

“The Hinderances to Rejoicing in the Lord”

Philippians 4:1-9

4 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved. Be United, Joyful, and in Prayer ² *I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.* ³ *And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow 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 all men. The Lord is at hand.* ⁶ *Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.* ⁸ *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.* ⁹ *The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.*

In the Summer of 1987, I was experiencing a crisis. In November of 1986 my cousin, who was eleven months older than me, and also one of my closest friends, drowned in a hunting accident. 1986 was my first year in Bible College. I had been in school for about 2 months at the time of the accident, and I was actually spending my first weekend home, and I was invited to go to the Lake with my cousin and another friend. I turned them down, and the next morning the police came to the house and told us that Tim had drowned.

I stumbled through the next seven months, as this was the first time I had ever really experienced tragedy. But in July of 1987 I discovered for the first time the meaning of the Joy of the Lord. This happened while reading through the Book of Philippians.

Ever since that Day, the Book of Philippians has been especially dear to me. The theme of the Book could easily be spelled out in one word and that word is "Rejoice". And yet, when you read the Book, there is no earthly reason why the Apostle spends so much time talking about rejoicing.

Philippians is one of the “prison epistles.” That means Paul wrote this Book from a Roman jail. While he was in jail, his enemies and his rivals were attempting to make jail life more difficult for him in the way that they presented the Gospel. But Paul’s response to this is spelled out in Chapter 1 of the Book. Beginning in verse 12 of Chapter 1 listen to the way he talks to his readers, the things which happened to him are most likely his imprisonment:

12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, ¹³ *so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;* ¹⁴ *and most of the*

brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: ¹⁶ The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; ¹⁷ but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

From our understanding, things are not going super great for Paul, but remember, he addresses himself as a bond servant of the Lord in verse 1, and as he sees it, the Lord has appointed him for the defense of the gospel, and so he rejoices that whatever the motive, whatever the pretense, the gospel is being preached. Paul understands something that many of us fail to understand. Our circumstance does not change our duty.

Paul is in prison. His reaction is to rejoice in the Lord. There are evil men preaching for the wrong reasons. By their preaching they can cause Paul grief. Paul's reaction is to rejoice in the Lord. Now, I want us to understand rejoicing in the Lord is different from grinning and bearing it. Rejoicing in the Lord is a firm recognition that where ever you are, and in whatever circumstance you find yourself, you are able to rejoice, because the steps of a righteous man are ordered by God.

In Philippians 2, Paul exhorts his readers as servants of Jesus Christ to be humble and obedient, even as Jesus was. Jesus, who had done nothing wrong, and yet He humbled Himself and became obedient even to the point of death on the cross. This would be difficult if it were not for what follows. In Chapter 2:9-11 we read: ⁹ *Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,* ¹⁰ *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,* ¹¹ *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

You see it is this ultimate victory and this name given to Jesus that is above every other name, of those in heaven and of those on earth, and those under the earth that give us reason and cause to rejoice.

The third chapter of Philippians reminds us of where our Citizenship lies. Citizenship is very often synonymous with the term nationality. But normally possession of citizenship is associated with the right to work and live in a country and to participate in that country's cultural life. It is truly a great blessing and a privilege to be a part of this glorious Kingdom. However, just because we are citizens of Christ's Kingdom, this does not mean all of our enemies are just going to turn tail and run away from us. They will hold on to their turf, sometimes to the very bitter end. They will afflict us, and they will cause us pain. We know they have no power to hold on forever, but many of the enemies of the Kingdom of God are relentless. And they will often test us where it hurts the most. And yet that does not change the idea that it is truly the joy of the Lord that is our strength.

Now, another quick reminder before we go on. One of the mistakes we often make is in misidentifying our enemies. In Ephesians we are plainly told that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against strongholds of the mind. Our warfare is against ideas and imaginations, it is against anything and everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ. It is tempting when reading this to think that this deals primarily with how we deal with other people. And while there is some truth to that, I mean we do have a responsibility to and for one another, to keep each other accountable to the Word of God, the real focus of this passage is that we have to come against these ideas, and principalities that would take our focus off of Christ.

