

Christ's Joy and Crown

Heb 12:2, Phil 4:1

21/09/2025

Tom Eglinton

Camden Valley Baptist Church

www.cvbaptist.com

TRANSCRIPT:

Let us pray before we come to God's Word together. O breath of God, come breathe among us today. Speak to us by Your Word. Revive us in every part, we pray, that we might be those who love You, those who serve You, those who do Your will here on earth as it is done in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I want to read a few passages to you before we begin to look more deeply at God's Word. The first few come from Philippians. If you turn there in your Bibles, otherwise you can just listen. Philippians 1:8 says this: "For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Turn over to Philippians 3, from verse 20 we read: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my Beloved."

And then turn with me over to 1 Thessalonians, just a few pages over. Again, Paul writing to a different church. And in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10 we read this: "For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?"

Now, if you want, you can turn back over to Hebrews that we read before, chapter 12. What we're going to do today is something a little different. We'll start in Hebrews, but we'll travel around a little bit and explore just one thought from the book of Hebrews.

Now, we're coming into spring, which has meant that for the last month or so, my family has been pruning roses. Because we inherited—well, we didn't inherit it, we bought a property that had a hundred or so roses on it. So we've been busy at the end of winter pruning them back, which is not

a very enjoyable task. Have any of you been pruning roses? You're all too smart to—oh, we've got one, the gardener among us. You're all too smart to have roses. Pruning roses is not fun. They're prickly. Well, I've got about a hundred of them, so it's time-consuming. It's painstaking work. But why is it that we do this work? Why is it that my family and I have been out there getting prickles in our hands? It's because we can't wait to see the flowers in a few weeks and all through summer. And they're stunning. I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be an absolute joy to walk down my driveway and just see all of these roses in bloom, and to be able to pick them and put them in the house. It's going to be a great joy.

And there are many things in life like this. There are many things where we go through a struggle, something difficult, something painful, something we're not enjoying, because there's a joyful outcome at the end of it. I was at the Walk for Life yesterday, and pregnancy is like this. Why on earth do women get pregnant? It's insane. It's painful. You get nausea. The birth itself, I'm told, is quite painful. I don't know myself. Why would you do that? Because you can't wait to see that baby. You can't wait to see that baby grow up into a human being who interacts with you. You can't wait to pour out your affection upon them. There's pain because at the end of the day, there's joy.

And that's what we see here in Hebrews 12:1-2. It's a very well-known passage amongst Christians. It comes at the end of chapter 11, a long list of people who have endured suffering and difficulty in the Christian life because they hoped for something to come, a hope that is to come. And the author of Hebrews, in verse 2 of chapter 12, tells us to look to Jesus as we seek to run this race, as we seek to engage in the difficulty of the Christian life. And we're told to look to Jesus for two reasons. First of all, because He is the author and the finisher of our faith. That is, He's the one who instigated our salvation, and He is the one who sustains our salvation, and He is the one who will finish our salvation. So we better look to Him. He's the one who's going to do all the work.

But we're also meant to look to Jesus because of the fact that Jesus Himself endured great suffering through His life and through the death on the cross, before He was then raised from the dead and taken up into heaven. And we are told in Hebrews 12:2 that He endured that suffering for the joy that was set before Him. For the joy that was set before Him. Just like all of those—all the pruning of roses, just like a pregnancy, just like all the other difficult things that we do in life, we do it for the joy that was set before us. Just like that, except on a much larger scale, Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

And what I want to do with you this morning is to just focus in on those

words. What was the joy that was set before Jesus? Have you ever thought about that? I think it's, at least for me, it's something you hear, and you're like, oh, you just assume that you know what the joy is. But I'm not sure we do. I'd like to at least look at it with you. Even if you do, I'm sure you'll find it helpful. But as we come to think about what was the joy that was set before Him, I just want to take one step back and think about the fact that whatever this joy was, it must have been significant.

I'm willing to endure a little bit of pain to see some roses bloom. But the suffering that Jesus went through was extreme. The cross was a terrifying situation. On the same night in which Jesus died, before He was arrested, He went across the Kidron Valley just out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, and He prayed. And Luke tells us what this looked like. He withdrew from His disciples about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done." And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.

What we see here in the Garden of Gethsemane is a serious struggle. Jesus is in turmoil, in agony, in anguish. His body is physically tensed as He's praying earnestly, desperately crying out to His Father to deliver Him from this upcoming difficulty that is before Him. And He's in such turmoil, physically, spiritually, emotionally, that His sweat becomes like drops of blood. He's so tensed up that His blood vessels under His skin are bursting, rolling down His head onto the ground. And this isn't even the struggle itself. This isn't even the trial that Jesus went through.

As the night goes on, Jesus is betrayed by the kiss of His good friend Judas. He's taken away and abandoned by His disciples. He's blindfolded, mocked, beaten, falsely accused, carted from chief priest to pilot to Herod, rejected by a crowd of Israelites, scourged with a whip that would have torn the flesh from His back. He had a crown of thorns rammed on His head and struck with a reed. He was spat upon, stripped naked, and crucified in public. The physical suffering that Jesus was to endure for the joy that was set before Him was severe. But that wasn't even the main thing.

When Jesus hung on the cross, Mark tells us that when the sixth hour had come, that's about midday, there was darkness over the whole land until about the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" This was the terror that He dreaded. This was the shame that the book of Hebrews tells us He despised. This was the cross He endured for the joy that was set before Him. The terror was being forsaken by His Father. The terror was having all internal and

external displays of the Father's affection towards the Son being turned away. The physical darkness that was over the land for three hours was a picture of the spiritual darkness, the emotional darkness of the Father turning the face away from Jesus Christ as He hung on that cross.

Jesus, this man, the Son of God taken on flesh, who had always lived in perfect communion with His Father, even while He was here on earth, was rejected, stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, chastised that we might have peace. His Father laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. I don't think we can ever fully understand the depths of that suffering. But it is that shame that Jesus endured for the joy that was set before Him.

The point is this: As He hung on the cross, suffering under the wrath of His Father, Jesus had in mind—he's not enjoying the situation—he had in mind something joyous that would come out of it. And that joyous thing had to be so significant in His mind that He was willing to endure the most intense suffering ever known to mankind. What was this joy? What was it that Jesus looked forward to as He hung on the cross?

Well, I'd like to explore this question by looking at it from three different angles. The first is by looking at some of the texts that we just read. Because in Philippians 1:8, Paul tells us something that helps us to understand more of the depths of the riches of Christ's heart for His people. We read it; he says, "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ." What that means is that whenever Paul tells you how he feels about God's people, about Christians, he is telling you something—a dim reflection, perhaps—of how Christ feels towards His people. Paul longs for the Philippians with the same affection that Jesus Christ has towards the Philippians. That's what he's saying.

And so then, as we keep reading the letter to the Philippians, we find this open up more and more. The passage we read at the end of chapter 3 and into chapter 4 was all about how Paul is encouraging the Philippians to press on and continue on in their faith. He's saying our citizenship's in heaven; we wait for Jesus Christ to come and transform us. And then he says in verse 1 of chapter 4, "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." I don't think you can pack more affectionate language into one verse.

And I want you to think about this verse through this lens: If Paul has the heart towards the Philippians that Christ has towards the Philippians, then what is Christ's hope? What is Christ longing for? What is Christ's joy? Well, he tells you right here: You are. You can hear these words as coming from Jesus Christ Himself: "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love

and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." Do you see what Jesus is saying? You are my brothers, my sisters, my family. I love you. I long for you. I yearn to be with you. When I think about what my hope is in the future, my greatest hope is to be together with you. I delight in you. You're my joy. You're my crown. You're my glory. You being made perfect and being brought into the presence of my Father is all that I'm working towards. It will make my day when you stand before me in the presence of my Father in perfection. So stand firm, because I can't wait to have you with me in glory. My beloved. My bride. My delight.

This same idea comes up in other parts of Paul's writings. We read some of them in 1 Thessalonians. Let me read a couple of others. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 says this: "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." Isn't that a perfect picture of Christ's attitude towards His people? Can you see Christ's heart reflected in Paul there? It's not just that Jesus was so affectionately longing for us that He came to give us a message—the kingdom of God has come. He was so affectionately longing for us that He came and gave us Himself, His body, His own life. Why? Was it just because He pitied us? No. It's because we had become dear to Him. It's what He says there in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. Jesus died on the cross, Jesus endured the shame, Jesus went through all that suffering, not just because He pitied you in your poverty, but because you were dear to Him. Because He was longing for you.

