

## The Sting of Consequence, The Hope of Grace: Part 3

### 2 Samuel 13

**Philippians 1:25** *“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for **your progress and joy in the faith...**”*

**Introduction:** If I asked you what is one of the greatest needs of the church today, what would you say? If we brought out a white board and listed areas that needed to be addressed, we'd probably come up with a broad, long, and thoughtful list. We need to stand firm and teach the truth without fear and out of conviction, and love people fervently. We need to invest in leadership development, training up the next generation for life and ministry. We need to train each person in the church for the work of ministry and make sure that discipleship is at the forefront of our activity. We need to invest in prayer, walk in humility, and not shy away from hard things. Each of these is **right, good, and needed**. But in the list, I'm not sure what would be included is a vital word: **joy**. But it is clear the Bible teaches the essential nature of joy.

Martyn Lloyd Jones commented that joyless or unhappy Christians are a poor recommendation for Christ and Christianity, and pointed out that **joy is one of the greatest needs of the church** in his book *Spiritual Depression*. Joy is NOT optional in the Christian life, but is both vital and necessary, since it is desired by God in us and comes through the full understanding of the gospel. David Mathis said this about the nature of joy in the Christian life:

***“Joy is essential to the Christian life. The Scriptures are clear: God’s people are both commanded to rejoice and characterized by rejoicing.***

*Our heavenly Father is not indifferent to our **happiness**. Joy is not a garnish on the dutiful entrée of the Christian life. Joy is not the icing on our cake, but an essential ingredient in a complex batter.*

*It’s not that there is **only joy**, but that in our **most painful losses and sufferings**, we discover how deep the reservoirs of Christian joy run. Only here, in difficulty and darkness, do we taste the essence of such joy — that it is not thin and frivolous and empty, but thick and substantive and full”<sup>1</sup>.*

But does this hold up Biblically or is it merely a nice thought? **FIRST** off, Paul saw joy as an essential purpose of his ministry and a reason to stay in the fight on this earth rather than go home to be with Christ:

**2 Corinthians 1:23-24** *“But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. <sup>24</sup> Not that we lord it over your faith, **but we work with you for your joy**, for you stand firm in your faith.*

**Philippians 1:25-26** *“Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, **for your progress and joy in the faith**, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause **to glory in Christ Jesus**, because of my coming to you again.*

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/joy-is-not-optional>

**SECOND**, joy is an ONGOING COMMAND, regardless of circumstances:

**Philippians 4:4-7** *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"*

**1 Thessalonians 5:16** *"Rejoice always"*

**THIRD**, our joy is based on recognizing and understanding the goodness of God:

**Deuteronomy 26:11** – *"And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you."*

**FINALLY**, joy is recognizing God is FOR us as He refines us for His glory:

**Jeremiah 32:41** *"I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul."*

**1 Peter 1:8-9** *"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."*

If a good working definition of **joy** is: *happiness in God based on unchanging spiritual realities that cannot be taken away*, why is keeping joy so difficult? It is a gift of grace, but it can easily be **stolen** by circumstances, pain, suffering, regret, and wrong thinking. I saw a quote this week on social media that said this: *"You're not healing to be able to handle trauma, pain, anxiety, depression. You're used to those. You're healing to be able to handle joy to accept happiness back in your life."* While this leaves out essential components of trusting Christ and dealing with sin, it does illustrate the point that moving forward with happiness in the midst of or after a traumatic life experience is difficult, even impossible with something else changing in us. So we recognize the tension we face in our **fight for joy**.

As we come back to the story of **Tamar** in 2 Samuel 13, we are once again reminded of this fight and tension. We have paused in this story to mine out what the Bible says in our struggle with pain, sorrow, and anxiety caused by something done **to us**, even when it was undeserved, although the fight for joy is also for those who struggle with regret from their own past actions. Remember, Tamar was **righteous, obedient, and faithful**, who did nothing but obey her father David and exercise compassion on her brother Amnon, only to be taken advantage of, overpowered, and sexually abused, left desolate and devastated. David was **angry but absent**, and **Absalom cared for her** but only to bide his time until he could exact revenge on his brother and kill him two years later (this is where we will go next week, addressing issues of *bitterness and forgiveness*).

