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[*Introductory video*: Puffy clouds in the sky are the backdrop for the written message ushered in by a streaking star with a shimmery comet-like tail accompanied by gently paced music with a boom-chicka-boom beat:]

WE ALL WANT *to make changes*
SO WE MAKE NEW *year resolutions*
BECAUSE WE THINK WE *will find happiness*
IN ACCOMPLISHING *them*
BUT WHAT IF WE *got this all wrong*
AND YOUR SUCCESS DIDN'T *bring you happiness*
BUT INSTEAD YOUR HAPPINESS *brought you great success?*
HOW WOULD THAT CHANGE *the way you approach life?*
HAPPINESS MATTERS
Find joy even when life hides it

[When the lights come back up at the video's end, Lead Pastor Sal Sberna (back from a two-Sunday holiday leave-of-absence) is greeted by the congregation's unusually long and boisterous cheering and applause, prompted ahead of time by Scott Rodgers (*Jones Road Campus Pastor*) as if they were cheering for the *Houston Texans* football team on winning their first playoff game of the season yesterday. Pastor Sal begins amidst the cheering:]

For those of you who are at our *Cypress Campus* or are watching via Internet, this is the way I'm always welcomed every Sunday here at *Jones Road*. In fact, the same as [when] I'm out there, now.

Glad that you're here with us this New Year and couldn't think of a better way to kick a New Year off than talking about *Happiness*. There are no more happier people than those who live in Houston, Texas today! How about those *Texans*, man! We did it! Do you know what I love? Is that every national sportscaster just dissed and dismissed us: *Yeah, the city of* (you know) *rednecks and roughnecks, they ain't gonna win anything down there*. Well (you know) put that in your pipe and smoke it (as my mother used to say). And you know what? Here we come, Baltimore. You'd better be shakin' in your boots. I may change our tune next week, but right now it feels good, doesn't it?

If you have your Bible, turn to *Philippians, chapter 1*. I was privileged to do some research on happiness this past break that we had. What I discovered is that there's not a whole lot of happy people in America right now.

(By the way, before we go any further, normally my wife is in the 11:00 service, but she's starting to go to the 9:30 service now. In fact [addressing Kristi Sberna:] *Honey, stand up so they can see who you are so they don't think I'm just grabbing on some young teenager while I'm down there on the front row*. She is starting a class; she's going to start teaching college [age Bible study classes at The MET]. So if you're in college and you'd like some masterful teaching from the one who taught me everything that I know about the subject, they'll be meeting at 11:00, Room 611, (the old *Ark* building), Building C. So welcome my wife. [Addressing Kristi about the congregational response:] *Your posse's already here*.

So, what about happiness? Last January—I was reading some surveys on happiness, and the people that survey the workforce in America said:

- Last year, there were 45 percent of the workers in America [that] were unhappy. It's the lowest job-rating since this poll has been taken over a 20-year time span.
- Depression rates in America right now are ten times higher than they were in 1960.
 - Fifty years ago the average age of the onset of depression was 29½
 - Today the onset of depression [is] 14½!—50 percent [younger]. *That's incredible; incredibly sad.*
- In 1998—one of the reasons I believe is just the incredible amount of research and psychology that is on depression and its related disorders—in fact in 1998 a survey done said that for every one study on *why people are happy* there are 17 studies on *why we are depressed*.

So after a while [if] you keep reading all that stuff—every book that comes out is on depression or it has a sad face on it or something's wrong—your mind begins to think: *It is just depressing to live. There is no joy and no happiness in life.*

In fact, focusing on the negative tricks your mind. Have you ever heard of the *Medical School Syndrome*. [That's] another thing I was reading about when I was researching this. *Medical School Syndrome* [happens] sometime during the first year or right after the first year, after all these young medical students have been just absolutely overwhelmed with all the different diseases and all the bad things that can happen to the human body, they begin to think that *they* start having those diseases. (But it's just in their minds.) They just have been exposed to so much bad of what can happen.