We know that Jesus loved us while we were enemies. But I think the word "love" can often lose something of the passion that Christ feels towards His people. We were dear to Him. While you were enemies, while you were in your sin, while you were rotting in the gutter, He looked at you and He thought, "I long to have my people in perfection in my presence." I want you with me. I delight in you. You are my joy. So I'm going to give you everything.

A few verses later on in Thessalonians, we get another picture of this. "But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and our joy." Now, this is incredible. This just takes the language of love and reworks it into something just astonishing. It's not a perfect picture of Christ—I don't think Satan is hindering Christ from returning—but it is accurate of Christ in every other way. Paul hates being separated from the Thessalonians. If he could have his deepest desire, it would be to be with the Thessalonians in person, in face-to-face fellow-

ship with them. Paul endeavors eagerly to see their face with great desire. What's his joy? What's Paul longing for? What's he working towards? You, in the presence of the Lord Jesus. That's his hope and joy and crown of rejoicing. And that's exactly how Jesus feels towards you.

He is separated from us for a time, but Jesus longs, even now, to be with you, to see your face. He earnestly desires this. He's working towards it. Why? Because His hope, His joy, His crown of rejoicing is you in His presence at His coming. You are His glory and His joy. Sounds almost blasphemous, doesn't it? That's what He says. Again, in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, which we read, "For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" Again, we see these same ideas coming through. Paul's thanking God for the Thessalonians and is full of joy and rejoicing before God because of them. Not only that, but Paul's praying incessantly with the goal of what? Seeing the Thessalonians face to face and perfecting their faith. That is precisely the heart of Christ on display for you once again.

We know from other scriptures that Christ's people are a gift given to Him by the Father. He prayed as much in John 17:6, "I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to me." Jesus Christ thanks the Father for giving Him you. And He is rejoicing before His Father because He's been given a gift from His Father—you—and He finds joy in you. And He is night and day praying exceedingly that He might see you face to face and perfect what is lacking in your faith. That's what He's hanging out for. That's what He's praying for right now. His people in His presence, in perfection. Incredible.

As Christ was hanging on the cross, what was in His mind? What was He thinking about? Was He gritting His teeth through the suffering, through the shame, thinking, "I'm looking forward to this"? His people in His presence, in perfection. You. You were. And He goes, "I can't wait to see Phil, and to see Shamir, and to see Voy. I can't wait to see them." And I'm willing to go through this trial, this struggle. I'm willing to go through hell itself to see you in my presence, in perfection.

What are we to do with this? Well, first, we should simply revel in who Jesus is. Jesus does not just look on you with pity. He looked on you in your sin, and He longed to have you in His presence. Just as a wife whose husband longs to be with her and delights in her being in his presence. Think about that. Okay? Imagine what a wife is like if a husband's just pouring out—this is oozing—the idea that he longs to be with her. How does the wife respond? She can't wait to be with him. She rejoices in his affection. And the point of Hebrews—I think part of the point of Hebrews,

part of the point of Philippians three into Philippians four—is that this is what should drive us on in our life.

As we look at our Christian walk and we think of all the struggles and the trials, as we battle our sin, as we battle the devil, as we battle the world, as we face persecution, as we risk our jobs for speaking the truth, as we risk our friendships and our families for speaking the truth in love, why would we be willing to go through these difficulties? Why would we be willing to deny ourselves? Because we look at our husband who's longing to be in our—to have us in his presence, and we say, "I can't wait to be with him as well." That is my joy. That is my crown. That is my what I long for. It should be our heart. Is that your great hope? Is that what drives you on? When you wake up in the morning on a Monday and think about the week ahead, is that the thing that keeps you going? Do you long to be in perfection in the presence of Jesus Christ?

Perhaps you find, like I do at times, that that's not the longing of your soul. Well, if it's not, my encouragement to you is, look at Jesus Christ. Look at His rejoicing and delight in you. Look at His beauty and glory as we see it on display in the gospel and in all of His interactions with His people throughout the biblical story and throughout history. Look at His life in the gospels. Look at His interactions with His people, His wisdom, His care, His compassion, His holiness, His willingness to speak the truth to those who rejected Him, His condescension, His humility in taking on flesh and veiling His glory. Look long and steady at your God and ask His Spirit to fill you with the same longing and joy that He has when He looks at you.

But you know, one of the ways that we see the longing of someone for us is not just through them in their person; it's also through their gifts. Look at what He was willing to do and look at what He was wanting to give to you. Look at all of Let us bow our heads in prayer before we delve into the Word of God.

Heavenly Father, we come before You with hearts open and ready to receive Your divine message. O Breath of God, come breathe among us today. Speak to us through Your Word, revive us in every part, we pray, that we might be those who love You, those who serve You, those who do Your will here on earth as it is done in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Beloved, I want to share with you a few passages before we begin to delve more deeply into God's Word. The first few come from Philippians. If you have your Bibles, turn there; otherwise, you can just listen. Philippians 1:8 says, "For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Now, turn over to Philippians 3, starting from verse 20, "But

our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my Beloved."

And then, turn with me over to 1 Thessalonians, just a few pages over. Again, Paul writing to a different church, and in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, we read, "For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?"

Now, if you want, you can turn back over to Hebrews, which we read before, chapter 12. What we're going to do today is something a little different. We'll start in Hebrews, but we'll travel around a bit and explore just one thought from the book of Hebrews.

Now, we're coming into spring, which has meant that for the last month or so, my family has been pruning roses. We bought a property that had about a hundred or so roses on it. So we've been busy at the end of winter, pruning them back, which is not a very enjoyable task. Have any of you been pruning roses? You're all too smart to—oh, we've got one, the gardener among us. Pruning roses is not fun. They're prickly. I've got about a hundred of them, so it's time-consuming. It's painstaking work. But why do we do this work? Why is it that my family and I have been out there getting prickles in our hands? It's because we can't wait to see the flowers in a few weeks and all through summer. And they're stunning. I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be an absolute joy to walk down my driveway and just see all of these roses in bloom, and to be able to pick them and put them in the house. It's going to be a great joy.

And there are many things in life like this. There are many things where we go through a struggle, something difficult, something painful, something we're not enjoying, because there's a joyful outcome at the end of it. I was at the Walk for Life yesterday, and pregnancy is like this. Why on earth do women get pregnant? It's insane. It's painful. You get nausea. The birth itself, I'm told, is quite painful. I don't know myself. Why would you do that? Because you can't wait to see that baby. You can't wait to see that baby grow up into a human being who interacts with you. You can't wait to pour out your affection upon them. There's pain because, at the end of the day, there's joy.

And that's what we see here in Hebrews 12:1-2. It's a very well-known passage amongst Christians. It comes at the end of chapter 11, a long list

of people who have endured suffering and difficulty in the Christian life because they hoped for something to come, a hope that is to come. And the author of Hebrews, in verse 2 of chapter 12, tells us to look to Jesus as we seek to run this race, as we seek to engage in the difficulty of the Christian life. And we're told to look to Jesus for two reasons. First of all, because He is the author and the finisher of our faith. That is, He's the one who instigated our salvation, and He is the one who sustains our salvation, and He is the one who will finish our salvation. So we better look to Him. He's the one who's going to do all the work.

But we're also meant to look to Jesus because of the fact that Jesus Himself endured great suffering through His life and through the death on the cross before He was then raised from the dead and taken up into heaven. And we are told in Hebrews 12:2 that He endured that suffering for the joy that was set before Him. For the joy that was set before Him. Just like all of those—all the pruning of roses, just like a pregnancy, just like all the other difficult things that we do in life—we do it for the joy that was set before us. Just like that, except on a much larger scale, Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

And what I want to do with you this morning is to just focus in on those words. What was the joy that was set before Jesus? Have you ever thought about that? I think it's, at least for me, it's something you hear, and you're like, "Oh, you just assume that you know what the joy is." But I'm not sure we do. I'd like to at least look at it with you. Even if you do, I'm sure you'll find it helpful.

But as we come to think about what was the joy that was set before Him, I just want to take one step back and think about the fact that whatever this joy was, it must have been significant. I'm willing to endure a little bit of pain to see some roses bloom. But the suffering that Jesus went through was extreme. The cross was a terrifying situation. On the same night in which Jesus died, before He was arrested, He went across the Kidron Valley, just out of Jerusalem, to the Mount of Olives, and He prayed. And Luke tells us what this looked like. "He withdrew from His disciples about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, saying, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.' And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground."

