

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Dangerous Joy

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Scripture:

Philippians 2:19-30

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Transcript:

Well, hello BelPres. My name is Ryan Beattie, and I have the privilege of working on things here like discipleship and spiritual formation, lots of cool things here at BelPres, and it's always a privilege to get to preach. Thank you for joining us online as well, as we continue our summer series on the book of Philippians and what it teaches us about joy. And when I heard that we would be going through the Philippians this summer, I'm not going to lie. I got pretty excited. Philippians is this amazing little book. The church is clearly one of Paul's favorites. They've got

some issues, but overall, he clearly thinks that they are great, and it shows in his writing. So I'm going to pray and then we'll get into it.

Holy Spirit, thank you for your presence here in this space and with those at home. Ask that you would open our hearts and our minds to receive what you want us to right now. In your name, Amen.

Yeah, so Philippians is like Paul's greatest hits, volume one. It starts off with, "He who began a good work in you will carry it onto completion," and then in 1:21, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition with Thanksgiving, present your requests to God." And then this in chapter three: "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." I mean, come on, right? It's amazing. So when I got the email from Pastor Scott that outlines who will be preaching what and when, I felt like a kid on Christmas opening up presents with their siblings.

And Sergio, he got this cool thing from chapter one about how Paul holds the Philippians in his heart. And John got to the part about Paul rejoicing and preaching the gospel, even in prison, and that the imperial guards heard the gospel of Jesus. And then Annie 2:1 through 11. And to be honest, I think we all secretly wanted that one. It's Paul's beautiful hymn about Christ's humility and obedience, obedience even to death on a cross for our sakes. And then Colin last week got to preach a little later in chapter two on how the Philippians' love and unity would cause them to shine like stars in the sky. And I was like, "Okay, here it comes. July 31st. What did I get? Okay. It's Philippians 2:19 through 30. Okay. I don't really remember anything super cool or poetic in there."

So I'm reading through it. And if I'm honest, it was a pack of socks moment. You know like on Christmas, when you open this present that you're excited about, it's soft and squishy. And socks, right? You think maybe it's going to be this retro Ray Allen jersey that you've asked for for 10 years. And socks are good, right? They're super useful. They're just socks, right? What I'm saying is, I basically got assigned Paul's travel plans. Okay? Paul's like, "I'm here in jail, then you sent this guy. I'm going to send him back to you pretty soon, since he's off sick leave now. And then as Tim and I figure out where we're going to meet up after jail, then I'll send him to you and then I will come hopefully after." Socks, right?

Okay. I'm kidding. But the point is that it's easy to miss the good stuff here because it comes alongside all these beautiful statements and these anthems of our faith. But don't sleep on the second half of chapter two, because Paul's basically saying, "Okay, I recognize I've made some lofty statements about living the way of Jesus. So now, let me show you two guys who get it and are living it out faithfully." Because as gifted a teacher and writer as Paul is, he knows that knowledge is important, but unapplied knowledge typically just makes us so heavenly minded

we're no earthly good. Anybody ever have a mom or grandma say that? Yep. Jesus and Paul know that we need live, walking, talking examples of people who are working out their faith every day. So read with me, and then we'll see what we can learn about joy and apply it to our lives.

2:19. "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, but not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved..." Stick a pen there. "Himself, because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, coworker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs, for he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

"Indeed, he was ill and almost died, but God had mercy on him. And not on him only, but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore, I am all the more eager to send him so that when you see him again, you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help that you yourselves could not give me."

Okay. First things first, we can't really understand the fullness of what Paul is saying here unless we read it in light of the rest of the book. Paul is expertly writing in the style of Greek rhetoric. And that means we need to recognize the larger points, the thesis he's making in the rest of the book. And today, we're going to focus on this theme of joy that we've been looking at in this series. And despite the entire letter being only 104 verses long, he uses the word joy or rejoice 16 times. Here's some examples. Philippians 1:4 through 5, Paul prays with joy because of his partnership with the Philippians. In 1:8, Paul contends that his joy over the Philippians is legitimate given their partnership. In 1:17, he says that he will rejoice given the Philippians' investment and gift to care for him. And then in Philippians 1:23, Paul says that the reason he wants to continue to live is to work with them, for their joy and progress in the faith.

And then, too, Paul says his joy will be completed only as the Philippians put differences aside and are unified. And then in 4:6, he says simply that the Philippians should rejoice in the Lord always. So Paul has been building this case for how important joy is. So let's look at three things that Timothy and Epaphroditus teach us about joy. The first on the surface sounds simple: show up. Be with others in person, face to face. Paul describes both Timothy and Epaphroditus as men who had genuine concern both for him and for the church in Philippi. And we read that Epaphroditus got so sick, he almost died bringing a gift of money to Paul, which happened a lot to people who were spending the seven weeks going 800 miles between Rome and Philippi. Because back then, if you were in jail, you relied on friends and family to feed you and to care for you. And despite being a small, persecuted church, without a lot of money, they sent

Epaphroditus, this leader, with this money. And clearly, Paul had a close relationship with both men. He speaks highly of their character.

