

04 – Rejoicing in Jesus

Philippians 4

1. What is Christian joy? (4:1-5)

4:1: Paul's affection for the Philippians.

- As we saw in chapter 1: Belonging to Jesus means belonging to one another.
- He cherishes and loves them. Paul calls them his "joy and crown".
- What does that mean?

4:2-3:

- Paul exhorts Euodia and Syntyche to stop fighting and be of one mindset. They are both to set their mind on the Lord (Jesus).
- Remember what Paul said in chapter 2: Have the same love, the same mindset, in humility consider one another higher than oneself. Now Paul has to apply this practically.
- This letter would have been read in the presence of the whole Philippian church.
- ➔ Why do you think Paul calls Euodia and Syntyche out publicly?
- This seems not to have been just a small falling out or disagreement. This must have escalated significantly so that it is having an affect on the whole church.
- If our sin negatively affects the church, then it is no longer just a personal matter, but a matter of the church. They are to help another.

4:4-5:

- ➔ What is Christian joy?
- An emotion and thus something we cannot simply "make" or "produce".
- A gift from God we can only receive.
- ➔ What do we make of this command to rejoice?
- ➔ Why are we called to rejoice if we can't make ourselves be happy?

We rejoice **in the Lord**. That is: We rejoice in Jesus.

Our joy is tied to Jesus. God doesn't say that we should just put on a happy attitude generally. It's not about aimless happiness, doing anything we can to feel the dopamine rush, to feel excitement or to get a fix so we feel less anxious for a view seconds or maybe minutes.

We aren't told: "just be happy". Our joy has an object and a source: Jesus

Lasting joy comes out of knowing Jesus and communion with him.

An important element of that is growing in our knowledge of who Jesus is and what he's done.

➔ Is there any reason to rejoice in Jesus?

Consider Philippians 2: He humbled himself all the way down from heaven's glory to becoming human and dying on a cross – for our sake. He is our redeemer. We can rejoice in Jesus and in what he's done whatever circumstance we're in. If we suffer, we are simply following in Jesus' footsteps. And we have the hope that our suffering will end because of what Jesus has done. In our darkest hour we are not forsaken by God, but he holds us. No person and no circumstance can take away the fact that Jesus has redeemed us. Our joy and hope rests in him and in what he has done.

The statement that "The Lord is near" has to do with our hope and joy. God promised to finish the good work he's begun in us until the day of Christ (1:6). If you remember, we said that this day is the day when Jesus will return and make all things new. It's the day when Jesus will bring perfect justice to the world. For Christians, this is the day we hope and wait for. Jesus will come. He will end all unrighteousness, all suffering, all pain. We don't know when Jesus will come. Nor did Paul know this. He thought it could well happen during his lifetime, but it might just as well be at a later point. We should adopt the same posture: It may well be that Jesus will come again today. He might also take a few thousand years more. But we have a sure hope: Jesus will come. Jesus will come to make all things new, including everyone who belongs to Jesus. Knowing that the Lord is near orients us towards the future. We hope for what is to come. And in that, we can rejoice. He has promised to come – he will not leave his work unfinished.

But there is another sense that is in mind here: God is near to those who suffer because they belong to him. Psalm 34:18-22 says:

¹⁸ The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. ¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. ²⁰ He keeps all his

bones; not one of them is broken. ²¹ Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. ²² The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

God promises to deliver those who take refuge in him. He is near to those who are cast down and afflicted. He preserves, he sustains, he redeems our life, we won't be condemned. When you suffer, Jesus is with you, and he promises to deliver you. The Lord is near. Rejoice in Jesus, because he is near. Rejoice in what Jesus has done and what he's promised to do. This doesn't mean to just force a smile and that's it. Instead, contemplate him, fill your mind with him, preach the gospel to yourself.

➔ What is the difference in rejoicing in Jesus or anything else?

Joy is only as good as its object. God made us to glorify and to enjoy him. There is no greater and more true joy than knowing God in Jesus. Any other joy will fade away. There are sinful fake-joys which only destroy you and bring no real joy. Joy in Jesus satisfies our souls. The joy of Jesus stills our thirst and satisfies our hunger.

2. Rejoicing in Jesus means we experience God's peace (4:6-7)

➔ What is prayer?

It's exercising your faith. It's faith in action. It's turning to God and entrusting him with your burdens and requests. It's enjoying him and thanking him for who he is and what he's said and done. We're told not to be anxious, but instead to pray. Instead of worrying about anything, we are to pray to God about everything. It's not that he doesn't already know – he knows better than you do. But he cares for you. Tell him your requests and pleas. Give thanks for who he is and for what he's done in your life. Tell God what you're worrying about.

Here is where faith, prayer and joy interlock: It's the same basic movement of looking away from yourself and turning to God to receive from him what you cannot produce or bring about yourself. It's trusting him and expecting everything from him rather than yourself or others. Each of these three is something God gives us out of grace. It is undeserved and unearned. Faith in Jesus is a gift from God. Prayer is a privilege we enjoy as God's children. True joy is God's own fullness of joy which he graciously shares with us as he draws us into communion with him.

- ➔ Is there a correlation between joy and peace?
- ➔ Can joy, peace and fear coincide/ occur together?

