

# Sorrowful Yet Always Rejoicing

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>2</sup> Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. <sup>3</sup> We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup> but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup> beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup> by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; <sup>7</sup> by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup> through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup> as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup> as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. (2 Cor 6:2–10)

### “Sorrowful, Yet Always Rejoicing”

- A. Just so you get a sense of what I'll be doing in this sermon, let me explain. Typically, I take a text of Scripture and move through it verse by verse and word by word. But this morning, I simply wanted to quickly dive into the Apostle Paul's flow of thought here and grab a hold of single phrase that I want to consider with you in more detail.
- B. In these verses I just read, Paul is talking about what it's like for him as a servant of God, as an Apostle, as a minister, as an ambassador, as a follower of Jesus. And, as he's describing the dichotomy of his experience in all of this, we come to that phrase there at the beginning of v. 10: “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing . . .” It is to these stunning words that I should wish to draw your full attention.
  - 1. I take them to mean, for various reasons, that Paul, though he experienced much in the way of suffering and hardship and sorrow, had a sort of impervious joy. Even in the midst of sometimes horrifying earthly circumstances, he had a joy that was rooted in something even deeper, fixed in a reality more certain and untouchable.
- C. Let me ask first: Do you have that? “Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”?
  - 1. I'm rejoicing when I'm on vacation. I'm rejoicing when there's money in the bank. I'm rejoicing when the weather is nice. I'm rejoicing when my kids actually do what I ask. But “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”? I'm not so sure.
- D. But now let me ask you another question: Do you want that? Do you want to be able to face whatever life brings your way—not with a cheap, plastic sort of smile—but with a deep abiding sense of joy? I know that you do.
  - 1. But the question that we have to answer, then, is how do we get it? How did Paul get it? Where does this kind of joy come from so that we can get in on it as well?

## Our Confused Relationship

- A. As human beings, it seems to me, we have this confused relationship with sorrow and joy. We know we don't like that sorrow piece. We definitely want the joy piece. So we have our ways of coping, our strategies for trying to get from one over to the other. Let's get rid of this and more of that.
  - 1. But they never really work. In all of our strategies to get more joy for ourselves now we inevitably end up reducing and, hence, distorting reality along the way.
    - a. So, even if we get what we were aiming for, it never feels quite right. The shoe never seems to fit. There's always something hollow about it. Something false. We may get bits and pieces of joy, but it's a far cry from the "always rejoicing" we see with Paul here. It's a far cry from the joy we long for.
- B. So what I want to do this morning in an effort to help us move towards this is to first identify what I think are the five most common ways we try to go about getting there—what I'll call the World's Strategies.
  - 1. And we'll make our way towards what I'd call Easter's Solution in Jesus, which, of course, is what I think the answer is.

## (1) The World's Strategies

### Strategy #1: Deny

- A. The first strategy we see often taken up by people is to deny the broken and sorrowful things of life altogether. "I want to be happy, I want good times, therefore I'm just going to act like this other side to things doesn't exist." They act like they're fine, even as their life is falling apart around them. We don't know how to deal with the fact that this world is hard so we find it best just to deny it.
- B. If I could, I think this is often what you get with dudes. We're raised to act like nothing bothers us. Men don't cry. We sweat. We don't feel. We don't gush with emotions. We're fine.
  - 1. It's the sort of thing that beautiful song from the movie *A Star Is Born* is trying to capture, I think. Do you know it? The woman is singing about this man that she sees self-destructing in front of her, but he won't own it or talk about. And she sings: "Tell me something, boy / Aren't you tired tryin' to fill that void? / Or do you need more? / Ain't it hard keeping it so hardcore?" That's it. Bite the lip. "I'm happy."
- C. But it feels false, right? The joy we get through denial is inevitably a reduction and distortion of reality. We live in a fallen world. This life is hard. Any joy that tries to circumvent this fact feels fake. It doesn't work.
- D. Can I just say that sometimes Christians can be just as silly on this point. Somehow we get this mistaken idea that when we come to Christ, if we were really trusting in Him, we shouldn't suffer or cry or grieve. We shouldn't be "sorrowful" like Paul's talking about in our text. We should just kind of float and glide our way to heaven as if on a cloud or something.

1. So we end up with these plastic Christians who are too scared to say how they're really doing. When you ask them, all they ever say is: "I'm blessed! Too blessed to be stressed, right?!" But what they really want to do is throw their arms around you, lay their head on your shoulder, start crying, and say: "I am really struggling and I feel like God isn't answering my prayers or working things for good in my life. I don't know what's up or down anymore."
  - a. Can I just say, being honest about this stuff is actually the pathway to deeper joy. God will not meet us in our real places of need if we won't open up to Him or others about it!
  
