**Rejoice in the Lord Always**

October 7, 2018

Philippians 4:4-13

Key Verse 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Philippi while he was in prison in Rome. One might think that a man writing from prison would be full of self-pity and excuses—that at least he would complain about the food or the hard bed or the lice or the cruel prison guards. But Paul’s letter is so full of joy and thanksgiving that the letter to the Philippians has been called the “Epistle of joy.” “Joy” is repeated 6 times and “rejoice” 8 times in this short letter. Even though he was in prison, he did not feel that he was a prisoner. What was his secret of joy? It was his faith in Jesus. He said, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” His faith in Jesus enabled him to give thanks to God in any circumstances. When we do not have faith in Jesus, we feel powerless in difficult circumstances. When we feel powerless, we are hopeless and we are not joyful. Stephen Curry is one of the greatest basketball players in history. He had a contract with Nike, and he wanted to put his favorite Bible verse, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength,” on the shoes. But Nike said no. So he changed his sponsor to Under Armour. Since then, Under Armour’s value increased by $14 billion. Whenever he shoots 3-pointer, he taps his chest and points to the sky. Someone asked him why. He said, “It means ‘have a heart for God.’ It keeps the perspective for me why I play the game and where my strength comes from.” On this Thanksgiving Sunday, let’s give thanks to God and rejoice in the Lord.

Look at verse 4. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” How can we rejoice in the midst of all the troubles? Paul said in Philippians 1:3-5, “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” The secret of joy is to remember what God has done in our lives. Thankful and prayerful people are not gloomy or grumpy. What, then did Paul remember with thankfulness about Philippian Christians?

When Paul entered Europe on his 2nd missionary journey, Philippi was the first city he visited (Acts 16:11-40). Since there was no synagogue, on the Sabbath, Paul went down to the riverside looking for a place of prayer. He found several women, and he preached to them. Among these was a business woman named Lydia. The Lord opened her heart and she accepted Jesus. She was the first convert in Europe. She immediately opened her home to Paul, and her home became a house church. But the pioneering work in Philippi did not go smoothly. When Paul cast a demon out of a poor slave girl, he was beaten and put in a jail. However, he did not despair. Paul prayed and sang hymns in prison. Then God sent an earthquake and the prison doors were opened. Through this, the jailor was converted. After Paul left Philippi, the believers there continued to pray for him and send him material support. They shared with him in the pioneering of Europe and the world. Paul was thankful when he remembered what God had done in Philippi. He said in Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this, that he who began to a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” We must remember that God is our shepherd. We should never despair because of our failures. Instead we must pray. We must turn from ourselves and turn to God. He is the one who works in us and in our Bible students. He will lead us to the best direction and finish what he has started. I thank God for all of you because of your partnership in this ministry. All of us have experienced ups and downs in our lives but I am confident that God will guide us in the paths of righteousness for all the days of our lives. Because of this confidence, we can rejoice.

In order to rejoice always, we need to live in harmony with everyone, even unbelievers. Look at verse 5. “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” Here the Greek word for “gentleness” means “reasonableness” or “moderation.” It is a disposition that seeks what is best for everyone and not just for oneself. Simply speaking, it is showing a Christ-like consideration for others. This is crucial for maintaining harmony in community. We should respect others, listen to them and understand them. We should not insist on our own opinions about things that are not essential. This calls for patience in the midst of disagreement, and even when facing opposition. In this way we avoid unnecessary conflicts that rob our joy. How can we do this? By knowing that the Lord is near (5b). The Lord is the Judge of all men. When he comes, everything will be revealed before him. He will reward those who patiently bore with all kinds of mistreatment for his name’s sake. He will also repay those who mistreated his people. We should not have a revengeful spirit toward others. Rather, we should entrust all things to the Lord’s hand and let our gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near!

In order to rejoice always, we need to present our requests to God, overcoming anxiety. Look at verse 6. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” One of the greatest enemies of joy is anxiety. Anxiety comes in various ways: we have anxiety at home due to maintenance or housework worries; we have anxiety outside, especially when we travel. When we have no job we have anxiety; when we have a job we also have anxiety. We have anxiety about homework, family finances, children's education, our ministry direction, the future of our nation, and so on. If we find that we have no anxiety, we become anxious thinking that something is wrong with us, and we manufacture anxiety. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults, and costing more than $42 billion a year to treat. Consider some more statistics about anxiety: 40% of all things that we worry about never come to pass; 30% of all our worries involve past decisions that cannot be changed; 12% focus on criticism from others who spoke because they feel inferior; 10% are related to our health, which gets worse when we worry; only 8% of our worries could be described as “legitimate” causes for concern. Obviously, we cannot solve this problem of anxiety by ourselves. Then how can we solve it?

