Choose Joy!

This morning I want to speak to you about joy. Quite a fitting theme for the time of year I feel! As you know we spent the last 3 months in the book of Philippians and Paul's main theme is joy. So when Martin asked me if I'd preach this Sunday, I knew that I wanted to share some of what God showed me through our study in Philippians – on the subject of joyfulness!

And so this morning I have 5 points on joy. This is what God has shown me recently, I don't pretend to have mastered them, but I would like to share with you what God has shared with me, and it's this:

1. Joy is learned. We are as happy as we choose to be! I decided to call this message '*choose joy.'* Because joy is a choice! Choosing joy is a discipline – it's something we develop. We've never mastered it! But we have to practice joy on a daily basis. And the more you do, the better you become at it! We have to **learn** to **choose** joy.
2. Joy is all about perspective. As we go through life we can either focus on our problems, *which we're quite good at doing – at least I am!* Or, we can look at them the way God sees them. And when we do, even our problems will be a source of joy in our lives.
3. Gratefulness & joy go hand in hand. *There's no such thing as a joyful complainer!* Joyful people are grateful people! I know when I feel most joyful it's when I'm being most grateful!
4. Worry is a killjoy. We **CANNOT** be worried and joyful at the same time. Joyful people are not stressors!
5. There are always reasons to be joyful! There's always reason to be joyful because of the hope we have in God. Joy doesn't come from what we have; it comes from what we know…and especially what we know about God. So I want to look at 5 reasons why **all** of us can rejoice **all** of the time!

So that's where we're heading this morning, but before we dive in, will you join me in prayer?

1. Joy is learned

Did you know that Pauls uses the words "joy" and "rejoice" 16 times in his short letter to the Philippians? Which is crazy when you think about it, because where is Paul writing this letter from? Prison! Paul's old by now, but he's not exactly enjoying a comfortable retirement plan! He's in prison – worse - he's chained to a Roman guard

24/7. Imagine what that'd be like? They've taken everything from him: his friends, his itinerant preaching ministry, his freedom, even his privacy has been removed! And if that wasn't bad enough, everyday he wakes up awaiting death by execution! Paul's situation is rough – just in case we'd be tempted to read Paul's joyful letter to the Philippians and say, *"Yeah but…"* No Paul's **learned** how to be joyful despite his circumstances! Even in prison, with no privacy or freedom, Paul is joyful. Look at Philippians 4:12: *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. **I have learned (crucial phrase)** the secret of being content in any and every situation.*

Paul says "I've learned to be joyful." He wasn't waiting for things to get better before he could be joyful. He wasn't waiting to get out of prison – he learned to be joyful there! I have a question for you this morning. **Are you waiting to 'find' joy?** If you are, you will be waiting for the rest of your life, because **joy is not found. It is learned!** We too often think joy is to be found in something or someone in the future…*'When I get this…then I'll be happy! "When that happens I'll be happy!" "When I get married, when I get divorced, when I finally get some time to myself, when I get a holiday, when I get that promotion, then I'll be happy!'* But we wont! We'll have the emotion of happiness for a while probably but it will fade fast and we'll be miserable again! So Paul tells us that joy is not found. It is learned! **Are you learning to be more joyful? Are you growing in joy?** You see joy is always a possibility because joy is a choice. It's fair to say that **the level of joy you are experiencing right now is completely and totally up to you**. It's not dependant on anyone or anything else! Paul had learned to choose joy and we must too!

2. Joy is all about perspective

Anybody in here have a lifetime ambition? *(barmptzphah!)* Perhaps you want to win a Nobel Prize, or you long to start a company, or be a pro skiier, well Paul had an ambition. He dreamt of preaching in Rome. Paul's ambition was to do some kind of preaching crusade in the coliseum! And guess what? He's made it to Rome! The coliseum is just around the corner but he's got a problem. He's in prison! Things were not exactly going according to his plan! He'd just spent 2 years in jail in Caesarea under false charges, then got sent to Rome – got shipwrecked on the way and stranded on a desert island, while he's there he gets bitten a snake, and then when he finally arrives in Rome, he gets imprisoned again for another 2 years with a guard strapped to him 24/7! That was Paul's situation. Anyone jealous? So we might have expected Paul's letter to the Philippians to look something like this: "*Dear Philippians,* I *want you all to know that I'm really struggling, and I have no freedom, I hate it here, my life feels useless and I think God's deserted me…"* But that's not what we read is it? Paul has a different perspective on all that's happened to him. Look at 1:12, he says, *"I want you to know, brothers, that*

what has happened to me here has really served to advance the gospel." He says, "My imprisonment is for Christ! God knows what he's doing! I had a plan, but he had a better one, sure it's not what I expected, but he's in control - praise God!"

