

**“REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS”**

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## Philippians 4:1-9

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

## REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS

“Rejoice in the Lord always.”

That’s what Paul said in his letter to the Philippians.

In fact, Paul thought it was so important that he wrote,  
“Let me say that again. Rejoice.”

It’s like when your teacher said,  
“Write this down.”

This will be on the test.

Let me say that again.

Write this down.

This will be on the test!"

Earlier in Paul's letter to the Philippians he wrote something similar.

He said,

"Finally my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard." (Philippians 3:1)

And in the verse that follows our lesson for today, Paul uses this same phrase in regard to himself and his relationship with the Philippians.

He wrote, "I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me..."

Rejoice in the Lord.

Write it down.

It's in the Bible.

It's going to be on the test.

ALWAYS?

But, like so many things in the Bible,  
at first blush this seems unrealistic.

Can we actually do this?

Do we rejoice always?

I don't know about you, but I certainly don't!

When the alarm rings at 5:20 AM,  
and I roll out of bed,  
I'm not rejoicing!

I'm searching for that first cup of coffee.

When I pay bills each month, I'm not rejoicing.  
Like many of you I'm trying to make ends meet.

When I have "issues" with someone important to me,  
Am I rejoicing?  
Not so much.

In frustration, I'm trying to figure out what to do next.

I hear those saccharin sweet TV preachers telling me to be the happy person that I want to be... that joy is a choice, and it just doesn't wash.  
It's unrealistic.

Oh, we can trick ourselves for a little while by singing, "Don't worry. Be happy".  
We can do our little happy dance...for a little while.

But, then the cares of the world intrude on our party,  
and joy has left the building!

## IN THE LORD

So how can Paul say rejoice always?  
Actually, that's not exactly what he said.

You may have noticed that I left something out.  
Paul does not say, "Rejoice always."  
Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

I'm thinking that the phrase "in the Lord" makes all the difference.

And there's something else that we might not pick up at our first reading of this passage.

The word "rejoice" is in the imperative tense.  
In other words its a command.

I can't command a person to experience joy.  
"I command you to be happy!"  
Won't work.

But, apparently Paul could command the Philippians (repeatedly) to rejoice in the Lord.

I think he meant that we are not at the mercy of our circumstances.

There are things that we can do...actions that we can take... to bring the joy of the Lord into our life.

The joy of the Lord is our goal.  
It is something that we pursue.

And in our passage for today,  
we have some specific ideas on how to make that happen.  
We can do something to bring the joy of the Lord into our life.

Last week we talked about how the hope of heaven changes our life today.  
If we have eternity in our hearts, that will change how we look at things,  
and it will change what we do.

This is what Paul is referring to in verse one of our lesson. Paul wrote,  
“Therefore” (because you have this hope of heaven, because you have  
eternity in your hearts) “stand firm in the Lord in this way”.

Paul is going to give the Philippians (and us) some practical instruction for  
living joyfully and faithfully in challenging times. He’s going to help us  
stand firm amid the shaky ground of our difficult days.

## JOY ROBBING PROBLEM 1: CONFLICT

The first joy robbing problem that Paul tackles is personal conflict.

We all have “issues” with some people.  
No matter who you are or where you go, you will struggle with this.

It’s no different in the church.  
It is inevitable that we will have conflict with some people in the church.  
This not only robs us of our joy; it also hinders the work of the church.

In the Philippian church two women had some issues that they needed to work out.

Their names were Euodia (Yo-odia) and Syntyche (Sin-thish). (I had to use my Bible program to get those pronunciations! Not common names today.)

But, unfortunately, the problem the church was experiencing then is all too common today.

I remember doing a sermon on this passage a while back, and I began by saying,

“There are two women in the church who have some serious personal issues.

And their disagreement has hindered the ministry.”

Everyone was looking around the congregation in horror.

Oh no. How did pastor know this?

Surely he’s not going to talk about it in a sermon?

You should have seen the smiles and the look of relief when I said, “Their names are Euodia and Syntyche.”

Although Paul wrote this letter to some specific people in a specific situation, his advice to them is helpful to us today. He encouraged these ladies and the congregation to restore their joy in several ways.

First, he reminded everyone that these two ladies had been very helpful in the work at Philippi. They had struggled beside him in the work of the gospel.

So, in light of that, the congregation at Philippi was encouraged to help these ladies be the people that they were called to be.

They were not to criticize or scold.

They were to help.

And this would be the basis of that help.

Paul said (in effect),

“We might not agree on everything,

but in the church we are reminded that we're on the same team. And our thinking should be guided by the example of Christ. We have the same mind in the Lord."

How can we have the "same mind in the Lord"? Does that mean we have a duel of Scripture quotes and the one with the most quotes wins the argument?

We sometimes do that.

But, I would suggest that the answer is found in the sermon title for today and the phrase that follows those words.

Immediately after encouraging these ladies and the congregation to have the same mind in the Lord Paul writes,

"Rejoice in the Lord always.  
Again I will say rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone.  
The Lord is near."

The answer to personal conflict in the community of faith is worship.

When we rejoice in the Lord, when we consider that the Lord is near, ...that changes our approach to other people.

"Gentleness" toward others is the fruit of worship.  
When we rejoice in the Lord,  
when we celebrate the grace of God,  
it transforms us.

We repent of our sin and this (as the Psalmist put it)  
...restores the joy of God's salvation. (Psalm 51:12)

## JOY ROBBING PROBLEM 2: WORRY

The second joy robbing problem that Paul tackles is the problem of worry. Nothing drains the joy out of life like worry.

Now I know...most of you don't worry...at all...Right? You're a very laid back congregation.