The obvious way we can see this clearly is when things are going well. When things are going well it is easy to “walk in joy.” But excuse me for stating the obvious, when things are going well even an unbeliever can be joyful. But when we receive bad news, when things are going against us, these are ideas and imaginations. Oh sure they may be based in reality, but if we are giving them over to Christ this is the key to walking in the joy of the Lord.

Today’s text begins with that all important word, therefore. As I say often, when you see a therefore, always ask your self what is it therefore? Paul has just reminded us that our citizenship is in heaven and now he calls us beloved and tells us to stand firm in the Lord. He gives a word of instruction to the congregation regarding two women in that Church named Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. There is a conflict between these two women and Paul encourages them to be of the same mind. Whatever the issue they were disagreeing about is not discussed. Very often we have disagreements with others, even other Christians, but the command from Paul here is that they come together and be of the same mind. According to Paul here, we are forbidden from allowing disagreements amongst believers to separate us.

Again we do not know what they were arguing over, but Paul continues his exhortation by calling on those who are closest to him to help these women who labored with him in the gospel. Paul is aware that there are often strong disagreements among good people in the body of Christ. One of the tasks that he gives to his faithful companions and to Clement, who is one of the early leaders in the Philippian Church is that they help these women. He closes out this dialogue by reminding him that even though they are disagreeing, and from the tone of this part of the letter it seems the disagreement was probably pretty severe, they both had their name in the lambs book of life.

I am certain there is a reason that the Apostle tells us in no way what these two are fighting about. To think this is coincidental is to miss the point of the passage. We don’t know the issue, but we do know the cure. Contentions are often there for the purpose of causing others in Christ’s body to grow. We are commanded to help them.

Disagreement and contention in the Body of Christ between believers, yes between believers, can be exasperating. It can cause stress, it can cause discord and if it is

handled in an improper way, and trust me there are a lot of improper ways to handle disagreements. This makes it very interesting what Paul says in the next verse. While dealing with a highly contentious issue, he writes.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Remember, Philippians is one of the Prison Epistles. Paul wrote this from a Roman prison. And in this passage today and in several passages throughout the book he speaks of "joy" or "rejoicing" This occurrence of rejoice is two of 16 occurring in the letter to the Philippians. It is also interesting that He doesn't just say it he tells us he is emphasizing it. AGAIN I WILL SAY. He really wants us to get this point.

Often we hear someone talking about a subject and they may tend to ramble. One of the things people look for to identify when someone is rambling is that they unknowingly repeat themselves. "Hey Paul, you've already covered this thing about rejoicing, why don't you move on to your next point." But Paul is not rambling...He tells them "again I say." He knows that rejoicing is something that many people in the Body of Christ tend to lack. I can almost hear his thoughts as he is writing this. "These people are lacking joy, I think they need to rejoice...Yeah, but I have already told them that. You know what repetition can't hurt. Shoot I have already repeated myself. Well maybe I need to be emphatic. And I will let them know that I really mean it.... Hmm. How to do that? Again I say rejoice." In the Seminary I attended we had a name for this kind of emphasis, we called them pulpit pounders!!! I know reformed churches, tend to be anti-pulpit pounders, but let me remind you, I grew up Pentecostal. We love that stuff.

"Rejoice in the Lord Always, and again I say rejoice."

Paul is in imprisoned – Rejoice

There are people preaching for all the wrong reasons – Rejoice

There is dissension and conflict in the church – rejoice

Rejoice in all things!!!

So what are the biggest killers of joy and rejoicing amongst believers? To answer that I think we must answer the question what is rejoicing? The dictionary tells us that joy is *"the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires."* So by this definition, if you desire something and you attain it, or receive it, you will have joy.

According to this definition, joy is what happens when something good happens to you. Yet, the way joy is used through out this book that definition seems to fall short. For Paul "joy" and rejoicing is primarily a verb, for something that we do, rather than an explanation of how we might feel.

If you have a tax bill due and if it is not paid you will lose your home, and the morning that the tax bill is due you receive money exactly equal to your debt it is easy to see how one might rejoice. But according to Paul, even if that check does not come in you are still under obligation to rejoice. It is often said by people that “love is not a feeling, it is a decision.” I am going to agree with this. When you commit to love your spouse that means you love them, even when you may not be twitterpated at that time.

