

## Sharing the Big Win

### The Big Win

By Pastor John Ewton

I'm going to welcome all of you here and especially welcome those who are at home and are unable to be here today. My name is Pastor John Ewton. When Mandy set up this series, you decided that today, the main point was that the big win is actually about losing. So remember, if your team loses this afternoon, there are two big winners.

There was a time when I was a child, and I grew up in a very strange world. New things were happening all the time. My grandfather in Tennessee was still using a mule and a yoke, but at the same time, television had come out. I remember the first colored TV set, and I remember that the world seemed very exciting, and I wanted it.

TV brought me all the new toys around, and I wanted every one of them. It really made me aware that the world had a lot of things to buy into. When I got older, I wanted to buy a house, and now that I have one, I can't afford it. I wanted a new car. I wanted lots of things.

Our brothers and sisters. I'm going to tell you that this world is attractive, but I have never found joy in the things in this world. I want you to hear that. I'm not saying there aren't great things in this world. I'm saying that the joy that fills the heart, the joy that brings life, doesn't come from the things of this world.

It comes from remembering that you and I belong to the kingdom and that God is the sense, the center of our strength. His Holy Spirit is what holds us together. We're going to be talking about Paul today. The key part of what Paul said is, "But whatever were gains to me. I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."

Brothers and sisters if we know something about Paul, it's that as Saul before Christ encountered him, he was a big man in his world. He wasn't a president, but he was a leader of the Jewish nation. And he was proud of all the things that his society valued that made him important. He was so fervent for what he believed in that he found himself going throughout the Middle Eastern areas, arresting Christians and bringing them back to pay the price.

And he took pride in that. But as Christ got a hold of him, his life changed, and he began to value things differently. Now, this Philippians letter is one of the prison letters. Its letters were written when Paul was in prison in Rome and in some other places.

It's important that we understand that because when Paul writes this letter, he's facing death. He knows that this world is not long for him. He's lost everything that was important to him. He has nothing. His friends even have to bring him some papers so he can write these letters. And yet, even in prison, he continued to reach out and touch the lives of people because Paul had found the twist, the paradox of life, in the closing of this letter.

Paul writes these words, which are so familiar to all of us, but as we're reading them, remember the context. Paul is knowledgeable that his life is ending. He is aware that never again will he be a big man in the world. He's aware that he's lost everything he once thought was important. And he's sitting in a prison awaiting death.

And in the closing, he writes, Rejoice in the Lord, always again. I will say rejoice. Isn't that amazing? This is a man who's lost everything he thought was important. He has given up everything that mattered to him. And he's sitting in a jail awaiting death. And he tells other people that they ought to be joyful in God. That, my brothers and sisters, is a great paradox. Paul has found what really matters in this life.

Now, Paul, these are the assets that the Jewish world of that time considered important. He was circumcised on the eighth day. He was an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews, and he was a Pharisee. He zealously persecuted the church, and he was righteous according to the law. But he now puts them all in the loss column.

That's exactly what these areas are talking about. They're talking about profit and loss. And Paul is saying to you and me that we can get so caught up in this world that we think the things of this world matter. And the more we have, the better off we are. What Paul's saying, I found a different truth. A truth that really matters.

It's not the things of this world that are important. It's all about sharing God. It's all about knowing God personally in our hearts. It's about telling other people the truth. And it's about living our lives, being willing to give to others and brothers and sisters, that is so important. I remember one day when I was younger. I don't know how stupid I was to think this, but the first computers came out for you.

Younger people. The first computers took up a room about this size. So I don't know why I thought I was getting a computer. It wouldn't even fit in my house. But I don't know what it is. But I caught a glimpse of what my mom was putting out. That was my Christmas present. And it had these bright red and yellow things checks on it.

And I thought to myself, Wow, a computer? Well, we got Christmas morning, and it wasn't a computer, of course. Apple hadn't come along yet. What it was that Mom had got me a

needle to put in the phonograph so I could play some records. And then she had gotten me a record. Chubby Checker. I didn't even like Chubby Checker, and I still don't.

