

REJOICING IN THE LORD - PART 1

Two reasons to rejoice

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Philippians 1:1-11
Subject:	Why Paul is filled with joy and thanksgiving as he writes to the Philippian believers
Complement:	because he is confident that God will finish the good work that He has started in their lives. we should wait with joyful expectation
Exegetical idea:	Paul is filled with joy and thanksgiving as he writes to the Philippian believers because he is confident that God will finish the good work that He has started in their lives.
Homiletical idea:	God who started the good work in your life will bring it to completion!
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers with the wonderful assurance that God will finish the good work which He has started in their lives.

Introduction

(Enter from the back of the church, singing). “I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart. I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You. I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.” Grace and peace to you, my brother. Grace and peace to you, my sister. Grace and peace to all of you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I did not expect to meet you on the Via Appia. I am Epaphroditus, from Macedonia. I make my home in the city of Philippi. In fact, I am on my journey home right now!

You may wonder why I’m dressed like a Roman if I come from Macedonia. Well, I’ve been in Rome for some time, visiting our spiritual father, the apostle Paul. The Christian brothers and sisters in Philippi sent me here to Rome when they heard that the apostle Paul had been put under house arrest. They knew that he would need provisions and someone to care for him. That’s one reason why I’m dressed like a Roman.

But I am also dressed like a Roman because I’m a citizen of Rome. You see, Philippi is a

Roman colony. Let me tell you a little about my city. Philippi is strategically positioned on the great East-West trade route across Macedonia. The city was founded almost 700 years ago. It was originally called “Small Fountains” because of the springs of water that flow out of the base of the hill on which the city was built. Philippi was fortified by King Philip of Macedonia almost 400 years ago. That’s where our city gets its new name: Philippi. Modest King Philip named the city after himself! For the past 200 years, Philippi has been a Roman colony. It’s more of a military outpost than a trading center. There are two parts to the city. The upper part, on the side of a hill, overlooking the fertile river valley of the Gangites river. On the upper part of the city is where the theater is located, and the Acropolis. In the lower part of the city, you’ll find the Forum and the market place. And right between the upper and lower city runs the Via Egnatia, the East-West trade route. Philippi is only about 2 hours walk from the coast. You just take the Via Egnatia east to Neapolis. Well, as you can see, I’m very proud of my city.

As you can tell from my name, Epaphroditus, I was not born into a family that worshiped the God of heaven, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Some people have told me that my name Epaphroditus means lovely or handsome, but I’ve discovered that it’s actually in honor of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. Epi means on or before. So Epaphroditus means one who is before the goddess of love. Devoted to Aphrodite. I’ve often wished that I had been born into a family that worshiped the God of heaven and been given a name like Timotheos, honored by God, or Theophilus, loved by God. I even thought about giving myself a new name. But even if I don’t have a new name, I do have a new heart! I have become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. That’s what the apostle Paul said in his letter to the believers in Corinth! A new creation. And I am rejoicing in the Lord!

I first heard the good news about Jesus Christ when the apostle Paulos came to my city, Philippi. That was more than 10 years ago now. Perhaps twelve or thirteen years. Time passes so quickly! It was quite an eventful visit. A few days after Paul and his companion Silas arrived in Philippi, they went down to the River Gangites, just south of the city. There they met several women who were gathered for prayer, including a devout woman named Lydia. She is quite an influential person in Philippi. She is a trader in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. Lydia and her family received the message about Jesus Christ with an open heart, and she and her family were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, right there in the river! She even invited Paul and Silas to stay at her home!

As they continued their ministry in Philippi, Paul and Silas met a slave girl. I don't remember her name. She was controlled by an evil spirit, but she made a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This slave girl kept following Paul and Silas wherever they went, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.." That sounded good at first. After all, it was true. But the slave girl just kept shouting over and over again. People couldn't hear what Paul was saying about Jesus. Finally, Paul got very upset. Not with the slave girl, you understand, but with the evil spirit. Paul rebuked the spirit that was controlling her and commanded it to leave in the name of Jesus Christ.

That's when the trouble started. The "owners" of the slave girl had been making a lot of money through her fortune-telling. And they were angry that their business had ended so abruptly. They didn't care about the slave girl. Just about themselves. So they stirred up the crowd and had Paulos and Silas arrested, publically beaten, and thrown in jail.

What happened next was truly amazing. Paul and Silas were thrown in the inner dungeon

and their feet were fastened in the stocks. It was dark. Damp. It smelled like a sewer! All around them were the sounds of cursing prisoners. But instead of complaining, Paul and Silas started singing. Because even though it was dark in the prison, the light of Jesus was in their hearts. Hallelujah! That's a Hebrew word, you know. I don't know much Hebrew, but I like that word! Hallelujah! It means "Praise the Lord!"

And that's exactly what Paul and Silas were doing. They were praising the Lord. And then at midnight, the God of heaven worked a mighty miracle. He shook the foundations of the prison with a great earthquake. But it was no ordinary earthquake. The prison didn't collapse and kill them all. No. This was a special kind of earthquake from the God of heaven. All of the doors of the prison popped open and all of the prisoners' chains fell off.

