

The Invincible Power of Joy for World Missions

by John Piper

This sermon addresses the obstacles to global missions faced by different age groups, focusing on politically correct cowardice, unquenchable consumption, and the creep of acceptable comfort. The speaker emphasizes the power of joy in overcoming these obstacles, using Philippians 2:17-18 to illustrate the joy of faith, joy in sacrificing for others' faith, and rejoicing in the sacrifice of others. The message urges believers to embrace this invincible power of joy for effective engagement in world missions.

Scripture: Philippians 2:17, Acts 20:35, Romans 5:2, Revelation 12:11, Psalms 34:8, 2 Corinthians 13:9, Psalms 43:4, Acts 20:29, Revelation 12:12

Topics: "Overcoming Obstacles in Missions", "The Power of Joy in Sacrifice"

Description

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Transcript

As I have pondered over the age range in this conference, with a huge group of younger people, and a modest group in the middle, and a few people like me at the upper end, what has come to the front of my mind is that there are peculiar obstacles for each of those groups to global missions, obstacles to full, red-blooded, un-intimidated, uncompromising engagement in world evangelization. This is a conference about missions, and for me that means you being mobilized, either as senders or goers, to reach the least reached peoples in the world. These obstacles that I have in mind, three of them, may not be the biggest ones for you or in your generation, but they're the ones that I feel burdened to address, and which I believe God has given me a word for.

So I wanna begin by naming the obstacles for each of those generations, the younger, the middle, and the older, and then direct your attention to a passage in Philippians where God will address those obstacles, and he will show that the invincible power of joy is the means of overcoming those three obstacles. Number one, I'm thinking here of the youngest of the youngest. In other words, the 18 to 40 group, I'm thinking toward the front end, a new form of politically correct cowardice has appeared in the last five or 10 years.

It takes the form of opposing those whose message you don't like by claiming that you don't feel safe when they talk. In other words, you protect yourself by turning your preferences into thought police that have the authority to shut other people down while you stay in your little self-defined safety. So for example, on a Christian college just recently, a speaker came, spoke about the entanglement of abortion and race, and a group of students protested to everyone on the campus.

This made them feel unsafe. Now I'm calling this politically correct cowardice, and I'm referring to it in a missions conference, global missions, because the more deeply and the more widely that mindset takes root in the Christian community in the upcoming generations, the greater the hindrance to global missions. Now why would that be? Because if you are so committed to feeling safe, how will you ever risk your life for Jesus? I mean, go figure.

I don't feel safe when they talk. Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves all over the world. That's all there is left is wolves.

If you are so fragile and cowardly that you must shut down those who love you by speaking hard truth to you, how will you speak love to those who hate you? If you have raced with men on foot and they have wearied you, how will you run with horses? Now, I assume, lest those of you who are young feel too beat up and unsafe right now, I assume from the fact that you would attend a conference like this means you're not totally infected with that mindset of politically correct cowardice. And I rejoice, I am hope-filled that the messages of this conference will not result in confirming you in cowardice but release tremendous courage. The gospel will not be preached to the least rich peoples without a readiness to die.

Number two, the middle years. I'm assuming that the biggest obstacle for those of you in the middle years, you define it however you want, is not politically correct cowardice. You kind of look funny at that and say, what? But rather what I would call the obstacle of unquenchable consumption, unquenchable consumption.

The consumption I have in mind is not the consumption of the bread of life but the consumption of social media. You just can't hardly put it down. Movies, entertainment, demands of your career, quest for more and more stuff.

The quest to consume more and more entertainment, more toys, more travels, more money. Is insatiable. It doesn't satisfy.

You know this, a life devoted to consumption consumes life. They are those who hear the word of God but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word and it proves unfruitful. It is a snare and plunges people into ruin and destruction while all the while giving the sensation of success.

Life devoted to unquenchable consumption of more and more media, more and more movies, more and more mammon will not be able to compute the calculus of the words of Jesus when he said, everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. Where that kind of calculation, lose now, gain later, doesn't compute, missions is over. If you are being lured into this kind of unquenchable consumption, I have a word of God for you.