But that was my gift. If you ever noticed how the world can draw us in, we're never satisfied when we want the things of the world. We always want something more. We need a bigger house. We need a better car. We need a faster computer. We need the latest bauble. And you actually believe that Apple is now selling virtual reality stuff for 30 \$500?

I saw a picture where five people had spent 3500 times five. I'm too old to calculate that. They were sitting at the table with the virtual reality glasses on. Who needs to eat dinner with a virtual reality class? For that matter, Who needs to spend 30 \$500 on one? There are better things in this world. The world pulls us in.

Don't you hear it? In the advertising? This computer from Intel is now twice as fast as the other one. I used to get hooked on that until I realized that meant that instead of one millisecond, it was two or half a millisecond. It really didn't show up at all. Brothers and sisters, it's not the things of this world.

They try to draw us in. They try to make us feel like they're important. There are many things in this world that are good. But I have to tell you again that the most important things don't involve winning, and they don't involve getting everything we want. I should have learned that lesson early because I grew up in Chicago.

I don't mean that Chicago was a loser, though. It probably was. I just meant that I was a Cub fan.

My grandpa loved the Cubs. He called them the Chicago Cubs. And we always knew that they would fail. We always knew that in the best circumstances, when it looked like everything was going to go alright, they'd goof it up. And I was also a Bears fan, and we all know them. And I became of fighting a lion. When I went to campus the year, the slush fund hit.

We didn't win anything in the four years I was there. But, you know, it wasn't about winning. It was about being part of it. It was about the joy of cheering for the Cubs. The only time they have ever disappointed me was a few years ago when they actually won. Now they're back to normal, and I love them again.

The joy wasn't in winning. It was in support. I believe that what Paul is telling us is that the real joy of life is serving our amazing God. You see what Paul understood, and maybe some of you can understand what I'm saying because when I was a teenager, I would have never thought this. When I was a young adult, I would have never thought this.

I may have preached it, but I didn't really understand it. But now that I'm 76 years old, I understand this world isn't what matters. There's another world that's eternal, where my loving God, who gave his life for me, is waiting to welcome me with open arms. And what this life is about is serving him. It's about giving of ourselves to others to try and make this a better world.

That's what it's all about. Witnessing to and serving Christ. Now, brothers and sisters, you and I are called to live the paradox that Paul is pointing out that joy is not found in the things of this world, but joy is found in giving of ourselves and what we have to share. God's love with others. Now, I'm not going to talk about financial gifts this morning.

It's discussed often, but there is a joy that comes from giving to the work of Jesus through our finances. What I want to discuss today is the joy that comes from sharing our lives with others. Each of us are called to serve others for Christ, and we too often miss that joy because of our fear. Our fear is that we don't know enough or have what it takes to teach or to help others.

And sometimes, though, this church isn't just bad. It's the idea that we pay the pastor to do that stuff. I have to tell you, the pastors, a part of the Christian team, and the effective pastor will do their share, and Mandy does. But the work of the kingdom involves all of us. Sometimes, that means that we face our fears and trust God to do what's right.

I remember when I first came to Omaha, I was put on a pastoral volunteer team for the Children's Hospital. I don't think that meant anything special. It just meant that they needed pastors, and we all took turns doing it. One day, when I was there, I was told by a nurse that this family had just lost their baby.

And it was my task as a young pastor to go and comfort them. I will always remember that I made a critical mistake that day. I was nervous. I was afraid. I didn't know what to say. And the first words that came out of my mouth is, I know what you feel. And the mother angrily said to me, No, you don't.

But what happened next amazed me. A woman that I didn't know walked up, and she said, I know what you feel. And then they hugged each other and began to cry together. And she spent several hours there ministering to this woman. The difference was this was a woman who had lost a child and had decided that Christ had called her as one who had gone through this to minister to others and help them deal with the pain.

I'll always love a family whose son died in the service. They were devastated and struggled with God's love. We spent a lot of time together. We prayed together. We talked together. And one day, I suggested that they could ease some of the pain by sharing with others.

