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**AUGUST 2015**  
**THE PROVERBIAL PALACE**

Greetings co-laborers in the kingdom of our Christ!

We pray that you all are abounding in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and are firmly rooted in the righteousness of our Savior!

Let me begin by giving you a little update on the Dickerson's... We are doing very well by the grace of God.

Let me begin with Levi... He is now 8 years old and is such a tremendous blessing! It is amazing to see how God's hand is on him and how special he is. I understand everyone believes their child is special but here is the difference: I know I'm right!

No, all kidding aside, Levi has such a sweet tender heart. He seems unscathed by negative situations and circumstances he sees or hears about. He is totally inclined towards the things of God, oftentimes asking me about my messages I preach on Sunday mornings and wanting to know what we are singing during the song service beforehand. He is also extremely smart- retaining information and being extremely creative. All in all, he is a real blessing to me and Shannon, and we know God has His hand on him.

Shannon is also doing well... She has taught at the church several times over the past 6 months and our family at High Point Church loves her so much.

I remember shortly after we took our position at High Point, Shannon was thinking along the lines of how should a pastor's wife conduct herself and I told her, by what I believe was a prophetic unction, "Do you know what a pastor's wife is like? A pastor's wife looks and acts just like you- because God has called you for this role. So evidently He thought you are what a pastor's wife should be like." In other words, I was telling her- "Just be yourself! God created you just the way you are for this purpose." Amen! And, friends, she has been so great in her newfound role and has been incredibly supportive of me.

I mentioned several months back that we were hoping for her to go to India with me this year and while we tried moving forward towards making that happen, she just could not get a peace about it. The main issue was leaving Levi for a little over two weeks and this just seemed incredibly difficult to make happen.

Well, as she was praying about it, one day the Lord reminded her of another couple of female ministers who minister alongside of their husbands and He told her- "Notice that you never heard of these two ladies until after their children had left home." Then He impressed upon her heart- "Your ministry and calling right now is to minister to Levi and Trey." In other words, the role He has her in right now is to raise Levi and support me. And He emphatically told her- "Your time will come!" Amen!

I am so thankful I am married to a woman who is not driven to be in the limelight and understands what is truly important. Amen?

And perhaps this is a word of encouragement for you today... Do not despise the day of small beginnings! Know that family and supporting others who are on the frontlines is just as important to the Lord as these great ministries that are out there directly ministering to thousands. It is really ok to minister to the one sheep that God has called you to minister to. Perhaps it is your child. Perhaps it is an aging

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parent. Whatever the situation and whoever your “neighbor” happens to be right now, love, serve and minister with all your heart and as unto the Lord. The Lord will certainly reward that! You don’t have to tackle the nations yourself. You can also support others who are on the frontlines through your prayers and financial support.

Saints, I can assure you that Shannon’s current role in our ministry is just as important as mine. Sure, I might be the one with the microphone. I might be the one writing this newsletter. I might be the one traveling overseas. But I will be the first one to tell you- if I didn’t have a life-partner who took care of our son, kept our house in order, faithfully prayed for and listened to me, I would not have been able to do what I have done today.

So your calling may not be to be a wife and a mother. Heck, you might be a dude! But the principle still holds true. Seeking out the one lost sheep and helping the ministry that God has adjoined you to, is super-significant. Don’t despise it! Rather embrace it and know your labor in the Lord is not in vain. Whoohoo! I felt the Holy Ghost on that one!

Well, last month, we began talking about one of my favorite subjects in all the Word of God- joy!

We started off talking about how joy will only be found through Jesus. He, and He alone, is the missing piece of the puzzle in everyone’s life who has ever been born. Therefore, if one does not receive Jesus into their heart and then continue to let Him reign there, they will at best have just a counterfeit happiness from time to time.

We also talked about how joy is everlasting. It is not like that happiness, which can be found at one moment and then lost at another. No, the joy of the Lord is a spiritual substance that is, therefore, unchanging. That is why the Apostle Paul could exhort us to rejoice in the Lord always. He could do this because he knew joy is a product of our newly recreated spirit which is not based on feelings and emotions.

No, as we learned, joy is not like happiness because happiness is based on our natural circumstances while joy is based on our spiritual situation. What I mean by that is joy is a fruit of the spirit. Therefore, the joy that we have been given no man and no circumstance can take it away. Amen!

That’s right, saints! We can still have joy in our darkest hour because joy is a product of the unchanging, unseen realm. Yes, our joy is to be found in the Lord and He is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore. Therefore, our joy can always remain the same. Amen!

We then began looking at one of the greatest examples of this from the life of the Apostle Paul. We saw how his triumphant Epistle of Joy- the Book of Philippians- was written in a Roman dungeon and proclaimed by Him behind his pulpit of stones and chains. Therefore, we learned that if Paul could preach joy and practice the same in the situation he was in, we too can rejoice no matter what this world throws at us. Amen!