Number three, for those wonderful 60, 70, 80 somethings here, we few, we happy few, our peculiar obstacle and I know this better than any of the others, our peculiar obstacle is not politically correct cowardice, it's not unquenchable consumption, it is what I'm calling the creep of acceptable comfort. From every corner of this culture, we happy few, like 70 million baby boomers, we happy few are being told that the biblical command, let us not grow weary in well-doing, has an expiration date on it. 65, or if by reason of strength, 70, we, we, we, no longer exist to create, we exist for comfort.

Now what makes it different from the lifelong temptations that everybody has for more comfort than we need, what makes it different for us is that now, the whole culture says, you've earned it, you deserve it, it's what the season of life is for, that's deadly, deadly for everybody, it's not what this season is for. Near the end of his life, Paul referred to himself one time as an old man, I love Paul, Philemon chapter one, there's only one chapter, verse nine, and when he spoke of himself as an old man, he wasn't speaking from paradise, he was speaking from prison, bless him, and here's what he said, I, Paul, an old man, and now a prisoner for Jesus, my kind of old man, better than a nursing home, and when he wrote, and when he wrote what are probably almost his last words, he did not describe his final years as a breather before meeting King Jesus, he said, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, henceforth, death on, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord will award to me, not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing, flat out race, flat out fight, death, glory, what is this crazy thing America has created? Called retirement, so if those happy few among you feel like I do, the creep of acceptable comfort threatening your engagement with Christ's global mission, I have a word of God for you, the same word to every group, so here they are again, the word that I would like to offer you from God is designed precisely by God in Philippians to set you free from the captivity of politically correct cowardice and make you courageous for Christ, it is designed to cut the choking cords of unquenchable consumption and set you on a totally different quest, and it is designed to halt the creep, halt the creep of acceptable comfort and help you dream a better dream for the last chapter of your life, now, you've been very patient, what's the word from God? Piper's analysis of the contemporary situation has zero authority in this room, what God has to say about it has all authority here, so if you've got a Bible, let's go to Philippians chapter two verses 17 and 18, we're spending all of our time on these two verses because they are simply mind boggling, culture transforming, church exploding, marriage, I pray, strengthen me, Philippians chapter two verses 17 and 18, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad, and I rejoice with you all, likewise, you should be glad and rejoice with me, there are three facets of the beautiful, supernatural diamond of Christian joy in those two verses, and I'm going to try to show you that this multifaceted joy is the power to free from cowardice, free from consumption, and free from comfort for the sake of Christ's mission, let me just identify them now one at a time, first, then we're going to go deeper a second time through, number one, verse 17, first half of the verse, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad, so first facet of the peculiar joy called Christian joy is joy in being poured out as an offering for faith, joy, I am glad, I am glad that I am being poured out, if I must be poured out, I'm glad, glad, glad, glad, glad to be poured out, what is he talking about? You know what he's talking about, dying, and we know that because he uses that phrase, poured out for himself one time, else, namely, 2 Timothy 4, 6, I am already being poured out as a drink offering, the time of my departure has come, he's dying, what he means in verse 17, the beginning of the verse is, I am glad if it costs me my life to build your faith, so the first facet of Christian joy is joy at the prospect of dying to bring other people to faith, how you doing? This is clear, this is clear, joy that I can die, joy that I can die, joy that I can die, not be saved, a Christian college, number two, at the end of verse 17, Paul says, and, not only am I glad that I can die for your faith, and I rejoice with you all, so if he's rejoicing with them, they're already rejoicing in something, so I got my joy dying,

you're rejoicing, I'm rejoicing with you, what are they rejoicing in? He has just said, I live and die for the sake of your faith, and now they are rejoicing, and he's joining them in their joy, I'm tempted to say this must be somehow faith and joy going together, and that triggered something in my brain, because I know this book, chapter one, verse 25, Paul believes he's gonna have a season of ministry with them alive before he dies, he says, convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress, and ESV, joy in the faith, literal, joy of faith, joy of faith, so my answer to the question at the end of verse 17, when he says, I'm rejoicing with you, you're already rejoicing, is because I have labored for your faith, and your faith is that faith in verse 25 of chapter one, the joy of faith, you're rejoicing in all that you have by faith in Jesus, that's number two. Second facet, first facet of joy is joy in dying to bring faith to others, second facet, the joy of faith that gets created by that mission.