We get to ask God for help. And we get to ask him to take our fear away and give us his peace instead. God's peace is his medicine against our fear. Joy and peace occur together. Joy in Christ is more than a dopamine rush. The peace of God is not a quick fix. Joy and peace are gifts from God. They are like a seed that needs nutrients and water and with enough time, this tiny seed will grow into a solid oak.

Don't think that this is an automatism as in: "I'm just going to pray this prayer whenever I'm afraid and then God has to give me peace and take away my fear". As we grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus and know him better, our joy and peace will increase. However, this doesn't mean that we won't experience just as much suffering as unbelievers. But we have our God to protect us. He is like a castle in which we can seek shelter from our enemy's attacks. Seek your refuge in him when you are heartbroken, crushed, afflicted, ill, etc. Ask him for help, ask him to give you his peace. He will not give you rocks when you ask for bread. But joy and peace are gifts we wait for. When we pray, we learn to trust God. This takes time. We can be so caught up with how badly we're doing that we cannot set our eyes on him. Then there are mental illnesses, which can cloud our view of Jesus and make us feel abandoned and forgotten. God's joy and peace is something we ask for as we learn to trust him and depend on him.

- ➔ What does God's peace do?

It guards our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. It keeps our feelings, our desires and thoughts in step with Jesus. God's peace is greater than our mind can grasp. His peace surpasses our fearful minds and rests us in God. As we said last week: Our joy in Christ must be guarded from the enemies of the gospel. Our joy is not happiness or excitement about just anything. It is joy and peace in and from Jesus.

Maybe some of you have heard about the prosperity gospel or health- and wealth- gospel, which is a perversion of the gospel. It's the idea that if only you have enough faith, you will be wealthy, you will be healthy and without worry. You have to "access" or "claim" God's blessings by believing strong enough. If you're still poor, sick, unwell in any way that is because you don't trust God enough. I disdain and condemn this "gospel" because it's a twisted perversion of the true gospel. But we sometimes fall for the same idea when it comes to our emotional/ mental

wellbeing. “The reason you’re depressed is that you don’t trust God enough. You just have to be more thankful”.

But God does not promise us that we won’t be sad or depressed when we trust him, just as he doesn’t promise us that we won’t be ill. He promises us peace and joy that surpass the circumstances we’re in. The peace of God anchors us. God preserves us, strengthens us, sustains us. He helps us to keep our eyes on Jesus, who is our joy. Our joy is not in how well or badly it’s going for us, nor is our peace. It’s in being united to Jesus.

2.1. Learn to walk in God’s peaceful way (4:8-9)

What do you think Paul is aiming at here? How is this connected with what he just said about peace and joy?

Living in God’s will leads us to joy and peace. God’s will is how we are meant to live. Consider what is pleasing to God, what is honourable, true, commendable, etc. Consider the will of God and the character we are to embody. And God’s peace will be with us.

It is more peaceful to forgive than to hold a grudge. It is more joyful to give than to receive. It is more peaceful to be humble instead of quarrelsome. It is more joyful to keep God’s commandments than to live in rebellion to God.

➔ How can we be more joyful in Jesus?

Illustration:

When hitting a baseball with a bat, where do you have to fix your eyes in order to get a good hit? You have to look at the ball, not the bat. Similarly, when kicking a football, you need to look where you want the ball to go to in order to hit it well. Or, when doing archery, you must fix your eyes on the target, not on the arrow. If you have your eyes fixed on the goal or target, the right action will usually follow. If you fix your eyes on the action, you’ll miss the target.

It’s similar with joy, I believe. Don’t focus on doing what makes you happy – it will leave you empty. Fix your eyes on Jesus, and joy in him will come. True joy is found not in yourself but in focusing wholly on Jesus.

3. Rejoicing in Jesus means we can be content in him (4:10-23)

In verse 10 Paul mentions how much he rejoiced over the gift that Epaphroditus brought him from the Philippians. This links back to the theme of mutual affection and partnership in the gospel we explored in chapter 1. Seeing the gospel at work in others is a reason for us to rejoice. It's simply beautiful.

But now the main point of these verses is that Paul is content. Whether he has abundance or is hungry, whether he is in a first century roman prison cell or free, he is content.

- ➔ What secret has Paul learned?
- ➔ In what or who is Paul content?

V.13 is the key statement: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

- ➔ What does Paul mean? Can we literally do everything through Jesus' strength?
- ➔ Does it mean that we can do whatever we set our minds to?

It's important we read individual statements in their context. Paul is saying that he has Jesus, and that's enough. If he is weak, Christ strengthens him. If he is empty, Christ fills him, if he is lost, Christ leads him. "Living is Christ, dying is gain".

Whether he has plenty or has nothing, Jesus satisfies him, not his belongings or property. Jesus is enough. You can have all the world but if you don't have Jesus, you are the poorest person on the planet. You can be homeless and starving but if you have Jesus, you are infinitely rich. Jesus is enough for us. He cares for us. He keeps us. We can do all things through him who strengthens us.

Summary:

- Christian joy is being satisfied in Christ.
- Christian joy is having peace in Christ.
- Christian joy is being content in Christ.