

Title: **Crazy Joy (Part 1): Joy in Spite of Suffering?!**
Text: **Acts 5:17-42**
Date: **February 4, 2024**

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Big Idea

We're all chasing after joy, but few of us ever really find it, at least in a lasting way. But that's what Jesus offers! For the Christian, God is both in control and up to good in their lives, however hard things may get at times. And because of this we can rejoice . . . though sometimes it's still through tears.

After being beaten and charged not to speak in the name of Jesus, Luke tells us that the apostles "left the presence of the council, *rejoicing* that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (v. 41). These guys are either insane or they have discovered the secret to everlasting joy. They are either masochistic maniacs or they hold in their hands the key that unlocks the very treasure chest we're all trying to open this morning.

As Blaise Pascal has said: *"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."*

Reason #1: Because God Is Still in Control

One of the things that makes suffering so unbearable for us is this sense that things are out of control. It feels like the floor is just falling out from under us and we're going down. It feels like God has fallen asleep at the wheel, like the devil has gotten the upper hand.

But Gamaliel's little speech in vv. 35-39 showcases a different reality. If I could put his point as sharply as I'm able, here's what he's saying: If this Jesus movement is not from God, they won't ultimately need to stop it (it will go out on its own in the end). But if it is from God, they won't ultimately be able to stop it (and he will run them over if they try). These apostles understood what this meant for them in a more positive sense: *God is in control*. He has the wheel. Even when peo-

ple try to hurt us or oppose us or kill us, ultimately, they can't. Even when it seems like God has abandoned us, he's not. One of the reasons we can have joy in Jesus, in spite of suffering, is that we know we have put our lives in God's hands and God's hands hold the world. He's got us (and all things!). It's going to be okay.

Reason #2: Because God Is Still up to Good

Another thing that often makes suffering so unbearable is we start to question whether God is actually for us. Here is where, in your suffering, you're not so much questioning his *hand* anymore: "Is he active, is he strong, is he in control?"—now you're starting to question his *heart*: "Is he good, is he for me, he may be sovereign but is he kind?" Because, again, it doesn't always feel like it.

One of the ways we can be reassured that God is up to good with us, that he is for us and not against us, no matter how hard it gets, is we can look at how he treats even his enemies here in Acts 5 (remembering that we too, without Christ, would be his enemies as well). The blood of Jesus is, at one and the same time, the *grounds of my guilt* and the *means of my pardon*. In other words: I can point to the blood of Jesus and say: "I am guilty!" But I can also point to the blood of Jesus and say: "I am forgiven!" His blood was shed *by me*. And his blood was shed *for me*! Both are true. That's the gospel. That's amazing grace!

If even when we were his bitter enemies, God still did not push away from us but instead he moved towards us, laid down his Son for us, and made way for our pardon; how much more, now that we have been pardoned, reconciled, made his friends through Jesus can we know that God is for us and up to good in our lives—whatever hardship we may currently be facing (cf. Rom. 5:8-11; 8:31-39)?! And if he is both in control and up to good, you can rejoice . . . in spite of whatever you may be suffering at the present.



Reflection Questions

- How has your joy been lately? Has your emotional life been more like these apostles (rejoicing always) or like these Jewish leaders (envious [v. 17], afraid [v. 26], angry [v. 33])? Why do you think? How might tethering your joy to Jesus make all the difference?

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Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor, and city through the good news of Jesus Christ.

FAITH: The Way Back to God | We are redeemed to enjoy intimate presses our church *upwards* in love

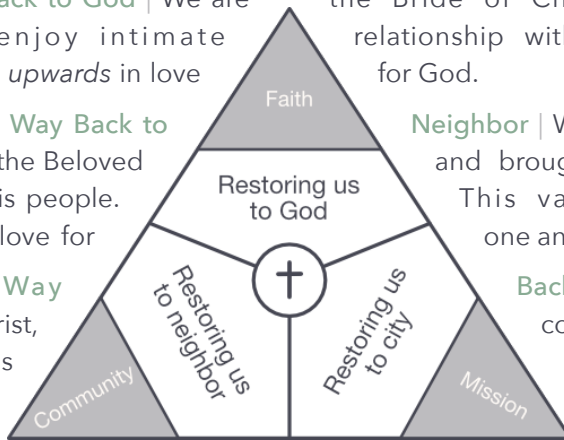
the Bride of Christ, created and relationship with him. This value for God.

COMMUNITY: The Way Back to Christ, adopted in the Beloved relationship with his people. church *inwards* in love for

Neighbor | We are the Family of and brought into covenantal This value presses our one another.

MISSION: The Way the Embassy of Christ, Savior to be his value presses our in love for the

Back to City | We are commissioned by the ambassadors. This church *outwards* unbelieving.



Your Next Steps

When approaching the Christian faith and life, it can be confusing to know where to even begin. Come find us at the Next Steps Table after the service—it would be our joy to help you along in the journey! And if you're a visitor, we have a special gift bag for you. Don't miss it!



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Welcome to Mercy Hill Church.
We are so glad you've joined us today!

Announcement Spotlight

All Church Hangout - Today!

Meaningful community is hard to find in Silicon Valley, even in the church. Our congregation is spread out all over the city. But there is one day of every week when we all commit to gather together and worship our God: Sunday. It seems strategic to take this pre-existing momentum and work with it in an attempt to develop deeper community within our body. Therefore, on occasional Sundays throughout the year we will invite the church to enjoy picnic-style afternoons together immediately following the service.

The Plan: After service, bring or buy your lunch and join us in the cafeteria adjacent to the sanctuary for a picnic-style afternoon. We'll also open the gym for people to play in!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

Easter Choir!

All Church Prayer - Tonight!

Short-Term Missions Interest Form!

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