In Philippians Paul uses the word joy and rejoicing the same way. We are told to rejoice in all things. This means when everything around you seems to be falling apart, you are rejoicing in the Lord. Anyone can rejoice when things are good, but when you are in Paul’s situation, remember, he is in prison, he is being prevented from doing the one thing he really wants to do, which is to preach Christ, and the Church is troubled by his plight and yet his emphasis is that they rejoice and be in joy. Sadly, we all tend to think of joy more in the way the dictionary defines it than in the way it is spoken of in the Bible.

So what are the great thieves of the joy of the Lord? The joy that Paul is talking about manifests itself in what Paul says in the next verse: “Let your gentleness be known to all men...”. This seems to line up with what Paul says in other verses. Let us be reminded, he is writing this to a group of people who are embroiled in a conflict. As I said earlier we don’t know what the conflict is, but it really does not matter what it is, how we deal with it is what matters. Are we rejoicing in the Lord... If we are, then it should help us with our attitude and demeanor. If every time you speak into a situation, you see the interested parties tremble and shake in their boots, you may need to work on this attitude of gentleness. The reason we are given to be gentle is because the Lord is at hand. This means the Lord is near. The Lord is present. I have in the past and I have observed others do the same that when they completely eviscerate someone, they seem almost proud or very well pleased. Would we be so pleased if we realized that while we were destroying our brother or sister with our words that Jesus was right there observing the actions. We need to be reminded of the attitude of Christ when He was reviled. If anyone ever had a right to go completely hostile on people it was Him. He was without sin, the crowds and the leaders had no right to condemn him and yet they did and his response was to pray that the sin would not be held against them. This does not need to be said because it is so obvious, but His attitude is far better than mine would have been. But what does need to be said is we are told to be gentle because He is at hand. I heard someone say the other day that “*Our default setting, because of our sin nature, is to do the wrong thing.*” That means when we go with our gut, we are probably missing it. Because Christ has changed us, we cannot use our default setting as an excuse. We are commanded to be gentle. The excuse, well that’s just not me, does not fly. As a Christian, we no longer live, but Christ in us. If we continue to make excuses, I would contend we don’t believe it.

The second great thief of our joy is anxiety. *Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.*

In my opinion this is one of the more difficult passages in the Bible. But difficulty does not lessen our obligation. I have heard some say of this command that it is an impossibility. Be anxious for nothing. A modern paraphrase might be Do not worry. Without getting too much into specifics we are commanded not to worry. One of the things we often pray during our time of confession is to forgive our sins of commission as well as our sins of omission. There are certain Red letter sins, that we all would admit are huge problems. Adultery, Theft, Murder. Now I am in no way minimizing these sins of commission. But there are certain sins, that we might call acceptable sins, or understandable sins. A sin of commission involves a willful act of doing something that violates God's commands in Scripture. Examples: lying, stealing, adultery...etc. A sin of omission involved not doing what is right or failing to do as instructed. Common examples here are refusing to share Christ with others, failing to read our Bible, or and hear is the big one I want to talk about right now, not placing our trust in Jesus. For each of this omissive sins, there is a failure to do what we ought. It is one thing to say Trust in Jesus, but the opposite of trusting in Jesus is to lean to our own understanding.

“Well when the Bible says not to be anxious, we have to understand what the Bible was talking about.” Well, how come that sort of thing does not fly for the commands against adultery, murder and theft?

I have to admit this issue is not easy for me. “Be anxious for nothing.” How can someone not be anxious when they receive a scary medical diagnosis? Or how can a person not be anxious when there is so much that is just not known? On our own this is impossible. We cannot sit down and simply say to ourselves. “Don't worry, don't worry, don't worry,” and expect it to go away. This is not how it works.

But the Apostle tells us how this is done. *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 minds through Christ Jesus.*

What are our concerns? What are our burdens? What are our worries? And understand they are **our** worries. What are the things that tempt

What are our concerns? what are our burdens? what are **our** worries? what are the things that tempt us to begin to doubt God's deliverance and God's mercy in our lives? What ever they are give them over to Jesus.

You may say to me, but you just don't understand my situation. That may be and probably is true. But I know this, we are told to cast all of our cares upon him, because he cares for us. If we won't do that, I would say we are having a major issue.

