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## PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6

Series: Choosing Joy in a Post-Traumatic World

You know, the biggest problem that parents report that their children have is not being able to handle disappointment well. How do I know that? Because I helped design what's called the Child Behavior Inventory. It's an inventory that measures nine different areas in a child's life that parents can write this. I asked the Christian psychologist that I'm working for to tabulate all of the reports so far. So throw this slide up there. I want you to see these are the kinds of things that they're measuring. They're measuring electronics addiction, they're measuring ADHD symptoms with focus. The first one is cooperation you see. That's defiance. We're looking at anxiety and anger. But notice the one that's the highest is disappointment. Kids often don't know how to handle disappointment today. They don't get what they want and they freak out. Things don't go their way and they get upset. They lose a game and they lose more than the game – they lose their composure. It's very difficult today many times for children to handle disappointment.

But it's not just a childhood problem, is it? I mean we have a problem with disappointment ourselves when we have these surprises that come into our lives. When your Starbucks order isn't what you expected, or when you get an unexpected bill in the mail, or when you get out into traffic. Sometimes those surprise disappointments are a challenge. We all must have a plan for dealing with disappointment in our lives. That's why it's exciting for me that we jump into Philippians 3 where Paul is going to give us some very specific ideas to address that.

Just to review, I want to show you that we're looking at emotional health from the eyes of the book of Philippians. We've already acknowledged that anger and love are on this continuum. So there's three emotions we all must have a plan for – anger, sadness, and anxiety. And we know that if you're having a problem with anger, then really the solution is to work love out in your life. We think, “Oh, if I'm having a problem with anger, I need self-control.” Well that's great. I think self-control is good. But 1 Corinthians 13:5 says – *Love is not easily angered*. If you want to really deal with your anger issues, then you work on love. You start thinking more about love and what that looks like. Because love is really the antidote for the anger challenges that we face. There's also sadness and joy. So they're on a continuum. So sometimes we have sadness and when we practice joy then that can reduce the sadness that we experience in our lives. The same thing is true with anxiety. If we work the peace in our lives then the anxiety reduces.

Now all three emotions are not bad. So there's some times we're grieving over something in our lives, a loss of some kind. Because sometimes the losses aren't small. They're not just like our Starbucks order got wrong. Sometimes it's a job, or loss of our health, or loss of a loved one. Those are very real losses. And we don't just want to say, “Oh put on a smiley face.” So there's times when I've talked to people who are either depressed because of some biological reason,

you know, something's off in their body and so they're feeling depressed, or a side effect of a medication, or something like that. Or they've lost a loved one. So I asked this question: Can you experience joy and grieving (or sadness) at the same time? Well I think we'll see the answer to that question today is yes. But it just has a different focus for this joy. Is all anxiety bad? No, it's the anxiety that helps us be responsible in life to get things done. But it's when those things start to control us then we have a problem. That's why we need the truth we're going to see in Philippians 3 today. So if you open your Bibles to Philippians 3:1-6 that will be our passage for today.

Now the first thing I want to show you, before we even start reading it is I want you to see, and I've circled some ideas in the passage. I want you to see how the logic flows in this passage because the logic is important. He starts with this idea of *rejoice in the Lord* and we're going to talk about that. But see the second idea? He says *it is safe for you*. What in the world does that mean? How does rejoicing in the Lord, how is that safe for you? We're going to talk about what that looks like. Because there's something about rejoicing in the Lord that creates some kind of safety for us. And then we go to the third idea is a sense of confidence. How does that tie into this idea of joy in the Lord? I don't think we would normally think the way Paul is describing these things today. So I want you to take careful note of the logic because I think it's within this logic that we're going to walk away with the truths we need to put into practice this week.

Well let's dig in and look at the passage itself. As we do an in-depth study of this passage we see first of all it says – *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord*.

The word *rejoice* and the word *joy* are used sixteen times in the book of Philippians. In fact, it becomes the key word for the book of Philippians. Because he wants the Philippians to understand that they can be joyful, even though he's in prison. Because he got word that they were all distraught and upset and disappointed that now the gospel has stopped because Paul's in prison. Paul's whole point in the book is the gospel hasn't stopped just because Paul's in prison. The gospel is advancing, in fact, even though Paul's in prison because it is the gospel of Jesus Christ and it's going to go forward. So he's saying to them – *Rejoice*.

