

# The Key to Simultaneous Sorrow and Joy

by John Piper

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of rejoicing in hope, focusing on the eternal glory of God as the ultimate source of joy and satisfaction. It delves into the concept of boasting in the hope of the glory of God, highlighting the transformation of the negative connotations of boasting into a positive expression of exalting Christ. The message underscores the need for Christians to have a heavenly-minded perspective, finding joy and compassion in the midst of suffering by fixing their eyes on the eternal glory awaiting them.*

**Scripture:** Romans 5:2, Matthew 5:12, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Isaiah 48:11, Hebrews 10:34

**Topics:** "Rejoicing in Hope", "Eternal Glory of God"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Endless days, Father, in your presence through Christ by the Holy Spirit, adoring you, loving you, treasuring you, delighting in you, satisfied in you, forever. Would you come and feed us now on your word to fit us for that day, I pray through Christ. Amen.

You may be seated. May I welcome you who are here to learn about Bethlehem College and Seminary and add my greetings to those who have given them already. I love this school.

I love its leaders. I love its faculty. I love its students, and I love its vision to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples.

We treasure some amazing things together here. We treasure above all the glory of God. We treasure an infallible Bible.

We actually treasure the inevitable gift of a lifetime of suffering, and we treasure in it all the invincible joy of the Holy Spirit. That makes this place pretty unusual, not unique, just pretty unusual. So I love it.

I'm glad you're here to consider it, and my prayer has been early morning at the 630 prayer meeting and then last night and on through the morning that there will be extraordinarily clear guidance for you. Some

of you definitely don't belong here, and others of you would be crazy to go anywhere else, and only God knows which is which. My theme is rejoicing in hope, and I invite you to open your Bible to Romans 5 verse 2. We'll get there in a minute.

If you focus on the main word for rejoicing in the New Testament, *kairo*, there are eight commands with that verb in the New Testament that we must rejoice. For example, Matthew 5 12, blessed are you when others revile you, rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. Luke 6 23, blessed are you when people hate you, rejoice and be glad, and leap for joy.

Philippians 4 4, rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. First Thessalonians 5 16, rejoice always. Now those four of the eight commands to rejoice with that verb show us that the call for Christians is not for joy to be a periodic experience, but a perpetual one.

So twice Paul says rejoice always, and Jesus says rejoice when you're hated and persecuted and reviled and mistreated and slandered. That's no reason to stop. Now if we respond to that statement, joy in the Christian life is not supposed to be periodic but perpetual, if we respond to that by saying that's not possible because it is so utterly emotionally contradictory to the pain in this world.

Witness Philippines, witness North Carolina, witness your mom, your marriage, just open your eyes, Piper, for goodness sakes, that's so crazy unrealistic. Live in the world. Get out more.

If you respond like that to the New Testament, Jesus responds to your response one way and Paul responds in another way and they both are essentially the same. I'll give you both of their responses. Jesus responds like this, no, I don't speak in contradictions.

I will say again what I said in Matthew 5 and Luke 6, it is precisely when you are being reviled, when you're being persecuted, when you're being killed, that you're supposed to rejoice. Not periodically, like my joy will be up to that point, it'll stop there, and if I get out I'll start again. No, that's not what I teach.

Here's Paul's response. He gives us a little glimpse into the experience of rejoicing always, which is his command when he says in 2 Corinthians 6 10, I am sorrowful yet always rejoicing. So he won't have it.

He won't let you sequence life like that. But he won't let you. I am sorrowful and always in my sorrow rejoicing.

Now, at one level of our emotional life, there is a sequencing. Psalm 30 verse 5, weeping they tarry for the night, joy comes in the morning. But this is the kind of thing we think about all the time here, okay, got that.

What you gonna do with those two texts? It is an oversimplification of Christian experience to think that joy in God should be only a periodic reality. It's an oversimplification. Paul won't have it.

