**REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS**

Philippians 4:1-23 (Key verse 4)

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”*

In today’s passage we are going to learn from Apostle Paul how to rejoice in the Lord always. Apostle Paul taught this to the Philippian believers who had challenges in ministry and their personal lives, even though they had been quite impressive with regards to serving in Jesus’ gospel ministry. Because of their challenges, the Philippians believers could be beat down and discouraged. Similarly to us, though we have been faithful in serving in Jesus’ gospel ministry this year, faithful in serving sheep, as the year ends, we might be filled with anxieties regarding our year end results on campus, we might be beat down about challenges in our lives such as difficulty at work, crisis in the family. Now through today’s passage Apostle Paul wants to encourage and restore me and you, to be whole again, to be joyful even though we might be having these challenges. How can we be joyful in the midst of all these challenges? Apostle Paul says we must rejoice in the Lord, always. Therefore, through today’s passage we will learn what it means to rejoice in the Lord and how we can rejoice in the Lord always even in the midst of our challenges. May God please be with me and you today, to receive one word, and be filled with the joy of the Lord as we close the year of 2024.

The passage today begins with Apostle Paul expressing deep love and affection to the Philippian believers in **verse 1** saying: “*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!”* Why did Apostle Paul express such deep affection and love for the Philippians? He said to them, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown. Apostle Paul said this to express his love for them as his sheep, to him serving them was not just a business transaction, but he genuinely loved them like his own flesh and blood, he wanted what is best for them. Furthermore, he said to them my joy and crown, in saying this he expressed how he is so proud of them. Apostle Paul was moved by their service in Jesus’ gospel ministry during the times when Paul was with them and also after he left. Their service was quite impressive, they sacrificed their time to serve in God’s gospel ministry, they sacrificed their material possessions to serve others. In **verse 15-17** Apostle Paul said about them: “*Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.*”

After Apostle Paul expressed his deep affection and love for them, he said: “*stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*” What did Apostle Paul mean in this? Firstly, to stand firm in the Lord means to hold on tightly so that you will not be blown away. Apostle Paul said, stand firm in this way, meaning they must continue to depend in God, they must continue to dedicate themselves in the gospel ministry of God. As the year ends some of you will be going home to visit family, some will still be in Johannesburg. It could be tempting to say its holidays, let me wind down. But Apostle Paul says to me and you, even in this year end holidays we must stand firm in the Lord, hold on tightly for the wind will continue to blow, Satan will continue with his attempts to drive us away from God. So during the December holidays, let us stand firm, let us remain faithful in the Lord.

Furthermore, after Apostle Paul expressed his deep love and affection, as well as encouragement for the Philippian believers to continue to stand firm. He pointed out a problem that affected the Philippian church, which is a conflict between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. These women were fantastic gospel workers who contended at Paul’s side together with Clement and other gospel workers. However, they did not agree with one another on a number of matters, and this caused problems between them, they probably stopped talking to one another, their conflict probably also divided the church as they were influential. This probably discouraged other believers as well, to see the church being divided and not happy, it seemed like all the good work was vanishing. To help the situation, Apostle Paul pleaded with both Euodia and Syntyche in **verse 2** saying: “*I plead with Euodia, and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.”* Apostle Paul pleaded that they must have the same mind in the Lord. What does this mean? This means they must both have the mindset of Christ. What is the mindset of Christ? In **Mark 10:45** we learnt that: “*“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* And so, Apostle Paulencouraged the women to have humble mindset, to repent from a mindset filled with pride but have a servant mindset. In order to resolve conflict in our ministry, we need to have the mindset of Christ Jesus, without the mindset of Jesus we will hurt each other, pride and hatred will fill our hearts, divide and turn our ministry into a horrific place to be. Let us therefore repent and have the mindset of Jesus Christ.

To further help the Philippian believers who were in the midst of this challenge, and on top of that who had their own personal challenges. He urged them in our **key verse 4** saying: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”* Apostle Paul is saying to me and you who are filled with discouragement, who have joy stolen from us by our problems, academic problems, problems at work, problems with our families. Apostle Paul is saying to you and me who feel like the year has just been very tough to us and are just beat down. He is saying with emphasis, “***Rejoice in the lord, always!”*** Why did Apostle Paul emphasized continuously that the Philippian believers must Rejoice in the Lord? He emphasized this because joy is a very necessary thing that human beings seek, more so when one is in the midst of challenges or difficult situation.

However normally when people are in challenging circumstances, they try to find joy various kinds of things, which cannot give them joy that can fully satisfy their soul. Some people try to find joy by seeking pleasure in alcohol consumption, some try to find joy in engaging in ungodly relationship, some excessive eating, unhealthy TV shows. Despite all these things being bad for one’s wellbeing, such as health and the likes, they are also very temporary, and put one in danger of addiction and ultimately drive us away from God. Therefore, instead of seeking joy in the things of this world, Apostle Paul is urging you and me to rejoice in the Lord always. When we feel beat down or are in the midst of challenges such as academics, work and family matters, Apostle Paul is urging you and me to rejoice in the Lord, and not try to take the urge off by seeking the pleasures of this world.

What is this joy that Apostle Paul is talking about? It is the joy in the Lord, heavenly joy, the joy that comes when one receives the gospel of Jesus. I believe we have all experienced this joy when we received Jesus as our Lord and savior, at that moment we felt a deep satisfaction in our soul, the weight of sin being removed from our shoulders, being renewed as children of God, granted the privilege to come to God any time with any request. Apostle Paul is urging us to seek this joy, it was not a once off kind of joy, it is the joy that the Lord is willing and promises to give us always. Let us repent and daily come to Jesus, confess our sins and allow Jesus to wash our sins with his blood so we can experience his joy.