What we see here in the Garden of Gethsemane is a serious struggle. Jesus is in turmoil, in agony, in anguish. His body is physically tensed as He's praying earnestly, desperately crying out to His Father to deliver Him from this upcoming difficulty that is before Him. And He's in such turmoil,

physically, spiritually, emotionally, that His sweat becomes like drops of blood. He's so tensed up that His blood vessels under His skin are bursting, rolling down His head onto the ground. And this isn't even the struggle itself. This isn't even the trial that Jesus went through.

As the night goes on, Jesus is betrayed by the kiss of His good friend Judas. He's taken away and abandoned by His disciples. He's blindfolded, mocked, beaten, falsely accused, carted from chief priest to pilot to Herod, rejected by a crowd of Israelites, scourged with a whip that would have torn the flesh from His back. He had a crown of thorns rammed on His head and struck with a reed. He was spat upon, stripped naked, and crucified in public. The physical suffering that Jesus was to endure for the joy that was set before Him was severe. But that wasn't even the main thing.

When Jesus hung on the cross, Mark tells us that when the sixth hour had come, that's about midday, there was darkness over the whole land until about the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" This was the terror that He dreaded. This was the shame that the book of Hebrews tells us He despised. This was the cross He endured for the joy that was set before Him. The terror was being forsaken by His Father. The terror was having all internal and external displays of the Father's affection towards the Son being turned away. The physical darkness that was over the land for three hours was a picture of the spiritual darkness, the emotional darkness of the Father turning the face away from Jesus Christ as He hung on that cross.

Jesus, this man, the Son of God taken on flesh, who had always lived in perfect communion with His Father, even while He was here on earth, was rejected, stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, chastised that we might have peace. His Father laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. I don't think we can ever fully understand the depths of that suffering. But it is that shame that Jesus endured for the joy that was set before Him.

The point is this: As He hung on the cross, suffering under the wrath of His Father, Jesus had in mind—he's not enjoying the situation—he had in mind something joyous that would come out of it. And that joyous thing had to be so significant in His mind that He was willing to endure the most intense suffering ever known to mankind. What was this joy? What was it that Jesus looked forward to as He hung on the cross?

Well, I'd like to explore this question by looking at it from three different angles. The first is by looking at some of the texts that we just read. Because in Philippians 1:8, Paul tells us something that helps us to understand

more of the depths of the riches of Christ's heart for His people Beloved, let us come together in prayer before we delve into the sacred Scriptures. Heavenly Father, we approach Your throne of grace with hearts ready to be nourished by Your Word. O Breath of God, come breathe within us this day. Speak to us through Your holy Scripture, revive every part of our being, we beseech Thee, that we may embody those who love You, serve You, and execute Your will on earth as it is faithfully executed in heaven. In the precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Brethren, I wish to share with you a few passages before we embark on a deeper exploration of God's Word. The initial passages are from the book of Philippians. If you have your Bibles, I invite you to turn there; if not, lend your ear as you listen. Philippians 1:8 declares, "For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Now, if you would, turn to Philippians 3, beginning with verse 20, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to bring all things under His control. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."

And then, let us turn together to 1 Thessalonians, just a few pages forward. Here, Paul writes to a different congregation, and in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, we find these words, "For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?"

Now, if you will, turn back to Hebrews, which we read earlier, chapter 12. Today, we will embark on a slightly different journey. We will commence in Hebrews, but we will traverse a bit and explore just one thought from the book of Hebrews.

As we welcome the spring season, my family has been engaged in the task of pruning roses. We acquired a property adorned with about a hundred roses. Thus, at the close of winter, we have been diligently pruning them back, a task that is not particularly enjoyable. Have any of you undertaken the pruning of roses? Ah, we have one gardener among us. Pruning roses is not a delightful task; they are thorny and the work is time-consuming and meticulous. But why do we engage in this labor? Why do my family and I endure the prickles in our hands? It is because we eagerly anticipate the blossoming of the flowers in the coming weeks and throughout the summer. They are magnificent. I eagerly await the joy of walking down my driveway, beholding the roses in full bloom, and having the pleasure of placing them within our home. It will be a profound joy.

There are many such things in life, where we endure a struggle, something arduous, something painful, something we do not relish, because there is a joyful outcome awaiting us. I attended the Walk for Life yesterday, and pregnancy is akin to this. Why do women endure pregnancy? It is a daunting endeavor. It is fraught with pain, nausea, and I am told the birth itself is quite excruciating. I cannot speak from personal experience. Why would one endure such an ordeal? It is because of the anticipation of seeing that child. The longing to witness that child mature into a being who interacts with you, to lavish your affection upon them. There is pain, but ultimately, there is joy.

This is the very essence of what we find in Hebrews 12:1-2, a passage well-known among Christians. It follows chapter 11, which enumerates a host of individuals who have withstood suffering and hardship in the Christian life because they were hopeful for something yet to come, a hope that is forthcoming. The author of Hebrews, in chapter 12, verse 2, exhorts us to fix our gaze upon Jesus as we endeavor to run this race, as we engage in the tribulations of the Christian life. We are instructed to look to Jesus for two reasons. Firstly, because He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He is the one who initiated our salvation, He sustains our salvation, and He will bring our salvation to completion. Therefore, we must look to Him, for He is the one who will accomplish all the work.

Moreover, we are to look to Jesus because He Himself endured immense suffering throughout His life and in His death upon the cross, before He was resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven. Hebrews 12:2 informs us that He bore that suffering for the joy that was set before Him. For the joy that was set before Him. Just as with the pruning of roses, just as with pregnancy, just as with all the other challenging endeavors we undertake in life, we do so for the joy that lies ahead. In a far grander scale, Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

This morning, I wish to focus on those very words. What was the joy that was set before Jesus? Have you pondered this? For me, it is something I have heard and assumed I understood the joy. But upon reflection, I am not certain we fully grasp it. I invite you to examine this with me. Even if you are familiar, I trust you will find it beneficial.

Before we consider what this joy was, let us take a moment to acknowledge that it must have been of great significance. I am willing to endure a modicum of pain to witness the blooming of roses. However, the agony Jesus experienced was profound. The cross represented a harrowing ordeal. On the night Jesus was to die, before His arrest, He crossed the Kidron Valley, just outside Jerusalem, and made His way to the Mount of Olives to

pray. Luke provides us with a glimpse of this moment. "He withdrew from His disciples about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.' An angel from heaven appeared to Him, providing strength. And in His agony, He prayed more fervently, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground."

Here, in the Garden of Gethsemane, we witness a profound struggle. Jesus is engulfed in turmoil, agony, and anguish. His body is physically tense as He prays fervently, crying out to His Father to spare Him from the impending hardship. He is so overwhelmed, physically, spiritually, emotionally, that His sweat resembles drops of blood. His blood vessels, strained beneath His skin, are bursting, and His blood rolls down His head onto the ground. Yet, this is not the trial itself. This is not the ordeal Jesus is to face.

As the night progresses, Jesus is betrayed by the kiss of His dear friend Judas. He is forsaken by His disciples. He is blindfolded, mocked, beaten, falsely accused, and shuttled from chief priest to Pilate to Herod. He is spurned by a throng of Israelites, scourged with a whip that lacerates His flesh, a crown of thorns thrust upon His head and struck with a reed. He is spat upon, stripped bare, and crucified publicly. The physical torment Jesus was to endure for the joy that awaited Him was severe. Yet, even this was not the crux of the matter.

As Jesus hung upon the cross, Mark recounts that at the sixth hour, around midday, darkness enveloped the entire land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which translates to, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" This was the dread He faced. This was the ignominy the book of Hebrews speaks of, which He despised. This was the cross He bore for the joy that awaited Him. The horror was in being forsaken by His Father. The horror lay in the withdrawal of all internal and external manifestations of the Father's love for the Son. The physical darkness that shrouded the land for three hours mirrored the spiritual darkness, the emotional desolation of the Father turning His face away from Jesus Christ as He was crucified.