There are certain sins we excuse. If someone came up to you and said bro, I just can't help myself I have to steal me a car. Who here would say, Hey I understand your

compulsion, it is perfectly understandable? I should hope no one. But when someone is dealing with anxiety or worry we excuse, because deep down in our innermost parts we struggle with worry as well. When someone is dealing with the issue of anxiety we should not soothe them with the words that it's ok. We should encourage them instead to cast all their care upon Jesus. When someone is dealing with bitterness, give it to the Lord. I am not saying it is easy, but I dare not say it is not a command.

Let me explain why this works. In Luke 12 Jesus says the following: *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!"*

First let me point something out and I have said this before, but when Jesus says "O you of little faith." That is not a term of endearment. It is more akin to the nice lady from the deep South saying "well bless your heart." It may sound sweet, but she is telling you that you are stupid. When the Lord says, "O ye of little faith" this is a not so subtle rebuke. He is asking you a question as well. Where is your trust?

A friend of mine in Sacramento said about this passage that anxiety is an issue of treasure. The things that we are so often concerned with, food, clothing, the cares of this world, people, situations, health...we cannot control any of them, but if they are the source of what we treasure then anxiety will be our constant companion. If you find your fulfillment in the clothes that you wear, if you find your fulfillment in the friends that you have, if you find your fulfillment in anything other than in Jesus Christ then anxiety will be a problem for you. Because nothing apart from Jesus Christ is guaranteed.

I often quote Psalm 20... *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.*

Psalms 146:3-7 ³ *Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.*
⁴ *When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.*

⁵ *Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.*

What ever it is that makes you anxious. That is where your heart is. If your heart is with Jesus, why would you be anxious? Jesus never fails. He will take us exactly where we need to go. And of course that is the rub. As Elder Knopp said this morning "God loves you, and is making YOU more like Christ THROUGH your struggles."

I have heard some people say that if we are struggling this is evidence that we are not in Christ. No. If we struggle, the question we need to ask is “Do I trust Jesus, or do I trust myself?”

Do we safely trust in him? I think the answer to that question often makes us nervous, or anxious. The reason for that is because we often place our trust in so many other things. Well let me just say, if your trust is in Christ, I am not saying things will always be easy, but you will be right where you need to be.

There is a quote on the front of the bulletin this morning by John Calvin. I want to take a minute and read the quote: *Seeing that a Pilot steers the ship in which we sail, who will never allow us to perish even in the midst of shipwrecks, there is no reason why our minds should be overwhelmed with fear and overcome with weariness.*

Christ is in control, and we know He is doing all things for our good. We do not always see it, but if the ship pilot who knows the harbor better than anyone else is guiding us through the rocky shoals, the worst thing that we can do is to take the wheel from His hand.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

This is another one of those passages in the Bible that is an incredibly difficult command. Whatever things are noble, just, pure, lovely, things of good report, if there is any virtue, things that are praiseworthy. These are the things we are supposed to meditate on. Sadly, I think what too often happens is we read this passage and we are so anxious about the cares of this world that we don't even see how this is possible.

It is easy to come up with counterfeits for the commands in this passage, we make up counterfeit nobility, counterfeit justice, counterfeit purity, and counterfeit loveliness and then we wonder why we are so full of anxiety. But remember these things we are to think upon and to meditate upon are found in the Scripture. We will find that when our heart is fixed on Christ these distractions and these counterfeit virtues will begin to fade.

The last verse of the text Paul tells us ⁹*The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.*

It is one thing to say, “Don't Worry.” It is also interesting that we know we are not supposed to worry. But Paul closes this section of Scripture by telling us “these things do.” It is only when we put them into practice that we are told the God of peace will be with you.

Riches will fail you, people will fail you, family and friends will fail you, If your trust is in politics, well, trust me that will fail you too. Look at this last week. If your trust is in your health or in your children that too is a fools errand. Often times we go through trials because Jesus is pointing us to trust in Him. Jesus saves, Jesus heals, and Jesus delivers. But in each case He does it His way. And I know that whatever He does is right. I want you to hear me. Jesus never fails. The sin of anxiety is a heinous sin, because it takes our eyes off of Jesus. My prayer is that the Lord would cause us to see it for the sin it is and give us the wisdom and the vision to place our eyes on Christ and learn to trust Him in ALL things big and ALL things small.