

Gospel Glory and Joy

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[0 : 00] All right, so 1 Thessalonians 2.17, we're jumping into that and I want to start with this! Glory and joy, two words, two important words. We need them, we want them, and you and I, whether! we realize it or not, we seek them relentlessly. We do. Today's passage forces us to reckon with that reality and consider and answer the question, where do you find your glory and your joy? Now, you think of glory and that can mean a lot of things to a lot of people. What do I mean by glory? It's more than just drawing attention to yourself. It's more than garnering personal praise. Glory is a designation of value. So to ask the question, what is your glory, is really to ask the question, what gives you value and meaning as a person? What makes you special and noteworthy?

And however you answer that question is going to also be the thing that you are pursuing for the sake, not only of glory, but for the sake of joy. And not all pursuits of glory and joy are equal. And that's what we're going to see. That is what Paul is going to teach us today. So, without further ado, let's jump into this passage of scripture. 1 Thessalonians chapter 2.17 to 20.

God's word says this, but since we were torn away from you brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you. And I, Paul, again and again. But Satan hindered us.

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. This is God's word to us. So, when I was eight, we had a local boys club in La Habra, California, where I grew up. And they had this basketball league, and I got to play in that basketball league. It was a lot of fun. And I liked it because I, not bragging on myself, but I stood out because I was ahead of most kids in dribbling and shooting. And the boys club's refs who refed the games, they started calling me Little Larry Bird, which they didn't realize wasn't a blessing to me because I was a Lakers fan, right? And if you're a Lakers fan, you know that Larry Bird is the enemy.

[2 : 28] All right. When I was in middle school, our football team went undefeated, and we got a trophy, and were celebrated at an awards ceremony. When I was in high school, our basketball team went to the California State Championship for the private school league that I was in. We lost, but we made it to that championship game. Those were fun, glorious, joy-filled moments in my life that I looked back on, and I still remember. And so, I say all that because I just want to honor the fact that there are good earthly pursuits of glory and joy. You know, pursuing things like career and higher education and contributing to technological invention or medical advancement, entrepreneurship, building a company where you are employing people and seeing things made and appreciated or excellence in sport or acting or music or art, all those are good earthly pursuits.

And as you mature in them and get better and better, they bring with it a sense of glory and joy. And that is okay. It's okay to experience joy and receive appreciation for something you've accomplished.

You know, I think us as Christians, we can just obsess over this idea of idolatry and be so scared that we're turning anything into an idol that we never celebrate anything meaningful in our lives, the milestones and the accomplishments.

It's okay to do that. So, if you get an award at work or you get promoted or you achieve something significant in your career or field of work or sport or for dancing or music or the thing that you enjoy, just receive that and be thankful that God made you in such a way to accomplish that, right?

You don't have to say like, eh, no big deal. It's all gonna burn anyway. That's not like God is okay with you celebrating those things. But, you're just like, oh, there it is.

[4 : 22] There it is. Here we go. But let's not build our lives around those things either. All my trophies, all the ribbons that I've won over the years, you know where they're at?

They're buried in some landfill somewhere. I have no idea. Why? Because the moment wears off, seasons of life end, and those glories and joy, the glow of them kind of slowly fades.

After high school, the door closed for me on competitive sports. I can't live off the joy of what I accomplished 20 years ago. The glory of those things fade more quickly than we kind of care to admit, right?

And as much as we'd like to have those glory days back, we just can't. We can't relive them. And this is the kind of feel-good message you all keep coming back for.

Amen. All right. But here's the good news. There is some good news here. As good as those earthly pursuits of glory and joy can be, there are better ones. And these verses reveal them.

[5 : 31] Verse 17 starts off, but since we were torn away from you, brothers. So for Paul, for us too, the heavenly gift of gospel family brings with it unbreakable glory and joy.

I want us to ponder and think about that. As meaningful as the personal accomplishments, the individual accomplishments can be for our own value and joy, the gift from God that brings us into unceasing, unbreakable, unchangeable joy and glory is gospel family.

It's incomparable. And that's the beauty of salvation is that our sins are forgiven. That we are made right with God because of what Jesus has done.

Nothing that we could do and accomplish has done that. And we stand before him in the righteousness of Christ who made a way for us to come to the Father. And the Father adopts us into his family because of that.

