

REJOICING IN THE LORD - PART 6

Always rejoicing

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	Philippians 4:2-23
Subject:	How it is possible to always rejoice
Complement:	by not remaining focused on our problems but by remaining focused on Jesus.
Exegetical idea:	It is possible to always rejoice when we do not remain focused on our problems but remain focused on Jesus.
Homiletical idea:	When you remain focused on Jesus, you can rejoice in the Lord always!
Purpose:	To challenge my hearers to shift their focus away from their problems and rather to remain focused on Jesus so that they can rejoice in the Lord always.

Introduction

Have you noticed when you read the Scriptures that certain passages jump out at you and catch your attention. Perhaps you're reading Isaiah, and you come across Is 40:30-31 where it says, "....." Or Jeremiah, and you are impressed by Jer 29:11-13: "....."

Memorable portions of Scripture.

In the closing paragraph of the Philippian scroll, we find numerous memorable portions of Scripture, passages that have become favorites of Christians down through the ages. Here are a few examples: Phil 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Phil 4:19 "And my God shall supply all of your need according to His riches in Christ Jesus." Phil 4:6-7 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

And then there is the passage that we are going to focus on this morning. It's near the beginning of the fourth paragraph of your Philippian scroll. What we call Phil 4:4. Let's read to

together: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” How many of you have heard that text before? Most of us. We even sing that passage as a Scripture song. You know the song, don’t you? Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.

But I have a question for you. Do you really believe that this text is true? Is it really possible to rejoice in the Lord always? I’m not talking about when we get to heaven, or in the earth made new. I’m talking about right now, right here, in the midst of this sin-sick, sin-marred world. Is it really possible to rejoice in the Lord always? Or is the apostle Paul naively idealistic, living in an imaginary fantasy land? What do you think?

Well, I want to suggest to you this morning that it *not* possible to always rejoice if your focus is in the wrong place. If you go through life focusing on your problems, you will not be able to always rejoice. In fact, if you are preoccupied with your challenges and difficulties, or on yourself and who you are, what you have done, or haven’t done, you will lose your joy altogether. If your focus is in the wrong place, it is impossible to always rejoice.

This fourth paragraph of the Philippian scroll begins with a brief comment about two individuals in the church at Philippi. Do you see their names there at the beginning of paragraph four? Euodia and Syntyche. Euodia and Syntyche aren’t getting along. They’ve had a disagreement. I wondered why Paul mentioned these ladies by name. So I decided to look up the meaning of their names. Euodia means “Fragrance” but she was acting more like “Stinker.” And Syntyche means “fortunate” but she was acting more like obstinate. And Paul appeals to them: “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other.” Don’t keep focusing on the problem. If you do, you’ll lose your joy.

That’s what happened to the disciples after Jesus was crucified. Instead of remaining

focused on Jesus and repeating the precious promises that He had given to them, the disciples became preoccupied with their problem: Jesus, their Master, had been arrested, beaten, crucified, and was now dead. Luke records the experience of two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Do you know the focus of their conversation? They weren't focusing on Jesus. Luke tells us that these two disciples were focusing on "all the things that had happened.." Luke 24:13-14 And from their perspective, every THING that had happened was bad. It was a problem. And as they focused on that problem, it loomed larger and larger in their minds. So much so that when Jesus came along side of them, what happened? Let's read Luke 24:15-17 "....." I think you would agree with me that these disciples have lost their joy. Why? Because they are remaining focused on the problem. They are preoccupied with the difficulty. And as a result, they have lost their joy. Their faces are downcast.

But it doesn't have to be a problem as massive as the cruel execution of your best friend, your Master, your Messiah, to cause you to lose your joy. Any problem in life, however small it may seem at first, if you remain focused on it, if you become preoccupied with it, any problem can steal away your joy.

