

ESF, Lord's day service message
8/17/2014

Rejoice in the Lord Always

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! [5] Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. [6] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [7] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

There are three major factors in our lives which rob us of joy. They are difficult circumstances, difficult people, and anxiety (worry).

Paul teaches us how we can overcome depression and troubles in our heart caused by those three factors and live a joyful life always.

1. Rejoice in the Lord
2. Let your gentleness be evident to all
3. Present your requests to God

Rejoice in the Lord

When our hearts are troubled by harsh and difficult circumstances we can't rejoice. So, to be able to rejoice always in all circumstances, we need to find a joy which is beyond our circumstances.

When Paul encouraged believers to rejoice always, he knew how to overcome depression caused by circumstances. He was telling them not what he knew as a theory, but what he knew through experience in his real life.

When Paul was encouraging the believers in Philippi to rejoice always, he was in prison. Paul was a very active person. But in prison, he didn't have freedom to move around as he wanted or needed to. Also he didn't know when he would be released from prison.

While Paul was in prison, some people, who had been jealous of Paul, were trying hard to reach out to more people and make their ministry bigger than Paul's ministry. By doing so they were trying to diminish Paul's influence on the church and to increase their own influence.

According to the situation, he had no reason to rejoice. But Paul was not discouraged or depressed by such a condition. Paul confessed that he could still rejoice in spite of such a harsh condition. How in the world could he rejoice in these circumstances? He shared his secret: *But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice* (Philippians 1:18).

He confessed that as long as Christ was preached, he could rejoice in spite of harsh circumstances. Paul always set his mind on Christ. And Christ gave him joy.

The joy from Christ filled his heart regardless of the circumstances he was in. Why? In Christ, there is forgiveness of all sins. In Christ we are set free from the dark power of the Devil. In Christ, we receive freedom from the law and judgment. In Christ, we have the right to be children of God. In Christ we receive the power of the resurrection. In Christ, we receive the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit. In Christ our souls are fed with spiritual food and water that completely satisfy our souls. In Christ, we have eternal life and we have no fear of death.

What we put at the center of our hearts controls our hearts.

To live a joyful life regardless of our circumstances, we must put Christ at the center of our hearts. Except Christ, there is nothing else that can give man permanent joy.

Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone." (pleasure)

Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of money. When dying, he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth." (money)

Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret." (position and fame)

Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent and said, "There are no more worlds to conquer." (human power)

We cannot find constant joy in money, in fame, in power, or in any other source or circumstance in this world.

As Paul did, if we have Christ at the center of our hearts, Christ will always make us joyful regardless of our circumstances. If you can't rejoice because of harsh circumstances in your life, set your mind on Christ, on who Christ is, and on the marvelous things which Christ has done and is doing for you.

Let your gentleness be evident to all

Another secret of Paul's rejoicing always is that he constantly treated and respected others with gentleness. And he encourages us to follow his attitude. "*Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*"

What does Paul mean by the word "gentleness?"

a). Gentleness means forbearance

Another word for gentleness is forbearance. It means to choose not to do something even though you could do it. It is to avoid doing or saying something, in consideration of others, even though you have a right to do it or say it.

There is a good example in the Bible (Genesis chapter 9) about forbearance in this sense. One day Noah became drunk, and lay uncovered inside his tent. And one of his sons, Ham saw his father's nakedness and told it to his two brothers. But the other two sons, Shem and Japheth took a garment, walked in backward, and covered their father's nakedness.

At that time, Ham was cursed because he exposed the fault of his father but God blessed Shem and Japheth for their thoughtful consideration of their father. God loves those who forebear other's faults without exposing them.

b). Gentleness means moderation

Moderation is to treat others with mercy as God treats sinners with mercy. It is the opposite of applying strict requirements of laws to others. To treat others moderately we need to receive and remember God's mercy. In Titus 3:2, Paul asked Titus to remind people not to slander anyone but to be peaceful and considerate and to show humility toward all men. And in verse 5, Paul mentioned the reason to do so; "*he (Christ) saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy.*"

No one can stand before God without His mercy. Psalm 130:2-3 says, "*Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?*" If we stand before God we are all the same sinners regardless of who we are, or what we have done. As others need God's mercy, so you need God's mercy.

When you treat others with the mercy of God, you can be tolerant toward people who offend you, whose attitude you don't agree with. And the offensive or disagreeable attitude of other people can't rob you of joy.

c). Gentleness means self-control

Gentleness means that instead of trying to control or change other people's attitude toward you, you change your attitude toward others.

It is almost impossible for you to change other people's attitude toward you. But it is relatively easy for you to control your attitude towards them.

