

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Joy is Advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ

John Kim

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Scripture:

Philippians 1:12-18

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice

Transcript:

Good morning, BelPres. How's everyone doing? Happy 4th of July. How many are barbecuing this weekend? See any of the hands? Smoking anything? Meat, that is, specifically. Want to welcome those of you who are joining us online. My name is John Kim and I am one of your mission pastors here at BelPres. I oversee 28 global partners that are around the world. It's the best job that I have. I'm so thankful that you entrust me with that.

I'm married to Soul. We've been married 27 years. Woohoo! I have three kiddos. I've got udub graduate, Ethan. I have a udub senior, her name is Audrey. She's known by BelPres High School students as Drey. And I've got my youngest, Emma, who is a senior at Jackson High

School. And she will be, if you follow me on Instagram or Facebook, I'm either posting photos of barbecue meat being smoked or archery because my daughter Emma is an archery nut.

Well, whether you're joining us in person or if you're joining us from your home or living room, we just want you to know we're so thankful that you're here with us.

So Father, we thank you this morning because we have been experienced Jesus, his love and his forgiveness. We thank you for our families, for our kids, for the love that you pour out into our lives every day because of your son Jesus. Amen.

Well, marriage can be difficult. For the first two years of our marriage, we had lots of arguments. My wife and I, we dated long distance for three years. She was in Minneapolis, I was in Dallas and we really didn't know each other before tying the knot. Now let me ask you this question. Have you ever felt like you could never live up to the expectations placed on you? I sure did.

As I shared with you, the first two years of our marriage was crazy difficult. One of our very first arguments was, get this, over filling the gas of our cars. I remember one day my wife said to me, "Hey, aren't you going to fill up the gas in my car?" And I replied very quickly back to her, "Well, can you do it yourself?" I remember her saying, "Why don't you sit down and let me just tell you a story."

Now I learned from that story I would never live up the expectations of my father-in-law. So my wife's family, she tells me this story, my wife's family, Mom and Dad and she's one of five siblings. And at this time, all the kids were driving along with Mom and Dad, so there's seven cars in the family. Now it's Minnesota, dead winter, 20 below zero. And my wife would tell me that her dad, after the last kid would come home, and many times that's after midnight, he would go out in this blizzard of snow, take each of the cars. And if they needed to be filled with gas, he would fill them up.

And get this. And then he would come back and he'd repark all the cars according to who leaves the house first in the morning so that no one is stuck waiting for a sibling or for a parent to move their cars so they can go to school or work. Now my loving wife said this to me saying, "My dad did this for me," implying that I should do the same.

Now I grew up independent, a latchkey kid, pretty much going to school on my own, making my own dinner and even putting myself to sleep at night because my parents wouldn't get home till way, way, way after I fell asleep because of their work schedule.

Now, this is just one of thousands of examples that my wife would tell me about her dad, that her dad was the greatest. And I mean, he was in all honesty. This was one of the ways that he showed his love to his family. And I love my father-in-law. He passed away when Ethan was just a baby so he never got to see and spent time and play with his grandkids.

But how do you live up to that, right? She expected me to fill her tank every time. And to be honest, for those first two years, living up to those types of expectations was really hard. It's hard to live up to expectations. Whether it's from our parents, whether it's from school, whether it's from our spouses or relationships, expectations placed in the workplace or even at church. And sometimes, the hardest are the ones that we place on ourselves.

Now I share this because I think when we think about Apostle Paul and the life and ministry that he lived and this letter of joy that he wrote to the Philippian Church, I think we all feel like, "How can we live up to that kind of faith and expectation?"

Follow along as I read a different version of Philippians chapter one versus 12 through 18, "Now I want you to know brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me actually serve to advance the gospel. And as a result, it's become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir trouble for me while I'm in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached, and because of this, I rejoice. Yes, I will rejoice."