Jesus, this man, the Son of God incarnate, who had always dwelled in perfect communion with His Father, even during His earthly sojourn, was rejected, stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, chastised that we might find peace. Upon Him, His Father laid the iniquity of us all. The depths of that suffering are beyond our full comprehension. Yet, it was this ignominy that Jesus bore for the joy that awaited Him.

The essence is this: As He was crucified, enduring the wrath of His Fa-

ther, Jesus had in mind—not with any sense of enjoyment—a vision of something joyous that would emerge from it. And that joyous vision had to be so monumental in His mind that He was prepared to undergo the most intense suffering ever endured by mankind. What was this joy? What was it that Jesus anticipated as He was crucified?

To explore this question, let us consider it from three different perspectives. The first is by examining some of the texts we have just read. In Philippians 1:8, Paul imparts something that aids us in comprehending the profound depths of Christ's heart for His people. "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ." When Paul expresses his feelings for God's people, for Christians, he is revealing a reflection, albeit dim, of how Christ feels towards His people. Paul yearns for the Philippians with the same affection that Jesus Christ has for the Philippians.

As we continue reading the letter to the Philippians, this sentiment unfolds further. The passage we read from the end of chapter 3 into chapter 4 is an exhortation from Paul to the Philippians to persevere in their faith. He reminds them that their citizenship is in heaven, and they await the transformation that will come with Jesus Christ. Then, in chapter 4, verse 1, he Beloved, let us bow our heads in prayer before we delve into the Holy Scriptures. Heavenly Father, we come before You, seeking the breath of Your Spirit to fill this place. Speak to us through Your Word, and revive every part of our being, that we may be those who love You, serve You, and do Your will here on earth as it is done in heaven. We ask this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Today, I wish to share with you passages from the Scriptures before we delve deeper into the Word of God. The first passages come from the book of Philippians. I invite you to turn there in your Bibles, or simply listen as I read. Philippians 1:8 says, "For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Now, if you would, turn to Philippians 3, starting from verse 20, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to bring all things under His control. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."

Let us also turn to 1 Thessalonians, just a few pages over. Here, Paul writes to a different church, and in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, we read, "For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?"

Now, you may turn back to Hebrews, chapter 12, which we read earlier. Today, we will do something a little different. We will start in Hebrews but will travel around a bit, exploring just one thought from the book of Hebrews.

As we enter spring, my family has been pruning roses. We bought a property with about a hundred roses, and at the end of winter, we've been busy pruning them back, which is not an enjoyable task. Have any of you been pruning roses? You're all too smart to have roses. Pruning roses is not fun; they're prickly. I've got about a hundred of them, so it's time-consuming and painstaking work. But why do we do this work? Why do my family and I endure getting prickles in our hands? It's because we can't wait to see the flowers in a few weeks and all through summer. They're stunning. I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be an absolute joy to walk down my driveway and see all of these roses in bloom, to be able to pick them and put them in the house. It's going to be a great joy.

There are many things in life like this, where we go through a struggle, something difficult, something painful, something we're not enjoying, because there's a joyful outcome at the end of it. Pregnancy is like this. Why on earth do women get pregnant? It's insane. It's painful. You get nausea. The birth itself, I'm told, is quite painful. Why would you do that? Because you can't wait to see that baby. You can't wait to see that baby grow up into a human being who interacts with you. You can't wait to pour out your affection upon them. There's pain because, at the end of the day, there's joy.

And that's what we see here in Hebrews 12:1-2. It's a very well-known passage amongst Christians. It comes at the end of chapter 11, a long list of people who have endured suffering and difficulty in the Christian life because they hoped for something to come, a hope that is to come. And the author of Hebrews, in verse 2 of chapter 12, tells us to look to Jesus as we seek to run this race, as we seek to engage in the difficulty of the Christian life. And we're told to look to Jesus for two reasons. First of all, because He is the author and the finisher of our faith. That is, He's the one who instigated our salvation, and He is the one who sustains our salvation, and He is the one who will finish our salvation. So we better look to Him; He's the one who's going to do all the work.

But we're also meant to look to Jesus because of the fact that Jesus Himself endured great suffering through His life and through the death on the cross before He was then raised from the dead and taken up into heaven. And we are told in Hebrews 12:2 that He endured that suffering for the joy that was set before Him. For the joy that was set before Him. Just like all of those, all the pruning of roses, just like a pregnancy, just like all the other

difficult things that we do in life, we do it for the joy that was set before us. Just like that, except on a much larger scale, Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

And what I want to do with you this morning is to just focus in on those words. What was the joy that was set before Jesus? Have you ever thought about that? I think it's, at least for me, it's something you hear, and you're like, "Oh, you just assume that you know what the joy is." But I'm not sure we do. I'd like to at least look at it with you. Even if you do, I'm sure you'll find it helpful. But as we come to think about what was the joy that was set before Him, I just want to take one step back and think about the fact that whatever this joy was, it must have been significant.

I'm willing to endure a little bit of pain to see some roses bloom. But the suffering that Jesus went through was extreme. The cross was a terrifying situation. On the same night in which Jesus died, before He was arrested, He went across the Kidron Valley, just out of Jerusalem, to the Mount of Olives, and He prayed. And Luke tells us what this looked like. "He withdrew from His disciples about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, saying, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.' And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground."

What we see here in the Garden of Gethsemane is a serious struggle. Jesus is in turmoil, in agony, in anguish. His body is physically tensed as He's praying earnestly, desperately crying out to His Father to deliver Him from this upcoming difficulty that is before Him. And He's in such turmoil, physically, spiritually, emotionally, that His sweat becomes like drops of blood. He's so tensed up that His blood vessels under His skin are bursting, rolling down His head onto the ground. And this isn't even the struggle itself. This isn't even the trial that Jesus went through.

As the night goes on, Jesus is betrayed by the kiss of His good friend Judas. He's taken away and abandoned by His disciples. He's blindfolded, mocked, beaten, falsely accused, carted from chief priest to Pilate to Herod, rejected by a crowd of Israelites, scourged with a whip that would have torn the flesh from His back. He had a crown of thorns rammed on His head and struck with a reed. He was spat upon, stripped naked, and crucified in public. The physical suffering that Jesus was to endure for the joy that was set before Him was severe. But that wasn't even the main thing.

When Jesus hung on the cross, Mark tells us that when the sixth hour had come, that's about midday, there was darkness over the whole land until about the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a

loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" This was the terror that He dreaded. This was the shame that the book of Hebrews tells us He despised. This was the cross He endured for the joy that was set before Him. The terror was being forsaken by His Father. The terror was having all internal and external displays of the Father's affection towards the Son being turned away. The physical darkness that was over the land for three hours was a picture of the spiritual darkness, the emotional darkness of the Father turning the face away from Jesus Christ as He hung on that cross. Jesus, this man, the Son of God taken on flesh, who had always lived in perfect communion with His Father, even while He was here on earth, was rejected, stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, chastised that we might have peace. His Father laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. I don't think we can ever fully understand the depths of that suffering. But it is that shame that Jesus endured for the joy that was set before Him.

The point is this: As He hung on the cross, suffering under the wrath of His Father, Jesus had in mind—he's not enjoying the situation—he had in mind something joyous that would come out of it. And that joyous thing had to be so significant in His mind that He was willing to endure the most intense suffering ever known to mankind. What was this joy? What was it that Jesus looked forward to as He hung on the cross?

Well, I'd like to explore this question by looking at it from three different angles. The first is by looking at some of the texts that we just read. Because in Philippians 1:8, Paul tells us something that helps us to understand more of the depths of the riches of Christ's heart for His people. We read it; he says, "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ." What that means is that whenever Paul tells you how he feels about God's people, about Christians, he is telling you something—a dim reflection perhaps—of how Christ feels towards His people. Paul longs for the Philippians with the same affection that Jesus Christ has towards the Philippians.

And so then, as we keep reading the letter to the Philippians, we find this open up more and more. The passage we read at the end of chapter 3 and into chapter 4 was all about how Paul is encouraging the Philippians to press on and continue on in their faith. He's saying our citizenship's in heaven; we wait for Jesus Christ to come and transform us. And then he says in verse 1 of chapter 4, "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." I don't think you can pack more affectionate language into one verse.

