

Rejoice! Don't Worry

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Bible Text: Philippians 4:4-7

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Our Scripture reading today is from Philippians chapter four. We are continuing in our studies in the book of Philippians—getting near the end of that book. Philippians chapter four beginning with the first verse.

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.¹

Today we are going to be focusing on that passage which begins in verse four and ends with verse seven.

I want you to think about this for a moment. How can you tell that a person is a Christian? I would hope that attitude would have something to do with it, that there would be something different about Christians, something that would distinguish them from the other people in the world.

I am thinking about two people that I knew many years ago. And when I comment on them I am not talking about anybody here or even anybody in Savannah. There was a man that I knew. He was a relatively wealthy businessman. He was quit prosperous, had

¹ Philippians 4:1-4, 6-9

a beautiful home and he was active in a church and he was active in various ministries. But whenever I looked at him there seemed to be a sadness on his face. There never seemed to be a sense of joy or happiness. In fact, even when he would say, "I am a Christian," he said it with a frown on his face. It was almost as if the expression seemed to say, "I can't believe what you are saying."

I knew another person, a lady, who was in the exact opposite position in life. She was one who had very, very little of this world's possessions. She lived in a very small dwelling. She had friends, but very few family members and she seemed to be alone most of the time. But whenever she would speak about the things of the Lord, there was this incredible brightness on her face. There was something that said, "I understand what you are talking about," that the smile was there that could light up a room. There was a sense of honesty and a sense of depth to the things that she was saying.

And I have often thought about that. I have often wondered: What is it that we, as Christians, should be demonstrating to the world around us? Is it ok that we say, "I am a Christian," and yet we have this sense of sadness about ourselves all the time? Or should it not be that there is a sense of joy and a sense of happiness in our lives?

Now I may say that this gentleman that I was talking about never seemed to have any major trials in his life. There weren't any health problems. He was, when I knew him, an elderly man. But he was in exceptionally good health. Never did I know he had any financial difficulties. Everything seemed to go well with him. And yet there was a sense of sadness that just seemed to permeate his whole life and being.

This lady, on the other hand, had had many health problems. I mean she had an arm that was about three times the normal size, part of her arm. She had pain in it much of the time. She had difficulties. She was always having what I would consider to be financial problems. She never talked about it, but she never seemed to have enough money for the things that she needed. And yet there was a sense of joy all the time. The circumstances didn't seem to matter. There was happiness and joy in her life.

God says in this passage that it is important that our attitude be such that people can determine who we are. Listen to the words. He says, "Rejoice in the Lord always."² And then he repeats it. He says, "Again I say, rejoice!"³

Now that word "rejoice" in the original language has the idea of being glad, being joyful, being full of joy. And he is saying that as Christians that should be who we are. There should be a sense of joy that surrounds us, that people can look at us and they can say, "Wow, what a happy man, what a happy woman. I can see something about this individual. Even in the midst of the most difficult circumstances there is happiness and there is joy."

² Philippians 4:4

³ Ibid.

But he goes beyond that. He said, “Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.”⁴ Now what does he mean by that? “Let your gentle spirit...”⁵ The word for “gentle spirit”—the word “spirit” is not in the original language—let your gentleness, your kindness be known to everybody. We are to rejoice. We are to be gentle in our relationship, kind in our relationship to other people.

And then he gives the reason.

Now it is very possible that this phrase in the original language was one that was sort of a catch phrase that was used commonly by the people in that day. It was something that was repeated over and over again the way we sometimes say, “God, bless you.” And certainly we mean it, but it is a common expression.

The expression that is used here is, “The Lord is near. The Lord is near.”⁶

What in the world did he mean by that? I believe that he is talking about the fact that Jesus Christ can return any time.

Back then, over 1900 years ago, they were anticipating the return of Jesus Christ. “The Lord is near.”⁷ It could happen in our generation he was saying. Just imagine. Jesus could return again. We have so much to be happy and joyful about. Remember, he is coming again.

And even though 1900 years or more have passed, we can say the same thing. “The Lord is near.”⁸ He is coming again. I don’t know when he is coming. Maybe he is coming in my lifetime. And maybe not. Maybe he will come in the next month or year or maybe it won’t be for a couple more generations. I don’t know that. But I can anticipate the fact that Jesus is coming again. And when he does, he will take his own to be with him through all eternity.