But just in case some of you do  
...lets look at what Paul says about the joy draining practice of worry.

First, Paul simply says,  
"Don't do it.  
Don't worry about anything."

Now, once again, on the face of it, that doesn't seem too helpful.  
Worry for most of us is like breathing.  
It's automatic and natural.

But, according to the Apostle, we can do something about worry.  
Our lesson for today reminds me of the old hymn:  
"Take it to the Lord in prayer".

Paul wrote that instead of succumbing to worry we should,

"...in everything by prayer and supplication  
with thanksgiving let our requests be made known to God."

When I teach on prayer I often use the acrostic, ACTS.

Each letter of the word A...C...T...S stands for an important part of prayer.

"A" stands for adoration.  
A good prayer begins with adoration:  
"Rejoice in the Lord always."

"C" stands for confession.  
How does our lesson for today put it?  
"Let your gentleness be known to everyone."

We are gentle with each other because God has been gentle with us.  
We ask God to forgive our sins as we forgive those who have sinned  
against us.

And in Paul's answer to worry we have the other parts of a good prayer.

“T” stands for thanksgiving.  
And “S” stands for supplication.

Supplication is just an old fashioned way of saying that we are asking for something earnestly and humbly. So supplication in a prayer is when we ask for what we need from God in an earnest and humble manner.

It’s interesting that Paul puts thanksgiving and supplication together. Sometimes we are so overwhelmed by our needs that we forget to count our blessings.

And that can make our prayer life less that it could be.

Try an experiment this week.

For each request you make of God in your prayers, pair that request with a word of thanks for some blessing that you have received.

When our prayers lack thanksgiving,  
when our prayers become a last ditch effort to just get what we want,  
then even our prayers can be a source of anxiety.

But, when we pair our requests with a word of thanks, that brings us according to this passage...

“the peace of God that surpasses all understanding...”

## PEACE THAT SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING

I am so enamored with this blessing that I use it almost every week.

“May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

At the Bible study this past week I remarked,  
“Maybe I use that blessing too much.”

And someone said emphatically,

“Oh no, you don’t.

We need to hear that blessing every week!”

That is why I use that it so much.

I need to hear that blessing each week

...so I reason that maybe there are some others who are like me.

Actually, I think all of us are searching for peace...  
because all around us there is so much conflict.

We want peace in the world  
And we want to be at peace in our own lives.

This passage offers the promise of peace.

We can't control what others do.  
We can't control the circumstances of our life.

But, we can pray for peace.

We can rejoice in the Lord.  
We can be gentle with others and ourselves.

We can ask for God's help  
and at the same time give thanks for our many blessings.

And yet when peace does come into our life,  
we recognize that is indeed a miracle, a gift from God.

It is not something that we have created.  
It is not something that is due to favorable circumstances.

It is the peace of God that "surpasses all understanding".

It is the call of heaven.  
It is eternity being placed in our hearts.

It is above us and beyond us.  
It is not something that we grab hold of.  
It is something that grabs hold of us.

It is a peace based upon trust in the goodness of God and the kingdom that comes.

Paul tells us that this peace guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

It's the same word used to describe a sentry guarding a fort.

The one thing that can separate us from God is doubting God's goodness. This was the original sin of Adam and Eve, and this is our sin.

The peace of God helps us overcome this sin by reassuring us of God's love and care.

The peace of God reminds of God's grace in Christ Jesus. The peace of God instills faith.

### JOY ROBBING PROBLEM 3: NEGATIVE THINKING

In our anxiety we are prone to think that God is not with us and for us.

But, for those who have eyes to see, God is at work in all times and places.

Where is God at work?

Paul puts it this way,

"... whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

To put it another way,

Where there is justice,  
where people work for peace,  
where people speak the truth in love,  
God is at work.

When we marvel at the glory of creation,  
we are reminded...  
God is at work.

Think about these things, and give thanks.  
Rejoice in the Lord always.  
I don't mind repeating myself on this one ...  
again I say rejoice."

Finally, if someone is doing something positive,

if someone is promoting peace, justice, and truth,  
if someone is bringing about reconciliation in difficult and dangerous situations, join them.

Parents sometimes tell their children,  
“Don’t do what I do.  
Do what I say.”

Paul was so bold as to tell the congregation at Philippi,  
“Do what I do.  
Use me as an example.”

He wrote,  
“Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me...”

Now we’ve noted many times that Paul wasn’t a perfect example.

Last week I mentioned again what he said in his letter to the Romans... that the things he should be doing were the things he neglected... and the things that he shouldn’t be doing... you guessed it...he did them.

But, notice that his lack of perfection does not prevent him from being an example.

It is important that we act as mentors to each other... that we encourage each other by example as well as by words.

A godly act done by a very weak, flawed and profane person can still be powerful example of God’s grace.

We don’t have to do everything in the kingdom of God. We just need to do the next thing.

In this way we encourage each other to love and good works.  
In this way we make the joy and peace of God’s kingdom a reality.

Notice that last verse again.

Paul says, “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”

That last phrase is important, "...the God of peace will be with you."

We want the peace of God, but we need to realize that the peace of God comes in a specific way.

Some teach that we receive peace by ridding ourselves of all earthly cares. We try to reach "cloud nine" so to speak. But, this verse suggests just the opposite.

The presence of God and the peace of God come through action.

The presence of God and the peace of God comes through imitating the life of Christ and the example of his disciples.

We will by no means be perfect.  
But, we will be changed.  
We will have a peace that passes all understanding.

And we will know a joy that cannot be destroyed by the troubles of the world.

And so I tell you once more,

"Rejoice in the Lord...always!  
Let me say it one more time  
...I don't mind repeating myself...it's that important ...rejoice!"

Amen.