**Joyful Thankfulness**

 ***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. (Philippians 4:4-7)*

 Joy is one of the most apparent and important qualities of a Christian. Today we’re going to talk about joy as one way of expressing thanks to God. It is not enough to simply talk about the reasons for being thankful. We also need to delve deeper into the manner or context of our thankfulness. The Apostle Paul is writing from prison in this letter and doing it joyfully and with many encouragements for the church in Philippi. The church had been going through various difficulties both from unbelievers in the community as well as internal issues stemming from pressure coming from those who held incorrect beliefs. There was danger of internal division within the church. In all of this, the Apostle was saying, “*Rejoice in the Lord.”* We too, need to talk about joy as an important characteristic of our faith-walk with the Lord. Let’s move on then to the Apostle’s encouragement…

 “Always r*ejoice in the Lord; again, rejoice.”* It wasn’t enough to say it once – but Paul felt the need to say it at least twice in one sentence. It was the beginning of his final words of the letter, and he was intending to finish it with a few encouraging words. After all, the church was going through quite a few challenges. They lived in a city that was considered a “little Rome”. In other words, Philippi had a special status in the Roman Empire. Its merchants and retired military officers had a great influence on the atmosphere in the city. Its citizens had special privileges and there was a significant enough level of idol worship among them. The most important false god that was worshipped was the emperor. Thus, it was not easy for believers to be surrounded by those who lived the easy but idolatrous life – by those who came and went without a care while Christians were careful not to participate in the evil pagan customs of that society.

 Knowing all this, the Apostle’s words were specific to their situation. To be joyful, to show gentleness, to avoid worrying, to be prayerful and thankful were all answers to that unhealthy godless culture. All these activities were to be done while *rejoicing in the Lord.* All this was to be done to bring forth God’s peace among the church (and hopefully among the city inhabitants). This peace meant political, social, and even physical well-being for the church.

 Sometimes, when we get sick, the doctor will not prescribe just one medication or solution to our ailment. It may be that we need to take this pill, to avoid a certain food, or to do so much exercise, etc., etc., …

 In our situation, it may be that the pressures of life are similar types of struggles as described above. Maybe today’s idols are not the same as yesterday’s – maybe no one is pressuring you to worship statuettes, but that the free expression of your faith is criticized outside the walls of this church building. Maybe there’s no pressure to worship the king, but a life based on freedom of faith-expression in Christ is dangerous to some of the country’s current philosophers. For these reasons, Paul’s advice was given in a set of commands. We are commanded to walk this faith out joyfully in the Lord – because without His presence, all joys are but temporary happiness. However, having joy in Him and His salvation, living in relationship with Him is the way to defeat every obstacle in the way of joy. How will the unbeliever see the effects of the Lord in our lives if we are always sad or depressed? If we do not carry ourselves in this way, how will the sweetness of the Lord be recognized?

 We are commanded to deal with all kindly, gently, and patiently – because the Lord’s return, His revelation, the Lord’s judgment is always near; and, yes, The Final Judgment is near, but so is the Lord’s Holy Spirit, with whom we are called to co-labor every day. For this reason, instead of worrying, let us bring our cares to Jesus; let us receive from Him *His* peace and *His* joy that comes from His Resurrection. The latter happens as we submit to Him – as we humble ourselves before Him and declare Him Lord of our life. This happens as we repent – as we come back from our wayward paths. And, when we bring all things by prayer and thanksgiving to God, He will make all things right, because His “Shalom”, His supernatural peace, will guard our hearts and thoughts.

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