

“Rejoice”
Philippians 4:4
(Preached at Trinity, June 11, 2017)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to **Verse 4** Paul once again stresses the duty of rejoicing. Joy is a subject Paul spoke of often. He addressed the subject almost 50 times in his epistles. The Book of Philippians is permeated with joy. The word joy or rejoicing occurs in 16 of the 104 verses of this letter. That’s an average of once every seven verses.
2. Now, as Paul begins to draw this letter to a close Paul gives a bullet list of things to do: Rejoice, be gentle, don’t worry, pray with thanksgiving, think on good things, practice good deeds.
3. He begins by charging them once again to rejoice. It is in the form of a command—an imperative. And using the common first century form of repetition to add weight, he states it twice. – future tense: “I will say it again”
4. I’m going to address this subject once again this morning. I’ve stated many times, I’m not afraid of repetition, especially since God often uses repetition in His Word.
 - a. Paul stated this principle of repetition in **Chapter 3 Philippians 3:1 NAU** - "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you."
 - b. This is particularly true with the subject of joy—over 600 times in Scripture. **Psalm 32:11 NAU** - "Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart."
Psalm 68:3-4 NAU - "But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God; Yes, let them rejoice with gladness. ⁴ Sing to God, sing praises to His name"
5. As we examine this topic for the final time in the Book of Philippians (except for **Verse 10**) I’ll just do an exposition of the text and then give some application on how we can fulfill this command.

I. “Rejoice!”

- A. This is a common word in the NT - χαίρω
1. It’s used 74 times. Paul uses it twice in this verse.
The verb, translated “rejoice” here is a form of the noun usually translated joy (χαρά). We could translate it “have joy,” or “be joyful.”
 2. The verb here is in the imperative mood – It’s a command. We need to take the imperatives of Scripture very seriously. “Thus saith the LORD”
 3. This isn’t the only time Paul issued a command to rejoice as he closed out a letter.
1 Thessalonians 5:16 NAU - "Rejoice always"
2 Corinthians 13:11 NAU - "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."
- B. Paul is setting forth joy as a Christian duty
1. He repeats it a second time. The Hebrew languages uses repetition to give an emphatic dimension to a statement. For example holy, holy, holy in Isaiah 6. Or “you will surely die” in Genesis 2.
The Greek language sometimes does the same thing. For example the phrase used by Jesus, “ἀμήν ἀμήν”
Paul is using this literary tool here.
 2. Joy is an absolute dimension of the Christian life.
Matthew Henry: “Joy in God is a duty of great consequence in the Christian life; and Christians need to be again and again called to it. If good men have not a continual feast, it is their own fault.”¹
 3. John Trapp, Bible commentator from the 17th century, said,
“It is no less a sin not to rejoice than not to repent.”²

II. “In the Lord”

- A. The joy Paul is speaking of here is particularly Christian joy
1. Worldly happiness is based upon earthly circumstances. If you take away earthly possessions or fame or prestige or earthly comforts, happiness comes to a crashing end.
 2. There are three things that characterize worldly joy.
 - a. Worldly joy is largely governed by self-interest—what satisfies me.
 - b. Worldly joy is affected by earthly conditions. Affliction has a direct impact upon the experience of joy.
 - c. It is temporary – this marks everything in this life. You look forward to a trip and then it’s over. A young lady plans her wedding and the day comes and goes and it’s over.

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2328.

² Trapp, John, *Commentary on the New Testament*, (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, taken from the second edition of 1865), 611.

3. Christian joy flows forth not from the external, but from the internal. Our joy comes by virtue of knowing, and being united to Christ. Only this will allow us to look beyond this world; beyond our temporal circumstances.
 4. Timothy Keller states: “Rejoicing” is a way of praising God until the heart is sweetened and rested, and until it relaxes its grip on anything else it thinks it needs.³
 5. Gordon Fee writes: “Joy,” unmitigated, untrammelled joy, is—or at least should be—the distinctive mark of the believer in Christ Jesus. The wearing of black and the long face, which so often came to typify some later expressions of Christian piety, are totally foreign to the Pauline version; Paul the theologian of grace is equally the theologian of joy. Christian joy is not the temporal kind, which comes and goes with one’s circumstances; rather, it is predicated altogether on one’s relationship *with the Lord*, and is thus an abiding, deeply spiritual quality of life.”⁴
- B. Joy “in the Lord” is a joy based upon finding our greatest possession in Christ
1. Jesus says this is at the very heart of Christianity
Matthew 13:44 NAU - "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."
 2. The Christian has fallen in love with the King of the universe. He is our greatest treasure and the source of our unfathomable joy.
 3. What is your treasure? What is the chief focus of your love? What has your heart? What brings you joy?
- C. True joy is a joy found in our fellowship with Christ
1. Our life is a pursuit of knowing Christ more. This brings us joy. We find joy in the things that draw us nearer to Christ. We find joy in prayer, joy in His Word, joy in coming to the Lord’s Table, joy in fellowship with the saints, joy in serving Him by serving others and serving the church.
 2. As Christians we have found fullness of joy in the presence of Christ
Psalms 16:11 NAU - "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever."

³ Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary, 1st ed., (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 266.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 404.

III. “Always”

- A. This is where we find the greatest difficulty
1. Paul is commanding us to maintain this joy at all times, in every circumstance.
 2. This does not presume that the Christian doesn't face times of grief. Paul didn't pretend that life was void of difficulty
 - a. He knew personal sorrows
 - Paul was writing this while incarcerated in Rome awaiting a life or death verdict.
 - He knew abandonment. He shared that some were trying to add to his difficulties by preaching with hearts of envy
 - He speaks in **Chapter 3** of the sorrow over those who were enemies of the Cross of Christ.
 - Paul witnessed Epaphroditus so sick that he almost died
 - b. The saints in Philippi were also facing difficulties-- daily persecution from without the church and conflict even within the church of Philippi itself – some were more focused upon their own self-centered agenda than upon their unity with others.
 - c. This life can be filled with difficult circumstances. There are floods and fires; there is the diagnosis of terminal diseases; there are job losses; there are interpersonal conflicts; there are unfulfilled dreams, and there is the ever-present reality of death.
 3. Can there be joy in the midst of such circumstances?
 - a. Paul says it is not only possible—he commands it.
 - b. We must remember what we deserve. Because of our sin, we've forfeited all rights to every comfort in this world. Therefore, every day of happiness, every day of painlessness, every day of sanity, is a day of grace and mercy.
 - c. We must remember our all-present God whom we can go to when anxiety creeps into our heart.
Philippians 4:6-7 NAU - "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
 4. The Christian life has a higher focus. This is why Paul can say in 1 Thes. 5 "in everything give thanks" (**1 Thes. 5:18**).
 5. How can a Christian maintain perpetual joy? How can we “rejoice in the Lord always?” Paul gives us the Christian mindset in the following verses. We'll look at each one in the coming weeks but I'll introduce them this morning.
- B. First of all, by fixing our sights upon our Savior - **Verse 5** – “The Lord is near.”
1. Consider His excellence. His perfect work of redemption.
 2. He has redeemed us from our sin and condemnation – we have been reconciled.

3. He has assured our place in eternity. Consider His upcoming arrival in glory.
Philippians 3:20 NAU - "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;"
4. Keeping our eyes upon Christ raises us above every earthly circumstance
- C. Second, by maintaining a life of prayer – **Verses 6-7**
 1. Paul says in 1 Thes 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing”
 2. Paul says this is the solution to all earthly anxiety and worry. It brings the Christian peace which sustains us in joy.
- D. Third, by focusing on the right things – “whatever is true, honorable, right , pure, lovely, of good repute . . .” – **Verse 8**
 1. Too often we fixate upon the difficulties of life. Paul commands us here to fix our minds on excellent things.
 2. The word for “dwell” is λογίζομαι
 - a. It is the same word used to refer to imputation
Romans 4:3 NAS - "For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."
 - b. In other words, we must set our minds upon good things and then take these things into account with regard to our joy.
- E. Fourth, by surrounding ourselves with the right examples:
Philippians 4:9 NAU - "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."
 1. We all know negative people; those who are always complaining. To them their life is always terrible. They seem to go from one problem to the next.
 2. Others always seem to be upbeat, always filled with the joys of life. Do these people have less difficulties than the first group? No, they’ve just found joy in the gift of life.
 3. One of the great challenges I’ve faced as a pastor is trying to make unhappy people happy. It is a field of folly, an impossible task apart from Christ. Without Christ they will always find something wrong to be unhappy about.
 3. Paul’s life was filled with Christ and so it was filled with joy.
 - a. He said in **Chapter 1:21** - "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
 - b. Then he adds: **Philippians 1:24-25 NAU** - "yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,"
 - c. Even in the face of death Paul continued to rejoice in Christ
Philippians 2:17 NAU - "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all."
 4. What kind of people should you surround yourself with?
Those who are always unhappy, always with a chip on their shoulder, always talking about the faults of others?
Or those who seem to have their eyes on higher things?

Conclusion:

1. As Christians we must find our total contentment, peace, and joy in Christ.
Philippians 4:11 NAU - "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."
Philippians 4:13 NAU - "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."
2. We have found the highest gift, the greatest treasure. We no longer find our chief joy in the things of this world
May we take Paul's words to heart:
Philippians 4:4 NAU - "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"