- E. O that we might learn from our Savior on this point. When He's in Gethsemane, He doesn't hide the fact that He is burdened and distressed even to the point of death. He tells His disciples and then He invites them to pray with Him. "Let's take these burdens and griefs to the One who can really help."

## Strategy #2: Escape

- A. These are the people who would at least admit: "Yes I am sad," but then they quickly go on to say: "But I don't want to think about it. I don't want to deal with it. I don't want to work through it. I just want an escape route."
  
- B. For examples of this, of course we might think of the those more obvious options—things like drugs or booze or sex. My life hurts, I want a moment of peace, this substance or this girl or this offers that.
  
- C. But escaping the broken and sorrowful things of life in an effort to lasso a moment of joy can take on many different forms.
  1. You can escape into food. Just another bite of ice cream. Or another handful of cheetos or whatever you junk food of choice is.
  2. You can escape into work—That dude that can't stop working day and night. He's always at the office, or whatever. It might not be that he's just a hardworking employee. It might be that he's running from something. Maybe his home life is a mess and at least at the office he feels successful, he doesn't have to deal with that, he feels better about himself.
  3. You can escape into shopping—Let me just get another outfit, or another gadget or something. The rest of my life feels out of control but being able to buy this or that I feel better about myself. There's a little high that I get.
  4. You can escape into entertainment—Just turn on the TV and get out of your head for a bit. You get to enter another world and forget yours with all of its problems.
  
- D. Marketers know our inclination towards such things. That's why they advertise the way they do.
  1. I wonder if you noticed that Coca Cola's slogan for a while there was "Open Happiness." Do you remember that? Like this bottle of fizzy corn syrup is going to make things alright in my life? We know it won't. But it might provide a momentary escape.

2. Or we could talk about Disneyland here right? “The happiest place on earth.” Now I like Disneyland—love it, in fact. But it’s not reality. We know that going in. There’s talking mice and carriage pumpkins and flying elephants. We know we’re not in the real world. But for some that’s just what they want. Escape. It feels almost like joy.
- E. But again it’s superficial, right? It’s a reduction and distortion of reality. And eventually the truth will come out.
1. That bottle of Coke in your hands, (I’m sure no one is surprised to learn) it’s bad for your body. It doesn’t fix things. It makes things worse. You drink enough and you’ll end up with a mouth full of cavities, or diabetes, or obesity, or whatever. But let’s not talk about that. It feels happy going down.
  2. That trip to Disneyland. Man, you made some good memories. Things felt happy while you were watching the fireworks and what not. But reality hits when you get back home and look at your credit card statement. They charged how much for that funnel cake? Are you kidding me? It better have been made by Mickey Mouse himself with a sprinkling of Tinker Bell’s pixie dust on top. Ten dollars for a funnel cake. It’s ridiculous. But we’re not thinking about reality when we’re there. We’re escaping it. And escape never works. The brokenness always resurfaces. The joy never lasts.

### Strategy #3: Blame

- A. Here now is where we’re willing to name our hardships and sorrows and even talk about them. We’re not denying, or escaping . . . now we’re blaming. “Yes this is messed up, yes I’m all torn up about it, and do you know what? It’s your fault!” We play the victim. We feel momentary reprieve as we point the finger at someone else. “You’re the reason I’m not happy.”
- B. Now I get that there’s a whole spectrum involved in this, and sometimes one person really is more to blame for things than another. But, oftentimes, there’s a grayscale to it. That person’s hurt us, but we’ve hurt them. But we don’t want to talk about our side in it. We don’t want to go there. Because we don’t know what to do with that.
1. It’s so much easier to say: “You’re the problem. You better go figure that out.” It’s a lot harder to say: “I see what I’ve done here. I’m sorry. I need help.” That feels a lot more risky. It threatens our joy. Because if I’m a part of the mess, well, what do I do with that? But if it’s all you, well, then I can go on my way and keep feeling good about myself.
- C. But we know it’s not that simple. And any joy we get on the other side of this blame game feels a bit false. This too is a reduction and distortion of reality. It won’t hold up. It doesn’t last.
1. Eventually, the same stuff resurfaces in our next relationships. But we keep blaming them, unwilling to look at ourselves. We just keep burning bridges. And pretty soon we’re alone.

### Strategy #4: Fix

- A. Here is the strategy of choice for those Type-A folks like me who love to-do lists and action plans and things. Here we may be willing to admit that we see the broken stuff, that we are discontent,

but we have this sense that we can fix it ourselves. We come up with our own ideas. Here's what I need. Here's what will make things right for me.