And I want you to think about this verse through this lens: If Paul has

the heart towards the Philippians that Christ has towards the Philippians, then what is Christ's hope? What is Christ longing for? What is Christ's joy? Well, he tells you right here: You are. You can hear these words as coming from Jesus Christ Himself: "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." Do you see what Jesus is saying? You are my brothers, my sisters, my family. I love you. I long for you. I yearn to be with you. When I think about what my hope is in the future, my greatest hope is to be together with you. I delight in you; you're my joy. You're my crown; you're my glory. You being made perfect and being brought into the presence of my Father is all that I'm working towards. It will make my day when you stand before me in the presence of my Father in perfection. So stand firm, because I can't wait to have you with me in glory. My beloved. My bride. My delight.

This same idea comes up in other parts of Paul's writings. We read some of them in 1 Thessalonians. Let me read a couple of others. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 says this: "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us." Isn't that a perfect picture of Christ's attitude towards His people? Can you see Christ's heart reflected in Paul there? It's not just that Jesus was so affectionately longing for us that He came to give us a message—the kingdom of God has come. He was so affectionately longing for us that He came and gave us Himself, His body, His own life. Why? Was it just because He pitied us? No. It's because we had become dear to Him. It's what He says there in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. Jesus died on the cross, Jesus endured the shame, Jesus went through all that suffering, not just because He pitied you in your poverty, but because you were dear to Him. Because He was longing for you.

We know that Jesus loved us while we were enemies. But I think the word "love" can often lose something of the passion that Christ feels towards His people. We were dear to Him. While you were enemies, while you were in your sin, while you were rotting in the gutter, He looked at you and He thought, "I long to have my people in perfection in my presence." I want you with me. I delight in you; you are my joy. So I'm going to give you everything.

A few verses later on in Thessalonians, we get another picture of this. "But we, brethren," Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:17, "having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore, we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and our joy."

Now, this is incredible. This just takes the language of love and reworks it

into something just astonishing. It's not a perfect picture of Christ—I don't think Satan is hindering Christ from returning—but it is accurate of Christ in every other way. Paul hates being separated from the Thessalonians. If he could have his deepest desire, it would be to be with the Thessalonians in person, in face-to-face fellowship with them. Paul endeavors eagerly to see their face with great desire. What's his joy? What's Paul longing for? What's he working towards? You, in the presence of the Lord Jesus. That's his hope and joy and crown of rejoicing. And that's exactly how Jesus feels towards you. He is separated from us for a time, but Jesus longs, even now, to be with you, to see your face. He earnestly desires this. He's working towards it. Why? Because His hope, His joy, His crown of rejoicing is you in His presence at His coming. You are His glory and His joy. Sounds almost blasphemous, doesn't it? That's what He says.

Again, in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, which we read, "For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" Again, we see these same ideas coming through. Paul's thanking God for the Thessalonians and is full of joy and rejoicing before God because of them. Not only that, but Paul's praying incessantly with the goal of what? Seeing the Thessalonians face to face and perfecting their faith. That is precisely the heart of Christ on display for you once again.

We know from other scriptures that Christ's people are a gift given to Him by the Father. He prayed as much in John 17:6, "I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to me." Jesus Christ thanks the Father for giving Him you. And He is rejoicing before His Father because He's been given a gift from His Father—you—and He finds joy in you. And He is night and day praying exceedingly that He might see you face to face and perfect what is lacking in your faith. That's what He's hanging out for. That's what He's praying for right now. His people, in His presence, in perfection. Incredible.

As Christ was hanging on the cross, what was in His mind? What was He thinking about? Was He gritting His teeth through the suffering, through the shame, thinking, "I'm looking forward to this"? His people, in His presence, in perfection. You. You were. And He goes, "I can't wait to see Phil, and to see Shamir, and to see Voy. I can't wait to see them. And I'm willing to go through this trial, this struggle. I'm willing to go through hell itself to see you in my presence, in perfection."

What are we to do with this? Well, first, we should simply revel in who Jesus is. Jesus does not just look on you with pity. He looked on you in your sin, and He longed to have you in His presence. Just as a wife whose

husband longs to be with her and delights in her being in his presence. Think about that. Okay? Imagine what a wife is like if a husband's just pouring out—this is oozing—the idea that he longs to be with her. How does the wife respond? She can't wait to be with him. She rejoices in his affection. And the point of Hebrews—I think part of the point of Hebrews, part of the point of Philippians three into Philippians four—is that this is what should drive us on in our life. As we look at our Christian walk and we think of all the struggles and the trials, as we battle our sin, as we battle the devil, as we battle the world, as we face persecution, as we risk our jobs for speaking the truth, as we risk our friendships and our families for speaking the truth in love, why would we be willing to go through these difficulties? Why would we be willing to deny ourselves? Because we look at our husband who's longing to be in our—to have us in his presence, and we say, "I can't wait to be with Him as well." That is my joy. That is my crown. That is my what I long for. It should be our heart. Is that your great hope? Is that what drives you on? When you wake up in the morning on a Monday and think about the week ahead, is that the thing that keeps you going? Do you long to be in perfection, in the presence of Jesus Christ?

Perhaps you find, like I do at times, that that's not the longing of your soul. Well, if it's not, my encouragement to you is, look at Jesus Christ. Look at His rejoicing and delight in you. Look at His beauty and glory as we see it on display in the gospel and in all of His interactions with His people throughout the biblical story and throughout history. Look at His life in the gospels. Look at His interactions with His people, His wisdom, His care, His compassion, His holiness, His willingness to speak the truth to those who rejected Him, His condescension, His humility in taking on flesh and veiling His glory. Look long and steady at your God and ask His Spirit to fill you with the same longing and joy that He has when He looks at you.

But you know, one of the ways that we see the longing of someone for us is not just through them in their person; it's also through their gifts. Look at what He was willing to do, and look at what He was wanting to give to you. Look at all of His benefits, if you like. Look at His electing grace, His justification, the adoption into His family, the sanctification that He works in our life. Look at the hope of the new creation, the gift of the local church. Look at His scriptures and how He's handed you His revelation and see that all of this is given to you because He delights in you. More than that, look at creation. This whole world is a gift. Everything around you is a physical display of Christ's yearning for you. Paul points this out actually in Acts 14:17 when he's preaching in Lystra. He says, "Yet He did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."

He's speaking to pagans. And what he's saying is, God gives us flowers and cool breezes and roast dinners and waterfalls. He overloads our world with beauty and joy that flood our senses because He's telling us about Himself and about His delight in man. And so, we should delight in His creation in the same way that a wife delights in a love note that her husband writes her. She doesn't love the note for the note's sake. She doesn't just sit there obsessing about the note, saying, "Oh, how wonderful is this note?" It's wonderful because of the person who wrote it to her. And ultimately, the hope is that she wants him in her presence. She wants this one who loves her.

But there's also an application here in terms of how we view other Christians, the church. I think it's amazing that Paul can use this language about the Philippian church and about the Thessalonian church. He has the same heart that Christ has for him, for them. That's what our hearts should be like for one another. Do you look around at your fellow church members and fellow Christians around the world and think, "you are my joy and my crown"? I can't wait to see you in glory, in perfection, in the presence of our Lord Jesus. And I want to work; I want to earnestly work and pray that you might be there. Is that how you view one another? That's how Jesus views you. That's how Paul viewed the Philippians and the Thessalonians.

Now, I want to show you a bit more of this because the language and this idea of Christ delighting in His people is actually not exclusively revealed in the New Testament and not exclusively revealed in Paul's words. You can find it in the Old Testament as well. Let me show you just a couple of places. It's all over. In the book of Jeremiah, we find God speaking about His people in this way. In chapter 30 and 31, Jeremiah is speaking into the context of the exile. During the exile, Israel was taken out of the land of Israel and removed into the place of Babylon. It was a time of suffering, a time of judgment, and a time of discipline, which is important.

And as Jeremiah speaks in chapter 31 of the restoration of Israel that's going to come, we read this: Jeremiah 31:20 says, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore, my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, declares the Lord." God says that even though He spoke against Ephraim or Israel, it was not because He hated them. He didn't despise them in sending them off. Think about what that means. He sent them into a time of death, turmoil, separation, disaster, and distress. He says it's not brought upon you, Israel, because I despise you. No, even as the people of Israel suffered under the hand of God Himself, He says He earnestly remembers them, and His heart yearns for them.

When it comes to His people, to those people who God has chosen to love, God's heart towards them never changes. Even as Israel turned from God and against God and brought upon themselves His discipline through the disaster of exile, God's heart was still groaning for them, yearning for them, longing for them—all the same language that Christ used and Paul used. And He's desiring a time of return, a time of restoration. That's what He's working towards throughout all of this.