That is a beautiful gospel truth that we, in our salvation, become a part of God's gospel family. That carries with it its own glory. Like God looks at you and he assigns upon you value and meaning and purpose.

[6 : 47] He looks upon you and says, this is my beloved child in whom I am well pleased. In the same way that he spoke that over Jesus at his baptism, when you have come through the waters of new birth, the same thing is what God says over you.

My beloved child, in you I am well pleased. And from that we get unspeakable glory and joy. There is no greater title and no greater achievement we can earn in this world that surpasses that title of being a child of God.

But also to being a brother and sister in Christ. Think of that. You are a brother and you are a sister in Christ. That title for Paul.

There was no better thing that he could call those Thessalonian believers except brother. Brother and sister. Think about that the next time you say that to someone. Or someone says that to you. Stop and appreciate the glorious value and dignity and calling and connection and identity that is assigned to that simple little word. Brother in Christ.

[7 : 53] Sister in Christ. You know, Christians in developing nations, I think they get this church as family paradigm a lot better than we do here in the modernized Western world.

We've kind of industrialized Christianity quite a bit. What do I mean by that? Is we kind of put our hope in the way that we do our, I don't know, religious practice.

We put our hope in building big platforms with big talents and hoping to get big results. We systematize discipleship like it's an assembly line. You have to go to this thing first and then that thing next and then you join this serve team.

You start giving over here. You start connecting to this group over there. And then voila, we got a finished product. You are now a made disciple. Our industrial approach to Christianity makes us feel good and we can look at the metrics and be like, wow, look at that.

But what is the fruit that it's producing? That's the question. I would say we're less patient, more entitled, less connected, more independent, less localized, and more nationalized than we've ever been.

[9 : 01] So what if we stopped doing that and stopped putting our hope in big events to bring about big change or stopped putting our hope in production line discipleship and instead settled in on the slow city growth that happens in small group family style discipleship?

What if we did that? What if we committed ourselves to that? Well, I think what we'd start to see is we'd start to build deep, meaningful gospel relationships where people really do feel like brothers and sisters in Christ, where that's not just something we say on a Sunday because that's good Christianese and we learn the right wording.

It actually means something to our soul when we say that. We both give it and receive it in a meaningful way. And if your glory and joy is found in God's people, you won't have to find the next accomplishment or achievement.

You won't be desperate for it to find value and meaning for yourself because unlike those things, relationships are incredible because they don't wear off. That is why we can say confidently that the heavenly gift of gospel family brings with it unbreakable glory and joy.

And like we're gonna see from Paul, the glory and joy of gospel family doesn't fade even when we're separated from one another. I mean, think about it. That is true.

[10:28] So in our community group, we have some guys that are in the military, Spencer Waters on the Austin Collard, and they've been gone. Whenever they're out of town, we miss them. We miss them, right? We would rather them be in the room than them be somewhere else.

We miss them when they're not there. We feel it, we notice it. And like Paul said in verse 17, we were torn away from you brothers for a short time, in person, not in heart.

When you look at that word torn away, it's a Greek word that means we were bereaved of you. Bereaved.

Being separated from gospel family feels like being torn away from the people you love. You are bereaved. Paul, his calling forced him to feel this strain.

He was called by God to take the gospel to new cities and to break it into new people groups and nations. And at the same time, he's needing to do that, but he doesn't wanna leave the churches that he just started, right?

[11:34] He was torn away from the Thessalonians. He was torn away from that city and sent on his way to Berea. And there in Berea, he started a new gospel family. And that was created there. And I'm sure he rejoiced in that and loved that because it added to the greater gospel family.

At the same time, he felt this tearing away from the Thessalonians because he separated from them. And he wants to be with them. But here's the beautiful thing. Even in that separation, even when he's not face to face, he was able to continue to hold them in his heart.

I mean, look at, if we go back to chapter one, he opens up, we give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

He's able to hold them in his heart. But still, he wants to be there with them face to face. That would be his preference.

So the question for you and me is our absence from gospel family and escape to somewhere we'd rather be, or are we diligently stewarding the circumstance and calling that we're in right now, which may sometimes take us away from gospel family, but that we would still desire to be with gospel family?

[12:56] I've been bereft of my mother who died of cancer in 2007. And look, if there was a non-Dr. Frankenstein way to bring her back, I would be all in for that.

That's what I think of when I read Paul's words in verse 17. He says, we endeavored, endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.