There are levels of rejoicing that are periodic, and there's another rejoicing that should not be periodic, but right through the night of weeping. Some of you know what I'm talking about. And I would just caution you, if you are at the level of emotional Christian experience that that sounds like meaningless double talk to you, you need to put your hand on your mouth and walk with Jesus and his word a few more years through a few more sorrows.

We don't judge the Bible around here. The Bible judges us. When we think the Bible is emotionally contradictory, it's our problem.

We haven't grown up yet. We haven't gone deep enough yet. We haven't lived enough.

We haven't seen enough. Don't come here if you're going to judge the Bible. We don't do that here.

We get judged. One of my goals in this message is to help you grow into that kind of emotional maturity, even though I know it takes hard knocks to really do it, but the word must accompany you into those knocks or you won't survive. And I'm 72, and I say with the Apostle Paul, I have not arrived on this one thing I do.

I'm going to say forgetting, renouncing all my past failures and the paralyzing effect of all my past emotional failures, renouncing all that, I press on to grow up into sorrowful yet always rejoicing so I can treat my wife better, my kids better, you better know how to do things, how to live life out of that wealth, rather than say, okay, that can't be. So join me as we grow. Are you with me at Romans 5? Verse 2 is where Brian read the key phrase.

I'll read both verses 1 and 2. What I'm going to argue is that the key to sorrowful yet always rejoicing is hope. Okay, you got that? This is simple. You don't have hope, you'll never do that.

You never do that. If your joy resides in being free from sorrow, it's over for you. You won't be a Christian.

If you have this, verse 2, hope, it's possible. So that's where we're going. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also, through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and here it is, this is the phrase we're focusing on, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

So I'm going to spend the next 30 minutes or so on that phrase, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Let's do the context where this awesome statement is embedded. A little bit of context.

Verse 1, therefore, since we have been justified by faith. So up till this point in Romans, say from 3:20 on, that's been the main theme, justification by faith apart from works of the law. And now Paul treats it as accomplished in his readers and in himself, having been justified by faith.

This is done for my readers and me, that's our common ground right here in this text. So in his life and death, Jesus provided, this is review now, a sinless obedience and a sinless suffering. And his obedience stands before God as a justice-satisfying righteousness, and his suffering stands before God as a punishment-satisfying sacrifice.

And when the Holy Spirit quickens us from our spiritual deadness and unites us to Christ by faith, gives us the gift of faith, and in the giving of faith, brings us into union with Jesus Christ, then Christ's obedience becomes our righteousness, and Christ's suffering becomes our punishment. So that our perfection is before God secured, and our punishment is passed. There is, therefore, now no condemnation.

That's worth a lifetime. That's worth a lifetime of reflection. You got a message for every people group in the world.

This does not need to be culturally altered to be relevant for every single people group. We love missionaries here, and that is empowering. He mentions two effects that flow from it, one in verse one, one in verse two.

First, we have, therefore, peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace, meaning no more wrath from God, no more rebellion from us. And I could unpack that from verses nine and ten, but no time.

Second, verse two, through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. So, when God's wrath is taken away, and our rebellion is taken away, a vacuum is not left. An ocean of grace fills it up, right? That's where we stand, swim, enveloped in grace.

So, every phrase deserves a sermon. You get this now, don't you? I took eight years doing this, so this is very frustrating. Nothing comes to us from God in Christ that is not grace.

Nothing. Everything that comes to us justified in Christ is undeserved, everlasting, omnipotent goodwill from God, even if you die or suffer for 30 years and then die. This is one of the reasons I love this place, because not a faculty member here would say, you shouldn't have said that.

And if there is one, we need a conversation. This is precious, and I'll give you illustrations at the end why it's precious from my hospital visit on Monday. So, why doesn't Paul say at this point, having talked about justification, having talked about peace, and having talked about grace enveloping us, why doesn't he say, and we rejoice in the peace and the grace of God? He doesn't say that.

He says, and we rejoice, and then he points us, here's the peace, here's the grace, he points us there, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Two reasons why he does this that I see. One, this peace and this grace where we stand are so afflicted with suffering in this world that the only way you could rejoice in them is hope.

