

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Always! In Everything!

Rejoice always,

Last time we looked at rejoicing in Gods mercy. This week we are looking at rejoicing in the Lord always.

Philippians 4v 4-9

Final Exhortations

⁴ 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 every situation, 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.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you

I am not sure how these last six months have been for you, for me they have been some of the toughest I have known, for various different reasons. To the extent I had to contact a counselor, which Ian reminded us are a gift from God. They were at the time, but they bring their own guilt, as a Christian should I not be stronger, surely I don't need help - God is with me.

I think sometimes we all reach our limits and need help. Jesus wept, Jesus needed spent time away to be on his own with his father. I went to Crowhurst Christian Healing center, on retreat, just to get away and to spend some time walking and talking with God, just resting in his love.

If we are to rejoice always we need to find space for Gods refreshing and healing.

In the Message in Mathew 11 we read

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

I am having to re-learn how to live freely and lightly in these days.

I have had to rely on my friends and family more than I have ever before, I have had to make myself vulnerable in seeking help. One of the positives from Covid-19, is that we have had to rely less on ourselves, to be patient and to trust more in God's grace and provision and providence, be it through friends or the NHS.

You may not be able to get away, but God will meet you where you are through his Holy Spirit. Today I rejoice in Gods faithfulness for me during this time and my whole life.

Paul was not in a great place either at the time of writing this letter, he was getting older with all the challenges that brings. He was chained and locked in a cell with nowhere to go, no option of escaping or meeting with his fledgling churches, just hoping that he would receive another meal and some fresh water.

Friends did visit but brought news of opposition against the Church, grumbling, disunity in the church, news he was being maligned by his enemies, he heard reports of sin and strife among his friends. What could he do from prison?

Paul's only option is to write a letter, to pray and share Gods love with those in the prison, trusting in all he had learnt from God in the past. I wonder, if he had not been in jail, would we have this letter?

In the midst of all his troubles Paul says; “Rejoice in the Lord always!” Paul's hope and confidence was in Christ, his Word and its promises, and not in his circumstances.

I think Paul could rejoice always, because he had seen God act graciously in his life. Beyond what he could have dreamt or expected and he knew his final destination.

However, Paul was not just hanging on waiting for Heaven, Jesus preached, The Kingdom of Heaven is near! Heaven is here, right now, which is why Paul could rejoice. He knew God presence and power in his life on a daily basis.

Jesus said in John 14: 27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

It's a promise for today to know God's peace and joy, not something we have to wait for heaven to receive.

Paul starts his letters - 'Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus.'

I use to think the Holy Spirit was here to undertake the spectacular things in life, the miracles we read about in the book of Acts. A better indicator of the Holy Spirit working in our lives, is joy and peace. What issues in life are trying to take joy from our lives? What is keeping us from rejoicing, what issues are keeping us imprisoned and weary?

We need to bring our prayers, petitions, requests and confessions to God and receive Gods mercy. We need this so we can walk in step with the Spirit and rejoice in the Lord. Even in the watching and waiting times.

But can we really rejoice in the difficult situations we face on a daily basis? Are we supposed to be happy and rejoicing all the time, every minute of the day?

I don't think Paul did rejoice in every situation, in (chapter 2 v 28) he acknowledges his anxiety and yet he writes do not be anxious about anything,

I would suggest, after being flogged he would not have had the energy to be joyful! However, our joy is not based on life's circumstances, but in the Lord's grace, love and faithfulness.

Many of Gods people had difficult circumstances to deal with. Take Joseph, loved; sold into slavery; falsely accused; jailed with the possibility of release promised but taken away; released. Becomes second in charge of Egypt but still dealing with family difficulties.

However, Paul sets a bench mark, just like eating our 'five a day fruit and veg' and regular exercise - if we can aim for it, not because we have to, but because we want to, life can change, and we can rejoice in the Lord always. But how do we do it?

Psalm 5 v 11 says:

But let all who take refuge in you be glad, let them ever sing for joy,
spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may
rejoice in you.

God's message to us in the Old Testament and the New Testament, is the
same, God wants joy, love and thankfulness to overflow in our lives.
Sometimes we have to let go of things and situations to be able to receive
God's blessings and direction.

Romans – 15 v13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says; Rejoice in the Lord, (also meaning in the Lord Jesus Christ) a lot in
this letter, his rejoicing was not in his strength and abilities, but in the Lord's
love and faithfulness, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Names conveyed a real meaning in scripture, God often changed people's
names to reflect a new status or purpose in life, Abram was renamed
Abraham, Simon to Peter. God had many names in the bible

Jehovah Elohim – The eternal creator

Jehovah Adonai- The Lord our sovereign

Jehovah Rapha – The Lord our healer

Jesus' name literally means to save and heal. Paul knew firsthand how Jesus
had saved him, healed him and shown him mercy and love, on the road to
Damascus.

So when Paul writes to rejoice in the Lord (in the name of)he comes, both with
an understanding of the Old Testament, and all that God had done for his
people in the past, but also a close personal relationship with Jesus who met
him face to face.

Paul also comes with a reliance on the Holy Spirit working through him, in
providing healing and the power to preach with authority.

So, Paul writes about his relationship in the Lord

1 v14 – Because of my chains most of the brothers in the Lord have been
encouraged

2 v19 – I hope in the Lord

2v24 - I am confident in the Lord

2.29 – So then welcome him in the Lord with great joy

3:1 Rejoice in the Lord

4 v 1 Stand firm in the Lord

4 v 4 rejoice in the Lord always.

So how is your relationship in the Lord?

Would you know who is communicating with you, Father, Son or Holy Spirit?

Do you need more of God's power and Holy Spirit in your life?

I find it easier to rejoice in the Lord when everything is going well, or at the other end of the spectrum when I am at my wits end, when I have come to the end of my resources and have nowhere to turn but to God.