Third, verse 18, likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me, and what did he say he was rejoicing in? His death, for faith, he is telling them, look, it makes me glad if I must be poured out in death to strengthen, create, preserve, advance, multiply your faith, be glad with me in my death, to which we can easily imagine the Philippians saying, Paul, it's asking too much, may we not have a season of sorrow at your death? We love you, to which Paul would answer, I think, why do you think that what I have said means you may not have a season of sorrow? Well, Paul, you said because you are rejoicing to be poured out in death for our faith, and then you summoned us to rejoice with you even in your death for us, that's why. And I think Paul, being the big man that he is, would smile gently and look at them and say, children, you have so much to learn about joy in Christ. Why would you think, Philippians, why would you think that sorrowing and rejoicing shouldn't be simultaneous, in the same heart, at the same event? Why would you not think that? 10 verses later, verse 27, Epaphroditus almost died in serving Paul from the Philippians, and here's what he said.

God had mercy on him, and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Paul would have wept if Epaphroditus hadn't gotten well. It's right to weep when you lose a great apostle that you love.

It's just not right to stop rejoicing, because Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6.10, we are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. And I know I'm talking to hundreds of you, who probably in your walk with Jesus just haven't quite gotten there yet. To you, it's always sequential.

There are seasons of sorrow and seasons of happiness, but this talk about sorrowful and always rejoicing, through and in the sorrow, that's a contradiction. It's not, just give yourself time. That's why I think Paul would have smiled gently and spoken to them of his children.

Those are the three facets of the diamond of joy. Number one, I'm gonna give them in the order that they happen in reality now, not the order that they happen in the text. Facet of the diamond number one, the joy of faith.

End of verse 17, by virtue of its connection with the beginning part. Facet number two, the joy of pouring out your life in death, if necessary, for the joy of other people's faith. Facet number three, rejoicing with those who joyfully die for other people's joy.

Now, let's go through them again. There's so much more to say. So much more to say about these three facets, okay? Well, we're gonna take them in that order, not the order that they came.

So, the joy of faith. I get that phrase from 125. I believe it's what the end of verse 17 is referring to, and he says, I rejoice with you, because you're already rejoicing.

I've just died, as it were, for your faith, and so the joy you have is the joy of faith. What does faith rejoice in? If you're a believer right now, what is your joy? Saving faith begins with the word of God. Faith come by hearing and hearing by the word.

You'll hear more about that if you haven't already. Faith rejoices in that word. Your testimonies are the joy of my heart, Psalm 119.

I rejoice in your word like one who finds great spoil, Psalm 119, 162. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, much fine gold, sweeter than honey, and drippings from the honeycomb. That's your experience, born-again believer.

What does the word hold out to us, reveal to us? For sinners, most precious, the love of God. For sinners, undeserving sinners, I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, Psalm 31, salvation. It holds out salvation.

The love of God brings salvation from sin and from guilt and from the wrath of God and from hell and from death and eventually from disease. Salvation is a glorious thing. The greatest thing in the world is to be saved.

Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and glorified, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. The outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. How do Christians walk toward that salvation? I'm just trying to get inside the head of what the joy of faith is.

We walk toward that salvation through weakness and suffering with joy. 2 Corinthians 13, for we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. It's almost a paraphrase of Philippians 2.17, right? I'm so glad when I can die for your faith.

I'm glad when I'm weak. If you're strong by my weakness. He's an unusual human being.

He's born again. We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance, character, and character, and hope. Blessed are you when people hate you and on account of the Son of Man, rejoice in that day and leap for joy.

I mean, that's just over the top, Jesus. Come on, say it again. Blessed are you when people hate you, revile you, cast out your name on account of me.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy like a lamb coming out of the stall. Something's crazy here. Something is so different than our fallen human nature.

You must be born again. This is the work of God. No human being rejoices at being hated unless this miracle happens by the Holy Spirit through his word.

That's why I'm here. Great reward, amen. That is what sustains our joy in suffering.

We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, Romans 5.2, which means that the end point, the final satisfaction of all our joy is God himself in Jesus Christ. I will go to the altar of God, to God, my exceeding

joy, Psalm 43.4. In your presence, there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

So at the end of verse 17, Philippians 2, when Paul says he's rejoicing with them, they're rejoicing in their faith includes all of that. Rejoicing in the word of God, rejoicing in the love of God, rejoicing in the salvation of God, rejoicing in the great reward of God, rejoicing in God himself. That's the most basic facet of the diamond of Christian joy.