And I could unpack that from verses 3 to 5 where our afflictions are made a cause for joy because of hope, but no time for that either. Second reason that Paul turns to hope in glory rather than turning to joy and peace and joy and grace, which are of course good reasons to rejoice, second reason why he goes there is because you weren't justified ultimately to have peace with God. You weren't justified ultimately to have undeserved, everlasting, omnipotent goodwill from God, working all your sufferings together for good.

That's off the charts, indescribably glorious, and it's not the main goal of salvation. What is, the glory of God is, and nothing short of it. So as we enjoy peace now, as we enjoy standing in grace now, we are waiting, waiting, longing, groaning, hoping.

No triumphalism, like, got that, we're there. Oh, Paul dealt with that. We're already kings.

No, no, there is so much not yet, you can't imagine what's coming. So that's the context that I see for my phrase for this message, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. So let's think about the phrase itself.

First thing I see is this little footnote after my word, rejoice. If you got an ESV, you see it. If you got an NIV, lo and behold, it's more literal than the ESV, Andy.

I mean, go figure. The footnote says that rejoice is otherwise translated boast. Got that? Exalt, but boast.

Boast is the core essential meaning of this word. Brag. Now, how does a word that even the New Testament over and over treats as sinful become so positive that Paul would use it here for how we should hope in the glory of God? Boast.

Boast in hope of the glory of God. Boasting really is sinful. It's sinful.

Unless something changes about boasting and doesn't change it so much that you stop using the word. A lot of lessons here, but that's another sermon. So what changed? How does Paul work with this word so that all of its badness goes away and it becomes a precious Christian way of hoping? Well, let me guide you through it.

1 Corinthians 1 29, he says God chooses his people in such a way, quote, that no human being may boast in the presence of God. It's over. Nobody's boasting in the presence of God.

Bad, bad, bad word. Don't do that. God has saved you in a way to make that impossible.

That's the point of 1 Corinthians 1 29. So what has to happen to get that bad, bad word into Romans 5 2 as a good, good word? What has to happen to boasting? My answer is, it must be stripped of all of its connotations of deserving earning and self-exaltation. It must be stripped of all of its connotations of deserving earning, self-exaltation.

Get all of that out of it. You might be able to use it. How does he do that? How does he get it out? Here's the way he gets it out.

1 Corinthians 4 7. What do you have? I'm asking you. Paul's asking you. God's asking you.

What do you have that you did not receive as a gift? Then if you received it, why do you boast as though you did not receive it? It's over. Everything good you have is a gift. Boasting possibilities? None.

None. You can't do that. So, boasting in a worldly, self-exalting way is over for Christians, because we stand in grace.

It's all undeserved, omnipotent, everlasting, goodwill, everything that comes. Well, here's the question. What's left of boasting? What's left of the word, if you take out what almost everybody means by it? That's a really good question.

Absolutely essential question. What's left of it? Anything? Well, evidently, Paul thought that something was left, or he'd scrap it and use Cairo. Rejoice.

Here's the difference. Words matter. Paul's not careless.

The New Testament really does treat it positively over and over again. Lots of negative uses, lots of positive uses. Listen to this one.

This is just one verse after saying nobody's going to boast in the presence of God. Here's what he says in 1 Corinthians 1.30. Because of God, from him, because of him, you are in Christ Jesus. You didn't get yourself in.

I jumped in. I grafted myself in. No, no.

From him are you in. And he has become to you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, so that as it is written, let him who boasts boast in the Lord. There must be something left in this word.

It's useful. Is there ever? You want to boast? You want to brag? Brag on Jesus. You might say, I got some righteousness.

I got some wisdom. I got sanctification. I got redemption.

And Paul says, the gifts. He's it. He's your righteousness.

He's your sanctification, your wisdom, your redemption. He's everything. You want to boast? Forget self-exaltation.

Get into God-exaltation. Get into Christ-exaltation. You boast all you want.

So what does it mean? My effort. What's left in this word is I am receiving some honor or privilege or riches or glory I am. I am.

