

Advent 2018: Rejoice, Part 3

Sunday, December 16, 2018

Philippians 4:4-14

We are celebrating the season of ADVENT, in which we ponder the Incarnation - God became man and dwelt among us in the person Jesus Christ. Our theme for this year is REJOICE: How the arrival (Advent) of Jesus enables in us tangible, life changing JOY.

So far in this series we have hit upon 4 Big Ideas that I want to remind us of, and then we are going to spend time building upon them:

- First, God's highest purpose in the universe is His glory. And our joy in Him is directly connected to this purpose. At the beginning of time we were made in God's image and then told to multiply and fill the earth with that Image. The purpose of an Image is to point those who see it to its subject. So we were intended to live lives connected to this purpose: Our highest joy found in relationship with God and with our task to make him known in all the earth. But sin ripped us from this purpose and caused us to seek satisfaction away from our creator. As [Blaise Pascal](#) (17th Century Theologian) said, *There was once in man a true happiness of which there now remains in him only [an] empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.* So our message for Advent is that Jesus arrived to free us from sinful affections and to fill the abyss in our hearts by reconnecting us to our original purpose. He came that we would have joy through treasuring God. That is what Jesus said it would be like to be saved. In [Matthew 13:44](#): "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field. Jesus said this man JOYFULLY released all of his treasure; because he had found a much GREATER treasure. The Gospel is joy saturated. IF our testimony about Christ, does not include our own JOY in Him, there is reason for us to ponder the state of our heart. Jesus restores us to our original purpose - to treasure God and make seen. And when our joy is in God, then He is glorified in us - His highest purpose.

- Secondly, God is committed to our everlasting Joy in Him. God grants us gifts and contexts in this life that propel us to Joy. **1 Timothy 6:17** instructs us not place our hope in the riches of earth. But rather place our hope in God, **who richly supplies us all things for our enjoyment**. So there are created blessings that God grants us for our joy. For each of us, there are certain contexts: places, people, circumstances that cause our hearts to leap. And those contexts are gifts from God, because He knows you and He knows how to bring you joy uniquely. But furthermore, God is so committed to our joy, that He insists that it be in HIM and not in a particular context alone, just as Josh had us pray today. This way even in times and circumstances that are difficult or harsh, our joy will remain deep and constant and God will be glorified in us all the more.
- Joy is both a gift from God and a command of God. Joy is found in God's presence (**Psalm 16:11**) and therefore is a fruit of His Holy Spirit in us as believers (**Gal 5:22**). So God is working Joy in us. Joy is an essential of our faith. At the same time we are commanded to strive for Joy in the Lord - a command we see throughout the letter to the Philippians (**Philippians 2:18, 3:1, 4:4**). So these 2 truths run parallel for us - We work out our own joy in the Lord FOR God is working joy in us. (**Phil 2:12-13**).
- Finally, Paul wrote **14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing...I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. (Phil 2:14,17)**. Grumbling (complaining) is a serious offense in scripture. Much more serious than we often consider it. Some of OT Israel died in the wilderness because of their grumbling against God, and a refusal to find joy in Him. And Paul said that account was written down so that we would heed its warning (**1 Cor 10:10-12**). Grumbling wars against our joy in God and in doing so robs God of His glory in us.

So today we are going to continue in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi and build on these big ideas. So let's read together the text for today **Philippians 4:4-14**.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. **11** Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. **12** I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. **13** I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.

I believe there are in this passage at least 4 connection points to our Joy in the Lord, either directly or indirectly taught by Paul and also confirmed other places in scripture. So building on the Big Ideas we looked at earlier as our foundation, now we are going to look at 4 ways we strive for joy in the Lord.

4 Ways we strive for Joy in Christ

1) Practice the Discipline of Thanksgiving.

After his command (which is repeated) **Rejoice in the Lord always** - Paul gives an instruction in verse 6 to not be anxious (worried) about anything; and in verse 7 He promises that God will provide the cure for anxiety - which is peace to guard our hearts and minds. So God promises peace - And **joy and peace** are connected in scripture. **Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe** (other translations as you trust) **so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.** So in Paul's instructions, we strive for peace and its companion JOY - by leaning into the Lord in trust. Joy and Peace come **as we trust**. And Paul gives us some specific instructions on what this leaning and trust will look like: **Do not worry about anything BY praying about everything.** But notice how we are to pray in **v6, with thanksgiving.** It is easy to skip over this; but it is part of Paul's instructions to seek peace (and thus to seek joy I believe). Being thankful is not an easy way to live. We have a nature that is quick to grumble and to criticize and to ignore the blessings of what we have in our desire to have something else. But practicing being thankful is not only war against ingratitude, but it is a pathway to peace and joy. We see this same thing in Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica when he says, **Rejoice Always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thess 5:16-18).** All 3 are present - Rejoice, Pray continually (about everything), be thankful. Just like grumbling robs us of joy and robs God of His glory in us; Being thankful cultivates Joy in us and glorifies God through us. This will take discipline, to always strive to ponder, How can I be intentionally thankful for all God has done, before praying my requests. Maybe I want prayer for a job situation, a relationship, a need, a person - but first, let me think through how I am thankful and how I can be thankful for this

