

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

WHEN THERE'S A LOSS | REBEL'S GUIDE TO JOY

RYAN BRAMLETT | FEBRUARY 12, 2023

Good morning. How are we doing? Hey, it's so good to be with you today.

And before we jump into the message, I just want to give everyone an update. I know earlier in the week we posted, just to have everyone praying about what is going on in Syria and Turkey. And I wanted to also let you know that because of your generosity, we were able to partner with Convoy of Hope and send \$15,000.00 over there to earthquake relief efforts.

That's the kind of church I want to be a part of—making a difference here and around the world.

As far as today goes, we are continuing in our series A Rebel's Guide to Joy. Anybody have their guide with them? Can you hold them up in the air? All the campuses. Show them. Yes!

Hey, we still have some of those available. That is a companion for you. We have print. We have digital. We have English. We have Español. We have everything that you will need as we continue in this series together.

And just a fascinating thought that I had this past week—I thought it was fascinating, maybe you won't. When you think of the word rebel who do you think of?

That's fair. For those who didn't hear, he said, "You."

What was fascinating was that I started thinking about the people who today we look at as model citizens, people who we call leaders and heroes. But maybe that wasn't always the case. There was a time when they were actually more of a rebel.

For example: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When you think about his life and his perception now, it's one thing. But Gallup, they actually did this public perception survey going back to 1966, 63 percent of this country had a negative view of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Majority culture—and this is after I Have a Dream. Three years after that people were like, "I still don't see it."



I throw that out there to say, right can feel wrong, wrong can feel right. Good can feel bad and bad can feel good. And public perception can often be wrong, even though it is majority culture, maybe it can be moving in the wrong direction.

So how do we know what to rebel against? How do we know where to go? We need a guide. And if you live longer than, I don't know, four years on this planet, you have to know that it has to be bigger than me and you, because I confuse myself all of the time. I get it wrong all of the time.

So we've said that we're going to go to Jesus. And we're going to trust Him and we're going to be obedient to Him. And we're going to trust that He has a life that He will lead us to that nothing else possibly could.

And to do that, in this series we're studying this small letter in the Bible called Philippians, Philippians. And just to give you a little bit of context for where we are and where this letter is coming from, it's written by a guy named Paul. And it's a letter that is filled with joy and encouragement, which is one thing.

But when you place it into its context you know that Paul is writing this from prison. And he's not just doing a weekend stay. He's facing possible execution. He's lost everything. He's even chained to a guard 24 hours a day. Yet he penned some of the most incredible, encouraging, and joyful words that we have.

And we believe that there is something in here for all of us if we truly want to live and to have this joy that Paul speaks of, that Jesus says is actually possible. So, let's go ahead and dive in. We're going to be in chapter 1, starting in verse 20. Look at what Paul says. He says:

"For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

"But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better." I love this. "I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live." Philippians 1:20-24 (NLT)

Powerful. In all of that right there, I want to focus us in on verse 21. Verse 21. I love the way that the NIV translates it. It says:

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Philippians 1:21 (NIV)

To live is Christ. Somehow our joy is wrapped in those four words—to live is Christ. So what does that mean? It sounds powerful. It sounds provocative. It sounds certain. But what does it mean?

When Paul is saying to live is Christ, he's saying, "No matter what circumstance I find myself in, no matter the season, Christ is the most important thing. Everything else is just a means to an end. Jesus is the prize.

Here's what it means:

To live is Christ means everything else becomes subservient to following Jesus.

You know, I was reading an article this past week. And some of you know that there is a game going on later today. It's kind of a big deal. But as we're gearing up for the Super Bowl, there is this player on the Eagles and his wife is 38 weeks pregnant.

So what are you going to do? Well, they made the decision that they are just going to bring the OBGYN to the game with them. He has a different high-deductible plan than I do. I don't remember that being an option. We've had lots of kids.

But it's pretty clear, this week for certain, I don't know this man's life, but the Super Bowl is the most important thing. Now everything else becomes subservient to that.

But for you, what is it?

TO LIVE IS

And if you're taking notes, I would love for you to write this down. To live is _____. What is in that blank space? Chances are if you are here with me it's not the Super Bowl. But there is something and I would love it if it was Christ, but honest answers only.

You know, I've lived for a lot of things in my life. And as I was thinking back through, I think there have been different loves. I would have said, to live is this... If I could have this then it means that life is good.