So how is it that showing up brings joy? Well at its essence, joy is relational. Dr. Allan Schore, who's been called the Einstein of brain science because of the groundbreaking work he's done over the last 30, 40 years at UCLA, he says this: "Joy is what I feel when I see the sparkle in someone's eye that conveys I'm happy to be with you." Isn't that amazing? Dr. Schore has discovered that joy is primarily transmitted through the face, especially the eyes. God designed us for joy and joy is relational. One pastor, when he began working with a neuroscientist named Jim Wilder about joy and the brain and what it might lead to and mean for spiritual growth, he went back and found that verse after verse that talked about God's presence and joy literally talked about God's face.

And so you're familiar maybe with number 6:24 through 26. This was a blessing the priest would say at the end of services, we sometimes say at the end of services. "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace." Another example is Psalm 16:11, which most Bibles translate as, "You fill me with joy in your presence," but a more accurate translation in Hebrew is, "There is abundance of joy with your face." Again, isn't that amazing? Brain science confirming what God has been telling us all along, that joy is central and it comes face to face. Seeing in another person's eyes that they are delighted to be with you.

And this is why joy has little to do with our circumstances. Even in the midst of tragedy or difficult times, showing up for people face to face, having people show up for you, our brains are designed for this deep joy, this comfort that comes from these relationships. Joy is an essential aspect of healing trauma and building resilience. It's how God designed us to grow and to heal and to thrive, but it can start small. What if we took our cue from God, and simply were intentional about giving people our face? We can practice this even in small ways here at church.

One morning, there was someone who was having a difficult time and was fairly emotional, having trouble figuring out where to watch church, and then eventually made the decision to leave. And as I and someone else who had been talking with her were walking and then heard her to her car, Pastor Annie appeared out of nowhere. And with the biggest smile looked right in her face and said, "Oh, it's so good to see you. I haven't seen you for a while." And it completely disarmed and stopped this person. And they literally turned kind of speechless, but you could see also how much it meant to her for someone to greet her like that.

Again, thinking of how Dr. Schore defines joy as the sparkle in someone's eyes that says they're happy to see you. So even the small things and how we give our face to someone, how we greet them, express joy in seeing them, it makes a difference. Which leads to the next ingredient of joy here, which is that there's joy as a wounded healer. Both Timothy and Epaphroditus had

become what the Dutch priest Andre [inaudible 00:11:30] called wounded healers. Now, please don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that you got to go out and get wounded in order to follow Jesus. And partially because the truth is, if this was homework, most of you'd be like, "Hey, I'm done. I've already done it. Here's an alphabetical list of all the things that have given me bumps and bruises and lumps in this life." But one of the main things that I love about God and why I follow Jesus is how he is constantly redeeming our brokenness, the brokenness that we experience, and then using it to help bring healing to others.

In verse 22 here, Paul says, "But you know that Timothy has proved himself." And that word proved in the original language, Domaaki, describes something or someone having great worth and being genuine because they've gone through difficult times. They've been tested in this world and they've come through it. When I was 16, we experienced a very difficult time in my family when my 19-year-old sister was killed in an accident. And this story really speaks to both the showing up and the wounded healer aspect of joy. But the moment I heard the news of my sister, I can remember just retreating into this mental and emotional bubble. And a week or two later after the accident, I went to our high school to pick up work from each of my different teachers, and the goal was just to... I wanted to go to each room, get what I needed, and then get out with as little interaction as possible.

And as I was in the first classroom, someone quietly asked me if I'd seen Amy, that she was looking for me. And I just shook my head or something and went on to the next classroom. And then someone in there asked me the same thing. "Have you seen Amy? She's looking for you." And I shook my head and started wondering a little bit what was going on, but again, I just wanted to get in and get out. And then the same thing happened in the third class. Someone in there said, "Amy's looking for you." And as I left that room and went down the hallway, down the stairs and around the corner came Amy. Now, Amy and I weren't close friends, but we'd known each other for quite a while growing up through elementary, middle and high school. And in middle school, her older brother had been tragically killed in a car accident. And when she heard that I was at the school, she literally got up and left her class without a word to the teacher. And she just went hunting from me, looking for me room by room.