Zephaniah speaks into a similar context as he prophesies about the coming exile followed by Israel's restoration. Listen to how God's described as Israel is restored: Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing." Now, we often—we regularly—think about how we rejoice when God delivers us. God brings us out of our exile, out of our sin, out of our discipline, and He's bringing us out of the desert, right? You'll regularly think about how we rejoice when God delivers us, God brings us out of our exile, out of our sin, out of our discipline, and we rejoice at the fact that He has chosen to save us. But the truth is that the rejoicing goes both ways. God saves His children because He delights in them, and as they are restored to Him, He starts singing with joy. He bursts into songs of gladness because His children have come through the discipline and back into fellowship with Him.

So this means that if you are a believer and you are going through a time of struggle, a time of difficulty that may well be because of your sin, and the Lord has caused grief in your life, disaster, turmoil, anguish in your life—even if it's because of your sin—the Lord's heart towards you has not changed. He's not doing this because He despises you, because He hates you, because He can't stand the sight of you. He's doing it whilst maintaining a heart that desires your restoration, that desires you returning and repenting from your sin, and He can't wait to see you restored. He can't wait to see you back in fellowship with Him. All the same language that Christ used and Paul used. And He's desiring a time of return, a time of restoration. That's what He's working towards throughout all of this.

Zephaniah speaks into a similar context as he prophesies about the coming exile followed by Israel's restoration. Listen to how God's described as Israel is restored: Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing." Now, we often—we regularly—think about how we rejoice when God delivers us. God brings us out of our exile, out of our sin, out of our discipline, and He's bringing us out of the desert, right? You'll regularly think about how we rejoice when God delivers us, God brings us out of our exile, out of our sin, out of our discipline, and we rejoice at the fact that He has chosen to

save us. But the truth is that the rejoicing goes both ways. God saves His children because He delights in them, and as they are restored to Him, He starts singing with joy. He bursts into songs of gladness because His children have come through the discipline and back into fellowship with Him.

So this means that if you are a believer and you are going through a time of struggle, a time of difficulty that may well be because of your sin, and the Lord has caused grief in your life, disaster, turmoil, anguish in your life—even if it's because of your sin—the Lord's heart towards you has not changed. He's not doing this because He despises you, because He hates you, because He can't stand the sight of you. He's doing it whilst maintaining a heart that desires your restoration, that desires you returning and repenting from your sin, and He can't wait to see you restored. He can't wait to see you back in fellowship with Him. All the same language that Christ used and Paul used. And He's desiring a time of return, a time of restoration. That's what He's working towards throughout all of this.

Zephaniah speaks into a similar context as he prophesies about the coming exile followed by Israel's restoration. Listen to how God's described as Israel is restored: Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing." Now, we often—we regularly—think about how we rejoice when God delivers us. God brings us out of our exile, out of our sin, out of our discipline, and He's bringing us out of the desert, right? You'll regularly think about how we rejoice when God delivers us, God brings us out of our exile, out of our sin, out of our discipline, and we rejoice at the fact that He has chosen to save us. But the truth is that the rejoicing goes both ways. God saves His children because He delights in them, and as they are restored to Him, He starts singing with joy. He bursts into songs of gladness because His children have come through the discipline and back into fellowship with Him.

So this means that if you are a believer and you are going through a time of struggle, a time of difficulty that may well be because of your sin, and the Lord has caused grief in your life, disaster, turmoil, anguish in your life—even if it's because of your sin—the Lord's heart towards you has not changed. He's not doing this because He despises you, because He hates you, because He can't stand the sight of you. He's doing it whilst maintaining a heart that desires your restoration, that desires you returning and repenting from your sin, and He can't wait to see you restored. He can't wait to see you back in fellowship with Him. All the same language that Christ used and Paul used. And He's desiring a time of return, a time of restoration. That's what He's working towards throughout all of this.

Zephaniah speaks into a similar context as he prophesies about the coming

exile followed by Israel's restoration. Listen to how God's described as Israel is restored: Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing." Now, Before we come to God's Word together, let us pray. O breath of God, come breathe. Come be among us today. Speak to us by Your Word. Revive us in every part, we pray, that we might be those who love You, those who serve You, those who do Your will here on earth as it is done in heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

I want to read a few passages to you before we begin to look more deeply at God's Word. The first few come from Philippians. If you turn there in your Bibles, otherwise you can just listen. Philippians 1:8 says this, "For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Turn over to chapter 3 of Philippians. From verse 20 we read, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my Beloved."

And then turn with me over to 1 Thessalonians, just a few pages over. Again, Paul writing to a different church. And in chapter 3 of 1 Thessalonians, verses 9 and 10 we read this, "For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?"

Now, if you want, you can turn back over to Hebrews that we read before, chapter 12. What we're going to do today is something a little different. We'll start in Hebrews, but we'll travel around a little bit and explore just one thought from the book of Hebrews.

Now, we're coming into spring, which has meant that for the last month or so, my family has been pruning roses. Because we inherited—well, we didn't inherit it, we bought a property that had a hundred or so roses on it. So we've been busy at the end of winter pruning them back, which is not a very enjoyable task. Have any of you been pruning roses? You're all too smart to—oh, we've got one, the gardener among us. You're all too smart to have roses. Pruning roses is not fun. They're prickly. Well, I've got about a hundred of them, so it's time-consuming. It's painstaking work. But why is it that we do this work? Why is it that my family and I have been out there getting prickles in our hands? It's because we can't wait to see the flowers in a few weeks and all through summer. And they're stunning. I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be an absolute joy to walk down my driveway and just see all of these roses in bloom and to be able to pick them and put

them in the house. It's going to be a great joy.

And there's many things in life like this. There's many things where we go through a struggle, something difficult, something painful, something we're not enjoying, because there's a joyful outcome at the end of it. I was at the Walk for Life yesterday, and pregnancy is like this. Why on earth do women get pregnant? It's insane. It's painful. You get nausea. The birth itself, I'm told, is quite painful. I don't know myself. Why would you do that? Because you can't wait to see that baby. You can't wait to see that baby grow up into a human being who interacts with you. You can't wait to pour out your affection upon them. There's pain because at the end of the day, there's joy.

And that's what we see here in Hebrews 12:1-2. It's a very well-known passage amongst Christians. It comes at the end of chapter 11, a long list of people who have endured suffering and difficulty in the Christian life because they hoped for something to come, a hope that is to come. And the author of Hebrews, in verse 2 of chapter 12, tells us to look to Jesus as we seek to run this race, as we seek to engage in the difficulty of the Christian life. And we're told to look to Jesus for two reasons. First of all, because He is the author and the finisher of our faith. That is, He's the one who instigated our salvation, and He is the one who sustains our salvation, and He is the one who will finish our salvation. So we better look to Him. He's the one who's going to do all the work.

But we're also meant to look to Jesus because of the fact that Jesus Himself endured great suffering through His life and through the death on the cross before He was then raised from the dead and taken up into heaven. And we are told in Hebrews 12:2 that He endured that suffering for the joy that was set before Him. For the joy that was set before Him. Just like all of those—all the pruning of roses, just like a pregnancy, just like all the other difficult things that we do in life, we do it for the joy that was set before us. Just like that, except on a much larger scale, Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him.

And what I want to do with you this morning is to just focus in on those words. What was the joy that was set before Jesus? Have you ever thought about that? I think it's at least for me, it's something you hear, and you're like, oh, you just assume that you know what the joy is. But I'm not sure we do. I'd like to at least look at it with you. Even if you do, I'm sure you'll find it helpful. But as we come to think about what was the joy that was set before Him, I just want to take one step back and think about the fact that whatever this joy was, it must have been significant.

I'm willing to endure a little bit of pain to see some roses bloom. But the

suffering that Jesus went through was extreme. The cross was a terrifying situation. On the same night in which Jesus died, before He was arrested, He went across the Kidron Valley just out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, and He prayed. And Luke tells us what this looked like. "He withdrew from His disciples about a stone's throw and knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.' And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground."

What we see here in the Garden of Gethsemane is a serious struggle. Jesus is in turmoil, in agony, in anguish. His body is physically tensed as He's praying earnestly, desperately crying out to His Father to deliver Him from this upcoming difficulty that is before Him. And He's in such turmoil physically, spiritually, emotionally, that His sweat becomes like drops of blood. He's so tensed up that His blood vessels under His skin are bursting, rolling down His head onto the ground. And this isn't even the struggle itself. This isn't even the trial that Jesus went through.