Now this idea of rejoice is a sense of wellbeing. Just think about what joy is for a moment. When you experience joy, what is it? You know let's say I get a check in the mail instead of a bill in the mail, I would feel joyful. That would be great. I would enjoy that. I think one of the things that makes me feel joyful is when a child comes up and hugs me. I go yes. All is well in the world when a child comes up. and I just loved kids. And so there's a sense of, of joy that I experience. In fact, I tend to feel joy based on circumstances that are out there that happen in my life. I think Paul's saying something bigger than circumstances. But I think the world only has circumstances that they rely on to experience a sense of wellbeing.

The sense of wellbeing that comes from joy is really a good feeling. I know you've felt it. I've felt it. And the medical profession and psychology says you really want to feel this good feeling. Because when you have this positive feeling, it will help you generally in life. It is a good thing to have. So we often have words to describe how we should handle that. We say, "Look at the bright side of life," or "make lemonade out of lemons" or "look at the glass is half full instead of half empty." You know we make those kinds of statements because they help us to think more

positively. Look at the good in your life, not at the bad. The idea is look at the circumstances, find the good things, then you can rejoice and you'll be fine. That's the idea that the world says if there's a sense of circumstances that are out there and we rely on them.

Paul is saying something different here. He's not just saying rejoice. He's saying *rejoice in the Lord*. I think that's where the safety is going to come, that's where the confidence is going to come. Because when we rejoice in the Lord, then our joy becomes more stable than circumstantial happiness or joy. It's not just about the circumstances out there. It's about something bigger, which we're going to talk about in a moment.

But the other interesting thing about this word is it's a command. I tend to think about joy as a response to good things. And Paul is not using it in that way. He's saying I'm telling you to create this good sense of wellbeing in your life based on something. That's what he's saying. He's making it a command. And I go, wow, that's really interesting that he's using this term not as a response to life, but as something that we have some control over. That becomes even more powerful, because now I don't have to view myself as a victim of life circumstances. Now I can take control to a certain extent. I think that's what Paul's assuming. I mean, if he's giving you a command, you got to assume you can implement that command. And he's saying rejoice. I need to take charge of my life and I need to rejoice. I need to have this general sense of wellbeing in my life on a regular basis. Rejoice.

But he's saying *rejoice in the Lord*. In the Lord. You see, when you rejoice in the Lord, you're saying I'm not going to rejoice in circumstances, I'm going to rejoice in something that has bedrock to it. I'm going to rejoice in something that doesn't change and go up and down all the time. I'm going to rejoice in God and how He's working and His character and His providence in my life. I'm going to rejoice in all that God is for me. And when I do that, it levels out my sense of wellbeing. We all need that good sense of wellbeing. God offers that.

He says – *Rejoice in the Lord*. I think that takes practice. I think it means that today I'm going to get up and I'm going to rejoice in the Lord. And so if my Starbucks order gets messed up, I'm still going to rejoice in the Lord. If I get out into traffic and it's frustrating, surprise disappointment, I might be late, I'm going to try to solve that problem, but I'm going to rejoice in the Lord. So my feelings, my sense of wellbeing is not grounded in circumstances; it's grounded in God Himself. One of the things that steals our joy is disappointment. Surprise disappointments. And when that happens, we need to be careful because it may be an indication we're not putting our joy where it needs to be in the Lord Himself.

There's another thing that steals our joy and that is when we mess up. I don't know about you, but when I mess up I feel embarrassed, I feel guilty. When I mess up I feel regret sometimes, discouraged. It kind of takes my joy away. There's a story in the Old Testament that illustrates this and the solution. I'm going to show it to you because it fits right into this passage. Because in Nehemiah's time that people were rebuilding the wall and then they came to a place where they started reading the scriptures or have them read to them. And in the midst of that, they realize you know why these walls have fallen down? It's our fault. And they start feeling regret and guilt for the forefathers who had caused this problem and they're feeling sad about it all. Notice Nehemiah's solution when he says to the people – *Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks*

*and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.* There we have it again. Joy of the Lord. What Paul is saying is rejoice in the Lord. But it's this joy of the Lord that provides this strength for us so that they could get up and start working again.

I don't know if you've ever been discouraged, depressed, despairing, sad so much that you just don't have the energy to do what you need to do. That's what's happening here. He's saying the joy of the Lord is your strength. There's something about the joy of the Lord that produces strength on the inside because you have meaning, you have purpose, you have direction. And God wants that for you. That's Paul's message. That's Nehemiah's message. Remarkable.

But now, as we continue on in this verse, he says – *To write the same things to you is no trouble to me.* In other words, I've said this a number of times already. To say it again is really not a problem for me. *And it is safe for you.* Safe for you. I go, wow, that's really a unique thing to say. What does he mean by *it's safe for you*?