In 2006 a Harvard professor by the name of Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar (before he wrote his ground-breaking book [on] happiness: [*Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*, (McGraw Hill, May 10, 2007)] he and his researchers wanted to get a class of students together to be able to talk to them about their findings on happiness, and be able to study those students, as well. So they offered a class in *Happiness*. Now this is Harvard:

- Top one percent of the people
- Hard-driving
- Type-A
- Going to be somebody
- Top of my class
- Want to make a difference

These are the...

- Leaders
- Business people
- All the folks that really think that: *Happiness is going to be bound up in what I can achieve.*

(Right?)

So they thought: *If we get 100 of these people that would take a Happiness class—over, say, (you know) an Economics Theory class—we'll be lucky.* Over two semesters, not 100 people but, over 1200 students signed up for the class on *Happiness*.

Do you know why?—because they were starving and hungry for how to be happy now (not later when they got their degree). They weren't even happy with everything that they had done and the success that they had up to that point. They were very young, realizing: Success...

- Getting into the right place
- Doing the right things
- Hanging around the right people

...does not guarantee happiness.

What we'll find is that:

YOUR HAPPINESS GUARANTEES SOME SUCCESS IN LIFE

That's what the apostle Paul came to [as] his conclusion as well. In fact, *happiness*—I would say for our purposes—*is the positive mood in the present and a positive outlook toward the future.*

In other words, whatever's happening to me right now, it's going to be good. Because in the future I know that it's going to be good. So really there's nothing that can get you down with that type of attitude. In fact, if you're a happy person, you even live longer.

A HAPPY PERSON LIVES LONGER

A hundred and eighty nuns from the *School of the Sisters of Notre Dame*—all born before 1917—were asked to write down their thoughts in their journals (an autobiographical journal). The nuns with more overtly joyful content lived an average of 10 years longer than those who were negative or neutral. By age 85, 90 percent of the happiest nuns were still alive. (My wife says: *Because they probably didn't get married and have kids, that's why they lived so long.*)

In fact, your happiness affects your physical health; obviously you live longer. But unhappy employees take an average of 15 more days sick leave than happy employees.

So here's the apostle Paul who's writing now. He's writing from very difficult circumstances (to say the least).

- He is in prison.
- Not just in prison, but he's on trial for his life.
- He's on death row—for all practical purposes.
- He has no personal freedom at all.
- He is chained up 24 hours a day to a guard.
 - They rotated them out every six hours.
 - Four different guards all day long
 - Sleep[ing], eating, going wherever—they were chained to Paul.
- Paul wasn't going anywhere for two solid years.

Yet, as you read this letter—even a cursory reading of the book of *Philippians*—you're going to find out this was one happy guy. This was one joy-filled individual. In fact, most scholars look at that and said: *This is the most joyful letter the apostle Paul had ever written.*

Now his dream was to go to Rome. That was his goal: *I want to go to Rome, and I want to preach the Gospel*. But he wanted to go as a preacher, not a prisoner. So his greatest expectations of what he wanted to do and accomplish in his life seemingly have been dashed and stripped away from him. Here he is a prisoner inside of a Roman jail, but yet he writes this beautiful, joy-filled letter.

I wonder if some of us sitting in here this morning or at our *Cypress Campus* or listening via the Internet would say: *You know what? Some things have been stripped from me. My life isn't turning out the way that I thought it would turn out. The circumstances that I find myself in right now aren't the circumstances that I planned to happen.*

So I want to ask you a question here at our *Cypress Campus*, right here at *Jones Road* and those of you that are listening via the Internet:

- What would you change about your life if you could?
- What is it that you would want to undo?
- What is it that you would say: *You know, if this didn't happen, I wouldn't be in this situation. If I could change one situation, this is the situation that I would change.*

Now think about that. What is it?

As you're thinking about that, let's start answering that question by a different perspective. Why don't we have a foundational thought; in that, we need to start asking the right question rather than the wrong one about our circumstances? Here's the right question: Instead of asking "Why?" let's ask "What?"

INSTEAD OF ASKING "WHY?" ASK "WHAT?"

Do you know *why*? (Pardon the pun.) Do you know *why*?—because *why* isn't ever answered...most of the time. Do you know who asks *why*?—two-year-olds. When we're constantly running around with the mulligrubs about our circumstances [asking] God: *Why? Why? Why?* What do we sound like? We sound like immature two-year-olds.