To endeavor means to try hard to achieve something. Gospel glory and joy pursues the investment of personal presence in gospel family.

There's no greater investment and no sufficient substitute for being face to face. Our son, Asher, he is at university up in Virginia, and we're happy for him.

We're happy that he's there. He's thriving. We get to keep in touch with him through the glory of modern technology. But you know what? I will take Asher in our home over Asher on the phone any day of the week. And then I'm reminded when he's home how much he eats, and I'm like, wait, when are you getting back up?

[14:04] University's calling, buddy. Come on, let's go. Family doesn't mean being together every second of every day, but family does mean investing into showing up when you can and endeavoring, trying to make that happen.

Asher came home last weekend for his brother's 13-year-old manfire, which sounds strange, I know, but it's kind of a rite of passage thing we do as we recognize our boys growing up, and they're hitting that age, that milestone, where they're stepping into the beginning of the journey of manhood.

And so it's an important moment. And so Asher came back because he wanted to make an investment into his younger brother, Rory. So he was there. That meant he had to pack and drive down, and he doesn't have a car, so he had to organize a ride to figure out how to get down. It's a six-hour journey each way, so now he's got all that till, like, he's there and he's back, and it's a lot. And Riley, too, he had to give up his shift at work, and he had to buy a gift and write an encouraging message and a charge to Rory as he starts this journey into becoming a man. It was this personal investment of time and energy and money for the both of them, but they did that for their brother because it mattered. And they did, and they wanted to do that face-to-face. [15:16] This personal cost was ultimately an investment into Rory. They wanted to pour into him gospel truth and wisdom to affect his heart and his mind and encourage him.

But that's what we do for family, and that's what we do for gospel family. Asher could have considered the obstacles and made all kinds of excuses, but he made a way. And when the gospel knits our hearts to others in our gospel family, it's not easy for us to give up on showing up. I mean, that's what Paul gets out here in verse 17. We wanted to come to you, Thessalonian church. We wanted to come to you, and I tried, Paul says. I tried again and again and again. He didn't stop and give up right away. And then he says this thing, Satan hindered us. But the point here is don't give up easily to be with gospel family. Don't give up easily to be with gospel family.

[16:14] And I say that, and I also want to give us some wisdom here because there are some legitimate hindrances we're gonna face, right? Legitimate ones that we will have to deal with and push through in this life in order to do this, not giving up easily in gospel family.

So three things. There are seasons of life that create hindrances. There's sin that creates hindrances, and there's Satan that creates hindrances. So seasons, major life changes, major life moments that we are in.

There was a time when me and my brothers, we started a business back in 2000, and I was working a lot. I was working about 80 hours a week to get that thing going and up off the ground and stabilize, and so I missed a lot of church during that time.

And one of my brothers that I was working with, he came up to me and said, like, understand where you're at, but don't let that become the pattern of your life. Make sure at some point you're doing what you can now, but, like, work towards whatever you can getting back into church, getting back in a gospel family.

That's important. There are seasons like sports that may take us away for some time or a hobby that we have that may take us away from time to time. Some of us hit seasons of illness.

[17:23] That happens. Man, I remember the joy of having Nancy Lake here every single Sunday, and then, because of cancer, she couldn't be here. Those are realities.

There's aging. I know that some of you folks that are a lot older, it's impossible for you to drive, or not safe for you to drive at night, so community groups at night is not a thing, and that's a real obstacle for you, and I get that.

Some of us are caring for aging parents, and that calls us to drive to where they're at and look after them. Those are beautiful seasons. Those are, like, good things that we can step into. Those are important things, and sometimes that just means that we are pulled out of gospel family right here from time to time.

So there are seasonal realities to life that might interrupt and be obstacles and hindrances to being a gospel family, and then there's sin issues, right? We sin against each other.

It creates distance. But we also know that the gospel offers us the path of reconciliation through repentance and forgiveness. And so sin can be a hindrance, but it doesn't always have to be.

[18:37] Do you give up too easily and move on from your gospel family because of sin? And I'm not saying there aren't circumstances and moments where you've legitimately given all you could to reconcile, and there comes a time when you kind of have to step back and just leave it to God and pray and wait for him to work on people's hearts to be able to bring them to the table.