We left the message last week with the following questions:

**What would reasonable, expected, understandable responses be?** One would expect in the coming days, weeks, months, and years to deal with: **fear** – from a fear of men, to intimacy, to trusting others; **Anger** – *"how could God let this happen? Where was my father? How could my brother do this?"*;

**Depression** – “now what am I supposed to do” “what is the point of going forward”, “why did I even try to live a righteous or obedient life. Look where it got me!?” **Anxiety** – “If this could happen out of nowhere, unprovoked, what else could happen in my life?”; “If God couldn’t stop this from happening, where else can I turn, who else can I trust?” **Deep Sadness** – with feeling hopeless and helpless; **Guilt and shame** – However misplaced, there would be a review of choices and decisions and feeling personally responsible; **Shock/Numbness** – confused, detached, and feeling no joy or happiness

Followed by these questions:

*So what was Tamar to do? What are we to do when we have similar (but most likely less extreme) things happen to us? Can we overcome these feelings and symptoms? Are we bound and captive to what was done to us? Are we supposed to lock it away, act like it never happened, put a smile on our face and move forward?*

This is what we endeavor to answer today, at least in broad ways.

### REASONABLE RESPONSES, BUT MISPLACED SOLUTIONS

Again, we stated that what Tamar or anyone that has had traumatic occurrences **felt or responded** would have been reasonable, since our human nature reacts to pain and sorrow. However, that is only half of the answer. In reality, **staying in those responses or feelings will only keep us in unnecessary sorrow**, and will begin to cloud our thinking and compromise the truth in our mind and heart. We will begin to **play the victim, look for someone to blame** (often directed toward, even indirectly, at God Himself), and **feel justified in our feelings**. This is a recipe for joyless living, giving way to bitterness, envy, anger, and insecurity. This is often a result of **not dealing with the issue at all**, and allowing whatever happened to us or whatever we did to **define us** rather than being transformed from it.

There are several examples in Scripture of those who found misplaced solutions to the traumatic situations they found themselves in. This provides a solid primer to evaluate our own heart and potential wrong responses:

**PETER** – We took a look at **JOB** last week, where his trying to decipher **why** everything was taken from him took him down a path to question God, which was met by a swift and full response by God. But another character of Scripture through whom God did many great things was the lead disciple **Peter**. We like Peter because he tended to make his mistakes out front, saying what others were thinking. But Peter had a **pride problem**, one that was remedied later in life (see 1 Peter 5). When Jesus stated that **all the disciples would fall away on the night Jesus was arrested** (Matt. 26:31), in classic fashion, Peter said, *“THEY will all fall away, but I will NEVER fall away...even if I must die with you, I will NOT deny you”* (Matt. 26:33, 35), saying he was **READY** to go to prison and death with Jesus (Luke 22:33). But oh how the mighty and brash fall.

Peter did the unthinkable. He not only denied Jesus, he did so **three times**, even willing to swear and invoke a curse on himself (Matt. 26:74), which afterward, he went out and **wept bitterly** (Luke 22:62). Shame, guilt, and joylessness would follow. In fact, the next time we see Peter, he had tried to deal with all of this in two ways: **SEPARATION & ISOLATION**. He went back to fishing, separating himself from the mission Jesus sent him to do. It was here that Jesus met him and restored him, redirecting him to complete the mission Jesus had for him (John 21:20-23). Far too often people deal with their shame,

sadness, and anxiety in isolation, removing themselves from the very people who are there to help them. **None of us thrive in isolation**, and separating from people because of our guilt and shame does not help us move forward.

