

A Life That Counts

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, driving through Mineral Wells, Texas one afternoon in 1994, Jim Rhodes noticed many buildings standing vacant due to a shutdown at a local military base.
- And he says, I always complain to God about things that bother me. And he said, so I asked him, why aren't these buildings being used to help the homeless?
- Well, a few days later, an announcement appeared in the paper. One of the buildings was available to any charitable organization that could put it to good use.
- And he said more to appease his conscience than anything else. He made an inquiry. He said it wasn't really a serious inquiry, but he sent a letter to the city officials suggesting his idea.
- Well, the answer he wasn't prepared for came back. It's yours. Never say, he said, never say God use me unless you really mean it.
- [1 : 0 6] With a smile. He says decades earlier, after earlier, another complaint to God abandoned about abandoned children, he said, led him and his wife, Melinda, to adopt eight special needs children and be foster parents to hundreds, many more over the years.
- Soon, Rhodes found himself also helping pregnant and battered women, which grew into New Haven Ministries in 1986. He said the next step was to begin helping homeless families.
- And Rhodes says, after a chain of miracles, including more than 5,000 volunteer hours from plumbers, electricians and painters who helped renovate the facility.
- He said New Haven Family Center opened its doors in September of 1995. He says since then, it has helped many intact families get back on their feet.
- He says families live at the center for two to three months while they find employment. He says while they're there, the center provides food, clothes, GED if necessary, and computer classes.
- [2 : 1 9] He said it's totally Christian, totally donated, non-government funded ministry. And he says most of the folks just need a hand up instead of a hand out.
- And so he was asked, what is next for him? He said he chuckled. He chuckled and he said, well, only God knows. Rhodes is living a life that counts.
- He had complained to God wondering why this building or these buildings weren't being used to help the homeless. And he said, well, never, never complain to God and say, ask about something unless you're willing to do it.
- He says, but I'm sure he let me know the next time I start complaining. You know, we all have a choice. Do we want to live a life that counts and make a difference? Have joy in the here and now and in the hereafter, knowing that we've lived out God's plan for our lives, holding fast to the word of life or be known as one who gave up the faith or live our life alone because we're complaining and disappointed because we've complained our whole life away and complained our way out of doing God's will.
- So how? The question is, how do we live a life that counts? Well, I believe the Apostle Paul would tell us it begins with the submissive mind.

[3 : 49] We've been reading about this and we've been studying this in the book of Philippians, chapter 2, for a few weeks. And if we're to have that submissive mind and the joy that goes along with it, we have to recognize that there's a purpose to achieve, and that is God's plan for our lives.

There's a power to receive, and that is received through the Holy Spirit when we trust Christ as our Savior. And there's also a promise to believe.

Let's begin today, this morning, with that promise to believe, and that is joy comes from submission.

Joy in our life comes from knowing that we've submitted our life to the will of God and we're living our life in the power of the Holy Spirit, knowing that what we're doing is making a difference, not only for the here and now, but also a difference for eternity.

Who wants to float through life? Now, maybe some do. Who wants to live an entire life and go into an eternity without anything to show for it, without a legacy that will last for eternity?

[5 : 11] And that's the option. That's the choice that we as followers of Jesus Christ have, is to live a life complaining and just going with the flow or living a life that counts for all eternity.

Let's look at chapter 2 of the book of Philippians, verses 16 through 18. We went through last week, verses 14 and 15, and he was telling the Philippian believers that they should stop grumbling and disputing with one another.

He says, Well, we all know that the world's philosophy, this world's systems philosophy, joy comes from aggression.

Fight everybody to get what you want, and you'll get what you want, and you'll be happy. That's pretty much the philosophy of today. Fight tooth and nail to get what you want, and once you get what you've been fighting for, then you'll be happy.

You'll be fulfilled, and you'll be filled with joy. And if somebody else takes that joy away from you, you fight for it back. Well, that's this world system way of getting joy.

[7 : 11] What was Jesus' philosophy? Do you remember? Philippians chapter number 2. What did Jesus do? What was his attitude? Remember Paul said, Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

And we looked and saw that when he used the word mind, he was talking about the way he thought about things, the way he viewed his life and eternity and everything.

And so we could say it was the attitude that Jesus had. So what was Jesus' attitude? All that he enjoyed in heaven was awesome, but he said, I can lay it down, and I can go to the earth and become a human being and live like a man, live as a man for 33 and some odd years, and ultimately go to a cross and die, be separated from God that he had, because he was God, but he was part of the Godhead, separated from God as a human being and as Jesus for some three hours there on the cross while he was paying for your sin and for mine.

Jesus' road to joy was through submission and through the attitude of, I give my life for others. And that is how he got joy.

