

"REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS"

Philippians 4:4

Paul wrote most of his epistles on some particular occasions, in order to rectify some particular error, or to guard against some particular danger, or to reprove some unchristian practice. But he seems to have written Philippians to enforce a particular duty, which all Christians were too apt to neglect; and that is, the duty of rejoicing in the Lord.

In the first verse of the third chapter, he had said, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Remembering what he had said before, he still thought it proper to repeat the same injunction and so he does in our text. In fact, this whole epistle is summed up in the words, "I rejoice, do you rejoice?" This daring, magnificent challenge from Paul was written in a prison with a chain on his wrist.

The Greek word "chairete," which is translated rejoice, expresses the predominant mood of this epistle, a mood wonderfully characteristic of Paul's closing years. This letter portrays Paul as a prisoner, dependent on Christian charity for a living, having no man like-minded to cheer his solitude, uncertain as to how it would be with him, and obliged to contemplate the possibility of being put to death. This sunny epistle comes from the pen of a prisoner who did not know but that tomorrow he might be a martyr.

I suppose all of us like to meet with cheerful people. We find it a tonic to be in the company of happy spirits. There is nothing attractive about a gloomy, pessimistic personality. There is nothing that would lead us to desire the company of one who always looks on the dark side of things, and if there be no dark side, who manages somehow or another to make one. For a religion to be attractive, it must be cheerful. A religion of tears will not appeal to a world that is all too familiar with sorrow and grief.

This text does not exhort us to smile. A smile can be forced. Neither does the text admonish us to appear to be cheerful. It is a deeper word than that. It is a command to rejoice always.

I. How We Cannot Rejoice.

1. We cannot rejoice always in ourselves.

When you have had an occasional and brief success, you may be rather happy, and half proud of yourself. I suppose all of us are foolish enough to take pride in some little accomplishment, but it does not last long. Taking one day with another, there are very few of us who can find occasion for rejoicing in ourselves.

We are forced to admit to ourselves that we have a good many failures to our credit. There are many things in our lives that have not produced satisfaction in us. Frequently, somebody tries to explain his plight by saying, "We all make mistakes." Yes, we all make mistakes; and we do more than that: all of us have done wrong.

Our lives are beset with troubles and our records are marked with multiplied efforts. There are people, of course, who say that they never make mistakes; they never go wrong. Even when they have made the most glaring blunders, they will cover them with a religious sanction of some sort, and try to make out that they have done only that which was right.

2. We cannot rejoice always in other people.

You have had joyous experiences in the society of other people. Many of them are naturally agreeable. But others are just like yourself; they have their moods, and if, when you are in the doldrums, you meet someone else in the same state, you are not very likely to sing. There will not be any proposal for a duet, and neither of you will want to sing a solo. We are such changeable creatures. Human nature is such a volatile, fluctuating thing. There is no depending upon it at all.

It is very difficult to be happy always in association with other people. Do not misunderstand me, for I am not a pessimist. Christian fellowship is a real thing; there are true friends; there are people who know how to be loyal through thick and thin, right to the end of the chapter. And there are people of whom you can say, "I thank God upon every remembrance of you," as Paul did, especially if you don't see them very often. If you do, you are likely to meet them on one of their off days, and that will spoil the whole story.

3. We cannot rejoice always in our circumstances.

"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." However, material things do play a part in the life we live. It is easy to sing with the birds on a fine spring morning, but it is another thing when it is twenty degrees below zero and there is no coal in the bin. There are elements in life of which we must take account.

II. How We Are To Rejoice.

It is divinely planned that we are to rejoice in the Lord. He is always the same. He never changes. His power never changes. His grace is always the same. When we get away from ourselves, other people and our circumstances and live close to the Lord, we can really rejoice in Him.

We are taught to rejoice always. Christians should not only rejoice, but to do so under all circumstances, no matter what sacrifices they have to make, what trials they have to bear, or what losses they have to sustain, for all of these are part of the Divine plan in accordance with which all things work together for good to God's people. It seems to be a very easy duty to rejoice in the Lord sometimes, but not so easy to rejoice in Him always. But Christians are commanded to rejoice in Him always, that is, amidst all the calamities, afflictions, trials, and bereavements which fall upon the world in general and upon themselves in particular. To rejoice in the Lord is to rejoice that He governs all things in the very manner in which He does.

Christians who rejoice in the Lord always perform a duty which is most pleasing to Him. They thus exercise the purest and highest love to God. Their love is not mean and mercenary, but sincere and supreme. Nothing but pure and supreme love to God can dispose Christians to rejoice in Him always. It is a difficult duty to perform but a most acceptable service when performed. Christians who obey the precept in verse four, and rejoice in the Lord always, are the happiest people in the world. To neglect to rejoice in the Lord is unwise and sinful. Those who neglect it injure their own souls as well as the Lord by neglecting to obey the command which He has given them for their own good and His glory.

Rejoice in the Lord of the Book. Read of Him and find gladness of heart in contemplation of His character and His work as they are set forth in the Bible. We have the glorious privilege of enjoying the abiding presence of the living Saviour. He is with us as a Companion. He dwells within us: "Christ in you the hope of glory." If we avail ourselves of the supplies of grace that are in Christ Jesus, even in the dullest and darkest days, when everything seems to be going wrong, we will be able to rejoice in the Lord.

A certain poor mother had one son. She had been left with this boy when he was but an infant, and she had brought him up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. She died, leaving the boy without care, without a guardian and without means. But before she left him she said, "Now remember, I have committed you to God, and He will look after you. No matter what comes, learn to say this, 'It all comes from above.' Nothing can come to you but by divine permission. You are His child; you are trusting Him,

and although mother will not be with you any more, your Heavenly Father will be looking after you, and nothing can come to you that does not come from above." No matter what happened to him, he would always say, "O well, as mother said, it comes from above."

One day he was going along the street when a piece of slate fell off a building and struck him, knocking him down. A crowd gathered. His head was bleeding profusely, and he was in a semi-conscious state. As they leaned over him, they heard him say, "O well, it comes from above." The crowd laughed, notwithstanding the seriousness of it. But passing by there was a man who saw the crowd and he stopped. Seeing the little fellow, he inquired about him, and took charge of the case before the police arrived, and accompanied him to the hospital. He watched him daily until the little boy got well. Meanwhile the boy had found his way into the Christian man's heart. That man had had one son and death had taken him away. When he made inquiries he found that this boy had no encumbrances at all; no one to look after him. So he took him, with his own consent, adopted him and made him his legal heir. He took him from the hospital to a mansion. In due time the boy became a rich man. The tile off the housetop had really come from above, after all.

So if our faith be in Christ, and in His overruling providence and in His abounding grace, we shall be able to say: "All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God." "Rejoice in the Lord alway" for your own sake, for the sake of your work, for the sake of others and for the sake of Christ. Rejoice in Him, in Who He is, in what He is, in what He did and in what He does.