Jesus didn't even get the answer to *why* when He asked His Heavenly Father when He was on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" [*Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34 (NIV, NASB, NKJV)*] There's no answer to that question. A booming voice didn't come from heaven. The heavens didn't open up and a scroll delivered by a dove to tell Jesus: *This is why*. Silence.

But there is a question that God will answer if you ask the right question and that is: *Now what?*

NOW WHAT?

It's happened. I'm in this circumstance.

1. NOW WHAT IS GOD DOING?

Because we believe, as believers, that God is always active in our life. That God is taking everything that happens to us—both the good and the bad—and He’s working it together for good. So what we need to ask God when we get in bad circumstances isn’t: *Why, God, is this happening?*—but: *Now what, God, are You doing? What are You doing, God?*

2. NOW WHAT IS GOD’S PURPOSE?

Now what is God’s purpose in doing what He is doing? Now the ultimate purpose of God is to save the world. We’re involved in the ultimate purpose of God. So in everything we say: *Ultimately, God is trying to save somebody through whatever is happening with me right now. This is going to work out for the good for me and for God’s glory. It is to God’s glory that people be saved.* If we are walking with God, [in] every circumstance in our life God is doing something—a great purpose inside of us.

3. NOW WHAT DOES GOD WANT TO SHOW ME?

Sometimes when we get in circumstances, what I’ve found—circumstances I don’t like when things in my mind take a turn for the worse—things begin to happen that I don’t like and don’t line up well with me. Do you know what happens? That which is on the outside (the circumstance) evokes something from my inside that’s just as ugly as what I’ve perceive the outside to be. A lot of times what God is doing is: He’s simply taking that circumstance that’s on the outside and pulling something on the inside out of me so that He can better use me.

So...

- Maybe your circumstance has got you down.
- Maybe it’s got you angry.
- Maybe it has you doubting.
- Maybe you’re living in unbelief because of a circumstance.
- Maybe there’s hate in your heart because of a circumstance (or whatever it is)

God’s saying: *If I’m going to continue My purpose with you, I’m going to have to get rid of this, and that’s **why** some of these things happen.*

[You say:] *What are you doing?*

He says: *I’m sanctifying you.*

4. NOW WHAT DOES GOD WANT TO DO THROUGH THIS?

What does God want to do with the circumstance that I find myself in? You see if you ask *why*, you’re going to get silence 99.9 percent of the time.

- Do you know what silence sounds like?—forsaking

- Do you know what silence sounds like?—God doesn't know
- Do you know what silence sounds like?—God doesn't care
- Do you know what silence sounds like?—confusion, abandonment, disorientation

But you're asking the wrong question. When you say...

- God, *what* are You doing?
- *What* is Your purpose?
- *What* do You want to show me?
- *What* do You want to do through this?

...God answers. How do we know? Because the apostle Paul—*Philippians, chapter 1, verse 12*:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened {—not *why* it has happened—*what* has happened} to me has really served to advance the gospel.

Philippians 1:12 (NIV, 1984 edition)

See the apostle Paul is sitting in jail and he's not saying: *I just wanted to be a preacher and now I'm a prisoner. (You know?) God, why do You treat Your...no wonder why You treat...you have so many...* (Whatever I was going to say was a good thought, but I've totally lost it.)

To the untrained eye, we look at Paul and say: *Failure! Loser! You're in prison.*

If somebody gets a prison term, now we say: *You've done something bad; something's wrong with you.*

But here's the apostle Paul on death row and he's not crying (whining): *God, why?*

He said: *Okay, God, what? Here's what—he says—here's what happened to me. This is what God is doing. I am advancing the Gospel.*

That word *advance* is interesting. It means: *a pioneering advance*. It's used in Greek language for somebody who would go out ahead of the army, like the Army Corps of Engineers, and they would begin chopping down a path, a clear-cut runway, for the army to advance to take the next city. Paul said: *I'm a pioneer. God is advancing the Gospel through me.* Paul was clearing a way so that Christ could be preached more effectively.

