

REJOICE IN THE LORD

Phil. 4:1-9

5/11/2011

INTRO: I have just completed a difficult series on forgiveness. I want to preach on two other difficult subjects, at least for me. I felt it was time to do something encouraging and not quite so demanding and maybe encouraging in the Christian life. And then, this past week I was asked by the pastor in Lyberia if I would do a live interview by telephone on 'Eternity, - Heaven and Hell'. So my time was short and I was looking for a message I had done in the past that I wanted to redo to save our sound people from having to change it from cassette to CD format. There was a message I had done before that I wanted to make available in CD format and this is one of them. It is the biblical command to rejoice in the Lord.

The text I had used for that message was Philippians 4:4 which says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice!" Many years ago I heard an older preacher on the subject of rejoicing. I do not remember the message but I have never forgotten the topic and it is one of those things that has been of greatest benefit to me. Life brings with it many and various circumstances and many times life is trying. Every once in a while everything seems to pile up on me. Sometimes I lie awake at night and ponder how to proceed with various difficulties. Sometimes I get depressed. And every once in a while, I am reminded of that subject I heard years ago and then I shut off all of life's troubles and I rejoice in the Lord.

The word to rejoice occurs again and again in the Bible. The first occurrence of the word is in Leviticus Leviticus 23:40. This was during the feast of Tabernacles or booths, and Israel was instructed to rejoice before the Lord for 7 days.

So, our text this mornings says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say 'Rejoice!'"

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REJOICE?

Let us begin with this question: What does it mean to rejoice? The word *joy* occurs 60 times in the NT in the KJV and the word to rejoice occurs 8 times in Philippians, where we find our text. So joy is a key

theme that runs through this little book. The word 'to rejoice' that occurs twice in our text is *chairō*. The root of that word is *char*. There are three key NT words that have that root word. These are *grace*, *thanksgiving* and *joy* or *rejoicing*. The key idea in that root word is that of well being. Joy indicates a sense or state of well being, contentment or satisfaction.

Now, as I see it, there are two reasons why we might rejoice in the Lord. I may rejoice in the Lord because something good is happening or has happened to me. I call that *subjective* joy. Let me give an example of subjective joy (read Luke 15:4-7). There was rejoicing because of something good that happened. Now this kind of joy is dependent on good things happening, so we know for certain that this joy is often absent in our lives. Furthermore, something I do not want to happen may happen to me, and the opposite of joy wants to occur.

But there is another kind of joy which does not depend on good things happening. It is what I call *objective* joy. It is a joy that can be chosen though good things are not happening. The prophet Habbakuk foresaw dark circumstances in life ahead. Here is how he said he was going to handle those circumstances. Turn with me to Habbakuk 3:17-19, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit *be* in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall be* no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God *is* my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' *feet*, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

Now this is a joy that takes place by how we choose to handle life's difficulties. It is a joy that can be experienced in the midst of troubles and trials. Let me give you an example of objective joy (read Luke 6:22-23). Jesus said people like this are blessed. That should make them rejoice but how can one rejoice at a time like this? Yet that is exactly what such persons are commanded to do. Jesus said, "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!". Now is this irrational rejoicing? Does it have to be faked? No,

look at the next part of the verse (read 23b, ...For indeed, great is your reward in heaven...). There is the cause of rejoicing.

Maybe some of you are suffering for your faith in Christ. Have you rejoiced with exceeding great joy? Jesus said that not only would their reward in heaven be great, but they now had the privilege of sharing with the OT prophets in their experience for Jesus said in the last part of verse 23, "...for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets."

Now note that the verb in our text in Philippians 4:4 *to rejoice* is an imperative. It is a command. That means we are talking about objective joy. This rejoicing is a choice. When Jesus and His disciples went out after the Lord's supper it says they did so when they had sung an hymn. No doubt, they sang the hymns that were always sung on the Passover day. And so the day Jesus was crucified He would have sung Psalm 118:24 which says, "This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." Rejoicing is a choice. Habbakuk, we noted earlier, said, "...I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." It is a choice. Therefore Paul could command the Philippians to rejoice.

Maybe you get down because of trials in life. James says in 1:2, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials." Now trials do anything but make us joyful. So what we have here is objective joy. Now notice how it is done. James says *count* it joy. The word to count is *hegeomai*. Vine's says it means *to lead before the mind*. How do we do this? Hebrews 12:2 tells us. It says of Jesus, "...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame..." Jesus could rejoice in the day He was crucified. How so? He knew what God would do in the future.

Subjective joy comes naturally. Objective joy does not come naturally. This joy comes when you reason out the facts and hold the truth up before the mind. So James tells his readers to **count** it all joy when they fell into various trials. James also tells us what they have to hold before their minds so they can obey this command, "...knowing that the testing of your

faith produces patience." So we can rejoice even when things are not pleasant, and we can say, "Lord, you have entrusted me with this and out of it I know You will bring something good if I persevere."

So in our text, we have the command to rejoice. We now want to see what we are to rejoice in.

