup>In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy<sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,*"

I can imagine Paul reflecting back on the time he was in Philippi during his second missionary journey as recorded in Acts 16. The first person who decided to follow Jesus there was Lydia. Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. She and her whole household came to faith and were baptized. Paul and his companions then stayed at Lydia's house during their ministry in Philippi. I'm sure Paul would also think of the Philippian jailer and his family who came to faith. There was a diverse group of believers in Philippi, but they were united in and through Jesus. Paul remembers the wonderful fellowship he had with them. He remembers as well their partnership with him in ministry since then as well. They supported him through encouragement, prayers and finances. All this filled Paul with joy.

Look at what Paul adds at 4:10 – *"I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it".* Even when the Philippians were prevented from showing their concern for Paul, he knew their heart and as he says here he – *"rejoiced greatly".*

I was reading in Christianity Today magazine an article by Mike Mason of British Columbia. He wrote about what he calls his *"experiment in joy"*. He confesses that he had often been a rather moody and melancholy person and so he thought it would be helpful to try to be joyful for 90 days and try to learn the secrets of joy and become a more jubilant person. (There's a good new year's resolution for you)

He wrote about how at one point in the experiment at a time he was not feeling too joyous how a fellowship experience brought him to jubilation.

It was the day before Christmas Eve (the day he calls Christmas Adam). He had breakfast with his friend Chris Walton. They had a good breakfast and as they were saying goodbye to each other in the noisy parking lot Mike Mason heard his friend call out before getting into his car – *"YABBA-KA-DOODLES!"*

He wondered what his friend was talking about so walked over to him to ask him what he meant by *"YABBA-KA-DOODLES"*. His friend said I didn't say *"YABBA-KA-whatever, I said – I'm glad we could do this."* They both burst out in hilarious laughter.

So now every time they meet since then their greeting to each other is – “YABBA-KA-DOODLES”. It reminds them of a special time and the good relationship they have with one another.

Paul didn't say “YABBA-KA-DOODLES” to his friends in Philippi, but he thought about them constantly. They were always in his prayers. They brought joy to his heart.

How about you and I this morning? How joyful are you over the other people sitting in your pew? Can you say like Paul – “*I thank my God every time I remember you ... with joy*”? Remember, before you answer, that – you may have to spend eternity with that person next to you or across the aisle. In the meantime we ought to find some joy in one another now, don't you think?

When we come together each Sunday it ought to be a joyous time. We should be able to go from here, back into the world singing songs of joy as a result of meeting with other believers in Christ. Don't go from here stunned this morning. Find joy in one another. You can even take time to pray with one another before you leave today.

If you are not part of one of our small groups at BBC – you are missing a great opportunity to find joy in fellowship with one another. Gathering in small groups gives us a chance to bear one another's burdens, pray for one another, encourage one another, and build one another up.

Paul teaches us to find joy in fellowship in the coming year.

## **2/ FIND JOY IN CIRCUMSTANCES**

Now I know this seems like a strange thing to say, because some circumstances are anything but joyful. But Paul's perspective is that we can always be joyful anyway no matter what the situation.

Back in Acts 16 again, when Paul was in Philippi, he and his companions got into trouble with the officials of the city because Paul had cast a demon out of a slave girl. The owners of the slave girl didn't like it because she made a lot of money for them through fortune telling. They brought Paul and Silas to the city magistrates and accused them of “*throwing our city into an uproar*” and “*advocating customs unlawful for us Romans*”.

Notice what happens next from Acts 16. (vv22-24)

*... the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

This was not particularly joyful circumstances. But look at the very next verse – (v25) – “*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God*” What? Can you believe that?

Paul it seems had a confidence in God and what God could do in and through any circumstances no matter how bad they seemed. That enabled him to find joy even in jail. He looked for the positive. He looked for how God was going to use things for good. Paul's purpose in writing the letter to the Philippians (as indicated in 1:27-30) is to tell them to find joy

even in the midst of persecution and to even rejoice regardless just like he did. It is a matter of perspective and focus.