- B. There are so many examples of how we try to do this, but, here in Silicon Valley, I think one of the more prominent examples is the way we approach our careers and work and money. We think: "Things aren't right in my life, I'm unhappy, because I don't have the right job. I'm not being paid enough. I'm not being appreciated enough. If I could just climb that ladder, get a hold of that carrot, I'll finally transition from sorrow to joy."
  - 1. But, in spite of all our greatest efforts, we never really get there, do we? Even when we get there, we don't get there. Are you with me? We might get the job, the promotion, the money, the house, whatever . . . but it never fixes things in here.
  
- C. There have been a lot of articles running on this topic lately, even from secular sources. One of these just ran in The New York Times Magazine, and the title really says it all: "**Wealthy, Successful, and Miserable: The upper echelon is hoarding money and privilege to a degree not seen in decades. But that doesn't make them happy at work.**"
  - 1. In this article, the author's talking about how, back in his days at Harvard Business School, his whole class was excitedly anticipating what would come in their professional lives. They dreamed of doing something big. They dreamed of making lots of money. They dreamed of finding happiness. And then when they all came back together for their 15 year reunion, he found most of his classmates were jaded, even dissatisfied with it all.
    - a. He writes of one classmate: "**He earned about \$1.2 million a year and hated going to the office. 'I feel like I'm wasting my life,' he told me. 'When I die, is anyone going to care that I earned an extra percentage point of return? My work feels totally meaningless.'"** The money didn't do it. That status didn't do it.
  
- D. And, yet again, it's because this strategy also reduces and distorts reality. When we act like we can do away with the sorrow, we can secure the impervious joy—whether by our work, or getting a new relationship, or reaching certain goals, etc.—we radically underestimate the depth and extent of our problem. The problem is not just somewhere out there in our circumstances. It's not something you can get your hands on and manipulate. You can't throw money at this problem.
  - 1. Our brokenness and sorrow is ultimately the result of our sin and the wrath of God that abides on us because of it. We are separated from the One for whom we were created, and no amount of money, or good deeds, or whatever, can fix that. All our self-reliant efforts only serve to make it worse.

## Strategy #5: Accept

- A. This last one isn't so much a strategy for joy as much as it is a forfeiture of the very pursuit altogether. These are the sorts of people that say: "I've tried everything and it hasn't worked. I see the hardships of this place. I feel the emptiness and the sadness of it. And do you know what? That's just life. Accept it."

1. If, after trying all these other strategies, joy still eludes a person, rather than raising the white flag and coming back to God through Christ, sometimes people just go careening off the edge of things into despair.
  - a. I wonder if you realize this really is where the atheistic worldview takes us. If there is no God, if there is nothing before us, nothing after us, then all of this is ultimately just madness and meaningless.
  
- B. I remember one of my professor's in seminary discussing the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, and I don't have a direct quote, but I did go back and try to summarize some of my notes for us here. Listen to this. This is where some people land: "Heidegger said that man should not be concerned with metaphysics and that being that is beyond us. He thought this was a pointless quest. Human beings, he said, are hurled chaotically into a world that does not have a rational beginning or an everlasting end. In back of your life is nothingness. Deep down you are a being trending towards death. You know it. Your awareness of this causes you to be anxious and unsettled. It causes you to be afraid and withdrawn. You are in denial—acting like you aren't dying but you know you are. Here's what you need to do: in the face of fear, death, and finitude, live authentically. When you die it will be over and you will slide back into the nothingness from which you sprang. Face that reality, embrace that reality, and live authentically in light of it."
  1. He's basically just saying what Macbeth said near the end of Shakespeare's play by the same name: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (5.5.24-28).
    - a. Going numb to the notion of hope and joy can actually be a sort of safety mechanism. It hurts to hope and then be let down, so we learn over time to just shut it off.
  
- C. But this too, like all the other strategies that have come before it, is a reduction and, hence, distortion of reality.
  1. It denies the beauty of this place and the inherent hope built into creation. After the dusk and deep darkness comes the dawn. God built it into the cosmos.
  2. And the author of Proverbs tells us He also put something of this hope into us. "He has put eternity into man's heart" (Eccl 3:11). The reason we are always looking for meaning, and looking for joy, and longing for something that will last, is because God has designed us for it. We have been created in God's image. He has stamped eternity on our hearts. We have His breath in us, a soul. We are infinite beings created for God. We know there is more.
    - a. But, sadly, we often refuse to come to Him to get it, so we just spiral off into philosophical silliness.