All that God promises to be for us in Christ, we have, and it is our treasure and gladness. Next facet, that was the facet of the joy of faith. The next facet is the beginning of verse 17.

The joy of pouring out our life for the sake of the joy of others. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad, I am glad. So he's glad to die in the service of the faith of the nations.

The diamond of Christian joy is not natural. It does not flow from the fallen human nature. It is supernatural.

It's one thing to rejoice that you are the instrument of someone's faith. If you've ever been an instrument in leading another person to Christ, you know the joy. It is beyond all normal human experience to rejoice that you can particularly bring them to faith by dying, which is what Paul said makes him glad.

So I'm gonna understand this, right? I gotta understand this. How can that be? Help me, Paul, because that's so different from what, that is so different. Help me.

Help me. There are multiple layers of explanation for how Paul can be glad to die for the faith of others. Multiple levels.

I'm gonna give you two. One, Jesus had taught Paul, he quoted it, he quoted the words of Jesus in Acts 20, 35, a very familiar sentence. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 20, 35, words of Jesus. So it is blessed or joyful to see another person's joy increase, right? If you love people and they move from low-level joy in God to high-level joy in God, makes you glad. Yes, it does.

But it is more blessed when you give to make that happen, when you give to make that happen. Why? Why is that? You've only, probably most of you've experienced this. Why is it? Because when you give yourself to bring joy to another person, your joy is expanding into them so that their joy in God is an extension of an experience of your joy in God and it's bigger, it's bigger.

So when Paul is dying to bring this about, he's not losing, he's gaining. Joy is increasing, not shrinking. More blessed to give than how much more your life, that's one explanation.

Here's a second layer of the explanation of how Paul can say this. Look down to verse 10 and 11. My aim is that I may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection of the dead in dying for the sake of the faith of the Philippians, verse 17, he is becoming like Christ in his death because that's what Jesus did.

He died for our faith. He purchased a new covenant and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us out of darkness into light and cause us to walk in his statutes. Jesus died for our faith and when Paul dies for their faith, he's becoming like Christ in his death.

Now let me say this and see if this makes sense. Few things give us or Paul more joyful confidence in our own resurrection than the grace of God at work in our lives to help us love like Christ, especially in suffering and dying for the joy of his people. That was a long sentence.

If by any means possible, I might attain the resurrection of the dead. Can you hear, I want so much to enjoy the assurance that I'm there, I'm there, I'm going home, I'm gonna make it. And his key was, if I could experience so much grace to become like Jesus, to love like he loved, even at the cost of my life, I would just be awash in assurance.

That's true, that's true. I've never been there, I've just been partway there. I've had little glimpses of this.

I know how this works psychologically, that's true. So that's the second facet of the diamond of joy. First, joy of faith.

Second, joy in being poured out in death for faith. Last one, verse 18. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me as I rejoice in dying for you.

So be glad when I die for you. Don't you stop rejoicing in all I've given you and shown you about God, because I'm dying to make that happen. Don't you stop, rejoice with me and my joy as I die for your faith.

Be glad in my gladness in giving my life for your faith. And of course, we already saw, don't need to say this again, but I will, because you forget the first part of the sermon, that does not mean you can't cry. Weep your eyes out when your pastor dies or your husband, your wife, your child.

Doesn't mean that, just means don't stop rejoicing. Paul was about to become a martyr. How are we supposed to feel about those who risk their lives to bring the gospel to the unreached and die? Like maybe in the Indian Ocean.

How are you supposed to feel about that? Write some nice critical articles about how stupid that is, how unexemplary that is. Is that what you're supposed to do? I'll tell you what you're supposed to do. Verse 29, Epaphroditus risked his life and almost died to serve the apostle in his mission.

And here's what Paul said, last part of verse 29, chapter two Philippians, honor such men for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. Epaphroditus was not a fool to risk his life. He was to be honored.

Jim Elliot, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Woe to us if we are quick to judge the very people who are willing to lay down their lives for the unreached peoples of the world. The book of Revelation, I'm asking you, how do you feel? How should we feel about people who risk their lives to take the gospel to the unreached? How should we feel about that? Here's another answer, that was Paul's answer.

Here's another answer, Revelation 12, 11. These are the martyrs. They have gathered, they have conquered Satan.

Watch how they conquer him. They have conquered Satan by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony for they love not their lives even unto death. Next phrase, therefore, rejoice.