Have you ever known someone who always focuses on the negative? Every time you talk to them they complain about something. Man that's depressing not only for them, but for everyone they dump on.

Paul instructs us to look at life and circumstances in a positive way and you'll be joyful.

**EG: 1:12-14 / + 2:17-18 + (commands us) 2:14 + (example) 4:12.**

Do you find joy in whatever circumstances you are in? Paul commands us – to find joy in the midst of our circumstances in 2014. *“Rejoice!”*

What does it mean to rejoice anyhow?

- It does not mean we ignore the situation hoping it will go away.
- It does not mean we put it aside or suppress it.
- Rather, it means to have a proper perspective on the circumstance or problem at hand.
- It means to have an attitude of joy and gladness in the face of all and any situation. And not just once. The command is in the present tense. It means to keep on rejoicing. It is a matter of the will. It is a decision to purposely look for the good and look for God.

This is what Jeremiah had to do in the book of Lamentations. His circumstances were overwhelming. In chapters 1-3 he laments over them, but then ½ way through chapter 3 he says – *“Yet this I call to mind and therefore have hope: Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness.”*

If in the coming year you are having trouble doing that look at Paul’s advice in **4:8**.

Make a list - what is something *“true”* I can rejoice in, something *“noble”*, *“right”*, *“pure”*, *“lovely”*, *“admirable”* and so on. Go through your day noting circumstances you can rejoice in. Chose to look at the ½ full rather than the ½ empty. Learn from Paul’s example and exhortation and find joy in the coming year – yea – even in circumstances.

### **3/ FIND JOY IN JESUS**

This is Paul’s main point in the letter to the Philippians. He mentions Jesus or Christ more than 70 times in this little letter. That’s 1 reference for every 1 ½ verses. He clearly wants us to find joy in Jesus.

Paul put it simply and powerfully in **4:4**.

What does the phrase mean *“rejoice in the Lord”*?

Without getting into all the grammatical details, the Greek structure here can suggest different nuances of meaning. EG:

- *“with reference to the Lord”* – that is – the direction of our rejoicing – we rejoice about the Lord.
- or *“by means of the Lord”* – that is the ability to rejoice comes from the Lord.
- There is some truth in both of those, but essentially I think it means to rejoice *“because of the Lord.”*

The key word is “*Lord*”. It is because of the Lord that we can rejoice in any and every circumstance. When we say the word “*Lord*” we call to mind that sovereign, majestic, mighty, powerful, controlling one who was, and always will be.

How can I rejoice when situations and circumstances seem so dreadful? I can rejoice because of the Lord. Because of who He is. Because He knows all about it. Because He is in control through it all. Because of all that we have in Christ now and all that we will have in Christ in glory. “*Rejoice in the Lord*”.

When Margo and I were in London, England a few years ago we were told you can tell when the Queen is in residence at Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle by the flag that is flown. Joy, someone said very well, “*is the flag that flies on the castle of the heart when King Jesus is resident there.*”

Joy, real joy, comes from knowing and focusing on Jesus. If you know Jesus – you can know real joy. If you don’t know Jesus you won’t be able to find real joy. I would encourage you to come to faith in Him today so you can begin the New Year as a follower of Jesus and full of joy in Him. Speak to one of us about this before you leave today.

Paul found joy even in jail, and you and I can find joy even in our jails. It really doesn’t matter if we are in prison or a palace, in chains or a chaise lounge, whether we have plenty or are in poverty, we can always and we must always find joy in Jesus and rejoice greatly.

### **WRAP-UP**

There’s a little song we sing at campfires, and fun times that says – “*I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart; where?; down in my heart; I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart; where?; down in my heart to stay. And I’m so happy, so very happy. I’ve got the love of Jesus in my heart.*”

You know – I just imagine the apostle Paul there in jail enthusiastically dancing and singing this song. It just overflows from the book of Philippians, and Paul I think would hope that joy and rejoicing would also overflow on to us and overflow from us in the coming year no matter what is ahead.

### **BENEDICTION**

*And now to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!*  
(Jude 24)