

Sparkling Joy

February 18, 2024

Introduction:

We're currently in a series called 'Journey into Joy' that walks through Paul's letter to the church in Philippians. Now just as a recap - Philippians is often called the Epistle of Joy... but in reality, it doesn't come from a very joyful context. Paul is imprisoned for his faith, away from his community, and facing the possibility of death.

But it's from this place that could easily be defined by despair, that he writes this letter that is saturated with joy and thanksgiving. He writes a letter that calls the church to a life modeled after Jesus' and his purpose.

As we've walked through Philippians together we've talked about Grateful Joy, Fruitful Joy, Resilient Joy, Unifying Joy, Unselfish Joy, Jesus shaped joy, and this week we are exploring Sparkling Joy!

And to be honest, when they first asked me to speak on Sparkling joy my brain immediately filled with a bunch of ideas... sequin outfits, glitter bombs, confetti canons... but don't worry, I've put those ideas behind me... for now...

Story:

But even in the absence of this, I am going to take this opportunity to tell you about my love/hate relationship with sparkles. Now, don't get me wrong, who doesn't love a good sparkle, But... if you have ever done a craft with kids, pulled Christmas ornaments out of a box, or opened a glittery greeting card, you've probably noticed two things... 1 – sparkles are VERY noticeable, they reflect the light, and glitter, and shine... and 2- they NEVER go away. Sparkles stick with you... forever.

There were many summers where I had the wonderful joy of teaching crafts to kids at camp. I loved it! I loved their creativity, joy, their ability to create beauty out of a random assortment of supplies. But one thing that I learned very quickly was that sparkles are the WORST. Write that down. THE WORST. Especially in the hands of little ones. Now, I was always a bit torn on this, because I know the kids loved them – pulling out the glitter could take a craft project from just fun to THE BEST DAY EVER. And the kids didn't care that the sparkles got everywhere... on their clothing, their hair, the entire craft shop, the chipmunk that lived under the floor, and of course all over me.

Because no matter how careful are, sparkles still stick to everything... and never go away. So, when I became crafts coordinator the following year and was unpacking the supplies

at the beginning of the summer, I carefully placed all the sparkles and glitter into a bin, put the lid on, duct taped it beyond recognition, and hid it in the basement. There were no sparkles in my craft shop... But the kids still asked for it, because people love the sparkle! They love how it shines, how it reflects the light, how it takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary.

But I'm not here to talk too much about my strong opinions about craft supplies, we're here to talk about JOY, about sparkling JOY, about JOY that sticks with you, that reflects the light, that shines, and that is visible to those around you.

Context:

So, as we jump into our passage today and explore the idea of Sparkling joy, let's just circle back on what we've looked at the last few weeks. Over the last two weeks we've worked through the beginning of Philippians chapter 2.

To recap - in the first section, verses 1-5, we see Paul's exhortations, or encouragements, to the church in Philippi. He urges the church to:

- Be like minded (v 2)
- Have the same love (v 2)
- Be one in spirit (v 2)
- Do nothing out of selfish ambition (v 3)
- To live in humility (v 3)
- To look out for others (v 4)
- Have the same mindset as Christ (v 5)

Easy eh? Just every day stuff... In reality, these are BIG and important asks that simply wouldn't be possible without some help. And luckily we are given that help verses 5-11 where we are told the way to do this is to imitate Christ and follow his perfect example. Paul writes a beautiful poem about who Jesus is and how he is the perfect example of humility, surrender, and love. Jesus gives us the blueprint for how to live in love, humility, and unity. It is only when we live our lives WITH Jesus and strive to follow his example that we can have the same attitude as Christ that Paul is calling us to.

So, now that we're caught up, lets pickup in Philippians 2 with verses 12-18.

Passage: Phil 2:12-18

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

¹⁴Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”^[a] Then you will shine

among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Okay, so walking out of what Paul is calling the church to at the beginning of the chapter, into the perfect example that Christ gives us of this attitude, we now jump into this passage which we are going to split into three parts. Three instructions – three things to do.

- **To work.**
- **To Shine.**
- **To Rejoice.**

WORK:

In verse 12 we continue to build on the encouragements from earlier in chapter 2 with some more instructions. Now that we know what to do and that we need to imitate Christ, the next questions is how do we actually do these things? How do we practically live in a way that imitates Christ? How does imitating Christ lead to a change in attitude and action?