Furthermore, Apostle Paul said in **verse 5**: “*Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”* In order to rejoice we need to live in harmony with all people, even unbelievers. When Jesus came into this world he exercised gentleness to all people, his disciples, the public sinners and even the Pharisees who looked for every reason to discredit him and kill him. Furthermore, Apostle Paul said the Lord is near to remind us that only God is the judge, and not us, ours is to live in harmony. When we become the judge, we cause so much trouble and hatred which at the end of the day steals our joy, but if we surrender everything to the Lord, we can have joy, knowing he is a just judge. Furthermore, in order to rejoice in the Lord, we need to present our requests to God and overcome anxiety. Let us look at **verse 6**: “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* One of the greatest enemies of joy is a anxiety, which comes in various forms, we can be anxious about our exams and their results, we can be anxious about work, a presentation we need to do, something that happened we think we might get us into trouble, we can be anxious about the health of our children, we can be anxious about that job interview, our finances, whether we will manage, will we be able to pay that school fees, will we get that funding. As we prepare to go home for the holidays, we can be anxious to see our old high school friends who might have been doing well academically or might have graduated already. Because of these anxieties many are left **with no joy**, panicking and helpless. Many people even spend so much money in medical care to treat anxiety, so anxiety is a serious matter.

As Christian believers we too are not exempted from anxiety, it can take hold of us and steal our joy. But glory to God for providing a way for us to escape and overcome it, by rejoicing in the Lord. How can we overcome anxiety by rejoicing in the Lord? We can do so by presenting our requests to God in prayer, petition and thanksgiving. When we come to God in prayer, we are given an encounter with God, we can experience God. When we come to God in prayer we can learn to trust in God, when we do not come to God in prayer the power and greatness of God disappears from our hearts opening room for anxiety to rule us and take away our joy. The truth is, on our own we cannot overcome anxiety, we need assurance that the Lord is with us, we need God’s assurance for he is the creator of the heavens and the earth, with power and authority over all things. Further, Apostle Paul said we must bring our requests with petition, meaning we must ask God exactly what we need from him, we must pour out all our struggles to God, we should not try to be strong to God, we must have a childlike mindset, expect everything from him. Furthermore, Apostle Paul said we must bring our requests to God with thanksgiving. Why thanksgiving? Thanksgiving helps us to remember what God has done, how he saved us from the power of sin and death, how he continued to provide for our needs daily. When we remember who God is, what he has done we can firm up our trust in him, and faith that in him that just as he has been with us he will continue to be with us. So, in order to rejoice in the Lord, we need to bring our requests to God by prayer, petition and thanksgiving and rid off the spirit of anxiety.

Furthermore, when we bring our requests to God by prayer, petition and thanksgiving, God promises that we will have peace. Let us look at **verse 7**: “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* When we bring our requests to God, God in his great wisdom fill us with the wonderful peace that transcends all understanding and guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Why does this peace transcend all understanding? This means with the human mind we cannot comprehend it, we cannot comprehend it because in this world we think we will have peace when what we ask for is given, but in God even if we do not get what we ask for, God in his great wisdom is able to fill our hearts with this wonderful and amazing joy. This is because God is the creator of the heavens and the earth with power and authority over all things, with power to crush all of the devil’s tactics. So let us not be anxious, but bring all things to God in prayer, petition and thanksgiving and God in his great wisdom will grant us peace, guard our hearts so that we can rejoice in the Lord.

Furthermore, Apostle Paul said we can rejoice in the Lord when we think about anything and everything that is excellent and praiseworthy, and put to practice the word of God. Let us look at **verse 8-9**: “*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”* To maintain our joy and peace as Christian believers, it is important to be careful of what we think about. Apostle Paul is urging us to always think about what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable and excellent and praiseworthy. We should not think about negative things, harmful things for they steal our joy, we should always remember that the Lord is good all the time. Furthermore, Apostle Paul urges us to put the word of God into practice, the Bible is not a novel or a story book, but it is the word of God. In **2 Timothy 3:16-17** it says: “*16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* In order to grow as servants of God and experience God and rejoice in the Lord, we need to put the word of God into practice. It is through putting the word of God into practice that we can truly see through the devil’s deception, but if we do not put into practice, we will fall for Satan’s deception that pleasure seeking is what we need to be satisfied. But when we put the word of God into practice, we can learn that God is sufficient to fill us with joy and peace. When put the word of God into practice we can rejoice in the Lord always.

**Conclusion:**

Last week Sunday I received a call from work about a crisis that occurred, that call completely stole my joy for it was it was a big thing and all that was in my mind was will they blame me for this, how did this happen, I was filled with so much anxiety. I was beat down; I was thinking why now especially after I had such a very tough year both at work and in my family. Now on Monday was our wedding Anniversary and I did not even say anything to my wife, I just stormed out and went to work. What was in my mind was that I need to resolve this, basically I placed my joy in resolving that crisis and clearing my name with my bosses. Sadly, no matter how hard I worked to clear my name, something came up and made me even more anxious.

I remained anxious because I was seeking joy and redemption in the wrong place, I depended on my hard work and acknowledgement from my manager that it is fine, for me to be joyful. Apostle Paul said: “*Rejoice in the Lord always.* *I will say it again: Rejoice!”* What I needed to do was to bring it all to Jesus by prayer, petition and thanksgiving. Apostle Paul says: “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” When we bring it all to God, the word of God promises unexplainable peace and joy. I therefore pray that God may be with me and you **to not seek joy**, peace and comfort from the things of the world, but rejoice in the Lord always. Come to Jesus by prayer, petition and thanksgiving, live with all people with harmony, and think about anything and everything that is excellent and praiseworthy.

Amen.