situation and these people. Living gratitude is not always natural, but it is an essential characteristic of Godliness. And it is essential to our joy.

2) Learn contentment.

Paul says he has learned to be content whether he is in a context of abundance or one of need; he says he has found the secret - and the secret is again to lean into the Lord; **I can do all things** - when I have the strength of Christ. This verse is not about being able to excel in sports necessarily; it is about our ability to excel in godliness whether in good times or hard times. **Godliness with contentment is great gain** - Pauls writes to Timothy. Contentment is closely tied to Thanksgiving and peace; and therefore contentment is a connector to our Joy in Christ. When you do not learn contentment, then we will live in constant dissatisfaction always wanting something different no matter what you have. **Proverbs 28:25** teaches that **greed** (which is the opposite of contentment) **stirs up strife**; but **those who trust in the Lord will prosper**. So same idea as what Paul is teaching - the secret he has found is to trust God in the contexts he places you and the gifts he gives; This leads to JOY in the Lord. Now does this mean that we should not pursue something more or different? No. But being content protects our JOY until such a time that God changes our context. Paul uses the term **learn**, because contentment comes from experience with dissatisfaction and how we respond to it. I want to be careful to not overdo this example in my own testimony; but I rejoice in the place God has put me here in being the lead pastor of a church that has been my home since 2003. But the joy I have in this, was in part the product of God helping me learn contentment in the 10 years that I longed to be a lead pastor somewhere but was not allowed. And not only did God help me learn Joy in trusting Him, but that trust I believe has only increased the joy when a dream was fulfilled.

3) Be watchful over what your mind dwells on.

Paul instructs the church that peace - which we have already determined is connected to joy - peace comes in part from practicing obedience. In **v9 he says what you have learned - practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you**. Preceding that verse he tells the church to thing about - dwell their minds on - that which is **praiseworthy, true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable**. Here is a LifeTruth for us - If we think upon something long enough, we will act on it. What is the object of your thoughts? Scripture tells us to **set our minds on things above (Col 3:2)**. And Paul had told the church in Philippi earlier **that enemies of the cross had their belly as their god** (meaning they served their appetites, the things that they want) **and their minds set on earthly things, And all of this Paul says will end in their destruction (Phil 3:18-19)**. I am not a legalist when it comes to entertainment; I enjoy certain types of secular music or movies; But here is a warning church: It matters what you take into your life. It matters the

lyrics to the songs you enjoy, the movie lines you memorize; it matters where your mind is and what you dwell on. It impacts your obedience and it impacts your joy. Listen to **Jeremiah 15:16** - **Your words were found and I ate them, And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart.** Some of us struggle with spiritual joy, the same way we struggle with physical health; it matters what we take in, it matters what we dwell on.

4) Remain in Christian community.

Notice this that Paul says in v 10 **I rejoiced in the LORD greatly** (the very command He had given them) **that now you have revived your concern for me.** Paul very clearly says that part of what stirred up joy in his life, was the concern and help provided by the church. Here is what I have seen in my pastoral ministry - that in times of hurt, dissatisfaction, and trouble - people tend to run from community; being robbed of joy, causes them to back away and isolate themselves. But in doing so, we actually cut ourselves off from one of the conduits of Joy that God has designed for us. **Proverbs 12:25** says - **Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.** Good words - life giving words - scriptural words - should be continually exchanged by the people of God. We are commanded in Hebrew to exhort one another everyday. Those words that come to you from Christian community can rid your heart of worry and make you glad. It is a work of the enemy to cause you to disengage from a source of your joy. Do not fall for it. I want to encourage you - BE in community. That call is not just to come to a church service. It is not just to attend gatherings. It is to engage in community. Be apart of a church. Get to know each other. Receive good words; give good words. Study so that you might make the hearts of others glad. And allow others to do that for you - don't run from this conduit of joy; seek it out.