

Messages on Philippians

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

REJOICING IN CHRIST

Philippians is indeed a book of rejoicing. That is one of the miracles of the book. How could Paul rejoice when he was shut out from preaching, shut away from those he loved, confined by a chain and hindered from the comforts of life? There is only one answer: Paul was IN THE LORD.

Twelve times in this short letter Paul speaks of rejoicing, and he speaks of JOY six times, so that the book is a bouquet of sweetness from the heart of one who is being crushed beneath the Roman yoke.

He had learned the blessed secret of living IN THE LORD. He was surrounded by the Lord and therefore was not interested in prison bars.

- The Lord's presence filled him with fragrance and sweetness so that he was not affected by the foul odors of the prison.
- He fed upon the living Bread and drank the living Water; therefore he was not crushed by the sight of prison walls and stone floors.
- He heard the voice of his Master and was not confused by the voices of the prisoners.
- He lived and walked and rejoiced IN THE LORD JESUS.

No matter in what circumstance he found himself, he found something over which to rejoice. He had many things to make him sad but more things to make him glad.

In chapter 1, we see that Paul rejoiced in fellowship. He was joyful in prayer, (1:4). He could rejoice as he prayed because of the sweet knowledge of the fellowship of the saints at Philippi in his service and in his sufferings. The happy heart always prays best and preaches best. Paul was thankful, and this thankful spirit made his heart happy. He encouraged the believers' hearts by telling them about it.

Some Christians make us sad when we think of them and of their actions. Some make it difficult for us to be happy in the Lord. Their looks, actions, failure to cooperate and opposition to progress tend to make the heart heavy and the spirit weary. These Philippian saints, however, had the opposite effect upon Paul. He thought of them with gladness. He prayed for them with joy, and he rejoiced in the memory of their fellowship.

In verse 18 we find one of the secrets of Paul's happy heart. Christ was being preached and he loved Christ. Christ was being exalted and Paul had given his life for the exaltation of Christ. The people were hearing what Christ could do and that filled Paul's heart with ecstasy, for he knew what Christ could do.

Paul was not occupied with the vessel that held the living water but only with the administering of that life-giving stream. He did not care whether the spoon that dished up the honey was made of brass, bone, or gold. He was glad that the people were getting the honey of the Gospel, and so he rejoiced. God grant that each of us may have this great undimmed vision of the power of Christ, the blessed miracle-working power of the Gospel, and may get our eyes off the instrument so that we, too, may rejoice that Christ is preached.

In verse 25, we find that Paul was interested in seeing that the Philippian saints were happy Christians. He was confident that his Lord would permit him to remain for a while so that their joy would be full. Some ministers make us miserable; some make us doubtful; some make us resentful; but Paul's ministry would make them joyful. He would add to their faith and help lift the load from the heart, and bring the song of worship and the oil of gladness instead of the spirit of heaviness. Paul's ministry would make the flowers grow where the weeds of discontent had flourished. His ministry would give them to see the power of the Lord Jesus over their besetting circumstances.

In verse 26 Paul assured the believers at Philippi that his ministry would give them more abundant joy in Jesus Christ. He would not be satisfied with a halfway measure, just a wee little bit of joy, just a smile once in a while. He would have the wells of salvation cleaned out, the flow of sweet living water increased, until a river would flow from their hearts. God grant that all of us who preach may have more joy in our ministry and bring more gladness to those who listen.

He knew that there would be adversaries (verse 28) and suffering (verse 29) and conflict (verse 30), but in the midst of all of this he would so minister to them that they would have abundant joy in their souls and a supply of gladness in their hearts.

Chapter 2 reveals that Paul rejoiced in the unity of God's people. He starts in verse 2 by telling them that if they wish to make him as happy as he wants to be, they should be of one mind and one heart in the things of the Lord. That always brings joy to the servant of God.

It is exceedingly depressing to minister when the congregation is pulling in opposite directions and when the members are at "outs" with one another, faultfinding and critical. How can one lead a flock or a herd when they are fighting and fussing among themselves? It hurt Paul's heart that Euodias and Syntyche were antagonistic. Of course, each one of them had friends and the friends had taken sides, so that there was serious trouble, and Paul's heart was feeling the hurt of it. He needed their fellowship. He wanted their assistance. He desired their co-operation, and he wrote the whole book in order that he might get it. I suppose we might say that God turned that liability, the liability of their quarrel, into an asset for us.

