

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 that as God's children we have been given the privilege to rejoice always. The key verse says we must rejoice in the Lord always, therefore we are going to learn what it means to rejoice in the Lord always. We are also going to learn about things that hinder us from rejoicing, and how we can overcome them so that we can live according to the purpose that God has created us for. May the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all, grant us humility to receive the message deeply into our hearts.

In the previous passage Apostle Paul declared to the Philippian believers that because of their faith in Jesus Christ, they have citizenship in heaven. He encouraged them to eagerly wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has power and control over all things, who will transform their lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. In today's chapter of the letter, Apostle Paul began by expressing so much affection for the Philippian believers. He said in **verse 1**: *“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!”* Here Apostle Paul was very glad that the Philippian believers had taken hold of the gospel message of Christ Jesus, which out of love he shared with them. It was so rewarding to Apostle Paul to see the work of God in the Philippian believers, hence he referred to them as his crown, brothers and sisters, his dear friends. Apostle Paul was filled with joy to see the glorious work of God in the Philippians believers.

Furthermore, Apostle Paul encouraged the Philippian believers that as children of God, granted citizenship and a privilege to be transformed into a glorious body like Christ, they need to stand firm in the Lord. As they eagerly wait for the coming of Jesus, they should stand firm in the Lord. What does it mean to stand firm in the Lord? This means to fully depend on God in everything in their lives. Just like the Philippian believers we have been granted citizenship in heaven; we have been granted a privilege to be transformed into glorious bodies, because of the blood of Jesus. And now the question is, do we depend on God in all things in our lives? Or is it just on selected things? Is there things that we think we can do it by ourselves? As Christians we need stand firm in the Lord, any other place is not safe for us.

Apostle Paul continued and brought up an issue that had been somewhat disturbing the Philippian believers. It was a conflict between Euodia and Syntyche, they both were very precious gospel workers who contended at Paul's side in the cause of the gospel. But now, they had a conflict which hindered them from being joyful, especially when they are in the same room, this conflict also affected the joy of other co-workers in their ministry, it probably affected their families and gave them sleepless nights. To help them Apostle Paul urged them that they should have the same mind in the Lord, they should stand firm in the Lord, like Jesus they should put all their trust and faith in the Lord.

Just like the women, we too might have conflicts in our lives, in ministry, at school, at the workplace, we might have challenges that steal our joy and peace. What should we do? How can we restore our joy and peace, what should we do to be able to sleep at night? We should stand firm in the Lord. Furthermore in the key verse (**4**) Apostle Paul said: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”* Here just as before, Apostle Paul emphasised that as children of God we need to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to entrust our joy in Jesus. We need to rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ because he is in control, he is the creator of the heavens and the earth. Jesus is unchanging, he was, and he still is today. Euodia and Syntyche, probably thought if the other can stop being stubborn and listen, then things will be better, then everyone will be at joy. We too might think if people can just see things as I do and just listen to me, then my life will be better, and I will have joy.

As we have experienced, such rarely happens, so this kind of thinking cannot help us, to have true joy we need to come to the Lord. Furthermore, Apostle Paul said we should rejoice in the Lord always, not sometimes but always. We should not be seasonal, but always come to God for our joy. In **verse 5** Apostle Paul continued and said: *“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”* Here Apostle Paul was referring to Christlike gentleness, not worldly gentleness which is selective, depends on our moods and the person we interact with. When Jesus came into this world, he was gentle to all people, his disciples, the public sinners such as tax collectors and prostitutes, he was even gentle to Pharisees who were his enemies. How could he do this? He could do it because he rejoiced in the Lord, his reward was the Lord God himself and hence he could not be offended by the world because the love of God was overflowing in his heart. Therefore as Christians we should exercise gentleness to all, not just to people who are nice to us, but to all. Just like Jesus we should be gentle even to those who oppose us and offend us. Yes, it is a difficult thing to do, on our own we cannot do it, we can only do it when we rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ.