That is a true thing. But do we give up too easily? Do we walk away from those relationships too easily? So there's seasonal hindrances, there's sin hindrances, and then finally there's Satan hindrances.

That gospel opposition, that's the kind of gospel opposition like we discussed last week where Satan's just making it hard and putting a lot of stuff in your way to keep you from getting to your

gospel family even though you would like to.

We don't really experience that too much in the USA today, but in the face of trial and suffering and persecution that any of us may face at any particular point, do what Paul says and try and try again. Now, if that sounds like a lot, if that sounds like, that is a tall order to be able to push through all of that for gospel family, I would say, you're right, it is. It is.

[19 : 47] But it is worth it because that is where our gospel glory and joy is found. What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?

Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. Paul uses this phrase in verse 19, crown of boasting, right?

And then in verse 20, he uses the word glory, and I think one reveals the other here. What you boast in is where your glory is.

In other places, Paul talks about boasting in Jesus Christ alone. Now he's talking about his crown of boasting being in the Thessalonian believers. Well, gee, Paul, which is it? Now we're not getting a schizophrenic Paul, thankfully.

That's not what's happening. He is boasting in both of those things, and I think it's a legitimate reason. When you and I, when we boast in something, what we are doing, we are rejoicing over it, and we are declaring it as precious to us.

[20 : 53] If I boast in my work achievements, I'm boasting over them and boasting in myself. If I boast in my investment portfolio, I am rejoicing in it and rejoicing over it.

If I boast in my kids, I am rejoicing over them. Imagine me, a 47-year-old man, that I was still boasting in my 12-year-old undefeated football season trophy, and I had that trophy prominently displayed in front of my wedding picture.

You would say, Jesse, you got some problems here. You got some priority issues here. What I rejoice in, what you rejoice in, says a lot about what is precious to us. It will be the thing that we serve and that we sacrifice for.

If we boast in Jesus and in his salvation as what is most precious to us, if we boast in our Heavenly Father's love and in his power and in his goodness and what he does for us, that is what we are declaring what is precious to us.

It will be the thing that we serve and sacrifice for. We will serve and sacrifice for that relationship.

And Paul says yes and amen to those things in other verses in his writings, and now he's strangely, he's giving us room to add a boast beyond God.

[22 : 03] Or is it? We get to. And Paul would argue that we should boast or rejoice over each other. Think about that.

When we gather together, it's an opportunity that we get to boast in and rejoice over each other. These crowns that Paul talks about here, this crown of boasting, they weren't the kind of crowns made up of gold and jewels that we think of with like British royalty.

These were branches of plants that were woven in a wreath, like a plant wreath. And they were given to athletes and they were given to generals for their victories. And to recognize their efforts and their labor that they put in in preparation to gain those victories.

Crowns were given for results. They were given to the winners. And we think about that and we're just like, man, that doesn't seem to fit the Christian message. That doesn't seem to fit the gospel message.

But here's the thing, Paul's crown of boasting, it isn't the reward of the athlete who dominated in wrestling. It isn't like that of the general who conquered his enemies. For Paul, this crown is more like the glory of childbirth that belongs to the mother after labor.

[23 : 16] Galatians 4, 17 to 19, he says, they make much of you. He's talking about these other false teachers that are coming in and leading Christians astray into false gospels. They make much of you, but for no good.

They want to shut you out. They want to shut you out of relationship with God. And they want to do that so that you can make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose. And not only when I am present with you. And then he says, it's my little children for whom I again in anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

The child is the mother's crown of glory. And that's why she endures the anguish of labor. Jesus formed in us is the crown of glory for which disciples labor over each other.

Here's the thing. People come to the hospital because they're excited to see the new baby, not the worn out mom. Sorry, moms. That's just the truth. Y'all know that too.

[24 : 21] But here's the thing. After that labor, the mom wants to show off her baby that she's been laboring over. She wants others to glory in what she is glorying in.

And that's why we show up and get into each other's lives. That's why we serve and minister as disciples of Jesus to one another. Not to boast about ourselves. Our boast is seeing Jesus being formed in each other.

That is our boast. That is our glory. That is our joy. So friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, do you and I, do we serve and do we minister caring mostly about how people see you?

Or do you do it because you need others to boast in you? Or is it because your boast, your crown, your highest joy is Christ being formed in your gospel family?

I want to end by meditating on this question. I want all of us to think about this. What will you and I present to Jesus as being our glory and joy at his coming?

