

## Rejoice in the Lord

Philippians 4:4 (NASB 1995)

*"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"*

### Introduction

Everyone wants joy. No one wakes up in the morning and says, "Today I want to be miserable." We all desire joy. We want a joy that fills our hearts and gives meaning to our lives.

People search for joy in many places. Some seek joy in success and achievements. They think, *If I can just get accepted into the right school, get promoted at work, buy a bigger house, or earn more money, then I will finally be happy.* Others seek joy in relationships. They think, *If I can meet the right person, get married, have children, or build a perfect family, then joy will come.* Others look for joy in comfort and pleasure. Vacations, hobbies, entertainment, possessions—many spend their lives chasing one experience after another.

The problem is not that these things are bad in themselves. The problem is that they were never designed to carry the weight of our hearts. Because eventually circumstances change. Health changes. Money changes. People change. Jobs change. Feelings change.

And when our joy depends upon things that constantly change, our joy changes too. Many people live on an emotional roller coaster. When circumstances improve, they rejoice. When difficulties come, they become discouraged. When prayers are answered, they praise God. When hardships appear, they question God. But God offers us something greater.

God offers us a joy that remains. The apostle Paul says: *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"* Notice what Paul does not say. He does not say: "Rejoice in your health." He does not say: "Rejoice in your wealth." He does not say: "Rejoice in favorable circumstances." Instead, he says: *"Rejoice in the Lord."*

This morning, I want us to remember one truth: **True joy is not found in circumstances; true joy is found in Christ.**

Let us look at three truths together.

### Content

## **I. Joy Is Not Dependent on Circumstances**

To understand Paul's words, we need to remember where he was when he wrote them. Paul was sitting in prison. He was not enjoying retirement. He was not relaxing on vacation. He was not writing from a comfortable office with a cup of coffee in his hand. He was imprisoned because of his faithfulness to Christ. He sat in a dark prison cell. He did not know whether release would come. Humanly speaking, his future looked uncertain. Yet from that prison came these words: *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"*

Think about how strange this sounds. How can a prisoner tell free people to rejoice? How can a suffering man encourage comfortable people? Humanly speaking, Paul should have been the one receiving comfort. The Philippian believers should have been encouraging him. Yet Paul becomes the comforter. Paul possessed something greater than freedom. He possessed Christ.

Many people today live like thermometers. A thermometer simply reacts to the environment around it. When the temperature rises, it rises. When the temperature drops, it drops. Many people's joy works exactly that way. If things are going well: "I feel wonderful." If problems come: "I feel miserable." If finances improve: "I am joyful." If difficulties come: "I lose peace."

But God did not call believers to live like thermometers. He called us to live like thermostats. A thermostat does not merely react to the atmosphere. It influences the atmosphere because something inside controls it. Paul was not controlled by his prison. He was controlled by Christ. The prison walls could limit his body. But they could not imprison his joy. Sometimes we say things like: "I'll be happy when..." "I'll be happy when my health improves." "I'll be happy when my children succeed." "I'll be happy when life gets easier." But there will always be another problem waiting around the corner. If joy depends upon circumstances, we will spend our lives chasing something that constantly moves away from us.

Jesus offers us something far more stable. He offers us Himself.

## **II. Joy Is Rooted in Christ's Presence**

Paul was not the only person who discovered this truth. History gives us another beautiful example. Many of you know the name Fanny J. Crosby.

When she was only six weeks old, she lost her eyesight because of improper medical treatment. Throughout her life she experienced suffering and hardship. She later experienced the pain of losing a child in infancy. Humanly speaking, she had every reason to become bitter. She could have spent her life asking: "Why did this happen to me?" "Why would God allow this?" She could have lived in self-pity. But she did not. Instead, she became one of history's greatest hymn writers. She wrote over 8,000 hymns.

Many continue leading people to Christ today. *"Blessed Assurance." "All the Way My Savior Leads Me." "To God Be the Glory." "Rescue the Perishing."*

She once said about her conversion experience: *"The Lord planted a star in my life and no cloud has ever obscured its light."* (Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 More Hymn Stories*, p. 240).

What was that star? It was not physical health. It was not comfort. It was not success. It was Christ.

Jesus said: *"I am the Light of the world."* He also called us the light of the world. Think about the moon. The moon has no light of its own. It simply reflects light from the sun. Likewise, our joy is not self-generated. We are not manufacturing joy through positive thinking. We are reflecting the joy of Christ living in us. Clouds may temporarily cover the moon. Storms may come. Darkness may appear. But the sun has not disappeared. Likewise, trials may come into our lives. Suffering may come. Disappointments may come. But Christ remains exactly the same.