## **LIGHT AFFLICTIONS**

You see, the Apostle of faith did not exhort us to always rejoice and practice the same because he lived a life of comfort and ease. This should be rather obvious by what we have seen already. He had multitudes

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of trying circumstances that go well beyond the imprisonments I briefly described last month. In fact, he had more problems in this life than you and I could ever dream of having.

You see, the great apostle of faith had many other afflictions and suffered many other things before and after his imprisonment in Philippi. And in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, he gives us a list of these hardships...

Beginning in verse 23, Paul begins to give us the resume of his ministry... He said he had been beaten with stripes, beaten with rods, stoned, sleepless, hungry, thirsty, cold, shipwrecked, put in prison several times, etc. Paul had it rough just like the Lord told him he was going to have at his conversion on the Road to Damascus.

Yet, earlier in his second letter to the church of Corinth, he called these painful situations- "light afflictions" (see 2 Corinthians 4:17)! The word he used for "light" here literally meant "non-burdensome" and was a reference to the weight of his trials. Therefore, Paul was saying that the afflictions that he suffered were not heavy, weighty, or burdensome at all.

How could he say that? A better question though is how could he view all of his incredibly difficult problems as just being light and we view our much smaller problems as enormous?

The reason the great Apostle of faith could view his circumstances in this light is found in the same verse- 2 Corinthians 4:17. He went on to reveal in this powerful verse two very important truths regarding his light afflictions...

Number one, he said that they were "but for a moment." This means that they were temporal- only lasting a short while. But what we need to understand is that many of these afflictions were not just momentary, naturally speaking. Many of them lasted weeks, months and even years. Therefore, Paul could not have been referring to them just being "for a moment" according to this present life. So what was he referring to? He was saying that they were "but for a moment" in comparison to eternity!

You see, in comparison to eternity, our present life is extremely temporal. In comparison to eternity, our life on this earth is just a brief moment. This is why you see the Bible compare our life to a vapor and to a blade of grass. It uses both of these examples because a vapor appears for a moment and then vanishes away and a blade of grass appears one day and is gone the next. Saints, our life is but a speck of sand in the beach of eternity. Never forget that.

But Paul does not stop there! He goes on to describe the main reason that he was able to disesteem and devalue his afflictions so much. He said that they are "working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

The Apostle Paul was saying that his difficulties could in no way compare to the reward for successfully enduring and overcoming them! In other words, **he saw his afflictions as light because he saw the glory he would receive in exchange for them as heavy!** So in comparison to what he would receive in the kingdom of heaven, his problems were not problems at all for two reasons: Number one, because the reward would be so glorious and magnificent. And, number two, because this awesome glory would be eternal. When we see the riches of His glory in this light- as awesome and eternal- there is truly no comparison. Therefore, our afflictions must be viewed as light and non-burdensome! Thank you Jesus for this living and blessed hope we have!

## YOUR SITUATION IS NOT UNIQUE

So taking to heart these afflictions that Paul endured, how can we honestly view our trials and tribulations as burdensome?

You see, one of the wiles of the devil is to convince us that our situations and predicaments are unique. In other words, he is good at tricking us into believing that nobody understands what we are going through and that our situation is different than everyone else's.

For example, these people who have bought this lie of the devil will respond to exhortations like this with statements like-“Well, you just don't know what it feels like” or “You just don't understand what I am going through right now.” And while it might be true that the person they are speaking to might not have ever experienced what they are experiencing, what they are implying is that nobody knows or understands their situation. Therefore, when we receive the lie that our situation is unique, we feel justified in being down and depressed. But if we were honest with ourselves, we could find someone that has, not only experienced what we are experiencing, but also has walked victoriously through it.

But what the flesh loves to gravitate towards is the self imposed belief that we are “special.” And while we most definitely are special to God and are loved passionately by Him, this mentality that nobody knows what I am going through is rooted in self-centeredness. It's tight, but it's right.

**The truth is that while we as individuals are unique, our situations and experiences are not unique.** 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man...” This means that there is absolutely no trial or tribulation that we have been overtaken by (i.e. surprised with or fallen into) that is not common to man. This phrase “common to man” denotes something that is regular or repeated among the human race. In other words, any and all temptations that we suffer are common and are not unique. Saints, someone else, and likely many others, have experienced what we are going through.

And a key word in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is the word “temptation.” You see, just because we are going through a trial does not mean we have to let it steal our joy. It is just a temptation to be down and depressed! We can choose joy in the midst of even the most difficult of circumstances! We can resist discouragement and receive the joy of the Lord! Hallelujah!