**MARTHA** – You remember the story of two sisters who welcomed Jesus into their home (Luke 10:38-42), with one choosing to sit at Jesus' feet to listen to His teaching, while Martha felt the need to entertain, busying herself with food prep. When she was miffed about the incongruity and lack of fairness between her and Mary, she got **anxious and troubled**, upset with her sister and Jesus. But it took her some time stewing as she busied herself by distraction.

Some people use busyness as a distraction in their life so they do not have to deal with the reality of their heart. This is a **sanitized way** of dealing with grief or anger, but is betrayed over time with a lack of joy. Busyness can be a mask people wear, since it portrays itself as healthy action while covering up a wounded and hurting heart. This is why we must spend time slowing down, having real conversations, and being willing to do the hard work of recognizing what is going on in our heart.

**JUDAS** – Judas was a thief (John 12:6), and his selfish heart culminated in the ultimate betrayal, selling out Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. When he came to his senses and **changed his mind** about the transaction (Matt. 27:3), meaning he **felt remorse**, it was too late. In the act of desperation and guilt laden regret, he committed **suicide by hanging himself** (Matt. 27:5). This happens when we have no recourse or hope that there can be forgiveness or restoration for the things we've done.

Isolation, burrowing away, or ending life are a result of wrong thinking leading to sorrowful actions in the face of trauma, pain, and sin. So the question remains: *how does the gospel change this?!*

### TRANSFORMATIONAL GOSPEL, JOYFUL RESPONSES

Last week we looked at Paul and his response to a *thorn in his flesh*, a messenger of Satan that dogged him in his post-conversion life. In this, Paul recognized that God was working *through this* to keep him humble and to glory in his *weakness*, which allowed him to trust completely in the strength of the Lord. But this is not the only time Paul had to deal with the traumatic parts of life. In fact, his **testimony** itself carried with it deep regret and shame if he would have dwelt on what he had done. Before Paul was knocked down on the road to Damascus and saved by Christ Himself (Acts 9), he was on his way to **ravage** the church, seeking to imprison and even kill Christians with the goal of snuffing out the burgeoning movement before it could get a full head of steam. Becoming the champion of the church later did not mean he never considered his past again, but now he looked at it in terms of **God's grace rather than his own guilt**.

In **1 Corinthians 15:1-7**, Paul gives a succinct explanation of the gospel: **it is able to save** (v. 2), based on receiving the message that Christ **died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures** (v. 3), that He was **buried, and rose on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day in accordance with the Scriptures** (v. 4), appearing to the disciples and 500 others. The simplicity of the gospel is staggering, but its implications are earth shattering. Whenever we think of the gospel **ONLY** in terms of *justification*, or "getting saved", we leave the power of the gospel to transform with it. The gospel changes, transforms, re-shapes, roots out, restores, revives, reconciles, and brings joy. Notice how this happened in Paul's life in the verses following, in 15:8-10:

*8 Last of all, as to **one untimely born**, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the **least** of the apostles, **unworthy** to be called an apostle, **because** I persecuted the church of God. 10 **But by the grace of God I am what I am**, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, **but the grace of God that is with me**.*

The change in the gospel allowed Paul to see **his past** through a lens of restoration rather than guilt or shame. He was one who was **untimely born**, a word used for one born prematurely or aborted. His point is that he had nothing to offer but was spiritually dead. He considered himself **the least** of the apostles, and **unworthy** to be in consideration for apostleship BECAUSE of the glaring issue of his persecution and hatred of the church. He had every reason to feel sorry for himself, try to excuse himself, or walk forward in misplaced guilt and shame, but instead he rested in the work of Christ on his behalf. Here is how it played out:

***But by the grace of God I am what I am...***

In this phrase, Paul understood so much revolutionary change. Notice that he mentions himself, but he is NOT the point. The emphasis is on **God's grace**, that which is lavished on us in Christ (Eph. 1:8) to understand the mystery of God's will. When God is the point and Jesus is the prize, then we can truly see ourselves in a new and proper light. **Paul saw himself with a new identity**, not one that was captive in the past but one that was kept in the present by a power OUTSIDE of himself. When we go through trauma or deal with shame in the past, we often look for answers **within ourselves**, which is like looking for a piece of luggage in a lightless basement. He now saw himself as a **product of grace**, that which is unearned AND undeserved, and that changed everything.