Now, from the passage we learned, Paul was imprisoned for his faith, that even the Praetorian this elite guard knew that it was because of his faith in Jesus he was placed under house arrest. And Paul goes on to describe the jealousy and envy of Christians that slander against him but he emphatically says, "Doesn't matter. As long as Christ is preached, I will rejoice." Three times the word "chains" are used in this passage, referring to his imprisonment in Rome.

Now, how many of you let me see your hands, have been put into prison for your faith? Now let me share this. The closest I got was when I was on short-term mission in Russia. I was in a small city and I was walking to the ministry center where a group of us were meeting pastors, local pastors. We were training them, teaching the Bible. I was teaching a class on the pastoral epistles, First and Second Timothy and Titus.

I was walking to this ministry center by myself and I was pulled aside by Russian police. One of the reasons is because I was totally out of place. In this city, there were no Asians and they're

looking at me like, "Who is this kid?" They pulled me aside. They were asking me questions. I couldn't understand. And they took me to jail. Now I didn't have my passport on me. It was at the place, so I just had no identification. Now the finish of that story is for another sermon.

I believe Paul knew that the reading of his letter, those that were reading his letter, probably felt the same way. So he answers this by saying everything in his life, everything that has happened in his life, exists solely to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when you do that, live your life for the advancement of the gospel, you become more confident, you live daring and you become fearless to proclaim the gospel of Jesus.

Now, let me say that. When you live your life for the advancement of the gospel, you become more daring. You become fearless. Now Paul dismantles any unrealized expectations that we might put on ourselves, that we are truly free, that the grace of God, Jesus sacrificing himself on the cross, frees us from the pursuit of chasing good works. And what I do for him says how much God loves me in return. Jesus loves us unconditionally because he freely gave up his life for us completely.

Jesus removed any expectation on us. And you know what? He placed it on himself when he hung on that cross and died. And he paid the penalty for sin once and for all. And when he was resurrected, three days later, he showed us how we can live a new life sending us a helper, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Now, if you remember, Paul was actually known as Saul before he became a follower of Jesus. He was a persecutor. He was chosen by the chief priest specifically to hunt down Christians and to kill them. In Acts chapter eight, we see that it was Saul who consented to Stephen stoning and death. He would go into homes of known Christians and he would drag both men and women to prison. He was relentless. He threatened and murdered as many Christians as he could possibly find. He wanted to destroy the church and he did everything to persecute those that followed Jesus.

It was after getting permission from the high priest, the chief priest in Jerusalem, where he would go to the city of Damascus, which is 130 miles. And basically, that city, the trip along the way, his job was to take and find as many Christians and put them in prison.

But you know what? It was on that road to Damascus where a light from heaven shown around him and it surrounded him and he heard a voice saying, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he asked, "Who are you?" And the voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Paul came face-to-face with his savior. We know immediately Paul became blind. He met the disciple named Ananias, who would pray over him, teach him about the gospel, disciple him and Saul would receive the Holy Spirit and he was baptized. You see, Saul the persecutor of Christians became a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. Isn't that amazing?

You see, Paul knew his own story of brokenness. And I think that's important for all of us. It's unique to you and you alone. Knowing our own sinfulness before a holy God, and our need for redemption and forgiveness, our daily asking for God for his mercy and his grace and his peace, which only comes through the blood of Jesus Christ. And because of his love for us, we can love him completely with all of our lives.

Paul says throughout this passage he is in chains for Christ. Did you know that while we might never hear about someone here on the Eastside being put into prison because of their faith, did you know this happens all the time in specific places around the world today? Did you know that 80% of the world's governments interfere with their citizens' religious worship in some way? And that there are 13 countries where the Bible can only be distributed through covert operations?

Early this year, I was invited to meet with one of our global partners in a private setting. They plant churches in Iran and they smuggle Bibles into the country. I met a man whose job was to smuggle Bibles, but he was caught and he was put into prison for several years, very difficult circumstances. He struggled a lot. He was beaten, but you know what? During that time he witnessed Christ not only to the guards but also to the inmates. And many of them came to Christ. It's exactly like Paul's life, like these words that we're reading in Philippians, they're coming to life as I'm hearing the testimony of this man.