Wow! I want that kind of perspective in my life, don't you? So what's Paul's secret? How did he remain so joyful? Here's how: **because he saw every problem from God's viewpoint**. When we take on God's perspective in the midst of a problem, and realize that he is working out his purposes even in our difficulties, we are on the road to learning true joy. You see, whatever's going on your life right now, the good stuff, the bad stuff, the confusing stuff, the difficult stuff, God is working it all into his sovereign plan! That's why Paul can say to the Romans, "*And we know that for those who love God **all things (not some things)** work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)* He has a purpose in what he's doing in your life right now!

Paul knew that he was not in charge of his circumstances, but he was in charge of his joy. And when he saw his situation from God's perspective, he rejoiced! **Joy is all about perspective!**

3. Gratefulness and joyfulness go hand in hand!

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 *"give thanks **in** all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* Notice Paul says be thankful **in** all circumstances, not thankful **for** all circumstances! That would be weird, if you were thankful for sickness, and pain and suffering and injustice. You are not commanded to be thankful **for** those things, but **in** those things.

Why does the bible command us to be grateful? Because grateful people are joyful people! We all know people who literally complain about everything – they're not much fun to be around are they? You can hardly describe them as joyful! And just as joy is a choice, **gratefulness is also a choice**. I've noticed something profound in my life: **that when I feel most joyful; it's when I'm being most grateful for what God's given me!**

And when I'm most miserable, it's when I'm thinking of all the things that I've not got, that I want, where I'd rather be… **How often do you thank God for all he has done for you?** *How do you start your prayers?* How often do you tell **people** how thankful you are for what they do for you? How grateful are you for your relationships? It doesn't matter who it is: could be your wife, husband, son, daughter, mother, mother in law, sister, colleague, boss, pastor, youth leader! Just think for a minute, especially about the

relationships in your life. Do you thank God for them? Even the difficult people that God has put in your life? Are you grateful for them?

I don't think its coincidence that Paul starts his joyful letter by saying how thankful he is for his relationship with the Philippians! *"Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy…"*

Here's a habit to develop, that Paul practiced, that is **guaranteed** to increase your joy: think of every relationship you have with others, as given by God and like Paul, pray for them with thankfulness. When you pray for people, especially the difficult people in your life, how do you pray? Do you complain to God about them? Or do you pray with thankfulness for them? There's a massive difference and it changes your heart towards them entirely!

I encourage you this morning to ask yourself, "**Who or what do I need to be more grateful for?"** Thank God for the people he's put in your life and pray for them with thankfulness. *Quick question: if you are more grateful do you think you would be more joyful?* Definitely! The more grateful we become, the more joy we'll experience!

4. Worry is a killjoy

I heard a few weeks ago that in the states, suicide has now passed car crashes as the number one cause of injury death, and I suspect it's not too dissimilar here in Switzerland. Let's face it – there's a lot of stress and worry in the world! Job loss, money, health, busyness, relationships, lack of sleep are all reasons we give for being stressed. I bet if I was to ask you right now, what are you worrying about, you would almost defiantly be able to give me a list – me included! We almost accept worry as a given don't we? People say 'oh I'm just a born worrier!' No you're not! Worry is learned behaviour – you don't come out of the womb worried! We have learned to worry and it does us no good at all! If you think about it, worry is pointless. It's actually illogical: it only exaggerates problems. It doesn't solve them. In fact, the more we worry about something, the more exaggerated it becomes in our mind! If you can change something there's no point worrying about it, you might as well change it! If you cant change it, then worrying about wont help!