It was a submissive mind that allowed his life to count and to make an eternal difference. Imagine this. If Jesus Christ hadn't submitted to the will of the Father and wasn't living for you and for me, Jesus would have stayed in heaven and he would have said, you're on your own.

[8 : 56] Good luck. And we all know the outcome of that. We would all be destined to the lake of fire and would all spend eternity separated from God in the lake of fire because we all deserve death.

We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Not a single human being that's ever lived, apart from Jesus Christ, was good enough to get to heaven on their own.

So Jesus Christ paid the penalty, paid our sin debt, and satisfied the wrath of God, rose again on the third day, and now for eternity is forever sitting at the right hand of God, making intercession for you and for me.

So that's what the submissive mind got for us. Now verses 16 through 18 that we're looking at today is one long sentence in the original language that the Apostle Paul wrote this in.

So it was a very, very long sentence. Now as far as English today and writing, we're told to write short sentences and for us to be able to make it easily readable.

[10:10] Well, a lot of the sentences Paul wrote went on and on and on and on. This is one of those. So a very, very long sentence from verses 16 through 18 started in verse 14 actually.

So what does it go back to? You remember what verse 14 said? Don't grumble. And he said, Don't complain. Do all things without complaining and disputing.

So Paul's continuing the same thought. Do all things without grumbling and disputing because you live among a crooked and a perverse generation. He said, Work it out among yourselves because you are living like the stars in the night sky.

You're living as shining lights in the world. Then verse 16 begins with that participle. He says, Holding fast or holding forth the word of life.

So it is not a disjointed verse. It goes along with the previous verses. One long sentence, one idea. And so he says, Don't grumble and complain, but instead do this.

[11:22] Question. How many of you complained this week since last Sunday? Come on. Hold your hand up. Yes.

I complained Sunday afternoon right after my message. We're human beings, right? So I quickly had to, or someone reminded me, and I had to quickly say, Oh, God, forgive me.

I complained. Why do we complain? We went over that. Because we think that if we had it a certain way, we would be happy, and we know better than God.

Well, why is it? Why are we having such a rainy winter? You know, if only the sunshine, I could cut my grass. Well, God knows best. And so we are complainers.

I mean, let's face it. Paul says, what? Stop it. Stop it. Get along. And work things out. Stop complaining.

[12:20] Stop grumbling. And if we're not careful, we'll end up feeling lonely as we push people away with a negative and a can't-do attitude.

Shouldn't we be able to get along and work together in the body of Christ? So the first thing that we see here is joy comes from submission.

And how do we get along with one another? We submit. The Apostle Paul said, don't just think on your own things. He says, think on things of others.

We are to submit ourselves to one another. We are to consider others' needs, not only as well as our own, but sometimes ahead of our own.

So that is how relationships flourish, is when we submit to one another and we work together. So joy comes from submission.

[13:18] But the second thing that we see is that joy comes from living a life that counts. We are living in a world of depression.

I'm not talking economic depression. I'm talking about spiritual, psychological, and emotional depression, where people are depressed and they're living in a blue mood day after day after day after day.

And there are so many people that are living their life wondering, what point is there to life? My life doesn't matter.

My life doesn't count. But the Apostle Paul is teaching here that joy comes from living a life that makes a difference, living a life that matters, living a life that counts for something.

What's our purpose in life? What we did yesterday, hopefully, should have made someone else's life a little better. What we did yesterday should have advanced the kingdom of God somehow in what we did, what we said, and how we lived.

[14 : 35] But Paul is saying here that joy comes from living a life that counts. Look at verse 16. He says, Stop grumbling, stop disputing, because you live among a crooked and a perverse generation.

And remember that you live as lights. People are seeing the light of Jesus Christ in the gospel, in the way that we live, in the way that we work things out. He says, then he goes on, he says, In doing so, holding fast, or holding forth, the word of life, so that, Paul goes on to say, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Let's take, first of all, that term, that word, holding forth, or holding fast. Just to get a little bit of background, that word was used in secular Greek to a host offering wine to a guest at a banquet.

So what he did was he took the whatever, whatever it was in, the glass, the goblet, and he held it out to a guest. Just like you today might take something and offer someone a bottle of water.

What you do is you hold it forth. You're holding fast to it, but the point is in order to give it to someone else. So Paul says, hold fast to the word of life or hold forth the word of life.

[16 : 14] As the Philippian saints held out or offered the word of life, Paul said, I would have joy. Now what's the word of life? What words bring life?

The gospel. The word of God. But more specifically, the word of God that pertained to the gospel. And so he's telling these Philippian Christians, these believers in Philippi, he says, when you live as lights in the world and you are holding forth the word of life and you are delivering it, you are offering it to those around you, he says, I get joy from it.