And starting out I would say my first love to live was ball. I loved basketball. And I'm going to be honest with you. At six years old, I was one of the greats. I'm shooting straight with you.

You know what they used to call me? At six years old? Killer. One, let's just highlight how great the 90s were because you're going to a bunch of games in this season. But nobody is yelling to your six-year-old, "Get them, Killer." Right?

But the way that God set up my body, it just didn't work out for me. There were a lot of people who thought I was really going somewhere with basketball. Once again, we cannot trust majority opinion.

I gave up with basketball and then I moved on to girls. Right? This will be the thing. This will be my ticket. I'm going to give my life to seeing if someone of the opposite sex will find me attractive. And it was cool until it wasn't. I remember this girl said that I looked like Bugs Bunny. And I thought, "You know what? There are better uses for my heart to give my life to than to live with this disrespect."

So then I focused most of my time and interest, truly, I gave my life to being accepted. I did a lot of things that I didn't want to do. I did things that I knew were wrong because I wanted to belong. I wanted to fit in. Because to me that feeling of acceptance, that was what it meant to live. If I could have those friends, in that season it was the most important thing.

Later on it was money. I just thought if I could get a little bit more of that then life would be good.

What is it for you? To live is _____. What do you have in that space right now? Maybe it is money. Maybe it's sports. Maybe it's acceptance. Maybe it's pleasure, morals.

I just want to give us some questions and feel free to take a snap shot of these as we walk through, but just some questions to help identify:

What am I living for?

What is it really that I'm living for in this season? What am I living for?

- What does your calendar say your life is all about?
- What do you daydream about?
- What are you willing to compromise pretty much everything for?
- What are you most fearful of losing?

What is that for you? What's the thing that you're willing to pretty much compromise anything for? What's the thing that you wake up thinking about, you go to bed thinking about? What's in that space to live is _____. Because if whatever is in that space is anything other than Jesus, then it changes the equation. To live is _____, whatever that is that means:

TO DIE IS

To die is to lose that thing. Life begins to fall apart when we lose that acceptance, when we break even our own morale code, when we can no longer do the thing that we love. It's like we suffer a thousand deaths throughout our lifetime.

And what Paul is getting at here, in these four powerful words, is that if you fill anything in that space, your joy is going to become circumstantial. It's going to become conditional at best.

Because when you think about it, think about how often we come to this place of just believing that if our circumstances would be better, then we would be in a better place, we would be better off, our health, our mental space—we would have more joy and peace if our circumstances could be a little bit different.

But I think what Paul is doing here with this phrase to live is Christ and to die is gain is shifting that perspective, to move us away from thinking that our lives are dependent on what we do or the season that we find ourselves in. Because what if that is not our biggest problem?

Look at this. He says:

Our biggest problems come from how we've chosen to define what it means to truly live.

What if our biggest problems come from how we've chosen to define what it means to truly live? That begins to make a lot of sense. And it's easy to do when we can pull back and we get ourselves out of that space.

Think about how delicate and fragile everything else is. If you've given your life to sports, have you ever met the human knee? It is so fragile. One wrong move and it's gone.

If you've given your life to money, have you ever met the stock market? It literally looks like a roller coaster.

He's saying, "Even if you've given your life to a relationship, have you ever been to a funeral? Someone who you love so much and now you're staring down at them as they are in a casket."

What Paul is saying is that whatever you put in that space, it's only a matter of time before it's gone. It's only a matter of time before the weight and the pressure of this world makes it fall apart.

Here's a way to think about this. If you're going through a season and your job is falling apart, and at the same time you would say that your life is falling apart, what does that tell you? That your job is your life.

So here's what Paul says. He says, "I want you to take that blank space and I have a name that I want you to write in it." And that is:

TO LIVE IS CHRIST.

Here's what that means. If we choose to live for Christ there will never be a funeral that we have to go to for Jesus. There will never be a retirement from Jesus. Jesus will be the one in that space that no matter if everything else changes, no matter if everything else slips through our hands, if we have Him, we will always have Him. Because circumstances didn't give us Jesus, and circumstances can't take Jesus away from us.

So Paul says, "I want you to live for Christ." And in the next few verses we're really going to push in on what that means—to really live for Christ?