II. WHAT ARE WE TO REJOICE IN?

Our text is very clear on what we are to rejoice in but it needs to be pointed out. We are to rejoice *in the Lord*. It does not say we are to rejoice in our troubles or in our circumstances. It says we are to rejoice IN THE LORD. And how can we obey the command to rejoice in the Lord?

There are times when life's pressures build up on me. I'm sure that happens to you too. And then, sometimes when I lay there at night and think, it seems to become almost unbearable. And then will come this reminder, "Rejoice in the Lord." That is not a rare occurrence for me. Then I begin to go through my life and count my blessings. And I say, "Thank You Lord for reminding me."

There are two things that can greatly facilitate rejoicing in the Lord. The first is knowing God. I do not simply mean knowing Him in salvation but knowing His Person. Study such things as we covered in the series on God. His omniscience, His omnipotence, His omnipresence etc... No matter what our circumstances, we can rejoice in the Lord in those things. Surely if we are to rejoice in the Lord, we need to learn to know who He is and what we have in the Lord. So, it is very crucial to remain faithfully in the Word of God if we will rejoice in the Lord.

The second thing that can help us to rejoice in the Lord is learning some of those things that are true of us that the Bible tells us about. These are blessings we have received from the Lord that can cause great rejoicing if we but remember them. Here are some examples as given by Neil Anderson.

- 1) I am God's child (Jn. 1:12)
- 2) I am Christ's friend (Jn. 15:15)

- 3) I have been declared righteous by God (Rom. 5:1)
- 4) I am united with Christ in His death, in His burial and in His resurrection (Rom. 6:1-6)
- 5) I have been bought by God with a price and belong to Him (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

He gives a list of 26 such things and there are many more. Now those are all things that have happened already and they are only a sample of what a Christian has in Christ. When you consider the doctrine of salvation alone, a whole list could be added. And all of that says nothing yet about the glories that lie in the future. The things that lie before us alone would make a list that should lift us above every circumstance in life. If we could get but one glimpse of hell, and then one of what lies in store in eternity in heaven, no sane person would cease to rejoice. Our trouble is we lose sight of these things and our minds gravitate to our earthly circumstances. So, in this book of Philippians Paul says in another place, "Whatsoever whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Turn with me to 1 Peter to see how he used such blessings as a way to cause rejoicing (read 1:3-9). There are so many Scriptures that are such a cause for rejoicing. He has begotten us again. I have repented of my sins. I have received Him as my Savior and He has begotten me again. God has begotten ME again. I have been born of God! He has begotten me again to a living hope. It is not a dead hope. It is alive! It is real! I have been begotten again by God to a living hope to an inheritance in heaven! Incredible! I have an inheritance in heaven! And, it is incorruptible! It is undefiled! It will never fade away! It is reserved in heaven for me! There it is in heaven. Here I am on earth with all kinds of trials and difficulties, but there in heaven is a package. It says, "Reserved for Phil Schlamp!" And every day I live and walk faithfully with Him He increases my inheritance!

Now notice further. I am kept by the power of God through faith for salvation. As long as I believe, God places His power in control over me. His power. My faith. Oh, how our faith pleases Him! Oh yes, life is full of trials. I have them. You have them. But right there we need to learn to trust God. And when we trust Him He keeps us by His power for salvation. And the salvation spoken of here is, I think, future salvation, when we are delivered from the trials and difficulties of this life and we enter His presence! Glory! Do we have something to rejoice in or what!

Now note what he says, "In this you greatly rejoice!" In what? Well, all those things we just mentioned. Now notice what he says, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now, for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials." You see, though life is filled with trials, all the things mentioned earlier are still true and we can rejoice in the Lord in all of these.

And then the Apostle Peter points something out to us we need to be reminded of as well. These trials, these difficulties, these matters we so wish were not in our life are there for a purpose. It is that the genuineness of our faith might be tested. It is our faith that pleases God. It is our faith that brings glory to Him. Are you weary today because of the trials and tests of life? Rejoice! That is Peter's message for us. This list of things to rejoice in could be extended without end. We have so very much to rejoice in, in the Lord.

Or, maybe you are struggling because of physical concerns or material concerns. These want to consume your mind and your energies. Or maybe there are things that are coming in the future and all joy that might be is zapped by these concerns. The prophet Habbakuk foresaw dark circumstances in life ahead. Here is how he said he was going to handle those circumstances. He writes in 3:17-19, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall* be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God *is* my

strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

David M. Levi, of Friends of Israel, rewrites this verse like this, "Although the bank account is depleted, the refrigerator is empty, and the heater is broken..." You see, joy that is dependent on good things happening will not survive a time like that. But joy that is objective and centered in the Lord can survive anything.

And so, no wonder Paul commands the believer to rejoice. No matter how bad things in this life are, they do not change these facts of what I am and have in Christ. And no circumstance is so bad that it can change that which lies before me if I walk faithfully with God.