In these verses Paul says two key things:

- 1) “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”
- 2) “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

Now, these two statements feel like they contradict each other. First we are being told to work out our own salvation and then we are being told that God works in us. How can we both work and let God work. Is this work of salvation our job or God’s? It is a bit contradictory, but in reality, they are one in the same and we certainly cannot have one without the other.

It’s like if someone gave you a gift and you left it wrapped in a box, sitting in a corner, collecting dust – it doesn’t change the gift itself. It still is yours, it was still given out of love. But, it’s not doing what it was intended to do, what it was designed to do. It’s not bringing the full impact, joy, or experience that it was meant to.

God gives us the gift of salvation, He’s the hero of the gospel. He works in our lives and in our hearts to grow, heal, and give us freedom in him. This is a gift for each of us given freely out of Christ’s surrender, sacrifice, and love. We don’t need to do anything to earn it. However, it comes with a responsibility and an invitation to something more. We have to take the gift, use it, and allow it to have the impact it was meant to. It’s only through this gift and God’s work in us that we can live out our salvation – that we can imitate and reflect Christ.

God's work in us is what changes everything – Inwardly, it leads us to healing, and wholeness, and freedom. But it also has an outward impact. God's work in us increases our love and unity, and allows us to live out the instructions that Paul gives us to be like minded, humble, unified, unselfish, and having the same attitude as Christ.

God's work in us leads us to put our own salvation into action and we do this by imitating Christ. We are called to do this work with fear and trembling. Now, this can sound a bit daunting... We're talking about love and humility and all of a sudden we're called to fear? But this word fear comes from the Greek, "*phobos kai tromos*", which can be translated directly to fear and trembling, but is also translated in Paul's letters (2 Corinthians 7:15 / Ephesians 6:5) as "Reverent Obedience." This call to live out our salvation does not come from a place of fear or terror, but of reverence and awe. God's work in us doesn't lead to an obligation or pressure to live out our faith, but it leads to a posture of awe in God's work that we simply can't keep to ourselves!

To live out our salvation is to allow God's work to spill out of us as we share his love, care for his people, and shine his light into the darkest places. And when we do this it is all part of God's good plan, his purpose that he mentions in verse 13. Some translations use the word pleasure. When we allow God's work in us to impact how we live our lives it gives God pleasure!

And beyond that, it leads to more. Let's pickup in verse 14.

Shine:

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation."^[c] Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life.

So when we allow Christ to work in us, live out our salvation, and imitate Christ we become blameless and pure. We are able to live as God's children without fault in a world that is warped, crooked, dark, and broken. And what does this lead to?

THE SPARKLE!

- 'Then you will SHINE among them like stars in the sky!'
- Then you will shine light into the darkness.
- Then you will stand out in contrast to the broken world.
- Then you will shine Christ's light into a world that desperately needs him.
- And this light not only shines out, it invites people in.

My small group happened to be studying this passage just a few weeks ago and when we got to this verse one of the questions we asked was who in your life shines? Who sparkles with Joy and with Christ's love? I loved hearing the answers as we went around the circle and so

many people in my life came to mind, but as it got to my turn to share it clicked. Who in my life shines? My Grandma – Helen Gould.

Now let me tell you a bit about my grandma. She turned 95 in December and was pretty excited about it. She's feisty and joyful and so deeply compassionate. She's lived a life of following Jesus and now, as she's gotten older and walked through loss, physical change, health challenges, and more, her joy is as bright as ever! And that joy is abundantly evident to everyone who meets her. We often hear from the staff in her home about how fond they are of her, how she makes them laugh, how she cares for them, encourages them, and shares about Jesus.

She is always ready with an encouraging word or compliment, her jokes and one liners are incredible, and even at 95 she is always ready for adventure and fun – she loves long drives to see the beauty of the different season, she's always down for an icecream stop, and she sneaks snacks to my dog and gives her all the attention whenever we come to visit. And she even made the front page of the paper by being one of the first people in her residence to try out the new bike.

I often say that she is one of the brightest lights in my life and I always leave our time together with a smile on my face and feeling encouraged by her words, reminders, jokes, and how she constantly points be back to Jesus with reminders about how fortunate we are, how God has blessed us, and how beautiful our world is.

The reason my Grandma shines so brightly is abundantly clear. It's all Jesus. She holds so tightly to the Lord and lives in such proximity with him that she can't help but shine. She lives out her salvation effortlessly and from muscle memory because she has lived her life closely beside Jesus. My grandma's relationship with Christ is completely unremovable from who she is, from her personality, her way of life, and her perspective on the world. People notice Jesus in her and are drawn to her. And I am so incredibly blessed by her.