They prayed about it and decided to make a difference. They decided that they wanted to take what God had done through them and help others with it.

And I tell you that from that time, I don't know if they're still doing it, but I wouldn't be surprised if they were. They made a decision that whenever a kid died in the war in Nebraska or nearby, they were one of the first families there. They shared their grief. They offered the hope of Christ, and they made a difference in the lives of a lot of families.

Neither of these people had counseling skills. Neither of them had special gifts. One was a farmer. And by the way, I'm not denigrating farmers. I'm just saying that one was a farmer, and one was a librarian. And I don't know what the other woman was. They weren't prepared for this. They just went with God's love and trust in God.

Like Derek, my brother, who chose to be out of town this morning while I was speaking, I have heard too many people over the years turn down opportunities to teach our children and youth. And most often, they're afraid that they don't know enough about the Bible to teach others. But I have to tell you, while we like teaching the Bible here, and it's important, what we most need is people who love God and want to share that love with our children and youth.

We can always find an excuse for not giving of ourselves. We're too busy. And I'll tell you right now, we are. But the work of Christ is too important not to be a priority in each of our lives. People say we don't have the skills that are needed. This may be true, but my experience is that the Holy Spirit gives us what we need when we carry out His work.

One of the lovely ones is we're too old. I will never forget the day when I made a terrible mistake. I went into the ministry to be a youth pastor. It was all I really wanted to do. And one day, I think I was 40. I don't remember. My daughter tells me that's getting more. But however old I was, I decided I was too old to work with youth anymore.

They need someone younger. So I quit. Now, I have to tell you that I enjoyed the years of pastoring a church. I learned to love preaching. I learned to love all the aspects of ministry. But right now, I'm 76 years old, and I am living my dream. I look forward to every Sunday. A part of me misses today because I won't be back.

Fusion Next service. You're never too old. Now, I have to acknowledge that my brother, Trent Howell, has more gifts than I do. He is younger, and the good Lord knows. The more I watch him, the more I know he has far more energy than I do. And he has a vision for what the ministry here needs to look like. However, I have the wisdom that comes with age, and I have a love and desire to work with youth. I'm there to show them God's love and to share the gospel as best I can.

You see, we are in a partnership with God. We don't get the gifts and then decide what to do. We pray for guidance and then find areas to serve Jesus. And only then will the Spirit provide. I will never forget the morning that I had to visit the family whose son had been killed in service. I sat there in their driveway, not wanting to get out of my car.

I didn't know what to say. I had been in the ministry for a long time, but I don't know. Mandy may be wrong. I know Mandy's never wrong. Forgive me. See, I am getting old. Mandy may feel differently, but no matter how long I'm in the ministry, I don't have the answers. I have the answers if somebody wants to know something in the Bible.

Sometimes. Sometimes I don't. But I don't know how to deal with those situations because I've been ordained. I don't know how to deal with them because I've done it before. Everybody's different. I sat in that car, and I said, God, I don't want to go in there. I don't know what to say. Tell me what to say. And I'll never forget what God said.

He said You have to take the step of faith and go in there and then trust that my Spirit will help you find what to say. You see, what I learned that day is that God doesn't give us everything and say, Hey, but you're fully prepared. Now go do it. God wants us to know we need him, brothers and sisters.

God wants us to trust him. And then he'll give us what we need to do the job. There are three things I want you to leave with today. We should enjoy the world in which we live. But never forget that we are children of the kingdom. God wants us to share and give to support His work. It's in letting go of what we have that we truly find the joy that is ours in Christ.

And when we accept the challenge and find ways to share God's work, the Holy Spirit will be our strength and help.

Heavenly Father, we praise, and we give you all the glory. You are our King, our loving father. And we just pray, Lord, that you might fill us with your vision. That is, we are surrounded by the things of this world. We can always remember if we are the children of heaven and that we may live as such, sharing and giving of ourselves, our finances, and our resources to bless others in your name so that your story may grow. In your name, we pray. Amen.3-