Well the Greek word there is *asphalos*, which is where we get our word 'asphalt' from. The idea is that it might be a little bit hard or tentative to walk on wood chips, but when you get to the asphalt you feel a little bit more comfortable. We know what that means. *Asphalos* is this idea of sturdiness; it's safe. It's safer there to walk on the asphalt than on the woodchips. I think a lot of times in our lives we feel like we're walking on wood chips, but the rejoicing in the Lord is the safety. It's the *asphalos* for us so that we can have this sense of sturdiness, of confidence.

Some of you might have the New International Version where it says *it is a safeguard for you.* Safeguard. Like guard rails is the idea. Well what is it protecting you from? In the immediate context if you go to the previous chapter, we see that he says there – *Do everything without complaining and arguing.* Well certainly joy in our lives, rejoicing in the Lord is going to prevent us from going off the guardrails. It's going to prevent us from the disappointments of life when we understand our joy in the Lord. It's going to help us deal with the regrets and guilt that we experience. Sometimes we say we're just overrun by this sadness. It's going to protect us in our lives. It's a safeguard for you.

I was thinking this week of an illustration to describe this safeguard idea and I was thinking about bowling. You know when you go bowling, if you're good, you don't need those bumper things in the alleyways. What do you call those things? The gutters? You don't need those. But if you're someone like me, I can score a lot of points and I can actually win a game if the bumpers are in the gutters. I like that. That's what joy is. I think that's what Paul is saying. They are a safeguard for you. So you can throw the ball down there and it's going to bounce around and still hit the pins. That's the beautiful thing about rejoicing in the Lord. We need to practice this. We need to practice rejoicing in the Lord every day. When we get up today – “Lord, I know I have a to-do list but the most important thing on my to-do list is joy. I want to serve you in my emotions today, Lord. I want to rejoice in you no matter what happens today. I want my joy to be in you.” And then it becomes like these bumpers in the gutters that allow us to continue on in the lanes of life. So it's a safeguard for you.

Let's go on to the next verse because notice it says three times *look out, look out, look out*. In the New International Version it says *beware, beware, beware*. Well I think he's telling us another thing we better be careful of or it's going to rob us of our joy. This is a third joy stealer. The first one was these unexpected disappointments. The second one is the guilt and regrets that might cause us to lose our joy. And now he's going to tell us about another one. Let me read the verse and then I'm going to try to explain this because we have to step into some church history here during that time in order to understand this idea. Then we'll take the application and bring it over to our own lives.

It says – *Look out for the dogs* (now this is a pretty strong language that Paul is using), *look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh*. It's all the same people he's saying look out for.

Let me explain to you what's happening in the early church. People are coming into Christ. They're getting to know Jesus as their personal Savior, forming into a church. Now some of those people are Jewish people who have a heritage of course we know is rich, where they have all of the history of David and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all of these great people that God worked in. They know all these things about Judaism and it just makes the understanding of Jesus Christ now, really...when you understand the tabernacle, whoa, Jesus Christ is great. When you understand the sacrificial system, you go amazing who Jesus Christ is. So once you know Judaism, then understanding Christianity is like the lights turn on. You go, wow.

And then you've got these people over here, the Gentiles. The Gentiles are getting saved. They don't have that kind of heritage, but they are saved from darkness into light. They're saved from idolatry into Christianity. It is amazing. They're loving their new relationship with Christ because it is freeing for them.

Now they're all starting to mingle together. And some of these Jewish people are saying, "Let me tell you about the history of Christianity. It really goes back into Judaism," which is true, it does. And the Gentiles are saying, "Wow, that's really interesting. I never knew that about you guys." So they're talking back and forth, and they're saying, "Yeah, we had circumcision. In fact, you guys, if you really want to get saved, you should be circumcised. If you really want to be a good Christian, you should obey the law." So now we have this problem, this heresy growing in the early church what's called legalism. They're called the Judaizer that says there's something else besides Jesus Christ that you must do in order to experience salvation. And that's the danger. Paul's warning about it. He warns about in other places, too. It's a danger that's going on during that time.

It's not just then. There's some times today when people add things to salvation. In fact, there's some churches that say, "Well if you really want to be saved, you have to do this, this, this, and this, and then you can be saved." There's some who say, "You need to be saved and baptized." I think baptism is important, but it doesn't save you. There's some that say, "You have to be saved and speak in tongues." Well, the important thing is salvation alone. That's the idea. When you add anything else to salvation, it starts to be some works thing that you're doing. And there can be nothing else but God's grace that our joy is based in. So if we start adding other things, then we are putting confidence in the flesh. We're starting to rely on something in ourselves that

allows us to have joy today because I'm such a good person, or I grew up in this family, or because I've done all these good things. If our joy is based on that, we're going to lose it. Our joy is going to be stolen away because we're going to see that sometimes we don't do good things, we have problems. Salvation is in Christ alone. We rejoice in the Lord, not anything else.