Some time ago, when we were still living in California, Bodil and I were enjoying a wonderful morning together. We got up early and enjoyed a refreshing walk. We prayed together and thanked God for His love and the gift of a beautiful day. When we got back to our house, we saw a small flock of Western Tanangers in the large oak trees alongsies our house. I don't know if you have ever seen a male Western Tananger. It's beautiful, with a bright yellow body and a reddish head. And there was a flock of them. A beautiful sight! I was beginning to feel like I was living in the garden of Eden. A few hours later, I went out to my mailbox and

found a letter. Here's what it said: "Postal customer: This is to inform you of recent mailbox vandalism in your area. We found the enclosed mail, (which was addressed to me and was opened) discarded in Forest Falls on Tuesday, April 16. (That's a mountain community about 16 miles from my house). Thieves may be after social security checks, income tax refunds, public assistance checks, food stamps, credit cards, or other valuables." All of a sudden, I had a problem. This didn't seem much like the garden of Eden anymore! And if I had decided to remain focused on that problem, and become preoccupied with it, I could have lost all my joy.

That's what happened to a friend of mine. There was a problem with vandalism along the Russian river where his family owned a summer home. Gangs would come in and tear up the houses, smash the contents, and steal anything of value. My friend became so focused on this problem, so preoccupied with it, that he lost all of his joy. He became filled with anger and hatred. He actually set an ambush one night, laying with a loaded gun, intending to kill anyone who tried to vandalize his home. Fortunately, no one showed up that night, or he might have ended up in the State Penitentiary! That story certainly illustrates what can happen to people when they become preoccupied with the problem. They lose their joy, and anger and hatred can take over. It is impossible to always rejoice if you are focusing on your problems, your challenges, your difficulties.

So how can we maintain our joy? How can we rejoice always? The answer is simple. It's right there in our text. What does Paul tell us in Philippians 4:4? "Rejoice in the Lord always." Instead of focusing on your problem, remain focused on Jesus.

When we have a reason to be anxious, worried, stressed out, notice what Paul tells us to do. Read with me from the fourth paragraph of your scroll. We all could have reason to become

Phil 4, beginning with verse 6. Let's read it together. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [7] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Your peace is found in Christ Jesus. Your joy is found in the Lord. That's why Paul doesn't just say, "Rejoice always," but "Rejoice in the Lord always." You can rejoice always when you stay focused on Him.

Those same disciples, who had lost all their joy, discovered that when they shifted their focus from their problems to Jesus, they experienced a change of heart. Notice Luke's testimony at the end of his gospel record. Luke 24:50-53. "....." Those same disciples were filled with great joy. They were rejoicing in the Lord. And later, Luke records in Acts 5:41, even after the apostles were beaten before that Sanhedrin and ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus, they "left the Sanhedrin, **rejoicing** because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." They weren't rejoicing because of the situation. It was a bad situation. They had just been beaten. But they weren't remaining focused on the situation. They weren't preoccupied with the problem. They were focused on Jesus. They were rejoicing in the Lord. They were filled with joy because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

My brothers and sisters, God doesn't promise us a trouble-free journey to the kingdom of heaven. But He does offer to fill our hearts with joy as we stay focused on Him. When we stay focused on Jesus, we can rejoice in the Lord always.

If your loved one dies, you will be able to rejoice in the Lord for the precious times that

you were able to spend together. Those times were a gift from your loving heavenly Father. If that person was a Christian, you will be able to rejoice in the Lord that death for the Christian is not the end. You will see that person again in the resurrection of the righteous when our Lord returns in glory. And even if that person was not a Christian, you can still rejoice in the Lord that He is gracious and merciful God.

If you are facing a sickness, and you remain focused on Jesus, you will be able to rejoice in the Lord for the times of good health that you have enjoyed. You will be able to rejoice in the Lord even in the midst of your sickness, that He is with you to comfort and to bless. You will be able to rejoice in the Lord that a better day is coming.

It works! Dear friends. It works! I've asked Roger (first service) and Arnold & Rhode Espinosa (2nd and 3rd service) to share their testimony this morning. Listen to how they have learned to rejoice in the Lord always.

Interview with Roger Anderson (1st service), Arnold and Rhode Espinosa (2nd and 3rd service)

In every situation, no matter what the problem, in sickness or in health, in times of comfort or times of adversity, stay focused on Jesus. Then you can sing your personal testimony: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and I again I say rejoice." So why don't we sing it now and remind ourselves that when you stay focused on Jesus, you can rejoice in the Lord always.

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