That earthquake not only shook up the prison. It shook up the jailer too. He was so distressed, he was about to fall on his sword. After all, if you lose a prison, you pay with your own life. So the jailer was about to fall on his sword when he heard a voice cry out in the darkness. "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!" Well, the jailer knew that something supernatural was going on. There were no lights. How could anyone see what he was about to do. The jailer called for a light, ran in to the inner dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. He cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

And the apostle Paul told the jailer about Jesus Christ. He told the jailer that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. He told the jailer that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead you will be saved. He told the jailer that, just as the prophet Isaiah had predicted, Jesus was wounded for our iniquities. He was bruised for our transgressions. The punishment that brought

us peace was upon Him. And with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray and the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.

Well, the jailer and his family received the good news about Jesus with gladness, and they also became followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptized that very night.

The apostle Paul came to visit us again several years later and encouraged us in the faith. We could tell that he loved us as his own children, and we loved him too. So when our church family in Philippi heard that Paul had been taken to Rome to stand trial, and that he was under house arrest, they decided to send me to Rome to bring provisions and offer support.

But instead of being a help, I became a problem. You see, I became very sick. I'm not as young as I used to be. And I think that the long journey was too much for me. I became very sick. In fact, I almost died. When my church family back in Philippi heard about my sickness, they were very concerned about me. This may sound strange to some people, especially unbelievers. But I actually feel closer to my church family than to my own family. My church family loves me and cares for me as my fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters!

And, as I said, they were very concerned about me. So Paul decided that I should return to my home city of Philippi. He wanted to send a letter to the church family, and he knew that they would be happy to see me and to know that I have recovered from my sickness. So he asked me to deliver his letter to them. And here it is. Now one very important rule that a courier must follow is this: you must never read the contents of the document that you are carrying. But the apostle Paul gave me permission to read this letter, because he said that it is also addressed to me! So I get to read it before everyone else!

The letter starts out like this. Why don't you follow along. I understand that someone

made a copy for you too. Here's what the letter says. "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi.... I had to smile when I read that! Because I'm one of those "saints." That's right. Me! Epaphroditos of Philippi. In Christ Jesus, I'm considered a saint, a holy one.

Those words remind me of the letter that the apostle Paul recently sent to the believers in Ephesus. In that letter, he wrote:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ." Eph 1:3

In that same letter to the believers in Ephesus, the apostle Paul wrote these words: Eph 2:8-10. **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do."**

Isn't that good news? Praise the name of the Lord! We are saved by God's grace. We are saints in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's read on. Phil 1:2-6. **"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.**

Isn't it wonderful that the apostle Paul includes us all? We are all saints in Christ Jesus, whether we're young or whether we're old. Whether we're rich or whether we're poor. Whether we're free or whether we're a slave. Whether we live in the upper part of town or whether we live in the lower part of town. We are all saints in Christ Jesus, and the apostle Paul gives thanks

to God for all of us! And that includes you too. Isn't that good news? God has saved us by His grace. He has done a good work in each of our lives. He has called us saints in Christ Jesus. Isn't that a reason to rejoice?

But if you are at all like me, you have times when you don't feel or act like a "saint." If you're like me, you have times when you fall flat on your face. Sometimes you might even feel like giving up, like it's no use trying. Well, there some good news for you in this letter from the apostle Paul. It's good news for me too. It's a second reason to rejoice. Let's read the words of the apostle Paul together. Let's start reading at the end of line two. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this.....here it is!.....that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Hallelujah! There's that Hebrew word again! Praise the Lord! There's a second reason to rejoice. Not only has God done a good work in our lives, saving us by His grace and calling us saints, holy ones, in Christ Jesus.....but He also will finish the good work which He has started, in your life and in my life! Isn't that good news? Isn't that something to rejoice about? God will finish the good work that He has started in your life. No wonder we can rejoice in the Lord always! That's good news. God saved us by His grace. He calls us to be saints by His grace. And God who started the good work in your life will bring it to completion.

Let's read on, because the apostle Paul tells us what will happen as God continues the good work which He has started.. Let's start reading at the end of line four. "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or

defending the confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God."

That's what God wants to do in each of our lives! He wants to finish the good work which He has started. Isn't that a reason to rejoice! Praise the name of the Lord! I think I'm going to change my name to Makarios, which means happy!

Well, I have to continue on my journey south on the Via Appia. I have a boat to board at the port of Puteoli. And from there to Neapolis, and on to Philippi. But I want to appeal to your hearts before I leave. The apostle Paul taught me, as one of the elders at Philippi, that I should never speak about the Lord Jesus Christ without inviting people to be saved by trusting Jesus as their Savior. So I want to appeal to you today. Is there anyone here today who wants to trust Jesus as Savior and Lord? Let me see your hand. Is there anyone who would like to be baptized in the name of Jesus? Let me see your hand. Is there anyone here who is happy that God will finish the good work that He has started in your life? Let me see your hands.

I'm convicted that the message of this letter will change the lives of the brothers and sisters back in Philippi. And I believe that God can use this message to change your life too. Will you make a promise today to read it? Read it carefully. Read it to your children. It only takes about the amount of time to walk from the city gate in Philippi to the banks of the river Gangites. If you make a commitment to read this letter prayerfully and carefully, I know that you will be blessed. And you will find many reasons to rejoice in the Lord.

We've discovered two reasons to rejoice this morning. God has done a good work in your life. And He will bring that work to completion. Praise His holy name.

We'll, I must be on my way. I'm making my way south on the Via Appia to the port of Puteoli. From there, I'll board a ship bound for Neapolis. And then to Philippi! Don't forget to read the letter. May the grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

(Exit through the back door of the church, singing). "I will praise you, O Lord, with my whole heart. I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You. I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High!"