Something that might seem so far off from life here on the Eastside isn't really that far off because it's actually happening around the world today. I say this because the advancement of the gospel, it's not just a cool worship service or a cool program at church. It's more than just attending Sundays or joining a program. It is taking the whole gospel of Jesus and discipling others to become disciples of Jesus and living out the kingdom of God both as it is in heaven and here on earth. The holy scriptures is applicable to us today. It's alive. The Holy Spirit is alive. He is active and he's moving in the lives of the saints. And we are a continuation of God's church since that day of Pentecost. Amen?

At the beginning of COVID, I had the opportunity to work with a global outreach intern. She was also a Renew House parent. Her and her husband were both house parents at Renew. Now, if you don't know, Renew is a program associated with Eastside Academy, which provides housing for homeless youth and those that are facing significant challenges in their home lives. Now my intern and her husband lived with these students in the Renew's two homes. I got to pray with her each week and I got to spend time with my intern and she got to participate and help the work that we're doing here at Global. She shared about her love for the students and the care and the purposeness of her life and everything that was going on.

Sometimes, I get a call from her saying that she needed to meet with the student because of an emergency, an urgent need. And she would say, "Can you just pray for me?" And I'd pray for

her. And she would need time. She would say, "Look, I can't do the work that you've asked me to do because I'm meeting the needs of this student." And I said, "Sure, no problem." I remember asking her, "Why'd you want to become a house parent? Why would you want to become a house parent?" And you know what she said? She said her and her husband sat down and talked and they said, "We want to live out our faith, a tangible expression of what it means to be a Christian." And they said, "We want to help others. And we want to make our lives a testimony of our love for Jesus." So becoming a house parent was a natural progression of what it meant for them to be a Christian.

It's amazing to see people live out their lives for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus. They become more confident, they live daring and they become fearless. I could see it every time I was with her. She oozed the advancement of the gospel because of her love for people. She just, the fearlessness and the confidence, and it affected me. I became more confident. I became more fearless. It was this infectious spirit about her.

Our imagination is so powerful. They did this study by Ellen Langer out of Harvard University. Now it was back in 1979, old days, right? The old days, old people days. And she would spend time at senior centers. And she was like, "This is not a vibrant place to live out your last days." And so she did an experiment where she took eight of the men out of that senior center and she placed them in a redecorated monastery. This is back in 1979. So she decorated the monastery and the rooms and everything like it was 1959.

So these men got out of the van as they got to this monastery and a lot of them had canes. I mean, they barely could get out of the van and barely into the monastery. They were struggling just to get in there. And they were just told, "I want you to pretend it's 1959 again." So they walked into their living quarters. They had television shows. Now, these were black-and-white television shows from 1959. The cover of Time Magazine and different magazine covers from 1959 were everywhere. And there was music being played from the top hits of 1959. They even took out all the mirrors so that none of the men could see reflections of themselves. And they were told just for the week, just pretend.

And before they were put in there, they were even tested for their biomarkers. They were tested for their senses. They were tested for their sense of sight, their sense of hearing. They tested their focus and their memory, and they tested their physical strength. And they took a picture of them before they went in. And then at the end of the seven days, they came back and it was like the movie Cocoon, if you watched it. They came back and they tested them. And you know what? They found that they were physically stronger, that they had better eyesight. They had a better sense of hearing. And cognitively, they had a better focus and a better memory after just seven days of living in that environment, listening to that music. A lot of them came out and they weren't using their canes anymore. It's amazing. That's how powerful our minds can be.