Verses 13 and 14:

¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the [whole] palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Philippians 1:13-14 (NIV, 1984 edition)

Paul said: *Let me tell you why I'm here. I'm here because of Jesus. What's happening in my life right now is because of the purpose of God. This is the purpose of God in my life. He's made it clear. And: Because of me people are coming to Christ and people who are outside are encouraged to preach the Word of God.*

The very chains that the Roman soldiers thought would restrain Paul, God actually used to release him. Now, think about that.

Can you imagine what the conversation would be like if you were chained to the apostle Paul for six hours? Here's Paul's relational ability. Here's Paul's relational approach to evangelism: *Hi! My name is Paul. Jesus Christ died for you on the cross. You need to repent and give your life to Christ or you're going to go to hell.* And then he would start going through the *Old Testament* and tell them every reason why Jesus was the Christ. Six hours! Chained! He couldn't—

- You would go to the bathroom with him, and he's telling you about Jesus.
- In his sleep, he's talking (in his sleep) about Jesus.
- When he's eating, he's praying.
- Everything—Jesus.

No wonder why, every six hours a sinner would be chained to him and a saint would walk out.

Paul said: *I know if I get four a day for two solid years, that's a lot of people I can win to Jesus. And they're going to spread it through the entire Praetorian Guard, and every soldier underneath them, and then their commanders are going to find out about it. And pretty soon the very purpose of God that I believed in my mind that God wanted to accomplish, God accomplished—not how I would have liked to have done it—but it still got done the way God wanted it done.*

Now, we get confused over the difference between *what* and *how*.

- We are responsible: *God, what are you doing?*
 - God will say: *This is what I'm doing.*
- When we start saying: *God, how are you going to do this?*
 - He says: *It's none of your business. You'd run away if I told you what I was going to do, Paul.*

He put the *what* in his heart: *Go to Rome and preach the gospel.* Paul thought:

- *I'm just going to go to synagogues*
- *I'm just going to be out there*
- *I'm going to be Paul, the man*
- *We're going to have giant crusades*
- *We're going to have television, Fox News, CNN*
- *Everybody's going to be there*

And God says: *No! I'm going to put you in jail.* Can you imagine?

Paul would have said: *God? Is that You?*

God says *what* (and we know what the *what* is). The *what* is to make disciples of all the entire world. *How was that going to happen?* We are just going to follow God and as the circumstances present themselves, we're going to ask God:

- *What do you want out of this circumstance?*
- *What do you want out of that circumstance?*
- *What's Your purpose?*
- *What are You doing through me?*
- *What are You doing in me?*

The gospel has got to go forward in spite and in light of our circumstances.

The apostle Paul says a couple of things about these chains—chains that we think that we have as well. What are the chains in our lives that are binding us that we wish we could change? (The things that we think are restricting us: *I can't do something because of my circumstance?*)

Here's what the apostle Paul teaches:

GOD CAN CHANGE YOUR OBSTACLES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Who would have thought that going to jail to await a sentence to death would have won more people to Christ than Paul preaching the gospel as a free man? Obstacle: *Opportunity*.

GOD CAN CHANGE YOUR SETBACKS INTO SETUPS

You would think that going to jail is a setback, wouldn't you?

- Career on hold
- I'm in prison
- Nobody to watch out after me

That was a setup for Paul. It was a beautiful setup for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But if we're wondering around: *Why?* and we're not asking the right question like: *Now what?* then we're going to miss God in all of the stuff that's happening in our lives.

- We are going to be miserable.
- We're going to point back to events and people and circumstances.
- We're going to say: *God, if that hadn't happened then I wouldn't be here.*

Not a good way to live life, is it? Because stuff is going to happen.

That which we thought would restrain us, God uses to release us. What are you chained to today? Is there a relationship that you are saying: *God, if I wasn't chained in this relationship I could do this for You [or] I could do that for You?* Rather than saying: *God, what's going on here? What is it You want through me?*

Some of you are married to unbelievers and you're thinking: *If I was just released from this unbeliever....Really?* That's not what the Bible teaches though. [*1 Corinthians 7:13* (paraphrased)] The Bible teaches: Because you are bound to that unbeliever and they're staying with you, then you have a wonderful opportunity to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to them

and they can see Christ in your life. Rather than saying: *Why, God? How come my husband (or my wife) isn't spiritual, and they're not the Ephesians woman or the Ephesians man? Why not say: God, what do you want from me?* Here's what God will say:

- *Shut up and live up!*
- *Quit complaining.*
- *Start getting on purpose.*
- *Let My character inside of you shine even greater than your situation.*

When something happens that we don't understand, the first thing we're going to say is: *Now what do You want to do, God? What do You want to do?* After you say: *What do You want to do?*—it puts in perspective all the other stuff that happens.

