

ARE YOU REJOICING?

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Philippians 3: 17- 4:9.

This is a very positive letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. There are not a lot of concerns that Paul has about the people. One theme that comes across, that he shares with the church, is the 'command' to rejoice (Philippians 3:1; 4:4). Instructing people to rejoice is actually not a heartless piece of advice but it is the logical outcome to the position Christians find themselves in their relationship to God.

So do we feel we have sufficient grounds to rejoice? Are we in fact rejoicing? Or is something else happening within the depth of our soul?

1. Christianity is not stupid.

Christians are real people living in a real world. We grieve, we feel vexed, we are sorrowful, we are troubled. We feel disappointments keenly, especially when the hopes we have for people and their spiritual progress are dashed. Neither do we look at the world and rejoice at what we see with wars unfolding in Europe and a host of ills across the world.

But Christians have foundations and a structure for life. We are like the house that is built on the rock and has foundations against the storms of life. We have convictions that are strengthened as we go through life. We endure difficulties because we have an essential hope, an essential knowledge, an essential relationship with God. This is cheering and inspiring to us. We are forward-facing and full of hope.

2. Reasons to be joyful.

Some people have few reasons to be joyful even though, as sinners often are, they are full of laughter now. Their prospects are not so cheerful, however. They may be out on their Saturdays, drinking and 'enjoying' themselves, but there is a reckoning to come. The Christian, however, has solid reason to be bright, hopeful, and cheerful.

First of all, we have a Saviour. Of course, we will never understand why we need a Saviour unless we understand that we need saving from our sin. In an unpardoned state there awaits for us judgment, hell and an eternal loss on an incalculable scale. In Christ, that deepest need is met, our eternal welfare is secure, and we are established in the

love of God. We are blessed to have our sins forgiven (Psalm 32:1-2). We have a sense of something profound and important now completed and that we are in the hands of a Saviour, mighty to save (Isaiah 45:21). Everything about our Lord Jesus Christ speaks to us of His capability, His nobility, and His commitment to the work. We look to Him and are satisfied in all that He is and all that He does. What we read in John 5:24 is what has happened to us. We are not paralysed by fear, frozen by guilt or consumed in anxiety. We are able to face the future with confidence that the Lord will do all things well.

This takes us to the confidence that we have in the Lord's care for us in the future. Heaven is our home. We are waiting a resurrection (Philippians 3:20-21). We will be forever with the Lord. This sad and broken world cannot support our longings and hopes. It cannot supply us with unending joy and peace. We cannot accomplish all the things we might have longed to achieve on earth. Heaven, however, will exceed our expectations.

Here on earth now, we have the most meaningful relationship a human being can ever have. We have the Lord as our Friend, our support, the source of constructive help. He gives us grace and we are able to rely upon Him. We are able to face challenges that He brings our way. We have communion with Him through prayer. He communicates with us and puts us in the right place at the right time on so many occasions. The result of this relationship is that we grow and change, forsaking sin and the world.

3. Why aren't we more joyful?

Perhaps we are not yet converted? We do not know Him and so it is a little foreign to us the thought that we should rejoice in His salvation. We should seek to know Him.

Or perhaps we are missing the point somewhere? We might have an insufficient Christ who is not able to save us to the uttermost. We might be careless about our relationship with Him and be leaving ourselves weak through lack of prayer. Of course, it is also possible that we are holding on to sin, or building our hopes on another foundation, or working with another philosophy to try to answer life's big questions. Perhaps we are secretly relying on works that we are doing, including some works that are inventions of our own minds.

The better we know and understand the Lord Jesus Christ, the more joy we will have. And the more Christ-like we are, the more joy we will have.