## (2) Easter's Solution!

- A. So what then? If the world's strategies fail us, where do we find this "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" sort of joy that Paul is talking about? Well, here now we come to Easter's Solution and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## 2 Corinthians 4 and John 16

- A. A couple chapters before our text, Paul tips his hat towards the answer, he shows his cards, he lets us in on the secret to his impervious joy.
1. In [2 Cor 4:8-14](#), he gives a similar sort of list to the one he gives in [ch. 6](#)—outlining the ironies, the paradoxes, the dichotomies involved in Christian experience. Only this time he makes plain what holds it all together for him. How is he able in the midst of affliction to not be crushed, in the midst of poverty to still be rich, in the midst of sorrow to still have joy?
    - a. Listen: "<sup>8</sup>We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;<sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;<sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.<sup>11</sup> For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.<sup>12</sup> So death is at work in us, but life in you.<sup>13</sup> Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak,<sup>14</sup> knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence."
  - B. The long and short of it is that Paul is able to face hard and sorrowful circumstances with joy because he knows the One who was crucified and raised for him. He knows the One who entered into the brokenness and the sadness and the mess of this world and overcame it. In other words: He knows Jesus.
  - C. This is precisely the sort of thing Jesus Himself is talking with His disciples about on the night He was betrayed. Speaking of His death and resurrection, He says this in [John 16:16-22](#): "<sup>16</sup>A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me. . . .<sup>20</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.<sup>21</sup> When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.<sup>22</sup> So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."
    1. Our joy is tethered to the person of Jesus Christ. When we don't see Him, sorrow. When we do, joy. Our joy is tethered to the person of Jesus Christ. And if the person of Jesus Christ has risen incorruptible then our joy is incorruptible as well. As He says there in [v. 22](#): "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."
      - a. Your joy is not tethered to earthly circumstance. It is tethered to heaven's King and He has risen triumphant, ascended to the right hand of the Father, and sat down once and for all.

- i. Therefore, whatever may come your way, however deep you may go into the brokenness and sorrow of this world, you will, nevertheless, always be able to rejoice. As He goes on to say in v. 33b: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

## The Only Sufficient Answer

- A. Only the cross of Christ can sufficiently address the sorrow we all experience and provide the joy we all long for.
  - 1. The joy that the world offers has to go momentarily blind to other parts of reality—you have to deny something, escape something, blame something on someone else.
    - a. But joy in Jesus looks wide eyed and takes it all in and is settled somewhere deeper than even the sorrow and pain. It is not naïve and superficial on the one hand. Nor is it hopeless and existential on the other. We can be honest about the brokenness, about the ugliness of sin, about the mess we’ve made of all of this, and yet not fall off into despair. We can have hope and joy—the kind that has a depth to it, a weightiness to it. We see this broken world and yet still see reason to rejoice.
      - i. Because we see the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- B. Can I just say, then, that, in one sense, the gospel will get you all mixed up inside. It will at the same time make you a more somber and sorrowful person and a more joyful and satisfied person.
  - 1. In the world this doesn’t make sense. How can sorrow go with joy? The two are opposed to each other. We’re always trying to stuff the first down to get to the second. But think about this with me, and I think you’ll get it.
    - a. What this really means is that, in Christ, we are finally able to look at reality the way it really is—broken, messed up, hard—and we can see ourselves for what we really are—broken, messed up, sinful.
    - b. But we are not crushed by this because we see that Jesus has entered in, He’s taken the mess on Himself, He’s taken our sin on Himself, He’s let it all have its way with Him in His death. And then three days later He rose. He’s overcome the hardship and the sin and all that.
- C. Don’t you see how this works? You’ve been wanting to say that this place is hard, that it doesn’t seem to be getting better, that you’re a sinner too and you don’t know how to change, you’re ashamed of who you’ve become, but you’ve feared if you actually owned up to and admitted these things you’d be forfeiting whatever shred of joy you still had left.
  - 1. But you see, trying to hide from this stuff has actually been hindering your joy. You have to wink at reality, to go blind a bit to what you see in yourself, so the joy you get always feels a bit false and never lasts. But with Jesus we can just name it, we can look without flinching, because we know that He has overcome it and there’s hope.



- D. This is Paul's story. He was against Jesus from the beginning, a persecutor of the church, murdering the saints of God. One would think that Paul would hide this sort of thing about himself, he would be too ashamed to mention it.
  - 1. But don't you see, once he saw his life in light of the cross, once he realized that he was both fully known in all of his junk and fully loved and forgiven, he spoke of his past with a strange sense of amazement and joy: "If me at my worst didn't stop Him from loving me, my goodness, nothing will!"
  
- E. So what we thought would hinder our joy actually ends up enhancing it.
  - 1. So you can cry, you can let it all out, you can feel sorrow over your sufferings and your sins, but there's also this deep abiding joy in it all. You can be "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing", because Jesus has died and risen for you.