God's grace was **not in vain** because it accomplished the intended work, and freed Paul from trying to earn salvation (see Philippians 3:5-7), and gain favor through his own effort, to producing **grace-fueled effort** that caused him to work harder and clearer than ever before. Now he could press forward because it was no longer about him but about Christ, and he was free from the bondage of self.

*Why is this so important?* The key to understanding the gospel of joy in the midst of our past is that we take the gospel through **humility**, which demands thinking of ourselves less. In humility we are able to see ourselves for who we are, not **victims of undeserved trauma**, and **not shameful sinners beyond restoration**. Humility sees self in the gaze of Jesus Christ, which means we can acknowledge our sinfulness and the gift of forgiveness. We know that we are bought with a price, and that Jesus makes us by quality NEW (2 Cor. 5:17). God no longer sees us through the lens of our sin or our shame but welcomes us by His grace alone, securing us forever through the finished work of Christ and preparing a place to dwell with Him in the future (1 Pet. 1:3-5; John 14:1-5).

*How does pride hijack God's grace in our life?* Pride fixates on ourselves, be it our pain or shame. When we think that our past makes it impossible for us to have joy, we are expressing an over-realized sense of self which is by definition, pride. When we think that we do not **deserve to be happy**, we are expressing pride in the fact that we believe God's salvation through the gospel is not powerful enough to allow us to be "*forgetting what lies behind and straining forward for what lies ahead*" (Phil. 3:13).

Salvation not only demands **humility but faith!** Paul had to believe that his past did not define him or bind him, but he could move forward with joy. This is the essence of so many **Psalms**, which work through the tension of how we **feel and what we know to be true by faith.** It's why the rallying cry of Psalm 77, 86, 88, 118, 120, and 142 is **"I cry out to the LORD...or 'out of my distress I call upon you'".** The cry of faith that asks God for deliverance based on His character, and pleads for a united heart (Ps. 86:11). We can cry out, **"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"** (Psalm 13:1-2)

What is the answer? **"But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me."** (Ps. 13:5-6). Did circumstances change? Did things get better? Did the past get wiped out? No, but the cry of a faith driven heart sees God as greater than how we feel, greater than our circumstance, and powerful enough to wash us clean from anything done to us. That is because the gospel **transforms** and does not leave us as we are, but makes us into NEW CREATIONS, knowing that one day God will make all things new.

**So what do we do when the darkness does not lift?** We fight to believe the truth, we recognize our feelings will not tell us the truth so we plead with God to unite them TO the truth, we fix our **gaze on Christ, and we fight to believe that joy/happiness is available to all, since it is God's desire for us to rejoice in all things.**

John Piper wrote a book called *"When the Darkness Will Not Lift: Doing what we can while we wait for God --- and joy"* and he prayed this way:

*"Start at the easiest place for those in darkness. Start with despair. Despair of finding any answer in yourself. I pray that you will cease from all efforts to look inside yourself for the rescue you need. I pray that you will do what only desperate people can do, namely, cast yourself on Christ. May you say to him, 'You are my only hope. I have no righteousness in myself. I am overwhelmed with sin and guilt. I am under the wrath of God. My own conscience condemns me, and makes me miserable. I am perishing. Darkness is all about me. Have mercy upon me. I trust you.'"*

*"It is utterly crucial that in our darkness we affirm the wise, strong hand of God to hold us, even when we have no strength to hold him."*

May we fight for and find joy in the LORD, who gives us strength.