Now, in some translations, it's hold forth. In some translations, it's hold fast. Well, the reality is it could be translated either way and I believe it could be translated both ways and still be correct.

Because if you think about it, if we use the line of thinking, hold fast to the word of life, there are many who don't hold fast to the gospel.

There are many who give up on the gospel and say, I don't believe that anymore or begin teaching false doctrine. begin adding something to the gospel and then all of a sudden it's no longer salvation by grace through faith, then it becomes salvation by work.

[17 : 40] So what did they do? They didn't hold fast to the truth and they allowed falsehood to come in. And so, in one way, we've got to hold fast to the word of truth or the word of life, rather.

But in the other sense, we take it and we hold it forth and we share the gospel and we give it out to others. So it could have both meanings. And Paul said, when you do that, he said, it'll give me reason to boast.

He says, I will have joy. He says, I'll rejoice in the day of Christ because I haven't wasted my time and you haven't wasted my time.

So it could either be holding firmly or holding forth and so that I may rejoice. An interesting word that Paul used there. It's not the typical word for the word joy.

Now we've had joy, joy, joy all the way. We sang that a few moments ago. We've got joy, joy, joy all the way through Philippians. But this time he uses the word rejoice.

[18 : 41] It literally means to boast, to brag. Well, was Paul prideful? Not in a selfish pride kind of way, but I believe in this case it was a boasting that honored God.

Look at how great a God we have. He boasted about God. And so I think that's the kind of boasting that Paul referred to when he said, do this and I can boast in the day of Jesus Christ.

I can lift up to the glory of God what he has done. The day of Christ is something else that has caused some confusion. So we do this for that Paul said might have joy in the day of Christ.

Well, is it the rapture or is it the second coming? My personal opinion here is that Paul is referring to the rapture when he refers to it as the day of Christ.

The day of the Lord, we know when it's used in Scripture quite often, it does refer to the second coming. After that thousand year reign when Jesus Christ comes back, sets foot on the Mount of Olives, that's the day of the Lord.

[19 : 56] But the day of Christ, I believe, refers to the rapture. So what Paul's saying is when Jesus Christ comes back to bring us home, he says, I'll have a reason to rejoice because you've been holding forth, you've been holding on and giving out the word of life.

But then, what he does is he uses an analogy, he uses a metaphor that Paul uses quite often. A race, an athlete.

So Paul is using a metaphor of an athlete, he says, so that when you're doing this and when I get to heaven, I'll know that I haven't run or I haven't worked for nothing.

My life will have mattered, Paul is saying. My life will have counted because it made a difference in your life and you are sharing the gospel with others.

Paul didn't want his life to be wasted. Paul wanted his life to count. And I trust that you want your life to count as well. Everyone who's here in this room or watching this or listening to this, if you want your life to count, the only life that counts is one that's lived with the Holy Spirit within you because you are part of the family of God and you are allowing God's will, God to work out His will in your life.

[21 : 26] And we're through submission partnering with Him throughout our life. Now I know what it's like to simply drift through life sometimes. You know, sometimes we get tired, emotionally tired, sometimes physically tired.

And we just drift. But the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us the power to hold out in life and the Word of God.

Excuse me. And hold out this Word of life. It's what we do for others that makes this life matter for eternity. Remember, everything that Jesus did on earth, for whom did He do it?

Did it for you. Well, He did it to honor His Heavenly Father, but He did it for you and He did it for me. Everything He did from birth to death to resurrection, everything Jesus did was for you and it was for me.

And there's a two-fold joy that comes to the person who lives out this submissive mind. There's a joy in the here and now, knowing that you're living a life that counts and a life that matters.

[22 : 36] But there's also joy in the hereafter, like the Apostle Paul says, when I meet Jesus face-to-face, I'll have reason to rejoice because of what you've done and my life counted.

So joy comes from living a life that counts. And then thirdly, we see that joy comes from living a life of surrender.

It comes from living a life of surrender. Verse 17 and verse 18. Verse 17, Paul said, and if you do this and you live a life that counts and you hold out the word of life and you share the gospel and you live a life as lights in this world, I'll have a reason to boast and know that I haven't lived my life in vain.

It was God's Holy Spirit working through me as the Apostle Paul lived this submissive life. And he said, yes, verse 17, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering.

Do you remember the Apostle Paul? Where was he? He was in jail and he was waiting for his hearing, wondering what was going to be the outcome.

[23 : 55] So he either might be vindicated and let free or be turned free or they would be guilty and capital punishment.

And Paul knew that. Paul knew that that was the possibility that he would die in jail, die in prison. And so Paul says, if I do die for the name of Jesus Christ, it will not have been in vain because the life that I live, he said, is like being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith.