That's left in this word. I am. And now in the mouth of Christians, there's no connotation.

I deserve them. No, no, you don't. You don't.

You get them. You don't deserve them. You get honor.

You get glory. You get riches. You get privilege.

You don't deserve any of it. Okay, take a deep breath. I'm going to keep using this word.

Yes, you are going to keep using this word. And in receiving all of that, Christ is going to be exalted in my boasting. I'm going to boast in Christ.

I don't think the word *rejoice*, carries that connotation. That's why he doesn't drop this dangerous *Calcutta*, my word, which, come back to 5.2 now, why is it so natural for Paul to say, we boast in the hope of the glory of God? Oh, it's coming. I'm going to be included.

It might, in fact, rub off on me. I'm going to have it as my mark, my insignia. I'm going to wear that uniform.

I'm wearing the uniform. I'm wearing it. I'm boasting in this insignia, this mark, this uniform.

I'm wearing it. That's my boast. The glory of God.

Now, I'm going there because I think boasting is pushing me there. Let me say one more thing about boasting before I turn to the glory of God and see whether I'm on track here. Okay.

Boasting, in Paul's understanding, his emotional framework, is a very happy act of the soul. It's a happy act of the soul. Nobody, in a Christian sense at least, boasts sullenly.

I wish I didn't have to boast, but I guess I'll have to. Nobody does that. That's here's why I think that.

Listen to 2 Corinthians 12 9. I will boast all the more gladly. I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, because Christ's power is magnified in my weaknesses. Now that little phrase, all the more gladly, says boasting ordinarily, all of it is a glad experience, but I'm taking it to superlatives.

And isn't it interesting that the word for that superlative is the superlative of *heideos*, from which we get hedonism? Hedonista. So, this is a glad emotion, all right? This is a glad emotion, which means that the translations, whether they're *rejoice* or *exult* or *boast*, all have a piece of the truth here. What is the glory of God in this verse? I'm boasting in the hope of that.

What is that? Could be the experience of no longer looking through a glass darkly, but face to face, beholding glory. Could be that that glory transforms us so that we are glorious, like Jesus is glorious. And

Paul, in Romans 8 17 and 18, puts both of those back to back.

Let me read it to you. We are heirs of God, fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him. So, made glorious, made beautiful, perfect.

We will shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father, Jesus said. You, just look up. You're so ordinary.

You're just so plain. Every one of you in Christ will be brighter than that ball in the sky, and nobody will be able to look at you unless they too are so changed. You believe that about yourself? Can you believe that? You're talking about bragging.

I'm going there. I'm gonna wear that. My insignia, bright as the sun.

What's yours? You love anybody who's on the other direction? Um, let me keep reading. Verse 18 of Romans 8, and this is the ground. We will be glorified with Him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us. That surely means that partly what we see, what we see, it will be revealed to us. It's out there, and we get to see it.

It will be revealed to us. Now, you know, I'll bet in half of you, there's another text in mine, namely 1 John 3, which says, when we see Him, we will be like Him. There's no separating seeing glory from being glorious.

There's no separating. Biblically, you can't go there. If you see it, you're it.

You got the insignia as soon as you see it. That's the way God's gonna do it. You can't decide at that point, oh, didn't want to go there.

Oh, yes, you did. That's why you were in. Now, here, back to chapter 5, verse 2. Paul could have said, we boast in the hope that we will be glorified.

He didn't say that. He's gonna say it, but he didn't say that. He put the emphasis on ultimate reality.

He put the emphasis on the ultimate. Like, nothing behind this. Nothing behind this.

When you get to this, can't go any farther up or in. The glory of God. We're not the ultimate goal, no matter how glorified we are.

God is, and His glory magnified. Now, of course, we would not be able to glorify God as God in the age to come if we were not made partakers of God's joy in God. You will not be able to magnify God in the age to come until you are made a partaker of God's joy in God.

Nothing short of God's joy in God is worthy of God completely. And, therefore, glorifying God will depend on us having God-like capacities to know God, God-like capacities to enjoy God. He won't get glory if we don't.