What a weird book this Bible is. I love it, I love it. Preach this, brothers, preach this, all of it.

It's weird, crazy, counter-cultural, get you killed, fired, loved. Therefore, since they overcame Satan by not loving their lives even to the point of death, therefore, rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them. That's how we should feel about martyrdom.

So, when I say this word from God is for young and midlife and happy 70-somethings, I mean that all three facets of this diamond of joy are yours in Christ, yours in Christ. If Christ is in you, all of this is in you. Yes, it is.

If you're not in Christ, come to him tonight. Believe in him tonight. This is a glorious life.

I'm sure there's an unbeliever in this room. I'm sure there's a non-born-again person who can hardly compute what I'm saying right now. You want it, and it seems like a foreign language.

Oh, come, it's all yours. The joy of faith, the joy of pouring out your life for others' faith, the nation's, and the joy of rejoicing with those who pour out their lives. That threefold joy is the invincible force of global missions, I'm arguing.

But let me close by relating it specifically to those three obstacles, okay? Going back now to the beginning, politically correct cowardice, unquenchable consumption, consumption, the creep of acceptable comfort. Does this address that? I don't need to say anything, do I? Oh, my. What becomes, let's just say it anyway, what becomes of politically correct cowardice that shuts other people down if you experience some discomfort when they talk? What becomes of that if you experience the joy of pouring out your life to bring others to faith? It can't survive.

Politically correct cowardice, or any other kind, can't survive. Cowardly ostracism of those that offend you, cowardly ostracism of those that offend you cannot survive in the same heart with joy ready to die for those who hate you. Duh, but I'm saying it anyway.

The cowardice of self-serving safety cannot live in the same heart with the joy of martyrdom, can't. If I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad that is not the voice of politically correct cowardice. My question is, is it your voice? Can you say that with the Apostle Paul tonight? Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad, is that your voice? Yes, in Christ that's your voice.

Open your mouth and say it in due time. Number two, what about unquenchable comfort in midlife? Pursuit more and more and more toys and more entertainment and more movies and more social media and more mammon and more rising on the corporate ladder, more, more, more, more, more. What if you are the recipients of the joy of faith? Oh my.

What if you know that someone died to bring you that faith? Someone died to bring you joy in the word of God. Someone died to bring you joy in the love of God. Someone died to bring you joy in the salvation of God.

Someone died to bring you joy in the great reward, the God's presence. Someone died to bring you joy in God himself. If with the psalmist you say, I will go to God, to God, my exceeding joy, and you drink of the river of his delights, Psalm 34, in doing that, start that sentence over now because I want you to get it.

If you go to God with the psalmist, I am going to God, to God, my exceeding joy. I'm gonna drink every day from the river of his delights. In going and drinking, you cut the cords that choke your life.

You cut the cords of unquenchable consumption. You will be free. You will be free from bondage to more and more media, more and more movies, more and more mammon, the joy of faith.

The joy in all that God is for you in Jesus is a mighty and powerful liberator. Yes, it is. Last.

Okay, you old people. The creep of acceptable comfort, 60-somethings, 70-somethings, 80-somethings. The last facet of the diamond was, rejoice with me as I rejoice in dying for your faith.

How would you apply that to 70-somethings? One very specific application would go like this. We who are grandparents will never, never, never say to our 30-something children, don't you ever take my grandbabies to that dangerous place. Never.

Would you hear your son or daughter say, but we're ready to go, be poured out for the faith of the nations, our whole family. We're gonna go, we're ready to go. And would you say to them, how can you do that to me? No, God has a better dream for your final chapter.

Rejoice with them, or better yet, go with them. How about that? Can you walk? Can you talk? Do you know that hair like this is powerful in certain cultures? Not here, but some places are more biblical. So, I'm done.

Let us be done with every obstacle between us and global missions. Let us be done with politically correct cowardice. Let us be done with unquenchable consumption.

Let us be done with the creep of acceptable comfort. And let us embrace, let us embrace God's word to us about the invincible power of joy. In world missions, if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad.

And I rejoice with you. Likewise, you should rejoice with me. Oh God, come and perform what no human can, no sermon can, only the Holy Spirit.

By supernatural power, working new birth and sanctification in the hearts of your people, can such a joy have such a power? And I pray that you'd give it now, in Jesus' name, amen.

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