He says, “Rejoice in the Lord always... Let your gentle spirit be known.”⁹ Why? Because “the Lord is near.”¹⁰ He is coming again. Isn’t that exciting? Isn’t that thrilling, Christians, that he has loved us with an everlasting love? And that love is one that cannot be comprehended unless we understand that Jesus is near. He is coming again.

He goes on here to talk about some of the negative things that exist in our lives and how we are to deal with them. He says to us, “Be anxious for nothing.”¹¹ That word “anxious” is a very interesting word. It has the idea of worrying.

⁴ Philippians 4:5

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Philippians 4:4, 5

¹⁰ Philippians 4:5

¹¹ Philippians 4:6

Now, of course, none of us worry, right? None of us worry? Yeah, I see smiles on your faces. We all worry sometimes. But he says we have no reason to worry. That is the whole point. We are not to be anxious about anything. We are not to let worry affect us. You see, this same Word is used many times in the New Testament and it is used in ways that tell us that we should not worry.

Listen to some of the uses of the Word. For instance, in Mathew chapter six it is used several times. And it says this. I am going to read a few verses. “And who of you by being worried,” that is that word, “can add a single hour to his life?”¹² You can’t do it, right? What good is worry? It doesn’t add any time to your life. It doesn’t add anything to you.

And then he says, “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin.”¹³ Why should we worry? Look. If God has created all these beautiful things and he has clothed them, he will clothe us.

In another verse he says, “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’”¹⁴ Don’t worry about these things he says.

And then in another verse, “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”¹⁵

Don’t worry.

In Matthew chapter 10 the word is used again where it says...when it is speaking of what can happen in a society were they whole leadership of society is against the Christian faith. And he says this. “But when they hand you over,”¹⁶ when you are turned in to the authorities for being a Christian he says, “do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.”¹⁷

Do you see the very essence of this? Jesus is saying, “I am going to talk to you about all the possible trials and difficulties of life. And as I do I am going to say for each one don’t worry. Don’t worry about how much clothing you have. Don’t worry about how much food you have. Don’t worry about how long your life is going to be. Don’t worry about whether you are going to be persecuted or not. For God will take care of you. That is what he is saying here.

And so Paul in Philippians says, “Be anxious...or do not worry about anything.”

¹² Matthew 6:27

¹³ Matthew 6:28

¹⁴ Matthew 6:31

¹⁵ Matthew 6:34

¹⁶ Matthew 10:19

¹⁷ Ibid.

It is the normal experience of Christians to have trials and tribulations in their lives. Isn't this what Jesus was talking about in the book of John where he says, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace."¹⁸ Listen to these words. "In the world you have tribulation."¹⁹ Do you agree with that? "In the world you have tribulation."²⁰ Don't we have trials and difficulties? But Jesus says, "But take courage; I have overcome the world."²¹

When a great sermon was preached in the early Church these words were spoken. "Strengthening the salt of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying this, 'Through many tribulations you must enter the kingdom of God.'"²²

Now what is to be our attitude about tribulation? Listen to this. Paul, in another letter in the book of Romans says, "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations."²³

Do you get excited about tribulation? That is what he is saying. He says, "We exult in our tribulations. We get excited about them. These are good things for us because tribulation brings about perseverance," just like the song that was sung for us. If we didn't have any trials then we wouldn't know that he could help us deal with them, right? You see, we receive difficulties in life so that we can be blessed of God as he helps us to overcome the problems, the trials and difficulties of life.

Remember that nothing in this world—including those tribulations—can take us away from Jesus Christ. It says in Romans chapter eight—we know this passage, I am sure—"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"²⁴ You see, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

There is another word that is used in the New Testament. It is not the same as the word that has been translated in the passage that I have been reading as tribulation. It is one that has the idea of a temptation or a test. But the concept, I think, is the same where he says in 1 Corinthians chapter 10. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man."²⁵ In other words, any trial, any difficulty you have, any temptation is something that is common, that everybody experiences. These are normal things.