So the second follow up thing that we say when we find ourselves in circumstances that we think: *Man, this isn't good, it's not right, how could God be in this?*—is: *So what?*

SO WHAT?

You know those two little words can save you a lot of grief? Paul learned to say to things that really don't matter: *So what?* How God gets His will done is never up to us. Only obedience to do His will and faith to believe it can be done (in light of and in spite of circumstances) gives us great joy and happiness. God always takes care of the *how* if we clearly ask Him and understand the *what*.

So here's what He says—here's why He says: *So what?* (You ready?) *Verses 15-18:*

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. {Paul said: I've got the whole gamut here. Some people are out there preaching and advancing the gospel because they think they are going to do me harm. Others, because they have a pure heart.} ¹⁶ The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former {the ones that do it from envy and rivalry} preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. {Now let's say this next phrase together—ready?} ¹⁸ But what does it matter?

Philippians 1:15-18a (NIV, 1984 edition)

Translated: *So what?* (Like I could control somebody's motives?) The gospel is being preached! No matter what their motives are, it's the Word of God.

I'm going to tell you: *God still hits straight licks with crooked sticks.* *So what?*

- So what, they get a bigger crowd?
- So what, they are free?
- So what, they're trying to do me harm.

The gospel is being preached. Thousands of people are coming to Christ.

The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this {What? I what?} I rejoice. {I'm happy.}

Philippians 1:18b (NIV, 1984 edition)

We're not happy because we're not in the will of God.

- If you're not in the will of God
- If you're not on purpose with God
- If you don't understand the *what* (and the *what* is making more and better disciples)
- If we're not out there trying to share the gospel
- If our life isn't all about reflecting the life of Christ

...we are going to be miserable, and little things are going to bother us.

You know, people leave this church all the time. (Why? I don't know, man. Why would you leave? It's perfect; the total package right here. And you know what? Some people just leave.) And when they leave they say bad things about me, or bad things about the church. They go off and they'll start a church or they'll join some other church and start winning people.

Here's what I say: *So what? So what?*

[They say:] *Well, we didn't like this, or We didn't like that.*

[I say:] *So what?*

- *Is Christ being preached?*
- *Are people being saved?*
- *Are folks' lives being turned around?*
- *Is the church moving forward?*

Then so what?—what somebody might say. So what?

But if you're not careful, it's the little *so whats* that will get you. (You know) sometimes there's a big *SO WHAT* and you've got to really deal with that one. But usually it's the minor ones: *What makes you grumpy when you come home from work?* (My wife would like to know that, as well.) What makes you grumpy? It's not the big things; it's the little/tiny things, isn't it? What are the things that cause you to get into an argument with your spouse about? It's not the major, it's the little/tiny, minor ones.

For example, this wasn't an argument, but it kind of proves the point. Yesterday, as we were watching the *Texans* totally dominate and do a Texas whooping on that team, I had a brand new reel and I was putting line in it. I got so frustrated because I just couldn't see and I didn't have my hat with the magnifier on it (and stuff).

I said: *This house is so dark and stupid, the stupidest, darkest house I ever lived in.*

My wife was sitting next to me and she goes: *Well, why don't you just go down to the kitchen, it's a little brighter, Sal.*

So I said: *Okay; I think I will. I'll just go down right now.* I marched down there and (you know) found my hat; put a light on; finally did it and just sulked for a while.

Now, that wasn't a major thing; it was a little thing. So what? Why did I have to make a major deal out of it? That's what she's asking right now: *Why did you make a major deal out of that? Ruined the game for a quarter and a half there.* Generally the things that we freak out most [about] are the ones that really don't matter much. It's the little things that freak us out.