In fact, Paul now is going to answer that in verse 3. So in verse 3 he says – *For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.* What he's saying is that when you're a true believer, you are the circumcise. You don't have to do something in your flesh; it's something that you have inside of your heart.

In fact, let me take you to another passage of scripture in Romans 2:28-29 where it says – *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.* Even in the book of Romans, Paul's trying to deal with this heresy and help people understand that true salvation is circumcision. That's the most important thing. It's the heart, not about something you do with your body.

This is a remarkable truth and very important, because when it comes to our joy there's nothing else that we want to attach to it. Because anything we attach to the Lord in our joy makes room for failure, for us to lose that joy, for the joy to be stolen away. It's joy in the Lord.

So if we go back now into our passage, we're going to see starting in verse 4 that it says – *though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.* Now Paul is going to use himself as an example. Essentially, what Paul is going to say is don't put confidence in the flesh. But if someone were going to do it, I could really do it. But he's going to say I don't do it either. I trust in the Lord. I rejoice in the Lord, not in my self, not in my own confidence. But he's going to say, hey, you want to look at someone who has confidence, look at this. And he's going to give us seven things for about who he is and three about what he does.

Here's what he says. *If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews...* Those are the four things about who he is. Then what he does. He says – *as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.* So these are the three things that he did. That he could say I could look at my life and I could feel pretty joyful based on who I am. I grew up in a religious home. Or I could feel pretty good about myself because I lived a good life. I had passion in trying to serve God and do other things. Even though I was wrong, I had a lot of passion when I persecuted the church. So he says I could rejoice in my own flesh, but I don't. I rejoice in the Lord.

So here's another thing that could steal our joy, if we tie anything else into that rejoicing in the Lord other than the Lord Himself. Because the Bible tells us that we're to mourn with those who mourn, and rejoice with those who rejoice. We don't just say, "Put on a smiley face because God's in control." There's grieving that we experience. And I said, you know, getting a job, as you know, Tim, is the hardest thing I think that you ever do. Because you send out your résumé and they ignore you or they reject you over and over and over again. And so it's very hard to go out there and get a job. In fact, we prayed for the job that he has now. He had sent over 100

résumés out to try to get this job and he got it, and we were rejoicing together back then. So then I asked the question, I said, “Tim, did you do something wrong? What happened?” I think that's a good question that we ask ourselves. I mean, if we brought this on ourselves, we need to learn from. “Did you do something wrong?” He says, “I don't think so. There were some misunderstandings and I tried to clear them up. My boss had some personal issues and I think he felt threatened by me. I tried to bolster him up, but he let me go.”

I said, “Oh, Tim, I am so sorry. Can I share some scripture with you?” Because I just looked at this whole thing about disappointment. And I started sharing, I started preaching the sermon to Tim, sharing some of these ideas and sharing some of the ideas from the other sermon I prepared for GraceWay. When I got done with what I was sharing, he said to me, “Man, that's really good. I needed to hear that. How did you come up with that? Do you have like something on your iPhone that says someone lost a job, look this up, and you start reading all of this stuff or something?” I said, “No, no, this is part of my sermon for Sunday.” He says, “I can hardly wait to listen to that sermon.”

See, I think Tim needs this sermon. But I need this sermon, too. And I think all of us need this sermon to know how are we going to process the disappointments of life. It's not just a child problem. I think we all need to have a plan for dealing with sadness, for dealing with disappointment, to dealing with our lives, because the most important priority we have is to serve the Lord. Not just by doing works out there, but even serve the Lord in our emotions. That they are centered on who God is and what He wants for us. That is the most important thing that we can do is to trust the Lord. And that's why Paul starts. He says I don't have a problem saying this again, because it's safe for you. I'm going to say it. Ready? *Rejoice in the Lord*. And he's going to say it more times as we continue on. We need that message and we want to trust God in the midst of that.

Stand with me and let's pray together before we sing that joy song again that we already sang once, but I want to sing it again. But let's pray first.

[PRAYER] Lord, thank you for your love for us. The fact that you give us the ability to have joy in any circumstance, we are grateful. So thank you. We ask for more of that in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's sing the song together.