But before we do that I just want to talk about what it doesn't mean to live for Christ. Just to be overly clear, what it doesn't mean is:

WHAT TO LIVE FOR CHRIST DOESN'T MEAN:

- NO GRIEVING

- NO PROBLEMS

If you even read in this short letter, Paul says that he almost lost one of his really good friends, that he was very sick. But then he was healed. And Paul says, "Thank the Lord that he saved me from so much sorrow."

To live for Christ does not mean we won't be sad or hurt, that we won't have tough seasons. Once again, exhibit "A" Paul is writing this from prison. But what he is saying is



that to live for Christ means that, “Even when everything else falls, you’ve got Me. Even when everything else becomes uncertain, you will always find yourself next to Me.”

And I don’t know about you, but I think that’s a great place to be. And then he’s going to push in on what it does look like if we are going to live for Christ. It’s in verse 22. Take a look at this. He says:

“But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ.” Philippians 1:22 (NLT)

If I live I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So this is the first kind of heads up on what it means to live for Christ. He says, “Well, there’s going to be fruit.”

It’s evident. Everywhere Paul went, no matter what he was attached to, no matter what season he was in, there was always the fruit of his ministry that was being shown.

What’s the fruit of your life?

Our lives are set up and designed to get the fruit that we are getting. And a lot of times the most important things to us find themselves in what we celebrate. How do we know it was a successful season? By the fruit that shows up.

And we see in Paul’s life that there was fruit. And for me and you, what is that fruit that we are looking for? I would say first and foremost that the fruit of our life should be evident to all by what God is doing in us.

We talk about this all the time. The fruit of the Spirit, God’s character should be evident. Things like joy and peace and patience and self-control and faithfulness and goodness. All of these things should be evident in our lives. They should be showing up.

Is that fruit that you are trying to cultivate in this season? Because if we are living for Christ, then that fruit should be there internally. And he says that that fruit is not just for you to feel good, or for you to experience the season that you are in with joy, it’s for ministry. It’s for others. Everything that you have been given is for the person next to you.

That’s really what he pushes in on in this next verse. He says, “If you live for Christ, there is going to be fruit in your life.” And then he says this:

“Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me.”
Philippians 1:25-26 (NLT)

Did you catch what he said? He said:

To live is Christ means you're here to help others grow and experience the joy of their faith.

If you are taking notes, that is the thing. If I'm looking at and I'm questioning, "Am I really giving my life to Christ, is everything subservient to Him truly? Is there fruit? Is there spiritual fruit that I cannot take credit for? Is that in my life?"

And then on the other side, is there a ministry in my life? Have I committed to helping others experience and to grow in the joy of their faith? Can you say that? What does that look like for you in this season? How are you helping other people do that?

And I don't know about you, but what I've seen is that a lot of times when we begin to look at that—how can I help others experience and grow in their faith—a lot of times, not always, but a lot of times God uses some of our biggest losses, things that we've walked through, things that we didn't know if we would be able to get through. And now He has this way of using them to one, shape us, form us into the image of Jesus, but then to use our platform for some of our greatest ministries.

I think Paul had this realization and I don't know when he had it, if it was one of the many times he was in prison, one of the times he was shipwrecked, one of the times he was beaten, but he had this perspective shift where he couldn't just bow out because of his circumstances. He couldn't just step away because of his loss. He began to see things differently.

We talked about this a little bit last week. He was literally chained to a guard 24 hours a day. But something in him shifted. The world was looking at him like, "Man, I'm so sorry. I can't believe that you are in this situation."

And Paul said, "No. No. No. No. You're not seeing it right. I'm not chained to him. He's chained to me. And now because I'm here in prison the whole prison guard knows about Jesus. Because I'm here everyone is placing their faith in Him." He's like, "Don't mourn for me."

It's this simple truth within the Christian faith. It becomes one of the most selfless things we can do. And when we're most like Jesus, we take this truth:

Your loss becomes their gain.



Your loss becomes their gain. It's when I move from this space of, "I'm not chained to this, it's chained to me." I've seen this. I know a guy. He's an incredible pastor. And he has struggled with mental health and illness for as long as he can remember. And he worked through it and prayed through it and saw experts—he did everything.

But then a few years ago it shifted. I saw it. It was one of the most beautiful and powerful things I've ever seen. It wasn't just this thing that he was going through, it wasn't just this trial that he had. He had this moment when he changed his perspective and he said, "I'm no longer chained to you. You're chained to me." And now mental health has become his platform. The thing that was trying to crush him has become his biggest platform to be able to minister and to care for others.