He remains faithful. He remains loving. He remains present. Fanny Crosby understood this deeply. At the age of eight she wrote her first poem "Oh What a Happy Soul Am I":

*"Oh what a happy soul am I!  
Although I cannot see,  
I am resolved that in this world  
Contented I will be.*

*How many blessings I enjoy  
That other people don't;  
To weep and sigh because I'm blind  
I cannot and I won't."* (<https://faithmusicconnection.com/oh-what-a-happy-soul-i-am/>)

What amazing words from a child. She understood something many adults never learn: Joy is not found in what we possess. Joy is found in whom we possess.

### **III. Joy Becomes Our Testimony**

Years ago, while serving in Michigan, I knew a sister in Christ who was battling cancer. She had gone through multiple chemotherapy treatments. Her body had become weak. She had lost her hair. Her strength had almost disappeared. Humanly speaking, she had every reason to become discouraged. I went to visit her because I wanted to encourage her and pray for her. But I still remember what happened.

I saw something on her face. A smile. Not an ordinary smile. There was peace. There was joy. There was something beautiful about it.

I remember wondering: "Where did that smile come from?" Because it certainly did not come from her circumstances. Money cannot buy that kind of joy. Health cannot guarantee that kind of joy. Circumstances cannot create that kind of joy. It came from Christ. I walked into that room expecting to encourage her. I walked out encouraged by her.

Sometimes the strongest sermons are not preached behind a pulpit. Sometimes they are preached through believers who continue trusting Jesus in suffering.

There is another picture that helps us understand this. You never really know what is inside a tea bag until it goes into hot water. The hot water reveals what is already there. Likewise, hardship does not create what is inside us. Hardship reveals what is inside us.

When Paul entered prison, joy came out. When Fanny Crosby faced blindness, joy came out. When this sister faced cancer, joy came out.

Why? Because Christ was already inside. Trials reveal where our joy truly rests. When everything is taken away, what remains? If Christ remains, then joy remains. People around us begin noticing something different. They begin asking: "Why are you still at peace?" "Why do you still trust God?" "How can you still smile?" "How can you still have hope?"

And suddenly our lives begin pointing others toward Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

This morning, we have met three people. A prisoner. A blind hymn writer. A woman battling cancer. Different lives. Different struggles. Different circumstances. Yet one source of joy. Jesus Christ. Their circumstances changed. But Christ did not. And Christ still does not change. He is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Maybe some of you today are carrying heavy burdens. Maybe your health concerns you. Maybe finances weigh upon your heart. Maybe family struggles keep you awake at night. Maybe fear about the future has stolen your joy.

Hear God's Word this morning: *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"* The command is possible because the source is unchanging. Our joy is not in circumstances. Our joy is in Christ. The same Christ who sustained Paul in prison still reigns today. The same Christ who sustained Fanny Crosby still reigns today. The same Christ who sustained that sister through cancer still reigns today. And He walks with you today.

The angels announced on that first Christmas: *"I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people."* That joy has a name. Jesus Christ. If you have never trusted Him as Savior and Lord, come to Him today. And if you already know Him, fix your eyes upon Him again. Because true joy is not found in what you have. True joy is found in whom you have. And if you have Christ, you have the source of everlasting joy.

### **I would like to end the sermon with a good story.**

We all know that joy is one of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience, and so on (Galatians 5:22-23). The best way for us to have joy in our lives is to remain sensitive to the Holy Spirit's voice and obey Him. Here's one example.

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand endured 14 years in Communist prisons in Romania. He was confined to a windowless, solitary cell. In his solitary confinement, he would sing, he would preach to the angels, he would pray and meditate.

Then, one day the Lord reminded him of what is written in the Gospels: *"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven,"* (Luke 6:23). He thought to himself, that is something he has not done. *"So, he began to leap up and down around his cell and rejoice. A guard looked through the peephole in the door, saw Richard leaping and jumping and concluded he had gone mad. The guard did not want trouble, so he came in to try to calm Richard down and told him to be quiet and to be calm and he would bring him something. So, Richard sat quietly, and a few minutes later the guard came in and gave him half a loaf of bread. Richard said that at that time their prison ration was one slice of bread a week. This was like Christmas!"* (<https://dotheword.org/2015/01/26/the-tangible-rewards-of-persecution/>). Joy is found in Christ. Rejoice in Him always. Your reward will be great.

Let us pray.