I live my life and it was poured out over you and it was like a drink offering and he says, I'm glad and will rejoice with you all. And he says, for the same reason, you also be glad and rejoice with me.

So the scene shifts from the athletic stadium. Crowds cheering and the word that the Apostle Paul is using there as having run in vain, it carries with it the idea of you run and you reach out for that tape because it was a successful finish to the race.

So the scene shifts from the athletic stadium to the altar, to the altar of sacrifice. Here's probably one of the most wonderful verses in the entire word of God as it relates to the life of the believer.

[25 : 28] Pictures, the life of a follower of Jesus Christ as it should be. And the Apostle Paul is referring to one of the earliest offerings in the Old Testament.

When we go back to Genesis chapter 15, excuse me, Genesis chapter 35 and verse number 14, we find that Jacob had set up a pillar at Bethel.

And the scripture says he poured out a drink offering thereon and he poured oil thereon. And then in the book of Leviticus and Numbers, God describes these sacrifices.

He describes what the drink offering or how the drink offering was to be done. And we learn that the drink offering was added to the burnt offering and to the meal offerings.

It was never added to the sin offering or the trespass offering. And it was the most unusual offering in that it had nothing to do with redemption. It had nothing to do with the person of Christ.

[26 : 33] And what they would do is they would bring a skin of wine and just pour it on the sacrifice which was being consumed by the fire. And then so what would happen to it?

It would be consumed and it would go up in steam. So the drink offering was poured on the burning sacrifice. It would turn into steam and it would just drift up skyward and then disappear.

So what Paul is saying is I want my life to be poured out like a drink offering on the offering of Christ and your life. And Paul knows that the Lord Jesus Christ had made already the supreme sacrifice.

He wanted to be like a drink offering just poured out and would go up in steam. That's a beautiful picture of the Christian life. We live our life being poured out on the altar of Christ and we end up disappearing so to speak and all that's left is the legacy the work that Christ has done.

So in a sense when we serve God it's not about us. It's about doing God's will and being submissive to the will of God through us.

[28 : 01] Our life is being poured out it's consumed and it goes up in a vapor. That's what Paul said he wanted his life to be like because he had run the race and if he died there in prison it would be just like a drink offering poured on the sacrifice his life would go up in steam and he would be in the presence of God and as we know the burnt sacrifices scripture refers to it as and we know that scripture anthropomorphizes God it would be sweet smelling savor it would be sweet smelling into the nostrils of God because he was satisfied with that sacrifice so that's that's what Paul is saying this is the mind of Paul he could think of no greater wish for for a follower of Jesus Christ than for their life to be consumed in service of others that's a life that matters that's a life that counts and then he says in verse 18 for the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me in other words if your life spreads the gospel my life is just just has been poured out as a drink offering and together we'll rejoice over this it wasn't just

Paul rejoicing he said you do this and you can rejoice with me as well and only a person with the mind of Christ or the attitude of Jesus Christ could be so poured out as a drink offering full and complete surrender Paul ends up with a note of joy and a note of rejoicing you know today we often rejoice at the wrong things you realize that we need to rejoice over the fact that Jesus died on the cross in our place and that we have the opportunity to serve him today when we hear of someone whom God is using or hear a church where people are being saved and built up in the faith we ought to rejoice when we hear of someone what someone else in the body of Christ is doing or another church that's flourishing we are to rejoice instead of saying ah well they're not doing it right or they're doing stuff that must be all wrong otherwise it wouldn't be growing today well if people are being saved and their lives are being changed and homes are being put back together then we ought to be rejoicing with others just as Paul said he could rejoice with them and they could rejoice with him if we're walking in humility we will rejoice at the success of others we have too much strife and we have too much disputing in the church the body of Christ today we need to realize that if we're serving together and serving for the same purpose to honor and to glorify

God and to bring others the gospel and have others trust Christ as their Savior we are in this together the disputing and the arguing was hurting the cause of Christ in Paul's day and it still hurts the cause of Christ today the mind of Christ in the believer will bring joy and bring glory to God so how do we live a life that counts submit ourselves to the will of God and serve God through serving others that's how we live a life that matters live a life that counts that's going to bring the joy joy joy joy down deep in our heart like the song says let's pray father this morning we're so so thankful that you've sent your son Jesus Christ to die on the cross in our place we're so thankful that

Jesus' attitude was one of submission and service rather than a desire to be served so father we ask today that you would instill within us that desire to live a life that matters in submission holding fast the word of life holding it out for others to see and to hear and that they may be able to trust Christ as their savior Lord be with us and help us to live the life that counts we pray in Jesus' name amen