As the night goes on, Jesus is betrayed by the kiss of His good friend Judas. He's taken away and abandoned by His disciples. He's blindfolded, mocked, beaten, falsely accused, carted from chief priest to pilot to Herod, rejected by a crowd of Israelites, scourged with a whip that would have torn the flesh from His back. He had a crown of thorns rammed on His head and struck with a reed. He was spat upon, stripped naked, and crucified in public. The physical suffering that Jesus was to endure for the joy that was set before Him was severe. But that wasn't even the main thing.

When Jesus hung on the cross, Mark tells us that when the sixth hour had come, that's about midday, there was darkness over the whole land until about the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" This was the terror that He dreaded. This was the shame that the book of Hebrews tells us He despised. This was the cross He endured for the joy that was set before Him. The terror was being forsaken by His Father. The terror was having all internal and external displays of the Father's affection towards the Son being turned away. The physical darkness that was over the land for three hours was a picture of the spiritual darkness, the emotional darkness of the Father turning the face away from Jesus Christ as He hung on that cross.

Jesus, this man, the Son of God taken on flesh, who had always lived in perfect communion with His Father, even while He was here on earth, was rejected, stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, chastised that we might have peace. His

Father laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. I don't think we can ever fully understand the depths of that suffering. But it is that shame that Jesus endured for the joy that was set before Him.

The point is this: As He hung on the cross, suffering under the wrath of His Father, Jesus had in mind—He's not enjoying the situation—He had in mind something joyous that would come out of it. And that joyous thing had to be so significant in His mind that He was willing to endure the most intense suffering ever known to mankind. What was this joy? What was it that Jesus looked forward to as He hung on the cross?

Well, I'd like to explore this question by looking at it from three different angles. The first is by looking at some of the texts that we just read. Because in Philippians 1:8, Paul tells us something that helps us to understand more of the depths of the riches of Christ's heart for His people. We read it; he says, "For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ." What that means is that whenever Paul tells you how he feels about God's people, about Christians, he is telling you something—a dim reflection perhaps—of how Christ feels towards His people. Paul longs for the Philippians with the same affection that Jesus Christ has towards the Philippians.

And so then, as we keep reading the letter to the Philippians, we find this open up more and more. The passage we read at the end of chapter 3 and into chapter 4 was all about how Paul is encouraging the Philippians to press on and continue on in their faith. He's saying our citizenship's in heaven; we wait for Jesus Christ to come and transform us. And then he says in verse 1 of chapter 4, "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." I don't think you can pack more affectionate language into one verse.

And I want you to think about this verse through this lens: If Paul has the heart towards the Philippians that Christ has towards the Philippians, then what is Christ's hope? What is Christ longing for? What is Christ's joy? Well, he tells you right here. You are. You can hear these words as coming from Jesus Christ Himself: "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved." Do you see what Jesus is saying? You are my brothers, my sisters, my family. I love you. I long for you. I yearn to be with you. When I think about what my hope is in the future, my greatest hope is to be together with you. I delight in you. You're my joy. You're my crown. You're my glory. You being made perfect and being brought into the presence of my Father is all that I'm working towards. It will make my day when you stand before me in the presence of my Father in perfection. So stand firm because I can't wait to have you with me in glory. My beloved. My bride. My delight.

This same idea comes up in other parts of Paul's writings. We read some of them in 1 Thessalonians. Let me read a couple of others. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 says this, "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." Isn't that a perfect picture of Christ's attitude towards His people? Can you see Christ's heart reflected in Paul there? It's not just that Jesus was so affectionately longing for us that He came to give us a message—the kingdom of God has come. He was so affectionately longing for us that He came and gave us Himself, His body, His own life. Why? Was it just because He pitied us? No. It's because we had become dear to Him. It's what He says there in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. Jesus died on the cross, Jesus endured the shame, Jesus went through all that suffering, not just because He pitied you in your poverty, but because you were dear to Him. Because He was longing for you.

We know that Jesus loved us while we were enemies. But I think the word "love" can often lose something of the passion that Christ feels towards His people. We were dear to Him. While you were enemies, while you were in your sin, while you were rotting in the gutter, He looked at you and He thought, "I long to have my people in perfection in my presence." I want you with me. I delight in you. You are my joy. So I'm going to give you everything.

A few verses later on in Thessalonians, we get another picture of this. "But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." Now, this is incredible. This just takes the language of love and reworks it into something just astonishing. It's not a perfect picture of Christ—I don't think Satan is hindering Christ from returning—but it is accurate of Christ in every other way. Paul hates being separated from the Thessalonians. If he could have his deepest desire, it would be to be with the Thessalonians in person, in face-to-face fellowship with them. Paul endeavors eagerly to see their face with great desire. What's his joy? What's Paul longing for? What's he working towards? You, in the presence of the Lord Jesus. That's his hope and joy and crown of rejoicing. And that's exactly how Jesus feels towards you.

He is separated from us for a time, but Jesus longs even now to be with you, to see your face. He earnestly desires this. He's working towards it. Why? Because His hope, His joy, His crown of rejoicing is you in His presence at His coming. You are His glory and His joy. Sounds almost blasphemous,

doesn't it? That's what He says.

Again, in 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10, which we read, "For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" Again, we see these same ideas coming through. Paul's thanking God for the Thessalonians and is full of joy and rejoicing before God because of them. Not only that, but Paul's praying incessantly with the goal of what? Seeing the Thessalonians face to face and perfecting their faith. That is precisely the heart of Christ on display for you once again.

We know from other scriptures that Christ's people are a gift given to Him by the Father. He prayed as much in John 17:6, "I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to me." Jesus Christ thanks the Father for giving Him you. And He is rejoicing before His Father because He's been given a gift from His Father—you—and He finds joy in you.

And He is night and day praying exceedingly that He might see you face to face and perfect what is lacking in your faith. That's what He's hanging out for. That's what He's praying for right now. His people in His presence in perfection. Incredible.

As Christ was hanging on the cross, what was in His mind? What was He thinking about? Was He gritting His teeth through the suffering, through the shame, thinking, "I'm looking forward to this"? His people in His presence in perfection. You. You were. And He goes, "I can't wait to see Phil and to see Shamir and to see Voy. I can't wait to see them. And I'm willing to go through this trial, this struggle. I'm willing to go through hell itself to see you in my presence in perfection."

What are we to do with this? Well, first, we should simply revel in who Jesus is. Jesus does not just look on you with pity. He looked on you in your sin, and He longed to have you in His presence. Just as a wife whose husband longs to be with her and delights in her being in his presence. Think about that. Okay? Imagine what a wife is like if a husband's just pouring out—this is oozing—the idea that he longs to be with her. How does the wife respond? She can't wait to be with him. She rejoices in his affection.

And the point of Hebrews—I think part of the point of Hebrews, part of the point of Philippians three into Philippians four—is that this is what should drive us on in our life. As we look at our Christian walk and we think of all the struggles and the trials, as we battle our sin, as we battle

the devil, as we battle the world, as we face persecution, as we risk our jobs for speaking the truth, as we risk our friendships and our families for speaking the truth in love, why would we be willing to go through these difficulties? Why would we be willing to deny ourselves? Because we look at our husband who's longing to be in our—to have us in his presence, and we say, "I can't wait to be with him as well." That is my joy. That is my crown. That is my what I long for. It should be our heart. Is that your great hope? Is that what drives you on? When you wake up in the morning on a Monday and think about the week ahead, is that the thing that keeps you going? Do you long to be in perfection in the presence of Jesus Christ?

Perhaps you find, like I do at times, that that's not the longing of your soul. Well, if it's not, my encouragement to you is, look at Jesus Christ. Look at His rejoicing and delight in you. Look at His beauty and glory as we see it on display in the gospel and in all of His interactions with His people throughout the biblical story and throughout history. Look at His life in the gospels. Look at His interactions with His people, His wisdom, His care, His compassion, His holiness, His willingness to speak the truth to those who rejected Him, His condescension, His humility in taking on flesh and veiling His glory. Look long and steady at your God and ask His Spirit to fill you with the same longing and joy that He has when He looks at you.