You say, "Well, I have financial problems."

Well, let's of people have financial problems. It is not a unique thing that is unique to us.

You say, "I have physical problems."

¹⁸ John 16:33

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Acts 14:22

²³ Romans 5:3

²⁴ Romans 8:35

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 10:13

Well, many people have physical problems. Do you see what I am saying? That he says here, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”²⁶

God says, “Rejoice in the Lord.”²⁷ “Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.”²⁸ “Don’t be upset about anything.”²⁹ Don’t let things bother you.

And some of you, at this point are saying, “Well, that sounds like a great theory, pastor. I mean, you know, it sounds good. But how do I do it in my life? How do I stop worrying about things and rejoice all the time?”

Well, I believe that the answer to that question is given to us in the next verse. It says this. “Be anxious for nothing, but...”³⁰ Now there are a couple of different words for “but” in the Greek language. This particular word is one that sets off things very, very strong. I could say in English, “I don’t have a book, but I have a pen.” That doesn’t sound like any big deal though but is used there.

Well, on the other hand I could say, “I have had some pain, but God has blessed me.”

Do you see? There is a strength to that but. Well, that’s the kind of but that is used here. It is a word with great strength. It shows the difference between two things. And he says here, “Be anxious for nothing, but...”³¹ On the other hand, totally different from being anxious and upset, “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”³² In everything, every difficulty, every trial, every experience that we have, every temptation that we don’t seem to be able to deal with, everything that comes into our lives. The normal reaction is prayer and supplication.

Two different words are used here. The word “prayer” is kind of a general word, the idea of what we do when we are praying. It includes praising God. It includes worshipping him. It includes entreating him and asking him for help. It includes all of these things. That is the word “prayer.”

The word “supplication” on the other hand is an extremely strong word, much stronger and has the idea of begging. In other words that we are to worship God. We are to praise him. We are to pray to him. But above all when we have trials we are simply to beg him, to go before him the same way we would go before a father on earth, but knowing that our Father in heaven is capable of answering every request that we have.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Philippians 4:4

²⁸ Philippians 4:5

²⁹ See Philippians 4:6

³⁰ Philippians 4:6

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

I could remember as a little boy—believe it or not at one time I was a little boy. I can remember it. But I remember as a little boy there were times that I would ask my daddy for things and there were times that the things weren't all that important.

“Daddy, may I have a glass of milk.” That wasn't a big deal. “Daddy, may I have this or may I have that?”

But I can remember when something was very, very important to me. And there was a sense in which I was almost begging. I didn't really have to beg my father because, you know, he was...he tried his best to give me the things that I wanted or needed. But I can remember begging my father for a bicycle because I really wanted to have a bicycle. Now, I didn't know that he had already bought me one, but that is another part of the story. But I can remember just begging, “Oh, please I want a bicycle.” You know, a little child asking the question.

These are the...this is the difference between these two words. Prayer is kind of a basic asking, a basic praying, a basic worshipping with God. Supplication is a begging of God. And we have a right to turn to him and beg him for the things that we really need in our lives, to beg him for a rejoicing spirit and a happiness in our hearts, to beg him to meet the very needs of our lives and to provide for us all the things that are necessary that we might live this life well. But there is one thing that needs to be included in the prayer of supplication. For it says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...”³³

When we pray to God for something it is absolutely essential that we thank him for what he has given us and who he is. Sometimes I think we forget to be thankful. Sometimes it is, “God, I need this and, God, I need that.” And there is sometimes we forget, “God, look at all you have already given me. Look at what I have in my life. Look at the blessings that I have received. Look at the house that you have given me. Look at the family you have given me. Look at the friends. Look at the clothing. Look at all the things that are mine.”

And I look about and I say, “Dear Lord, you are to be thanked for all these things.”

And when we have this kind of attitude, an attitude that says, “Yes, I am going to turn to God. I am going to praise him. I am going to ask him for the things I need. I am going to beg him for those things that are needed in my life and I am going to thank him for what he has done, something will happen in our lives. There will be a dynamic and a dramatic change if we have that attitude. He describes it here.