We might not have had this book of Philippians if they had not quarreled. Let us learn from this that none of us is a quarrel unto himself. When we are quarreling with another we are hurting many. A little root of bitterness may defile a large company. We should bring joy to the heart of those who are our guides and shepherds, and not make their path hard and difficult.

In verse 16 Paul indicates that his joy was affected by the growth of this Church of God. If they united in holding forth the Word of Life, then he would rejoice in the coming day of judgment. If he could see this group of believers gathered around the Saviour in the glory after having lived a life of sweet unity and godly service, that would bring joy to his heart as the shepherd of the flock. If they did not run well together, nor work with each other, it would hinder and affect his joy most adversely. He would rejoice if he saw them ministering to saint and sinner with the precious life-giving Word. If, however, they failed to do so and ceased running the race in order to bicker and fuss with one another, his heart would be heavy and his spirit sad.

In verse 17 he speaks of a different kind of joy. In this instance, Paul would have these Philippians with him to the uttermost limit in growing in grace, in learning the Word and in ministering to others.

He does not care if they pour him out as a drink offering; he does not care if they use all his service and ministry to the very limit. He would willingly die for them or live for them if by any sacrifice he might make they would be brought nearer to God and become more useful in the service of the King. What a great heart Paul had! He had no thought of his own comfort but only of their happiness.

In verse 28 he reveals that his joy is still concerned with them. He would send Epaphroditus to them so they could hear from his labors, how he was getting on, and how the Lord had graciously restored Epaphroditus to health again. He would willingly do without the presence and fellowship of Epaphroditus if by sending him to Philippi their hearts would be made glad. What a self-denying preacher, what a self-effacing shepherd was this master mind Paul!

In chapter 3 we see that Paul rejoiced in humility. In verse 1 he calls them to forget their surroundings, persecutions, oppositions and local quarrels and be a singing, happy group IN CHRIST.

In verse 3 he reminds them again that their rejoicing must be in the Lord and not in their circumstances. They are not to depend upon men, for if they do, their hearts will be disappointed and they will have tears instead of joy. If they will take the low place so that their feelings will not be hurt and if they will look not at the things which are seen but at that blessed, lovely Lord who is unseen, then they will keep singing and serving with happy hearts and joyful lips.

Those who are proud and self-sufficient, independent and egotistical, stiff and hard are not usually fruitful in the service of our lovely, lowly Lord. Christ is on the throne highly exalted, but the exaltation followed the humility. If the mind of Christ is in us, the heart of Christ will be in us. Then we will abide in Him in sweet humility and rejoice in Him rather than complain about our circumstances, our associations, or our friends.

In chapter 4 we see that Paul rejoiced in attainment. They were his joy. With what feelings of exultation a mother watches her famous son receive the Congressional Medal of Honor! With what gladness does the teacher see her pupil win the silver cup! So Paul felt, as he looked forward to the day of Christ when these lovely saints whom he had taught, comforted, trained and ministered unto would receive their reward and the approval of their Lord.

Having said all of these lovely things, he now turns to these two Christian girls and asks them to join with him in the deep desire for the happiness of all the saints at Philippi. They knew in themselves that they were not happy. There could not be joy in their hearts while they were quarreling. Paul knew also that possibly their difficulties were of such a character that they could not find a happy solution. Therefore, they should lay aside this particular quarrel, wrap themselves up in Christ, have the mind of Christ and love each other as believers.

He cannot drop this subject of joy; so immediately after pleading with them he says, and no doubt for their benefit, **“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice”** (verse 4).

Paul was wise. He knew that if he could get these two girls to sing about the loveliness of their Lord, they would soon forget their difficulties. He emphasizes the rejoicing by repeating it the second time, and then in order to further help these women he tells them to be full of care about nothing (verse 6).

If their prayers and supplications were filled with thankfulness, then peace would fill their hearts, God’s own peace, and if their minds were occupied with those eight beautiful graces found in verse 8, they would be rejoicing Christians instead of faultfinding Christians.

Again Paul’s joy is expressed because he had attained to the place of contentment, whether he had much or little (verse 11).

This is a wonderful attainment. Not many reach this place. Paul could rejoice and their gifts had added to his joy when he was in this far-off prison. So Paul closes this lovely story with the joy of attainment in contentment. How blessed it would be if all of us could have this same sweet experience and sing in the storm and rejoice in the rain!

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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