Who knows what the shortest verse in the Bible is? (John 11:35, Jesus wept.) But that is only true in our English Bible. The NT was originally written in Greek and in that language 1 Thessalonians 5:16 is the shortest. It is two words while John 11:35 is three words. Someone has said that Jesus wept that we might rejoice evermore.

III. WHEN ARE WE TO REJOICE?

So we have considered what it means to rejoice; we have considered what we are to rejoice in, and now we will learn from Paul when we are to rejoice. Our text says, "Rejoice in the Lord always..." The word *always* is an adverb modifying the verb and it answers the adverbial question: when.

Now this word *always* can be viewed in at least two senses. It may mean continually or it may mean repeatedly. For example, listen to Hebrews 7:25, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He **always** lives to make intercession for them." The word *always* here means continually. He never stops living to make intercession. He does not live repeatedly; He lives continually.

However, the word *always* is usually used in the sense of repeatedly. Let me give you an example from

Colossians 1:3, "We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you..." Paul does not mean that they pray without ever stopping in between, but they pray for them again and again when they have their time of prayer. This is probably the most common use of the word *always* and I think that is the sense in which it is given here. We are to rejoice in the Lord again and again.

When life is good, we can rejoice in the Lord by learning more about Him. Then, having learned truths about God and life, we can use these to be encouraged and to rejoice when life is not so good. When we learn the Word of God and learn to know God and learn what we have in Him we can rejoice again and again. It may just be that that which we learn when life is good, which will help us through things when life is not so good.

Let us take a look at Paul's circumstances. While he penned these words he was in prison. Not only was he in prison, but from Philippians 1:20 we learn that his life was at stake. I can imagine that Paul was sitting in prison feeling sorry for himself. Here he had poured out his life for the Lord and now he is alone and in prison. And then as he considered his life in the Lord he began to rejoice in the Lord. And so, as he wrote to the Philippians he reminds them of this important aspect of the Christian's life.

Does Paul qualify to instruct us to rejoice in the Lord regardless what our circumstances? In Acts 16 Paul and Silas were cast into the dungeon part of the prison. It is a foul, dark, smelly place. And in the midst of all that, the other prisoners marveled to hear them praying and singing praises to God!

When are we to rejoice? Always. Time and again we need to be reminded. Time and again we need to turn back to the Lord and rejoice in Him. So let us look at why we need a double dose reminder to rejoice.

IV. WHY DO WE NEED A DOUBLE DOSE REMINDER?

Our text says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, **and again I say 'Rejoice!'**" We are told the first time to rejoice in the Lord because it does not come

naturally. Because we are sin bent creatures, and earth bound, rejoicing is not a native commodity with us. Complaining comes naturally for most of us, but not rejoicing. So it is necessary to be commanded to rejoice.

But Paul found it necessary not only to command us to rejoice, but to punctuate the command by repeating it. Why do we need a double dose reminder? Because this particular command we will tend to forget almost right away.

Two of my brothers were working together. The one brother was very hard to wake up in the morning. And when he did wake up, before he could be roused enough to get up he was sleeping again. If he hadn't redeemed himself by being such a good worker, I don't think anybody would have put up with him. Actually, I had more than one brother like that. Well, the other brother had the job of calling him by telephone to wake him up. That was a challenge in itself. And so well did he get to know this sleeper that he would first wake him up by phone. This took many, many rings. Then as soon as the sleeper woke up and answered the phone and hung up the phone again, he would immediately dial his number again and then he would say, "Don't even think it!" He knew that already the sleeper was lying down for just a few more winks of sleep.

That is the idea in our text. Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord..." and immediately behind it says, "Don't even think it". He knew we would need a double dose reminder or we would immediately forget. So our text reads, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say 'Rejoice'".

CONCL: So, let us bring this message to a conclusion. What is Paul talking about when he commands us to rejoice in the Lord? In my view, he is speaking of that objective joy that is held out before the mind on the basis of the facts of who and what I am in Christ. It is a chosen joy that is not dependent on outward circumstances.

When are we to rejoice? When circumstances are good. When circumstances are bad. When things look impossible just as well as when they look good. You will remember the Apostle

Peter's response when he saw Jesus walking on the rough water of the Sea of Galilee. He called out to Jesus and said, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." And Jesus said, "Come." And Peter climbed out of the boat and a miracle took place; he walked on the water. And all of a sudden his circumstances came crowding in and he got his eyes off the Lord and on the water, and his faith turned to fear, and he began to sink. Then he cried out to the Lord to save him. He got his eyes back on the Lord and the Lord saved him. And Jesus said, "Oh you of little faith. Why did you doubt?"

"When upon life's billows we are tempest tossed;
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost...," then, rejoice. It is then time to get our eyes off the water and on the Lord. It is time then to begin to count our blessings, and then we will be surprised what the Lord has done.

Rejoicing! If you are like I am, you need a reminder again and again for our text says, "Rejoice in the Lord always."

"Oh, by the way, don't forget. Rejoice in the Lord."