1 Peter 5:9 also gives us this powerful key to resisting the temptation to feel discouraged and depressed...

Many of us are familiar with verse 8 where Satan is described as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, but verse 9 goes on to exhort us to “Resist him, steadfast in the faith [How? By] knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” In other words, by understanding that the same sufferings that we are currently experiencing are being experienced by other Christians presently in the world right now, we will be better equipped to resist the temptations that accompany those sufferings. Did you get that? By understanding that you are not alone and that others are dealing with the same temptations, you will be better equipped to resist the temptations to be discouraged and give in to the devil. Evidently, there is some crippling power in buying the lie that our particular circumstance is unique and no one understands the things we are going through.

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Saints, what you are dealing with is common to the human race. I know it might be difficult to see that when you are in the middle of a trial of your faith, but the bottom line is many have dealt with similar and even far worse things than you are currently dealing with.

You see the danger in not understanding this truth is that we will have a tendency to fantasize about the “other guy” and think that the grass is greener on the other side. People fall into this fallacy time and time again, thinking that if they just had a different job, a different spouse, or a different church, they would be happy. No, my brothers and sisters, a change of scenery or a change in circumstances is not going to make you happy. You must learn to be content in whatever your situation might be- and as we just learned, our perspective has a lot to do with our attitude.

### THE PROVERBIAL PALACE

Permit me to remind you where the Apostle Paul’s current imprisonment was when he penned the Book of Philippians...

It was in a prison (more literally, a dungeon) directly beneath the palace. Do you reckon that there might have been a temptation for him there to fantasize about the palace above him- thinking that dwelling up there might make him happier? I am sure that if any of us would have been in that exact same situation, we would have entertained those thoughts.

You see, we all think we would have joy if we dwelt in our own proverbial palace. In other words, if our circumstances were perfect and our conditions were ideal, we believe then we would be happy. This is a worldly and carnal attitude...

The majority of the world believes that if they just dwelt in their “palace”- that is, their place of perfection where all their dreams and desires were being fulfilled- then they would be happy. This, of course, is a total lie. That “never, never land” that the world paints for us will never fulfill us. It will never bring us the joy and contentment that we think it will. But the media feeds us this lie- painting a picture for us that there is a perfect life out there where dreams do come true. A fairytale, if you will.

The enemy is proficient in getting people to believe this as well: He deceives countless people into believing that if they just had more money or more stuff that they would then be happy. He also aims at convincing people that if they just had a different job or a different spouse that they would be happier. These are all lies that he has fed countless people for generations and has been extremely successful with. But if we just understood that no amount of money, no amount of things, and no change in any other area of our life is going to bring us the true joy that we are seeking, we would not allow him to get us out of God’s perfect will for our lives.

The truth is that **your circumstances do not dictate your joy; your focus and attitude dictate your joy.** You can have nothing and possess more joy than those who have everything. That is just the gospel truth!

As the old saying goes, the grass is not always greener on the other side, and that is so true. It might seem that way for the time being but in the long run we will be just as discontent and unhappy as we ever were after we have accumulated all these things that we thought we needed to be happy.

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But the truth is **that you can have more joy in your “prison” than your “palace” can ever bring you.** I know of a man who had more joy in the prison beneath the palace than all of those who dwelt in the palace above him combined: and his name was the Apostle Paul!

He dwelt beneath the palace, in prison, and I guarantee you that he possessed more joy than the most wealthy and regal individual that lived in the palace above him. The vast difference in circumstances would indicate otherwise, but I can assure you that true joy is experienced and maintained independent of our circumstances.

But this is not understood by the natural mind. The carnal mind equates favorable circumstances with joy and justifies discouragement and depression by undesirable situations. This is not the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ focuses on the spiritual circumstances, not the natural circumstances.

The reality is: You are blessed all the time! God is with you, never to leave you or forsake you! You have been forgiven, shown mercy, and stand in His righteousness! If this weren't enough, you are a citizen of heaven and will rule and reign with the Lord Jesus for all eternity! That is mine and your reality! Those are our “circumstances” that we should be focused on- the spiritual and eternal ones! Thank you Jesus!

Sure, our natural circumstances- the ones we can see- are uncomfortable and hurt, but victory is found in knowing that they are temporal and subject to change. Yes, our spiritual circumstances- the unseen ones- are eternal, unchanging, and far outweigh our natural circumstances! They are wonderful realities in the spiritual realm never to change and never to fade away! Praise the Lord!

You see, Paul understood something. There were things that he understood and applied to his life that enabled him to be full of joy despite his circumstances. So what were his keys to gaining and maintaining such a joy filled life? What can we glean from his example that will help us to experience more joy in our lives? Those keys are laid out plainly in His letter to the Philippians...

So for the next few months, we will uncover the secret to Paul's success. We will see through the Holy Spirit's inspired words in this Epistle of Joy what the keys are to unlocking the joy of the Lord in our life. So join me in the upcoming months as we take this journey through Paul's crowning masterpiece and discover his keys to having our joy be full and overflowing. Amen!

Until next month... Maranatha!

Victoriously,