When Job had lost everything he still worshipped and rejoiced in God, for being God, the awesome majestic creator of the universe who had provided so many blessings in his life until that day. God had not changed and was worthy of praise.

At my lowest point over the last few months, all I could do was put 'The Blessing Song', on repeat. The Lord Bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to Shine upon you... and we, as a Church, did our own version. It helped me rejoice in the difficult situation I found myself in, I wasn't always happy, but could rejoice in the Lord for being there for me.

For me, the hardest place to rejoice is somewhere in the middle. We try to sort things in our own strength; we have gotten over the worst and are not trusting in God as we once did; we don't wait patiently for God's grace, provision and unconditional love to lift us from our despair and depression.

In trusting in God's grace and providence, I am not saying do nothing, lie in bed and let God sort everything out! No, God calls us work in partnership with him, we are his children and he wants to bless us and provide the very best for us. Even if we don't understand all of Gods timing, and have to wait for his promises to be fulfilled, there is joy in the journey of looking back.

It came home to me the other day, both my sons have gone off to University this year, we have kitted them out with everything they need, and more, and if they get into trouble they can always come home.

But it struck me as we left, all hugged and sent on life's adventure, that God is exactly the same with us. He wants to provide the absolute best for us, is always waiting to hear news every day in prayer. He wants to bless us and keep us.... He wants to shine his face upon us. And we can rejoice always in that, if we acknowledge God has a part in our lives, we can rejoice that we are ultimately safe in his care, because God has it.

However, my eldest is still self-isolating and awaiting results of his COVID test results. Life is never risk free, trouble free, love is never a risk-free option, but God Has it, He is still sovereign overall.

The world says we don't need God anymore, technology, medicine and PPE can provide for all of our needs.

But it begs the question, if we can do it all ourselves, why would we need to need to rejoice always, and rejoice in what? Our own pride, will we pat ourselves on the back for a job well done.

Where is the joy in that? We will find our rejoicing to be very short lived.

If we trust in the God and allow God to be part of our lives, then it will create in us a spirit of thankfulness, awe and wonder, reverence and joy.

We can rejoice in our Abba Father, who loves his children. We can rejoice in the one who heals; we can rejoice in Jesus who listens and understands us and helps us through the difficult times and the good times.

We can rejoice that we are part of God's family,

We can continually rejoice for the times God, by his grace, has stepped into our lives and made a difference, beyond our understanding.

These are the truths Paul rejoices in, always.

Even though in a prison cell he could rejoice in his relationship with Jesus

In 3 v 8 – "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord"

Paul rejoices and finds joy in working in partnership with the Philippian Church, when we are at work together, as Gods family, life can be more joyful, even with its challenges.

Hebrews 1:3

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word”

The word sustaining is the same word as carrying or bringing, as the crippled man was brought to Jesus to be healed. Jesus is sustaining, holding this world together, day by day, through his powerful word, until he comes again. God’s kingdom is at hand.

We can rejoice always that our loving God holds us and keeps us, until one day when we will be with him. Just as he was with Paul in jail.

We can have joy because Christ went to the Cross freely for each one of us, not thinking of the cost to himself, to set us free, Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him.

We are that joy, we all reflect something of God glory to those around us. We can rejoice when we see Gods love and joy shown to us.

It could be giving someone something as simple as a toilet roll, or a glass of water - but people remember it and rejoice in it, because it shows we care.

The problem is being a Christian does not make us perfect, we make mistakes, hold onto regret, if we are to be joyful always we need to forgive, and to be forgiven each and every day. There is a joy in making up with friends, there is a joy in knowing freedom from guilt and shame, rejoicing in Gods mercy.

Lasting joy comes from knowing that Jesus loves us just as we are.

By God’s grace in our lives we can never fall to far from his love, we can see life as a roller coaster full of ups and downs, when we are up, God loves us, when dip he loves us. We can rejoice in God’s love and grace, in that we can never drop to far down that grace does not catch us. The catcher is always there for us.

Ian reminded us last time that we can rejoice in Gods mercy and forgiveness if we confess our sins

Max Locado writes; Grace goes beyond mercy..

Mercy gave Ruth some food, Grace gave her a husband and a home. Mercy gave the prodigal son a second chance, Grace threw him a party. Mercy prompted the Samaritan to bandage the wounds of a victim. Grace prompted him to leave money as payment for the victim's care. Mercy forgave the thief on the cross. Grace escorted him into paradise.

Mercy Pardons us from guilt, grace woos and weds us.

Do we know the last words of the Bible?

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with Gods people Amen

The more we learn of God's grace the more we will rejoice always in Gods blessings. In Acts chapter 4 it says; As the church grew, it says much grace was upon them. Paul had no right to receive Gods love and grace having persecuted the early church, and watched Christians die, but yet God did it anyway. Grace is Gods unmerited love and favour.

I am not sure if any of you have been to Brussels and seen them making lace. Traditionally only light from a small widow shone through into a room. The lace maker worked in the dark and damp conditions, so the finest thread did not break and the true beauty of the work created was only truly recognized when the pattern was complete and taken into the full light.

One day we will fully come into Gods light and Gods presence in Heaven, we will become complete in God and will be full of Gods joy and rejoice always for eternity. Life can be difficult in our second-choice world, life and the evil one tries to steal our joy, we can try and rejoice in our own achievements and pride for a short while, but is all that this world offers truly satisfy?

Will we rejoice always, in Jesus reckless love, we receive day by day? Will we rejoice in the knowledge that Jesus is sustaining all things, both now and in the future? Will we rejoice in the Lord's grace, his love acknowledging the Lord is our healer, provider and hope and ask the Holy spirit to move in power in our live each and every day?

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