But you know, one of the ways that we see the longing of someone for us is not just through them in their person; it's also through their gifts. Look at what He was willing to do and look at what He was wanting to give to you. Look at all of His benefits, if you like. Look at His electing grace, His justification, the adoption into His family, the sanctification that He works in our life. Look at the hope of the new creation, the gift of the local church. Look at His scriptures and how He's handed you His revelation, and see that all of this is given to you because He delights in you. More than that, look at creation. This whole world is a gift. Everything around you is a physical display of Christ's yearning for you.

Paul points this out actually in Acts 14:17 when he's preaching in Lystra. He says, "Nevertheless, He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." He's speaking to pagans. And what he's saying is God gives us flowers and cool breezes and roast dinners and waterfalls. He overloads our world with beauty and joy that flood our senses because He's telling us about Himself and about His delight in man.

And so we should delight in His creation in the same way that a wife delights in a love note that her husband writes her. She doesn't love the note for the note's sake. She doesn't just sit there obsessing about the note, say-

ing, "Oh, how wonderful is this note." It's wonderful because of the person who wrote it to her. And ultimately, the hope is that she wants him in her presence. She wants this one who loves her.

But there's also an application here in terms of how we view other Christians, the church. I think it's amazing that Paul can use this language about the Philippian church and about the Thessalonian church. He has the same heart that Christ has for him for them. That's what our hearts should be like for one another. Do you look around at your fellow church members and fellow Christians around the world and think, "you are my joy and my crown"? I can't wait to see you in glory, in perfection, in the presence of our Lord Jesus. And I want to work. I want to earnestly work and pray that you might be there. Is that how you view one another? That's how Jesus views you. That's how Paul viewed the Philippians and the Thessalonians.

Now, I want to show you a bit more of this because the language and this idea of Christ delighting in His people is actually not exclusively revealed in the New Testament and not exclusively revealed in Paul's words. You can find it in the Old Testament as well. Let me show you just a couple of places. It's all over. In the book of Jeremiah, we find God speaking about His people in this way. In chapter 30 and 31, Jeremiah is speaking into the context of the exile. During the exile, Israel was taken out of the land of Israel and removed into the place of Babylon. It was a time of suffering, a time of judgment, and a time of discipline, which is important.

And as Jeremiah speaks in chapter 31 of the restoration of Israel that's going to come, we read this: Jeremiah 31:20 says, "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spoke against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." God says that even though He spoke against Ephraim or Israel, it was not because He hated them. He didn't despise them in sending them off. Think about what that means. He sent them into a time of death, turmoil, separation, disaster, and distress. He says it's not brought upon you, Israel, because I despise you. No, even as the people of Israel suffered under the hand of God Himself, He says He earnestly remembers them, and His heart yearns for them.

When it comes to His people, to those people who God has chosen to love, God's heart towards them never changes. Even as Israel turned from God and against God and brought upon themselves His discipline through the disaster of exile, God's heart was still groaning for them, yearning for them, longing for them—all the same language that Christ used and Paul used. And He's desiring a time of return, a time of restoration. That's what He's working towards throughout all of this.

Zephaniah speaks into a similar context as he prophesies about the coming exile followed by Israel's restoration. Listen to how God's described as Israel is restored: Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." Now, we often—we regularly—think about how we rejoice when God delivers us. God brings us out of our exile, out of our sin, out of our discipline, and He's bringing us out of the desert, right? You'll regularly think about how we rejoice when God delivers us, at the fact that He has chosen to save us. But the truth is that the rejoicing goes both ways. God saves His children because He delights in them, and as they are restored to Him, He starts singing with joy. He bursts into songs of gladness because His children have come through the discipline and back into fellowship with Him.

So this means that if you are a believer and you are going through a time of struggle, a time of difficulty that may well be because of your sin, and the Lord has caused grief in your life, disaster, turmoil, anguish in your life—even if it's because of your sin—the Lord's heart towards you has not changed. He's not doing this because He despises you, because He hates you, because He can't stand the sight of you. He's doing it whilst maintaining a heart that desires your restoration, that desires you returning and repenting from your sin, and He can't wait to see you restored. He can't wait to see you back in fellowship with Him. And as you repent of that sin, as you turn back to Him, and as you earnestly desire to be once more in communion with Him, He's going to sing over you. So return. Repent. What a God to come back to. The Father's not going to stand afar off as the prodigal returns. What does He do? He runs down the road to meet him. And then He goes and throws a party to celebrate. "Look at my son who's come back. Look at my son who's returned."

And that story of the prodigal in Luke 15 is a great way that we can transition into thinking about how Jesus Himself uses this kind of language to talk about His heart towards His people. Because in Luke 15, the parable of the lost son comes after two other parables: the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. Let me read those to you. They're very short. Actually, I'll just read the end of them. Luke 15:6-7 about the lost sheep, "When he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.' I say unto you, that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." And again, as he speaks about the woman who goes searching for the lost coin in her house, he says, "And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.' Likewise, I say unto you,

there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

This is what heaven longs for: prodigal sons coming home, lost sheep being found. This is what heaven delights in: wayward sons returning to the family, wandering sheep returning to the flock. There is rejoicing, collective joy. Heaven throws a party when a sinner repents. The Father is delighted. The Son shouts for joy. The Holy Spirit is thrilled, and the angels catch on and get caught up in the rapture of it all. Over one sinner.

Jesus uses this language as well as He prays to His Father just before He dies in John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me: for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." These words of Christ echo Proverbs 8:30-31 where we see wisdom personified, which I believe is Jesus Christ, "Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men." You see the picture? The triune God who we worship, the true and living God—His Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father delights in His Son, and the Son rejoices in the Father's delight. And the Son delights in man and desires that man rejoicing His delight. It's a cascade of delight and, I know, a fountain of joy.

The God of the Bible is not a God who is so high and lifted up, demanding glory and honor and servitude from subjects and slaves. That's a pagan god. All the pagan religions, their gods invented men to be their servants and their slaves. "Bring me food, so I don't have to work." That's the whole point. "Sacrifice yourself for me." That's what the pagan gods say. The God of the scriptures is a triune God, full of joy in others. The Father delighting in the Son, and the Son rejoicing before the Father in the joy of the Holy Spirit, and this joy that jumps and bounces to and fro in the Trinity overflows into His creation. Adam and Eve were brought into a world that engaged in this joy and delight, but their sins separated them and all their children from the joyous relationship of God.

But God so delighted in man that He sent His Son. You can almost hear it. You can almost hear the Son speaking to the Father, saying, "Father, we've got to do something. I want these people in my presence." And together with the Holy Spirit, they hatched the plan. "I will go through great suffering. I will come down and lay aside My glory. I will take on flesh and live among them. I will die. Father, turn Your face away from me, because I want them in My presence. I want them to share in our delight and in our glory." And so He came because He looked forward through the grief and shame to a joy set before Him, to a day when He brings many sons to

glory, not as slaves, but as His longed-for brothers, His beloved, His joy, His crown of rejoicing, in His presence and in the presence of His Father, and in the delight of the Holy Spirit forever and ever.

Perhaps here this morning you are not a Christian. Perhaps you've never placed your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. You've never come to Him for salvation. The message of Christianity is often presented, and rightly so, as "be saved from the wrath to come." Each one of us will die. Each one of us will face judgment. And we will be removed from the presence, the loving presence of God forevermore because of our sin. But there is another side to the coin. Certainly, flee the wrath to come. But also look at what God holds out for you to run to. Do you see Him over there saying, "My son, come home. My daughter, come home"? There is a fountain of delight. There is a God who, in a real sense, longs for you to return to Him, to repent, to place your trust in Jesus Christ, so that He might welcome you into His embrace.

What an amazing God we serve. There will be joy in heaven if you repent today. Rejoicing in heaven for just one sinner who repents. Because repentant sinners are the crown and joy of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Father, may we have the heart that You have for us. Lord, help us to delight in Your glory and Your majesty, in Your nature, in the way in which You delight in us. And help us, Father, to long for one another. Help us to long for this lost world and to desire that we would see many saved alive, that we would see many enter into the joy of Your rest. Father, we confess that our hearts are often cold to these realities. We desire, Lord, to be like Paul, to burn with the same passion You have, to be like Jesus Christ, who was willing to endure such suffering and shame for the sake of His people, to be like You, Heavenly Father, who was willing to give even Your Son, that You might receive us into Your presence in perfection. Lord, bring us home, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.