In verse 6 Paul gives us clear direction: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” “Anxiety” in Greek, means “divided.” Although anxiety appears in many forms, at the root it comes from a divided heart; we are not fully trusting in God. Jesus encouraged us, “So do not worry...But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:31a,33). Apostle Peter urges us, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pe 5:7). In verse 6 Paul tells us the attitude of prayer. It is with thanksgiving, not complaining. When we pray with thanksgiving, God is pleased and answers our prayers. Presenting our requests to God in thankful prayer is the best solution to our anxiety problem. God has given us a great privilege to live an anxiety-free life through prayer. Let's make the most of this privilege in any and every situation. When we do so, God has promised us in verse 7, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” The peace of God transcends all understanding. It is beyond our reason and wisdom. The peace of God has power to crush Satan (Rom 16:20a). Though Satan attacks our hearts through anxiety, when we pray to God, the peace of God guards our hearts and minds. Then we can rejoice and solve all problems with God’s wisdom.

In maintaining our Christian joy, what we think about is very important. Look at verse 8. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.” We can compare our minds to a reservoir which God wants us to fill with beautiful things. Whatever things we allow into our minds will be reflected in our words and our actions and bear fruit. Our thought world is very important. Behavioral science teaches us that thoughts guide behavior, behavior forms our habits, habits develop our character, and character shapes one’s personality. The thoughts we think have tremendous power in our lives. When we wear black glasses, everything looks black. Likewise, when we think about ugly things, we see nothing but ugliness in the world and we become ugly people. Children who are saturated with media can easily fill their minds with violence and immorality. When they do, they cannot hear the beautiful stories of the Bible or appreciate the godly examples of noble men and women around them. But when we think about noble things of God’s world, we can appreciate his beauty and become noble people. Paul urges us to think about noble things as citizens of heaven.

Romans 8:5,6 says, “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” What we think about is very important. It is a matter of life and death. This is why pornography and movies filled with sex and violence are degrading and dehumanizing--to adults as well as to children. So, let’s think about what is true, what is noble, what is right, what is pure, what is lovely and what is admirable, excellent or praiseworthy. In a world ruled by the devil, there is no way to do this unless we invite Jesus to come into our hearts and minds and rule. We don’t need to surrender our thought worlds to the devil. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5b, “...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” The downward plunge starts with surrendering our thought world to the devil--allowing our minds to drift into thinking the idle or useless thoughts dictated by our sinful nature. This is why some Christian leaders who started out with a sincere desire to serve God have fallen into sin.

Look at verse 9. “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” It is so important to follow a Christ-centered mentor because studying the Bible is not enough. We must put it into practice by following the examples of Christ-centered mentors. God spoke through Paul to write two-thirds of the New Testament. His life is certainly a Christ-centered example to follow. There is a promise here in verse 9: “The God of peace will be with you.” When we meditate on God’s word and seek to obey him, the God of peace gives us his peace and his presence.

Look at verse 10. “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.” Paul rejoices in the Lord that their concern for him and for God’s work has been renewed. He values their friendship and wants to see their active participation in gospel work. Look at verses 11-12. “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” In regards to contentment, there are two dangers which can rob our joy. When we are in want, we try to become rich. There seems to be no time to serve God, study the Bible or care for others, because we are driven to make money and eventually we lose joy. On the other hand, when we gain riches, it is natural to become proud, look down on others, lose spiritual desire and joy, and betray God. So Proverbs 30:8-9 says, “...give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.” There is a Jewish proverb which says: “Who is the wisest man in the world? The one who always learns from everyone. Who is the strongest man in the world? The one who overcomes himself. Who is the richest man in the world? The one who is content with what he has.”

Finally, Paul shares with them the secret of his contentment and his source of strength. Look at verse 13. “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” Paul did not try to live a Christian life in his own strength. He drew his strength from Jesus. We also can find strength in Jesus to rejoice “in the Lord always”; we can find strength in Jesus to forgive, and strength to love. We can find strength to overcome times of want, and strength to overcome the temptations of abundance; in Christ Jesus our minds and hearts are guarded by the peace of God. No problem is too big for Jesus and no problem too small. We must learn to turn to Jesus in every circumstance and ask his help and guidance. We must be humble enough to learn to depend on him, not on ourselves. This was Paul’s secret of victory. “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” Of course there were many things Paul could not do. He was not free to go around Rome and preach the gospel. He could not help his own people to believe in Jesus Christ. Yet, he did what he could in his own situation. He used his prison time to write letters, including this Philippians. He preached the gospel to the prison guards. This reminds us of Jesus’ words to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation 3:8b, “I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” Jesus promised them, “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world.”

In this passage we learned Paul’s secret of joy and thanksgiving in all circumstances. It is through Christ. May God fill us with joy and thanksgiving through Jesus Christ so we can say with Paul, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”