Now here are a couple of questions. Ready?

1. When you're getting ready to freak out about something, ask this: *What will this matter a hundred years from now?* (I mean) honestly, a hundred years from now, so what?
2. What does this mean in eternity? (I mean) that I couldn't string a reel and got angry about it? So what? I can't string the reel. My eyesight isn't as good as what it used to be. I still catch the fish, baby. It doesn't matter! So what? What does it mean in eternity? So what is really most important right now? Was stringing that reel that important right then? No, it really wasn't.

Being with my family...watching the game...all that was a whole lot more important than that stupid reel. So what? Do you know the most important thing is? There [are] only a couple of things that last for eternity:

1. People
2. The Word of God

Everything else, honestly, so what?

- So what, if your car breaks down?
 - Do you think a hundred years from now it's going to be worth all the emotional energy that you put in about a car? It's not even going to be around four years from now. As soon as you pay that piece of junk off, you're going to get rid of it. So what?
- So what that you don't like your job? So what?
 - Maybe inside that God is saying: You know what? You'd get the promotion; I'd do something else for you if you'd just ask what I'm trying to do in you right now in this situation.

Here's what I've found; if you don't ask that question and you don't understand the answer, you're going to be in that position a long time, pal. Even if you decide to change jobs, the same thing will come up until you say: *God, what is important right now? What are You trying to do through me?*

- (You know) so what, your hair is thinning?
 - Do you think a hundred years from now it's going to matter what your hairstyle was like? (Except for Donald Trump, and people will still be laughing a hundred years from now.)

- So what? So you have more hair on your back than your head, so what? It's great to embarrass your kids with.

So what? Some things just don't matter. Try this one on:

- Suppose your kid brings home a loser and wants to marry him? Now, that's a big one.
 - That one you take to God, and then you take a pickaxe to the other thing.

So what? So what?

- Your family matters.
- What God wants matters.
- Relationships matter.

All this other stuff: So what?

You hit a wall. You don't understand. You feel chained. What you think the world is using you to restrain you, God is going to use it to release you if you say: *Now what, Lord? So what? This little stuff that's happening right now, I'm not going to let it get me down.*

Let me tell you—you ready?—here's the key. You walk away from [here] with this today:

TRUE HAPPINESS IS NOT BASED UPON WHAT IS HAPPENING TO US BUT “WHO” IS BEHIND THE HAPPENING

I'm going to say that again because that's major. True happiness is *not* based upon what happens to us. You ask someone who has a mile-long résumé of success after success and...

Ask them: *Are you happy?*

They'll say: *No. I'm still driven to do more because whatever it is I do and I get, it's fleeting; it's not there.*

True happiness is never based on what happens to us. It is based on *Who* is behind the happenings.

Do you know the story of Joseph? This won't pop up on the screen, but if you have your Bible, you can turn to *Genesis chapter 45*. Here's the story of Joseph. Are you ready?

- Joseph was the favorite son of his dad.
- He had a bunch of brothers.
- They end up becoming all the tribes of Israel.
- Because he was his son in his old age, he loved him.
- He gave him this coat—the coat of many colors—do you remember that?
- He had these dreams. When he would dream, God would give him these prophetic dreams.
 - He would tell his brothers: *Hey I had this dream that all you guys were going to bow down to me one day.*
 - Imagine how your little brother coming up to you and telling you that would make you feel. [Pantomimes slapping the kid with a back-hand swipe.] (Right?) But it was worse than that.