Listen to what Paul writes in Philippians 4. In fact I'm going to read from verse 4 through to 9 to set the context: *Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! (There's our command to choose joy!) Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.* ***Don't worry about anything****; (and I love this*

next bit – it doesn't just tell us us what not to do, but also what to do) instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (there's our command to be thankful again!) [7] *Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.* [8] *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.* [9] *Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.*

Wouldn't it be nice to be stress free? You can be! Paul just told us how: we have to choose, **1) not to worry about anything, 2) pray about everything, 3) thank God in all things, 4) focus on good things, and 5) choose to rejoice in all circumstances!** These are all choices for us to make. It's us that stresses us out! But be warned, worry and stress will rob you not only of joy but also of your health! Worry is really unhealthy! You've heard the expression 'worried sick?' There's a reason why people say that! Because we literally make ourselves sick by worrying! Our bodies weren't designed to handle worry. Proverbs 12:25 tells us that "Worry weighs a person down!" We can all testify to that I'm sure!

But God promises us a peace that doesn't make sense to others - even in the chaos. There in verse 7. God promises a more peaceful, less stressed mind. Proverbs 14:30 says *'a heart at peace gives life to the body.'* Worry is a definite killjoy! Both Paul and Jesus tell us not to worry. But the choice is ours - **we have to choose not to worry!**

5. There are always reasons to be joyful!

I've been looking forward to getting to this point! I am aware that some of you are experiencing enormous difficulties and painful circumstances this morning. Some of those I know about, some I don't! They make you want to question God instead of being thankful. Our life circumstances can change in a moment and forever alter our lives. Tragedy & difficulty strikes young and old, rich and poor. You may be in a difficult season right now, but there are always reasons to be joyful and to put your hope in God no matter what's going on. Every child of God in here this morning can rejoice in the unchangeable character of God.

1. His Grace. Everything that's good in your life is a gift from God. Family, talents, abilities, homes, money… What do we have that God didn't freely give us? No matter what's going on, we can be thankful for his grace. Psalm 103 (which I preached on

earlier in year), talks about all the things that God does for us. *He forgives all my sins, he redeems me from death, he crowns me with love and tender mercies, he fills my life with good things…"* The Psalmist goes on! We have no hope and no future, and nothing good without his grace! You can always rejoice in his amazing grace to you!

2. His Plan. The second reason we can be joyful this morning is because no matter what is going on in your life right now, if you are his child, he is working it into **his plan**.
Listen to Jeremiah 29:11: *For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.*

That's a reason to be joyful guys! Sometimes that's the only thing that brings me comfort – knowing that God is working out his plans in my life and incorporating everything - the good, the bad, and even the ugly – into it! Only God can do that! Paul knew this, and he knew he could trust God, and that gave him joy. Listen, just because you don't see him or understand what he's doing in your life right now, don't think that he is not working out his purposes in your life – if you are his child – he is.

3. His Faithfulness. The third unchangeable is **his promise to never leave me.** Hebrews 13:5 says*, I will never fail you nor forsake you.* No matter what you go through, He'll never abandon.

- He won't let go of my hand. I might want to try let go of his sometimes, but he wont let go of mine ever. He'll be faithful to complete the work he's begun in me! His grace abounds in deepest waters.

4. His work in us. (sanctification). We can **rejoice in the changes he's making in us**! 1 Thess 4:3 tells us that God is making us more like Jesus and he's using everything in our life to do it! The good, the bad and the ugly. This brings me joy!

5. His future plans for us. God is preparing a home for us in heaven and we have the hope of eternity where one day we'll be with him forever and listen to how incredible it sounds: *He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."*
The hope of heaven where our joy in him will be complete is enough to keep us going in this life.

So take comfort in those 5 unchangeable truths this morning no matter where you're at or what you're going through. (review them) If you're hope is in anything that can be taken away from you – a job, a relationship, a bank balance, your health, you set yourself

up for disappointment, but these things wont change because God is faithful! Others can desert you, God wont, you might lose your job but God wont lose you, others may plan to harm you but God plans to prosper you!

There is real, concrete, genuine hope for joy in your life and it's found only in him. Even in the midst of despair, you can experience joy. God intends for us to experience true joy. It's the life Jesus purchased for us. He said in John 10:10, *I came that you might have life and life to the full*! Not a life of misery and sorrow! So it's up to us. It's our choice.

- *Traintracks?*
- *It's a process.*