[25 : 33] We're going to all stand before him one day. That's Paul's rhetorical question in verse 20. What is our hope or joy or crown of boasting at Jesus' return?

What are the trophies we labored over that we are going to be excited to show Jesus when we stand before him? Guess what, friends? It's not going to be your voting record. It's not going to be your ribbons or trophies or certificates of achievement.

It's not going to be your wealth portfolio. It won't be any kind of accomplishments or records that you kept over how many times you've read through the Bible or attended church.

Look around the room. Look around this room right now. Think across the street and think of those precious souls over there in the kids' ministry.

We are each other's trophies of glory and joy. Okay, that's what Paul's saying here. It will be those you called gospel family that you did life with and labored over and served alongside and prayed with and sat with in tears of loss and lowliness and taught the gospel to and counseled with wisdom and laughed with and played games with and rejoiced with.

[26 : 51] That's going to be, these are the people that are our glory and our joy. When Paul looks ahead to the coming of Jesus, he isn't planning to list out his good works or his title as an apostle or that he got to hobnob with Jesus' 12 apostles, his 12 disciples.

Look at all the people I knew. Where Paul's value lies, where his boast lies, where his joy lies, is in that which glorifies Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus told us how he's glorified here on this earth. He's praying this prayer in John 17 to the Father and he says this. I'm praying for them. I'm praying for these disciples.

And he's thinking about us too. I'm not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, Father. For they are yours. And all that is mine is yours and all that is yours is mine.

And I, Jesus, am glorified in them. Does Jesus have complete, perfect glory apart from us because he's God?

[27 : 57] Yes. And yet, in some mysterious way, he has made it so that he is also glorified in us. How? Because as we yield and participate in his redemption work in us and around us, you and I are becoming more and more like him, which manifests him and displays him.

And that's how he is glorified in us. And all that, you know what? All that's his work. It's his power at work in us. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that's at work in you and me and making us more like Jesus.

So even that boast in Christ being formed in you and me, it's really boasting in God. So then what is our highest value? What is our greatest glory?

Where is our boast? Where is our joy? That Jesus is glorified in you and me. That is gospel glory and joy that is unbreakable and never ends.

Amen? As the band comes up, we look to respond. In a moment, we're gonna take communion. I wanna say to you, if you're here, you're not yet a follower of Jesus. Jesus being glorified in you begins with believing and surrendering to him as Lord and Savior.

[29 : 13] And I wanna invite you to do that today. By faith, you believe. By faith, you are forgiven. By faith, your sins are washed away. By faith, you are adopted as a child of God and you become gospel family.

And the journey of Christ being formed in you begins. There's gonna be a prayer up on the screen for you to pray. And if that's you today, I really would just urge you and call you to pray that prayer.

Put your faith and hope in Jesus. And for those of us in the room that are already followers of Jesus, we're gonna take communion in a moment. And as we do that, I just want us to reflect on what will you and I present to Christ?

We're kinda coming to the table and it's an imitation of Jesus saying, hey, come to me right now. And he is not visibly here, but man, his presence is with us. So as you come to the table, think about coming to Jesus.

One day we're all gonna come to him. Think about like, man, what am I gonna present to Christ as my glory and joy? When he asks me that question, what am I gonna present to him? You know, communion reminds us that we are coming around the table that represents Christ and we do that as a body.

[30 : 22] We do that as a gospel family because that's what Jesus created through his sacrifice, his death and resurrection for us.

And so we can ponder anew this gift of salvation as we come to the table, that you and I, that we get to be children of God, part of a gospel family.

And let's ask ourselves, is Christ being formed in me? Is Christ being formed in my gospel family? Is that my greatest joy? Is that my greatest glory? Let's pray, and then you can go to the table nearest you when you're ready.

Jesus, you invite us to come to your table of grace, the table of your presence. We get to draw near to you and we get to be reminded of all that you have done for us, all that you've created through your life and death and your resurrection.

You create a gospel family because of your body that was broken for us, your blood that was shed for us.

[31 : 36] I pray right now that, Holy Spirit, you would take this moment, whether it's those in the room who are putting their faith in you, Jesus, for the first time, or those who are coming to the table, that you would meet us in profound, meaningful ways.

We thank you for all that you are, all that you're doing in us. You are our glory and our joy. Amen. Amen.