- He even told his dad one day: *Yeah, Dad. You and everybody are going to bow down to me.*
- [Dad] said: *Man, what are you saying? Are you out of your mind?*
- So one day as his brothers were out tending their flock, his dad said: *Go check on your brothers. Tell me how it's going.* So he goes out there and he's got his cloak on. He is full of his dreams and ambition: *Man, this is what God's going to do.*
 - His brothers see him coming; they say: *Let's kill him.*
 - His older brother said: *No! No! No! Don't kill him; that would kill our dad. Let's sell him into slavery.*
- So they see a band of slave traders coming; they sell him into slavery and get some money for him.
- Then the brothers concoct this scheme.
 - Let's take his cloak and put some goat blood on it and let's take it back to dad and say: *Hey, wild animals must have eaten Joseph. We found this cloak.*
- Meanwhile, poor Joseph's sold into slavery in Egypt.
 - Rather than saying: *Oh why, God? You gave me these dreams and these visions, and everything was going to be so good. Why have my brothers done this to me?*
 - He said: *Now what, Lord? Now what? So what, they did that. Now what?*
- There in Egypt because he asked: *Now what?*
 - He was sold to Potiphar.
 - He became Number One in all of Potiphar's household.
 - There was nothing that Potiphar didn't trust him with.
- Then one day, Potiphar's wife comes and tries to seduce him into sleeping with her.
 - Joseph said: *I can't—how can I do this horrible thing in the sight of God?* He says: *No!* and he runs away. She grabs his coat. (If I were Joseph, I'd never wear a coat again—ever.)
 - He runs away and then her husband comes home and [she] says: *Do you see this cloak?* (It's the cloak again). *Your Hebrew servant came in here and tried to rape me.*
 - So Potiphar had him thrown in jail.
- And in jail: *So what? Now what, Lord? Now what?*
 - So he begins serving in jail.
 - As he served in jail, he became the head trustee.
 - He still had his dreams and visions.
 - (In fact he had a dream.) He interpreted the dream of the baker and the cupholder. He said: *Okay, baker, you're going to die. Cupholder, you're going to be released.* He said: *Remember me when you get out of this place. Let me out.*
 - Guess what happened? Dream came true. Baker died. [Cupholder] got to go in Potiphar's service again.

- But you know what? The [cupholder] (the butler) never remembered Joseph. You know what Joseph said? *So what!—Now what?*
- For years, he was in that prison.
- Then finally one day the Pharaoh has a dream that nobody can interpret.
 - The butler is standing there and he goes: *Ugh! P-man, my bad. I remember this guy in prison and he has the ability to interpret [dreams]. In fact he told me what was going [to happen] and it did.*
 - He [Pharaoh] said: *Go and get him.*
- So they get him out of jail, they clean him all up and they put him in front of Pharaoh. Pharaoh gives him his dream and he [Joseph] says: *You know what? I can't interpret this dream, Pharaoh, but God can.* Where is his focus? God:
 - The purpose of God
 - The power of God
- You know what the dream was? *You're going to have seven years of plenty. Then you're going to have seven years of absolute famine, like you've never seen before. If I were you, Pharaoh, here's what I'd do: I would take and I would build barns and I would make everybody give an X-amount of grain to the Pharaoh and so when the lean years come, you're going to be able to feed your people.*
 - The Pharaoh said: Great idea. You're the man. You're in [charge]. Here's my signet ring. There is nobody more powerful in all of Egypt [than] you.

Now listen! What if [Joseph], the minute his brothers sold him into slavery went into the: *So why? And: Poor, pitiful me.* (I mean) do you think that this story would have been different? Yes! It wouldn't have been. But he didn't let his circumstance dictate his happiness. He let his happiness and joy dictate his circumstance; which is: *Now what? So what.*

Fast forward a little bit. Two years into the famine things are going great. Not only are the people [able to] eat but the Pharaoh has just about bought up everybody's property because he's got the grain now. Joseph is (like) living high on the hog and here come his brothers who don't know who Joseph is. They start asking for grain and Joseph pulls off this great ruse. (You ought to read about it. It's great reading in the Bible.) Then finally he can take it no more and he reveals to his brothers who he really is and his brothers begin to freak out a little bit. They said: *Surely he's going to kill us.* Chapter 45 now, beginning in verse 5: (Ready?)

⁵ But don't be angry with yourselves... {Can you believe that? Don't worry about it. Don't be angry—why? Don't be angry...} that you did this to me, {you ready?} for God did it. He sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. {What did the apostle Paul say? *I don't care if I'm in jail, God did it, He sent me here so the gospel could be proclaimed.* He sent me here to preserve your lives.} ⁶ These two years of famine will grow to seven, during which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God has sent me here to keep you and your families alive so that you will become a great nation. ⁸ Yes, it was

God who sent me here, not you! And he {being God} has made me a counselor to Pharaoh—manager of his entire household and ruler over all Egypt.