Our imagination is so powerful. Now, here is where I'm going with this. When we live out the gospel of Jesus Christ, when we live out the gospel in our lives, when we advance the gospel, Paul says here we become more confident in Jesus. And we dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. You see Paul's own failures, right? You could see... I talked about his failures. He murdered Christians, but you know what? He was transformed by the grace of God and his life and his ministry became a lighthouse to all the disciples. Everyone who read his words, they experienced supernatural confidence and they lived daring lives and they were fearless in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

Can you imagine if we lived our lives like that just for one year? The kind of miracles, the supernatural power of the kingdom of God that would change our families, our marriages, our community, our church. Jesus said the two greatest commandments are, one, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul; and two, to love your neighbors as yourself.

BelPres, can I challenge you this summer, how are you going to live your life to advance the gospel? I challenge you to love someone like Christ is asking us to: through time, action presence, prayer, companionship, over coffee and meals. This might mean a coworker. It might mean a neighbor or a friend or a relative. Parents, this might mean to love another family that has kids in the similar ages as your kids.

For some of you, I challenge you to love God more deeply. Now that might mean understanding God's word in the light of justice and racial reconciliation. We have people in this church that can help you, like our justice and racial reconciliation team. They can provide resources and they can help you process what God is doing in your heart and life.

Now, my friend and theologian, Dr. Joel Lawrence, he said this, "The greatest weakness of the American church's approach to discipleship is that it has largely focused on discipling the individual, but not the church." We have worked to train individuals to follow Jesus often with behavioral emphasis, but haven't worked to form the church as a communal society with a unique being in the world. The focus on individual discipleship has led to a failure to form a foundational ecclesial identity that can sustain the church in her call to be an alien people. And this failure of formation is contributing to the polarization of the church today as a lack of ecclesial formation has made the members of the church vulnerable to be discipled by political identities, both left and right, and of American culture. We are not able to be the church today because we haven't been discipled to be the church. The result? A divided body of Christ engaging in open warfare against each other and against the world that we have been sent to love.

So how do we combat this, church? Well, we need to look for collective ways to be connected to each other in community. We have so many different communities here at BelPres, our kids and students for one. If you go to our website, you'll see all the different groups that you can be a part of and join. So my encouragement is to join one, be in community.

In own communities here on the Eastside, we've got PTAs, we've got local community groups. We've got educational groups, professional groups, sporting groups, lifestyle groups. There's so many that God has called us to be a part of. Jubilee Service Day is approaching fast and loving our community as the body of Christ is one of the ways that we form a communal society reflecting Jesus' love to the world. So sign up for Jubilee service day.

Now when I first heard the stories of my wife sharing about her father and what he did for his family, I brushed it off. And I said, "You know what? I'm not doing it, no way." And much of the difficulties in my first two years of our marriage was really because I was extremely selfish. I did not want to recognize the inherent love and the inherent good that he did for his family and the way that he loved his kids.

But you know what? Over time, over 27 years, I am becoming more and more like my father-in-law. I would see myself do the same things that he would do to show his love for his kids. Now I'm nowhere near the extent of the love that my father-in-law have. He's one of my heroes today. But I am following example, I'm taking a step forward in developing and showing my love for my family. And it's made a difference. It's made a difference in my own marriage, in the way that I relate to my kids.

BelPres, in this next season of life, let's live out our lives for the advancement of the gospel. Let's take those steps of faith. And when we do that, we find confidence and we become more daring and we become fearless. That's how God has designed us. Let's live without fear, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So Father, we thank you for the encouragement that you give us in your word today. Thank you for Paul's life and his testimony, where you would take someone who murdered others, who murdered Christians, and you would give him and pour out your grace in his life and his life could be changed, where his life would become a lighthouse to the disciples around the world, and even including us today.

Father, help us to live for the advancement of your gospel. Build in us confidence, give us daring lives and fearless hearts. And we pray this in your son's holy and precious name. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Why is it difficult to find joy when we are going through a very difficult trial or situation? What do you think was Paul's secret?
- Paul experienced a lot of difficulties in his life, when his sole aim in life was to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Look at 2 Cor. 11:23-30. Write down all of those difficulties. Which one(s) would you most identify with? Why?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.