After Apostle Paul encouraged the Philippian believers to rejoice in the Lord, he went further and urged them not to be anxious. In **verse 6-7** it says: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. / And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Apostle Paul emphasised that we should not be anxious. What does it mean to be anxious? The dictionary defines anxiety as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with uncertain outcome. Have you ever had such a feeling? What makes you feel like this? Is it pressure from your schoolwork, pressure to provide for your family, pressure to deliver at the workplace or is it pressure in ministry? Whichever it might be, Apostle Paul says we must not be anxious about anything, we must not allow anything to fill us with worries and nervousness. Instead we must rejoice in the Lord always.

How can we rejoice when we are faced with challenges, when things are not going well for us? We can do it by standing firm in the Lord, by rejoicing in the Lord. Apostle Paul said: *“...but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. / And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”* We can rejoice in the Lord by prayer, and petition, by coming to God and telling him about our struggles and needs, coming to God with thanksgiving. When we come to God by faith, God will listen, when we come with thanksgiving, we will remember the goodness of the Lord. When we present our requests to God, God will grant us peace, we will experience peace of God, God will grant us reason to rejoice. Even when our situation does not change, God will grant us his joy, instead of being sad, angry, fatalistic about our crisis, God will grant us a pure mind and heart, we will think only of things that are excellent and praiseworthy.

In **1 Samuel 1**, Hannah in her deep anguish prayed to God, when she was tormented by her sister wife Peninnah who had become her enemy. Hannah was always anxious at the hand of Peninnah because of her childless problem, reminding her how she is not good enough for her husband Elkanah. But when she sincerely prayed to God, something amazing happened. The Bible says... *“her face was no longer downcast.”* When she prayed, she experienced the peace of God, she could now rejoice in the Lord, she could live as an inspirational women faith in the Lord. Therefore, let us not be anxious about anything, but present our requests to God, who will grant us peace, let us stand firm in the Lord and rejoice in the Lord.

Because of my sins and imperfections, I have hurt, disappointed, and caused trouble in many people's lives, in my family, my professional career and in ministry. In my pursuit to make things right, I have experienced so many anxieties, I lived a restless life trying to apologise, trying to be nice to people, desperate to hear that we are okay with those I have wronged. When I did not get a positive response, I would be left with so much sadness and a feeling of uselessness. For one, early this year, my uncle who played a pivotal role in my life by raising me for 3 years while I was in high school complained that I no longer call him. This really made me sad, because I respect him, and somehow it is important for me to make him proud. When he expressed his disappointment, I was left anxious, it stole my joy somehow. And Satan came at me, and it filled my mind with negative things, I started thinking about the bad experiences I had when I lived with my uncle. It really messed me up, that I could not even see how blessed I was to live with my uncle.

Thinking about this made me realise that, even though I have faith in Jesus Christ, deep down I rested my joy in things of this world instead of God always. Instead of rejoicing in the Lord, I sought joy from validation by my uncle, my bosses at work, my leaders and co-workers in ministry, and Bible students. Because of all this, I lived a pitiful life, I could not live a joyful life, I could not be sincerely gentle to others. I could not live the best life that God had set out for me as his servant to take care of his flock. But today I want to thank God and give glory to his name, for Apostle Paul's words who said, *“rejoice in the Lord always, do not be anxious about anything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”*. I pray that I may repent from my sins, and in deep anguish pray to God about all things so that he may grant me his peace. I pray that I may rejoice in the Lord always.

Conclusion

When Apostle Paul wrote this letter he was in prison, a very unfavourable situation. Yet, in this very circumstance he said he greatly rejoiced in the Lord, not because the Philippian believers sent him aid, but because of the work of God amongst the believers, how God moved their hearts to give. Though it was a beautiful thing to receive, Paul did not rest his joy in receiving, rather he set his mind to rejoice in the Lord who is in control and unchanging. Whether in need or with plenty, Paul sought to be content. Being content is a crucial ingredient to see the marvellous work of God and to rejoice in the Lord.

Apostle Paul acknowledged that being content is not easy, but through Jesus Christ who gives him strength, he could learn to be content. Likewise let us stand firm in the Lord Jesus Christ who has control over all things, who is able to grant us strength in all situations, to grant the spirit of contentment. May God help us all to repent from our sin of seeking worldly joy, and fully rejoice in the Lord always. Let us not be anxious about anything, but present our requests to God with prayer and thanksgiving, trust God who is able to grant peace which transcends all understanding. Let us rejoice in the Lord who is able to meet all our needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.