⁹ “Hurry, return to my father and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. {Now} Come down [to me] right away!

Genesis 45:5-9 (NLT, 1996 edition)

Six different times he refers to what God did to him—never what his brothers did.

Are your circumstances defining who you are? Or is God defining what He wants to do in your circumstances?

[Are you whining:] *Why, God?*

[Or saying:] *What now, God?*

Big difference.

I can't believe they did that. So what.

Someone doesn't like me. So what.

I didn't get the raise. So what. In the scheme of things—so what!

Now here's the ultimate joy. (You ready?)

THE ULTIMATE JOY

Philippians 1:21:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21 (KJV) (NKJV)

Now that's a perspective that we need to have. That's how you maintain your joy and your happiness. For me to live, that's just Jesus every day. *What now, Lord? So what! What now, Lord? So what! What now, Lord? So what!* I have Christ and to die is gain.

Now (I've said this before, but let me say it again): What's the worst thing that we think could happen to us? We—what?—we die! When we die, where do we go? (Come on, Church. I've been here for a while; and I taught you this one; right?) Where do we go? [Congregational response: *Heaven.*] Is that a bad place? [Congregational response: *No!*] (I mean:)

- No more sickness
- No more crying
- No more squabbling
- No more bad circumstances
- No more wondering: *Why? Now what?* (All of this stuff)
- We're finally perfect
- We're in His presence
- We are just everything, anything; it is beyond description

So what happens down here. Worst thing that can happen is that we die and go to heaven. How is that *bad*?

Now, if you don't know Christ—very bad. Guess what? You die and go to hell. Not good. No matter what the media tells you and some semi-spiritual guru out there who says: *Your light's just as good as any other light*. But if your light isn't Jesus, it is darkness, my friend. Darkness.

The only way for you to escape hell is to flee into the arms of Jesus Christ. Then you're going to know:

- My job isn't the reason I live.
- My family isn't the reason I live.
- Money isn't the reason I live.
- Accolades [aren't the reason I live.]

For me to live is Christ so when I die, I gain. I can never lose here, and I certainly won't lose there. "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." [*Philippians 1:21 (KJV)*]

So here's what I want to ask you, Church. Over this next year....

Because—you know—quite frankly, I wish I could say that with all confidence, every situation that I'm in, that's what I say. But my wife's here so I've got to tell the truth. No, it's not.

Because, do you know what happens to me sometimes?

- I still get wrapped up in things that don't last that long.
- I still get wrapped up sometimes in what people think about me, and the reasons why things are happening.
- I still ask: *Why?* when I should be asking: *Now what?*
- I still—instead of: *So what*—[I say:] *Oh, that really hurt. I wish they liked me. And: I wish this, and I wish that; rather than saying: What next, God? What is it that You have for me?*

But with the help and the power of God by the end of this year, Church, could we all say (at the end of this year): *You know what? We have discovered: for me to live is Christ, and to die, it's going to be gain. I have happiness—really happy—in my circumstances, whether here or there, it doesn't matter.*

Would you pray with me? As our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed, if you're here this morning and you don't know Christ, you need to remedy that right now. For you to die, it's not going to be gain; it's going to be loss. And you're losing right now. So I want to ask you if you want Christ in your heart, there's a simple little prayer. At our *Cypress Campus* and here at our *Jones Road Campus* your campus pastor is going to come up here and follow up on that and give you some *Next Steps* which are very, very important to do. But here's your first step: It's a simple prayer—as I say it aloud, you say it within your heart:

Dear Jesus, I want to live for You. I want You to save me. I want when I die, I gain and I don't lose. Thank You for dying on a cross for me; giving me new life.

And for the rest of us, Lord, may this be the year—this year—that at the end of these months, and whatever it is that You’re going to take us through as individuals and a church, that we could say at the end of these twelve months: *You know what? We experienced a year where to live was Christ and to die was gain.* Amen.

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The hopes of the godly result in happiness, but the expectations of the wicked come to nothing.

Proverbs 10:28 (New Living Translation)

Legend:

(words in parentheses) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[words in square brackets] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{words in curly brackets within indented quote} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*