I've seen it with divorce. I've seen it with infertility. I've seen it over and over again. Where that thing that was supposed to crush us now becomes our biggest platform to serve and to show others that joy is actually possible. Not when it's gone, but in the midst of it.

So:

How are you helping others grow and experience the joy of their faith?

And it's okay if you say, "I don't know." Or, it's okay if you know and you're like, "I'm not doing anything." I just want to challenge you here in this moment. This is a big part of what it means to follow Jesus, not just one day when we get to show up in heaven. But you and I have been tasked, commissioned, to go and to help others experience joy and to grow in their faith.

This is why we talk so much about serving. Serving is about so much more than you. It's about what the person on the other side of you needs. And no matter what serving opportunities you hold here at this church, that's what you are doing. You have something, some action that you are doing, but underneath every position you can be sure of this. You are here to help others experience and grow in the joy of their faith.

And if you are here and in this season you've been saying, "I've been waiting for a sign. I just don't know when or how or what I should do." This is your sign. And I want you to go find a bigger sign. It's in the lobby of all of our campuses. It's the next step wall. Every opportunity of what it could look like for you to be on mission and to start serving here is right there.

What am I doing? I want to have that fruitful life. I want God's Spirit to be taking over. I want to spend my days, not just cowering and shrinking back because of the hits that I've taken, but I trust that God can work all things for the good of those who love Him.



And the thing that was supposed to crush me, now that's the thing that I hold up and I say, "God is taking me through this. There is hope on the other side of this."

But I know that in a lot of the rooms, like the one you're sitting in right now, there are people who are like, "Is faith really that good? Is faith really that strong? I mean, it worked for this Paul guy 2000 years ago, but what about right now with today's problems, today's struggles? Can this ancient way of life really help me this week?"

And I believe it can. The power to live is Christ is still available to you. And if you only knew the people that you are sitting next to, what they've walked through to get here... You are sitting next to heroes of the faith. You're sitting next to people who hell has been trying to take down for decades and yet they are standing in the victory of Christ. Their lives do not make sense outside of the grace of God.

And what we want to do right now is just to share a story with you of a couple who lost so much but held on to joy throughout everything. Take a look at the screen.

Video

Asiret

I was 19 when I had Christian. I think it was like four years after that we planned Carter. A year after that I was pregnant with Caleb.

If we needed a depiction of what our life was, we were like, "We are finally getting to where we wanted to be." And then it felt kind of like it was snatched, it was just taken. All of the cancer care was very hard, and I wanted to just know: why?

De'Marqueis

It felt like I was less than a man. I couldn't figure out how to save my little boy. I'd been a Christian my entire life. But then I never really had to step in front of a trial and have to make a conscious decision to actually follow God and not have any resources. That is the moment where I made the choice to actually believe what the Word of God said.

Asiret

The men's group and the women's group were very involved. They came to our house and prayed with us. And that's when I decided if God took Caleb, that I would have to continue to obey. I really felt God hovering over me during that time. And from then on I decided if He took my baby away from me, that I had to trust Him and I would be still then everything would be alright.



De'Marqueis

I believe that there is a purpose. Ephesians talks about us being made as a masterpiece. Well, how many Mona Lisas are there? There is only one. There are a lot of counterfeits, but there is only one. There is only one you. He's given each one of us a specific purpose and so in the life of Caleb, I also adopted that same mindset.

So today, how we are able to talk about this, how we are able to speak to people is not because we are not sad, it's because we know that God has a purpose and He has a plan for us.

Joy is something that is not conditional. Happiness is very conditional based off of the condition of what I am going through.

Asiret

We still have hard times and I still definitely have hard times. I think that our children still have hard times when remembering Caleb, but I don't think that trials and tribulations come just when you think that people are constantly watching. I think that Caleb's death has created hope. Different conversations that I have had are like faith and hope—hundreds of people messaging, just hearing the story.

De'Marqueis

At the funeral, a lady came up to us and she said, "You all don't know me. And I don't know you. But I followed you guys' story on Facebook and I want to let you know that we gave our lives to Christ because of your story."

Asiret

Looking back, seeing how God just provided, then, without us knowing it He went before us. Prior to Caleb's diagnosis I don't think that I had a really close community that I saw often. My joy comes from spending time with Christ and making sure that I'm in touch with all my children. Spending time with Christ, and then getting to know them so that way they can have the same joy that I have in the midst of whenever a storm comes.