My Grandma shines because she is with Jesus. It's only when we live into Christ's work in our lives and align ourselves with his attitude and calling that we can shine.

But shining is not always easy, especially in dark places. Looking back at this verse, Scholar N.T. Wright talks about the connection between this verse in Philippians and Daniel 12:3 where it says, "3 Those who are wise^[a] will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."

Now both of these verses are written by people in challenging situations – people who were living in places that were not their homes, where they could not freely talk about God, where they sin and brokenness had become the norm. But both of these verses talk about the contrast of the brightness of the stars against the darkness of the night. They talk about how living with wisdom and righteousness in alignment with Christ allows us to be blameless and pure as we shine Christ's light into all places.

This sparkle and shine is not an ask for us to do something – this is a natural result of being in alignment with Jesus. Those who follow Christ ARE lights in the world, it's a fact. We are lights, but how brightly do we shine and how noticeable is our sparkle?

When light shines into dark places it make things evident, it provides guidance, helps us find our bearings, brings hope, draws people closer, and reveals beauty. And just like the stars in the sky they can only do these things by working together. One star would have little impact on us, but a whole sky lit up by light – its awe inspiring.

Rejoice:

So as we work out our salvation and live out our faith we shine, but this isn't where Paul leaves us. The last instruction Paul gives in this section is to rejoice – starting in verse 16.

- as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

As we come to the end of this section Paul brings us back to the reality that he finds himself in. He recognizes that he may die, but he doesn't view this with bitterness or fear, but with joy as he sees the ultimate victory of Christ. Paul says that if God's people live this way and shine Christ's light that he did not run or labor in vain and because of this he can rejoice and we can rejoice too.

Christ's light leads to joy. Christ's work in us leads to joy. And this sparkling joy is not defined by our situation or circumstance. Instead, this light shines brightest into the darkest places and stands in stark contrast to our broken and heavy world. And as we rejoice and shine, this joy becomes abundantly clear to others and invites people in.

Conclusion:

So as we consider how we can shine like stars this week I have been thinking about a moment from a few years ago. I was in Malawi – a beautiful country in South Eastern Africa. We were spending the night at our friend's house in a rural village tucked between two beautiful mountains... okay hills. When we talk about this community we often said you go to the middle of nowhere and then keep going, its super remote.

This community has no electricity and is hours away from any other town with power. So, at night, its pitch black. We arrived at our friend's house and as I climbed off the motor bike and took my helmet off my eyes immediately were drawn to the stars above me. I was completely overwhelmed. It was unlike anything I had ever seen before or ever seen since. Hundreds of thousands of pinpricks of light that filled the sky and shone so brightly that they

nearly covered the black sky above. And as my eyes adjusted to the darkness the stars only got brighter.

All I wanted to do was sit and stare. All I wanted to do was sit with Jesus as I looked with awe and wonder at what He had created for us. It was breathtaking in every sense of the word and filled me with incredible joy. Even now, my heart is still glad when I think about it.

So what would it mean to have that affect? What if God's people shone so brightly that it made people stop and stare and want to be with Jesus?

Now, this isn't just a dream or aspiration, this is happening across the world as God's people are shining light into the darkest places. And I am constantly overwhelmed that God has allowed me to see glimpses of it. I have seen Christ's light shining through churches, organizations, communities, families, and individuals. I have seen the effects when people live with the attitude of Christ.

And I get to see it all the time as God shines light into our neighbourhood through our Cornerstone community and all of you as you engage in his mission and extend his love to each other, to our community, and beyond. You are shining and sparkling with the light of Christ and taking that light into your families, communities, workplaces, and into even the dark corners of our world and it is so beautiful to watch.

So as we shine light into our world, I want to leave you with a three practical things to do this week.

- 1) **Work:** Think about what is the next step that God is asking you to take as you work out your salvation and shine his light.
- 2) **Shine:** Look for those people in your life that Shine Christ's light the brightest. Tell them what qualities you notice.
- 3) **Rejoice:** Take some time to rejoice in what God is doing in and through his people in this world. Make a list of things you are grateful for, write down stories of how his light is shining, or take some time to thank God for light in dark places.

As we leave this place today and go into our weeks, Let's go with the invitation to work, shine, and rejoice together.

Pray.