Therefore, the glory of God will not receive its proper, fitting, eternal exaltation apart from our glorification. But, when all is said and done, God alone will be God. We will not be God.

God's glory alone will be the ultimate beauty, the ultimate value. Everything about us in that last day will be derivative, and He alone will be the original. Everything about us in that last day will be dependent, and He alone will be self-sufficient.

The Lord alone will be exalted in that day, Isaiah 2.11. The Lord alone will be exalted in that day, Isaiah 2.17. And it will be our joy to have it so. You will be so glad to say those words in His presence. It will be our boast.

Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. Let the Lord alone is exalted in that day. There is a profound sense in which we will share the glory of God, and there is a profound sense in which we will not share the glory of God.

Don't get into an argument with somebody, or do we share the glory of God? What a knucklehead argument. Clarify! Clarify! Yes and no! When we shine, when you shine, I will be so eager to see you, when you shine like the sun in the glory of your Father, God's superior, original brightness at that moment, we'll be so crystal clear as to give stark meaning to Isaiah 48.11, my glory I will not give to another. Period.

I won't. And it will be your boast to say, right! I love it! That's the kind of God I love! And you will be given a badge, an insignia, a uniform, a capacity to see in Him a totally all-satisfying God. Now let me close with two stories to illustrate how precious hoping, boasting in the hope of the glory of God is.

On Monday I received a text that one of the long-time members of the church, younger than I am, a good bit younger than I am, about the age of most of your parents I would guess, is in the hospital with stage 4 cancer and may not have long to live, and so I called Jason Meyer and said, can I go visit? That's the way our covenant works here. He never says no, but I clear it. He said, go.

And I walked down, I mean I drove down to Abbott here, parked on Chicago, where I always parked for 38 years. I know secret parking places. And I walked in, uncle, oncology, room 3968, and when the nurses came out I walked in, she smiled real big, and I sat down, and you know what we did for 15 minutes? We boasted in the hope of the glory of God.

We're not pulling any punches here, you're gonna die, and I'm gonna die. You're sick, I might be sick. No no games here, let's get ready, let's talk about it, let's enjoy this, let's boast in this.

And I looked her right in the eye and said, God has not appointed you for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for you, so that whether you wake or sleep, you might live with him who is the glory of God. Listen, whether you are in the seminary and preparing for the pastoral ministry or not, you're gonna get to do this someday. Don't run away from it.

Bring it on. Nothing is more sweet, precious, deep, awesome than to stand beside a person who in a matter of weeks will be in the presence of Jesus and exult together in the hope of the glory of God. Last illustration just from the New Testament.

I want to end where I began. You're not called to periodic joy, you're called to perpetual joy, sorrowful yet always rejoicing. And I'm arguing that the key to that is hope, the key to steady state joy in and through cancer and through the flooding of your house in North Carolina and in and through every manner of suffering is hope in the glory of God.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad. And then what does he say? For great is your reward in heaven.

That's the only way. That's the only way. You have to be heavenly-minded.

You have to love the glory of God coming to you in a matter of weeks or years more than you love everything in this world, more than you love making A's on tests or getting married or being healthy. Which means, in closing, that hope in the glory of God is the key to loving people and feeling compassionate for people, even when it may cost you your life. Hebrews 10.34. You had compassion on those in prison.

Where'd that come from? You had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. You didn't just endure the plundering of your property. You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property because you've been identified with those rascal Christians who are in prison.

How did you do that? How did you do that? How do you get joy while they are burning your house down? Father, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one, infinitely better, infinitely lasting, the all-satisfying glory of God. Let's pray. Father, first, awaken our hearts to taste the glory of God in Christ through the gospel, and then so establish us in our experience of it, foretaste now, hoped for later, so that the pressures, the afflictions, the sufferings of this life, both emotionally and physically, do not destroy it, but are born by it.

And then, Lord, in that hope, give these students guidance so that they can smell with the olfactory senses of their spirit-filled hearts where the trail of your glory is leading. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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