“And the peace of God...”³⁴ The word “peace” is used in two different ways in the Bible. First of all, peace has the idea of the end of war, doesn't it? We talk about, you know, we now have peace because a war is over. It is used that way in the Bible. It talks about our

³³ Philippians 4:6

³⁴ Philippians 4:7

having peace with God which means that our conflict with God is over because he saved us.

But then it is also used in another way and that is the way it is used here. It is that peace, that sense of satisfaction that we have inside of ourselves, the peace and the relaxation that is ours knowing that we have a God who loves us and loves us eternally, who has given to us all things necessary for life and godliness, a God who is abundantly gracious, a God who owns all things. The cattle on a thousand hills are his. And he is the one who provides all our needs from his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

And when we have that as our attitude we have real peace in our hearts. And here is the description. He says, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension...”³⁵ What does he mean by that? Well, it is something that the world will never understand. It is beyond comprehension.

You know, when you meet a Christian family who has been through a disaster, a family that has lived through having their house burned down or has gone through the terrible turmoil of a death in the family or has been through a devastating financial turn that has left them almost penniless and you find the smile on their faces and the joy in their hearts nobody can understand it. The world can't understand that.

How can anybody understand the smile on the face of someone who has had horrible trials in life? God says that when we turn to him in true faith, when we turn to him with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. He says, “The peace of God which can't be understood, which cannot be comprehended will have a dramatic effect in our lives.”

And what will it do? It says it will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The word for “guard” here has the idea of a military garrison guarding. It is as if the soldiers are there to make sure there is no invasion. And God says that that peace will guard your hearts. Why hearts?

Every one of us has gone through difficult times in our lives. And do you know what it is like when you are going through a difficult time and it feels as if your heart is just fluttering? You have had that experience. I think we all have, where there is a sense of fear and your heart is beating faster than it should and there is an unsettling feeling inside you. God says that his peace will guard your hearts. He will give you that peace which cannot be understood, but it also guard your minds for the mind is that with which we understand the realities of life and we understand the realities of the trials and difficulties that we have experienced. But we also understand that the Lord is near and that he provides for us a peace which is beyond anything that the world can give or that the world can ever understand.

³⁵ Philippians 4:7

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”³⁶

What is our attitude, my friends? How do we feel about the life that we live today? Oh, I don't mean are we having difficulties? We all have some difficulties in life. Some of us have the difficulties of health. Some of us have the difficulties of finances. Some of us have relational difficulties in our lives. We all experience these things. That's normal. That is part of life. Those are the trials. Those are the temptations. Those, my friends, are the tribulations of life. That is not the question.

The question is: As Christians how do we live in the midst of those difficulties? Can we say that we rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice? Do we have that attitude within us?

I'll tell you. If we are going to God in prayer and thanking him and worshipping him, there will be a sense of rejoicing. It is kind of difficult, I might say, to be worshipping God and loving him and experiencing the joy that he provides and not to rejoice in our hearts even in the midst of difficulties and trials.

Is our gentle spirit known to all men? There is, first of all, this sense of rejoicing that we can have among ourselves. But when the people of the world look on and see us they see us. What do they think?

“There is something different about him. There is something different about her. There is a spirit of peace and rejoicing that I don't find anywhere else in the world.”

If that, my friends, is what we are like then what a testimony our life is for the glory of God. And what it means as we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with those who are around us.

Two questions today. Do you know Jesus? If you have never come to know him, you cannot experience this joy. You cannot have this victory over tribulation and temptation and trials that we have talked about today. If you don't know him, I challenge you to turn from sin and turn to him in faith believing.

For those of us who are believers let us...each one of us examine our lives and ask the question, “Are we living in a way that demonstrates this rejoicing gentle spirit that is spoken of in this text of Scripture? If not, my friend, let us turn to the Lord in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving that he may give to us that spirit, that the world may see that we are a Christian, that we are Christians.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how we thank you for your love for us. Lord, we want to rejoice in the Lord always. We want our gentleness to be known to all men. Father, we don't want to be

³⁶ Ibid.

anxious or upset about anything. Help us, Father, to turn to you in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving as we let our requests be made known to you. And we know, our Father, that you will provide that peace which is beyond the comprehension of any and it will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Give us the joy that can only come from you we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.