

REJOICING IN THE LORD

Philippians 4:1-4

Paul's appeal to his readers was most affectionate. He declared that they, his beloved brethren, were in his heart and mind, and his separation from them caused him pain and distress. He yearned to see them. Paul referred to them as his joy and crown. We have no way of knowing how much prayer, how many tears, how much personal work, and how much pleading Paul had put into winning them to Christ. Souls are won to Him through prayer and toil, and for every soul that is won there is a reward. After acknowledging that the Philippian Christians were his joy and crown, Paul exhorted them to steadfastness in the Lord. He urged them not to fall back or retreat from a firm stand for God. As he had unwaveringly stood for God in every situation, so they should stand. But they were unable to stand in themselves. The true place and power for steadfastness is "in the Lord." Apart from Him a Christian will be forced to yield ground in almost every onslaught of Satan.

Paul had received the information that a disagreement had arisen between two prominent women in the membership of the church at Philippi. These ladies had helped in the work, but they had also hindered it. The cause of their differences and dissension is unknown. One thing is certain and that is it was not a matter of any importance. The occasion of their difficulty was too small for mentioning. So, Paul besought these two women to be of the same mind.

Paul proposed that a trusted friend act as an arbiter and peacemaker. Evidently the person in mind was a man of rare discretion. His task was delicate, as can easily be imagined. However, it was noble and honorable. A sympathetic friend can do much to reconcile differences and difficulties between Christians. The ministry of reconciliation is much needed, and it is an exalted form of service. "Blessed are the peacemakers."

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. It was written at a time when Christians were in a lively and incessant agitation of mind because persecution and rumors of persecution abounded. All things seemed to be in commotion around them. Nothing was fixed. There were no churches to soothe them. There was no course of worship to sober them. There were no homes to refresh them.

Paul could not rejoice in himself, in his circumstances, in liberty, in wealth, or in fame—but he could now and always rejoice in the fellowship of his Lord and in His service. The word *chairete*, which is translated rejoice, expresses the predominant mood of this epistle, a mood wonderfully characteristic of Paul's closing years. This letter shows Paul to us 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.

We are herein taught the duty of Christian joy. We are taught to rejoice "always." Christians should not only rejoice, but rejoice 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.

I. The Nature Of Rejoicing In The Lord.

It is to make Him the object of our joy.

1. For what He is in Himself.
He is the God of love and life and light and blessing.
2. For what He is to us.
 - (1) Our Creator.
 - (2) Our Preserver.
"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."
 - (3) Our Redeemer.
"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"
 - (4) "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people." Heb. 8:10.

Rejoicing in the Lord is opposed to gloom and dejection. These are natural to some, fostered by the circumstances of many, but forbidden to a Christian.

Rejoicing in the Lord is distinguished from levity and mirth. Mirth is an act, cheerfulness is a habit.

Rejoicing in the Lord is distinguished from indifference and insensibility.

II. The Importance Of Rejoicing In The Lord.

1. Joy is the spring of energy.
A cheerful Christian is usually a very active one.
2. Joy kills the taste for sinful pleasures.
3. Joy enables the believer to confront persecution.
4. Joy enhances the charm and influence of the Christian life.
Professing Christians should be happy and joyous Christians, with the joy that is drawn from the Lord, because they thereby become walking advertisements and living witnesses for Him. A gloomy, melancholy, professing Christian is a poor recommendation of his faith.

III. The Duty Of Rejoicing In The Lord.

1. It is urgently commanded.

2. Christ prayed for it.
"And now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." John 17:13.
3. The Holy Spirit works it in us.
"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance--against such there is no law." Gal. 5:22-23.
4. It is enforced by the examples of the saints.
Paul and Silas sang praises unto God while they were in the dungeon at Philippi. Paul rejoiced in the Lord when writing this text in bonds in Rome, encompassed with many hardships and afflictions, and in daily danger of a violent death. If he, in the midst of disappointments, imprisonment, and suffering, could and did rejoice, so may others.
5. It is necessary to the fulness of our Christian experience.
 - (1) As lessening our love of the world and of sinful pleasures.
 - (2) As making us more active in the Lord's service.
 - (3) As supporting us under the weight of troubles.
6. It is constant--"Always."
Christian joy is not a capricious sentiment, a fitful rapture, but a steady, uniform, and continued emotion. We can rejoice even in the midst of sin, suffering, and sorrow. This is possible because the joy of the Christian is not in himself, in his own experience, or in his own achievements. Pure, lasting joy is found nowhere but "in the Lord."

The joyousness of life is liable to suffer through untold circumstances. When these trying days dawn, the Christian should remember that his peace and joy are not dependent on material affluence. As the peace of the souls is not dependent upon material resources, it is not banished by their curtailment or withdrawal. Much of the New Testament is devoted to the illustration of this truth. Indeed, the whole life of our Lord was an illustration of His teaching, that the highest life and the sublimest joy may be realized apart from happy circumstance. And every thoughtful reader of the gospel will be struck by the fact that as the Master's career passed into deeper darkness His joy seemed to increase.

To "rejoice in the Lord always" is both the privilege and the duty of the Christian. Who is so true a Christian as he who has learned what Kingsley called "the sacred duty of being happy"?

IV. The Encouragements To Rejoice In The Lord.

1. For our own sakes.
If there is no virtue in melancholy, it is foolish to refuse the gladness offered by the Lord. We may not be able to rejoice in our circumstances, successes, friends, or prospects, but we can always rejoice in Jesus Christ--in His worship, presence, fellowship, and service.
2. For the sake of our work.
Joy is invigorating--"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Needless melancholy is sinful when it paralyzes our energies.
3. For the sake of others.
Our joy will be sunshine to others if it be a true, generous, Christian gladness. Our gloom will make others miserable. By manifesting Christian joy we invite others to share in the benefits of the gospel.
4. For the sake of Christ.
It pleases Him and honors Him. Rejoice in Him, in what He is, and what He

did and does.

V. The Reasons For Rejoicing In The Lord Always.

1. It is commanded in the Scripture.
2. It stimulates one to do good deeds.
3. It is contagious--others are gladdened by it.
4. We have a good Lord and we know it.
5. He has given us such golden opportunities.
6. He always knows what is best for us.
7. He is always disposed to do what is best.
8. He is always able to do what is best.
His power is as unlimited as His wisdom and goodness.
9. We have such bright and glorious prospects for the future.