If you try to control other people's attitude toward you, you will have trouble constantly in your heart. Because usually other people do not and cannot change their attitude as you would want them to change. While you are trying to change other people's attitude, you will become judgmental toward others. And you will get frustrated and bitter constantly.

But it is possible for you to control your attitude. Gentleness in the form of self-control creates great capacity of tolerance for others. Gentleness in self-control enables you to tolerate all kinds of offenses other people do to you. If you constantly put your attitude to others under control, you can tolerate other people's unkind, rude or even harsh attitude gracefully. If you treat people with gentleness in controlling yourself, their attitude which used to cause trouble in your heart won't cause trouble anymore.

To cultivate gentleness in self-control we must imitate Jesus' attitude. In Philippians 2: 3-8 Paul says, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ...*

⁵*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

⁶*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
⁷but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

⁸*And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross! ”*

When we remember how humbly and gently Christ treated all people even the people who are very difficult to deal with, and imitate His attitude, He molds us to be in self-control. When your heart is troubled by other people, always try to imitate Christ’s gentle attitude.

Present your requests to God

When our hearts are troubled by anxieties and worries, we can’t rejoice. Anxieties and worries rob us of our joy. So, to rejoice always, we must find a way to overcome anxieties and worries in our lives. When Paul encouraged believers to rejoice always, he shared the secret of how to overcome anxieties and worries.

First, we must stop anxiety with faith.

There was a study about anxiety. An average person's anxiety is focused on:

- 40% -- things that will never happen
- 30% -- things about the past that can't be changed
- 12% -- things about criticism by others, mostly untrue
- 10% -- about health, which gets worse with stress
- 8% -- about real problems that will be faced

So, Paul encourages: “Do not be anxious about anything.” Another translation expresses, “Stop being anxious!” The meaning of “stop” can be compared with stopping a car. When you see a red light on a cross street, you push down on the break to stop your car. Anxiety and worry is a red light warning sign to a joy destroyer. You have to stop! A breaking system to stop worrying is faith in God!

So, “*do not be anxious about anything*” means to stop your anxiety with faith. George Muller said that the beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety. Anxiety and worry are on the opposite side of faith. If we have faith that God takes care of us, we can use the faith to stop anxiety. What a wonderful breaking system we have!

Have faith in the Lord who surely takes care of your life with His power and grace. Jesus says in Matthews 6:31-32 “*So do not worry—for the pagans run after all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*” Always remember that your faith in the Lord is not a small matter. It is a great breaking system to stop your anxiety.

Secondly, we must pray in thanksgiving.

Let’s look at verses 6 and 7. *...in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

A key to prayer through which we receive joy is thanksgiving. When Paul prayed with thanksgiving in all circumstances, the peace of God guarded Paul’ heart against all anxieties.

In the phrase “the peace of God will guard your heart” the word “guard” is a military term. It signifies the duty of a soldier who is standing at a military post to prevent a hostile invasion. When we pray to God with

thanksgiving, God's peace will stand guard over our spirit and thoughts to prevent a hostile invasion of worry. Thanksgiving in prayer is like oil that makes every rough thing in our lives smooth.

Our prayer of thanksgiving is a pleasant and acceptable sacrifice to God. Thanksgiving in prayer brings a tasty flavor to God, as salt brings a tasty flavor to our food. So, Paul encourages us to "*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*" (Thessalonians 5:18), and "*Devote yourselves to prayer; being watchful and thankful*" (Colossians 4:2).

Scottish minister Alexander Whyte was known for his uplifting prayers in the pulpit. He always found something for which to be grateful. One Sunday morning the weather was so gloomy that one church member thought to himself, "Certainly the preacher won't think of anything for which to thank the Lord on a wretched day like this." Much to his surprise, however, the minister began by praying, "We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this."

A young woman named Anne Steele had encountered one trial and disappointment after another. Being a devout Christian, she continuously sought to praise God; even in sorrow. She was engaged to be married, and had looked forward to her wedding day with eagerness. The big day finally arrived and so did the guests; but the groom was missing. After about an hour of waiting, a messenger brought the tragic news that Anne's fiancé had drowned. The sudden shock was almost too much for her, but after a while she regained her spiritual composure.

Later Anne Steele penned the song that is still found in many hymnbooks:

Father, whate'er of earthly bliss Thy sovereign will denies, Accepted at Thy throne of grace, let this petition rise: Give me a calm, a thankful heart, from every murmur free! The blessings of Thy grace impart, and make me live to Thee.

God fills your heart with peace when you pray to Him with thanksgiving. And God sets you free from all anxieties so that you can rejoice always. Even if you face trials that are impossible for you to overcome today, pray to God with thanksgiving.