De'Marqueis

Joy is a confidence in the Lord. Ultimately that's what we have now. He decides what we go through so that our fingerprints can touch the world. I think why our story is



most impactful is that despite what people go through if you just depend on God you will have a peace that passes all understanding. Joy.

Ryan

Can we just take a moment and celebrate and honor the Harvey family for their faith, for their story.

You know, I got to be an eye witness to all of that. I got to hear the prayers. I got to see the fasting. It was unlike anything I've ever seen before. And there are definitely days that are hard for them. And there are still tears that are shed. But today De'Marqueis is at our West campus leading on our worship team. Asiret is probably sitting in the front row worshipping.

There is this evidence of fruit to their lives. Their story, which could have gone so many different ways, has now been used as a story of hope that has drawn people closer to Christ. They have heard that over and over. Last week alone, we were talking to the team. Two new families were at our church because they invited them to come.

To live is Christ. I hope you see the power behind those four words. And there is just as much power behind those last words:

TO DIE IS GAIN

Nobody talks like that. It was Albert King in the 70s who had a song that said, "Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die."

Kenny Chesney, 2008, "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to go now."

Now, that makes sense to me from a worldly perspective. That makes sense to me if whatever you have in that line: to live is, if it's anything other than Jesus. Why? Because at death that means that I've lost it. I've lost all of the things that I've worked for. I've lost all of the things that were most important to me.

Jesus is the only One you can put in that space that truly to die is gain. That's what Paul said. "It would be better if I was dead. It would be better if I... Are you kidding me? To be done with these prisons. To be done with this torture. To be done with all of this pain and just be with Jesus. I take that because I will be gaining more than I lose."

Why? Why do we have this gain at the end of this thing that the rest of the world is so fearful of? It's because of Jesus Christ.



This is the Good News of the gospel. Jesus came to live that life that you and I could never live. He went to a cross. He paid the penalty for our sins. He would die for me and you. His loss would become our gain. Then Jesus would resurrect three days later, proving that all authority, all power is given to Him in heaven and on earth.

And He says that one day there is going to be a joy that awaits you and it will be Me and you for all of eternity. No more pain. No more loss. But He said, "In the meantime I want you to live for Me. I want you to continue what I began."

That is what Paul said. He said, "Not any longer do I live. My old self was crucified and it is Christ who lives in me."

You know, I was telling my son about this maybe a year ago. He was seven or eight years old. And I was explaining to him the gospel. I'm explaining to him heaven, what all awaits. What will be there and what won't be there. And just like a childhood faith, he said, "Then why don't we just die now?"

That should be the only logical explanation. That's what Paul came to. But then he remembered, "While I'm here there is a fruitful work that I have been called to do."

And I told him, that faith that you have buddy, that confidence that you have, that picture of eternity, that knowing of who Jesus is, that's what we're here to bring to the world. To help others experience and to grow in the joy of their faith.

So, it's not just waiting until we get to heaven one day, it's how can I help bring heaven to this situation? How can I partner with God to bring His kingdom here? That begins with defining what it is that we live for.

So what I want us to do right now is just to create a space, a time of response, a time to be honest about what it is in that space: to live is _____. And to create a moment when you just take whatever that is and place the name of Jesus in it.

So if you could at all of our campuses, right where you are sitting, just bow your heads and close your eyes and just take a moment, what is it that is in that space: to live is _____?

God, whatever I put in Your space, whatever is at the end of: to live is _____, God, I pray that it would be removed right now. We repent of it. We turn from it. We realize how fragile and small it is in comparison to live is Christ.



Father, I remove it in this moment and I place my life in Yours. To live is Christ. Make that your prayer. It could be the first time. I could be the first time in a long time. To live is Christ. I make that declaration today. I place my faith in You.

Jesus, I believe You are the Son of God. I believe You went to a cross. I believe You resurrected. And I place my faith in You and You alone. Lord, fill me with Your Spirit.

Father, as we go from here, God, as we go in Your name in Your power, God, let our lives only make sense in the light of grace. God, allow us through Your power to take the things that were meant to destroy us and to turn them into our greatest ministries.

God, allow us not to lean on things that are so circumstantial. But, God, we stand in You. We stand in Your victory. And if we are to live, if You give us another moment, another day, another year it will be for the joy of others. And if you take us, God we stand in confidence knowing that joy will be all we ever experience in Your presence.

Father, it is in Your name that we pray. Amen.