And when she found me, she didn't say anything. She just walked up with tears in her eyes. And I'll always remember this slight smile - not a smile of happiness, but something much deeper - and simply gave me a big, long hug. But that look on her face cut through whatever protective bubble I had up, because I could see on her face this understanding that she knew. She understood the pain and felt compelled to comfort me. And looking back, I would call that a very joy-filled moment. But again, not happiness, but this deeper sense of, "I understand what you are going through. You're going to get through this." And now, even 30 years later, whenever I read in the Bible about these tender encounters that Jesus has with someone, that make them drop their guard and receive these words of healing or even literal healing, I always imagine that his face must have looked something like Amy's.

BelPres, where have you been wounded by this world? Jesus, like Timothy, has been tested even to death and has proven himself faithful. He understands our pain, your pain, better than anyone else because he himself was wounded. And if you will let him, he will heal your pain and then redeem it to bring healing to others. It's a wonderful miracle. Okay. The third thing that Timothy and Epaphroditus teach us about joy is that there's joy in carrying Jesus with us everywhere and at all times. Paul uses four metaphors to describe Epaphroditus. He calls him a brother, a coworker, a soldier, and a messenger. And that Greek word for messenger is the same word that we get missionary from. And it's interesting that he doesn't call him my job, pastor.

But during the first few hundred years of the church, the distinction between who was supposed to be doing ministry and who was not was not a big topic. That comes later. And if I'm honest, I think one of the most frustrating and evil lies that we've bought into is that there's this distinction between the amount of ministry people like me are supposed to do, and what you do as a student or someone who works in tech or healthcare or marketing, or if you're home full time with kids, or you're retired. There simply isn't more or less of an opportunity or calling from God to bring his love and healing based on whether you work in a church versus Microsoft or Starbucks or a hospital or a school. It all counts as ministry. And I think that's part of what Paul is pointing to in this example of Epaphroditus.

In two of his other letters, he says this. Second Corinthians 4:10: "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." And in Colossians 1:27, he writes, "To them, God has chosen to make known among the gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." In fact, would you just say this after me? I will carry Jesus into my world.

I will carry Jesus into my world.

Awesome. Well, what does this look like? This deep joy out in the world? It sounds a little funny, but I think it looks dangerous. I'll explain. We see it in two things that Paul writes elsewhere in Philippians. He says in 1:21, as we talked earlier, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." In other words, if I'm not executed for my faith, that's great. I can continue to share the message of Jesus. And if I die, that's great, and maybe even better, because I get to finally see Jesus face to face. And then in 4:12, he says, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

And whenever I read these verses, it strikes me that Paul has become a dangerous man. It may sound odd. I don't mean dangerous in as he's a threat to hurt people. I mean dangerous because he understands the deep joy he has in Jesus, and that his source of true security and identity is in Christ, not in this world. And that made him dangerous to the world, in the way that people like Mother Teresa are dangerous or Dietrich Bonhoeffer were dangerous, or the way Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jr. were dangerous. And as I was writing this, I just kept

having pictures of people at BelPres come to mind, so many wonderfully dangerous people here in this church, who I know are dangerous to the devil's lies and the condemnation and shame he wants us to feel, because they've received God's love and grace.

I know there are kids and students who are dangerous in their schools because they're fighting against the bullying and belittling and isolation that can happen to kids, and instead showing people Jesus' love. There are people who are dangerous in their workplaces. I think of a friend right now who is showing up and risking a lot and modeling a different way of being competitive in a cutthroat sales environment that so often simply dehumanizes people. There are people who are dangerously joyful in their neighborhoods and their schools, wherever they go, because they know that they carry the death, and therefore the life, of Jesus in their bodies wherever they are. We're surrounded by people who are full of such dangerous joy that the devil and the broken systems of this world shake. But listen, they aren't perfect and they didn't get there overnight. And like Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus, their circumstances aren't always easy.

So do what they did and start learning. Find some dangerous people who know what it means to show up, who've had their wounds redeemed, and now in this great miracle, bring healing out of those places, and those who know that it all matters. It's all ministry. BelPres, go out there and be dangerous for Jesus. So Holy Spirit, thank you so much that this example of Timothy and Epaphroditus and Paul, and so many others here have been preserved for us and that we get to benefit from this. God, would you teach us to hunger for your face, to hunger for your joy, God? And make us dangerous for your kingdom. In your 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:

- What are the admirable characteristics Paul attributes to Timothy and Epaphroditus? Is there one you admire the most, why?
- Paul calls Epaphroditus four things – brother, co-worker, fellow soldier and messenger (i.e., missionary). If someone were to describe you and your faith with four descriptors like this, what would they be? Which are you strongest in, in which are you weakest?
- What would change if you kept doing the same things you're doing now (co-worker, student, neighbor, friend, etc.), but tried to do them with a missionary mindset?

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.