

I’ve entitled this evening’s message, “*Sabbatical Reflections: The Importance of Rejoicing in the Lord.*” Rejoicing in the Lord? Why that topic? I’ll tell you why in a few moments.

To introduce this message, I want to share a sermon title I could have used, but didn’t. I contemplated calling this talk, “*A Message to a Special Church from a Grateful Pastor: Learning from Philippians.*” What Paul says in Philippians sums up how I feel about you, my WBC family. If I preached that message, it would have four points.

**1. Paul wrote Philippians to say thank you to a special church.**

1:3 “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.”

1:4-5 “...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

**2. Paul wrote Philippians *specifically* to say thank you for a recent love gift from this special church.**

What love gift? We find out in 4:10ff.

4:10 Paul was rejoicing because the church sent him a financial gift while in prison.

4:14 “It was good of you to share in my troubles.”

4:15 “...in the early days, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only.”

**3. Paul tells this special church what their gift meant for the giver.**

The Philippians wanted to encourage their spiritual shepherd, Paul. That’s why they sent him the gifts again and again. Now Paul does something to encourage them. He tells them that as generous givers they are entitled to two benefits.

a. One benefit is *confidence*. 1:6

b. The second benefit is *the promise of future provision*.

Look at 4:19, “My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” They had just given sacrificially to meet Paul’s needs.

**4. Paul tells this special church what their gift meant for the receiver.**

He mentions at least three personal benefits...

a. God gave him opportunities to make Christ known to lost people (1:12-13).

b. God gave him opportunities to mobilize believers to make Christ known (1:14). “Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”

c. God gave Paul the opportunity to get to know Christ better himself (1:21, 23; 3:10). “For me to live is Christ,” confessed Paul in 1:21. It’s not just what I do *for* Christ that makes me tick. It’s *Christ* Himself. “I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far,” he said in 1:23. Later in 3:10 Paul said, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings...”

I want to focus on this final benefit, the opportunity to get to know Christ better personally. This was a tremendous sabbatical take-away for me personally as well. And one of the primary lessons was the importance of *rejoicing in the Lord*.

This language comes from Philippians 4:4. Please turn there with me. It's a familiar verse, but so significant. Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice."

**Rejoice. In the Lord. Always. I will say it again. Rejoice.**

Most of us struggle with this and don't even realize it. Life gets in the way. Oh, we believe in the Lord, sure. But rejoice in Him? What does that even mean?

As a pastor I rejoice in the work I do. It's a good work. Studying God's Word, preaching sermons, giving biblical counsel to hurting people. All good. Serving on boards, like Scioto Hills Camp and ACBC. Strategizing. Developing plans. Striving to advance the Lord's mission of making disciples worldwide. Again, all good.

So where's the question. What happens when I'm not doing those things? What happens is I have the opportunity to find out where I am finding my joy.

A man's identity is often wrapped up on his work. For a woman it's often her family, but I can't speak to that personally. I do know that when I am taken out of my normal routine, I begin to find out the true source of my joy. Is it what I do? Is it what I've accomplished? Or is it something else, something outside of me, something for which I was created and have been redeemed?

This is what the command, "Rejoice in the Lord," is getting at. Is the Lord Himself my source of joy. Not what I do for Him. Not even what He does for me. But He Himself. Period. Do I rejoice *in Him*?

When I'm working, when I'm being productive (whatever that means), I can *say* that I'm rejoicing in Him, that He's my source of joy, but that may not be the case. But a sabbatical break forces me to see the true answer to the question.

Let me show you an important connection in the text. In verse 4, Paul says *rejoice in the Lord*. In verse 7 he says *the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds*. There's a connection between *rejoicing in the Lord* and *the peace of God*.

No rejoicing. No peace.

A little rejoicing. A little peace.

Continual rejoicing. Continual peace.

If I'm in turmoil, if I'm a fretting person, if I'm anxious, if I'm not experiencing the peace of God, here's the first place to look. Am I rejoicing in the Lord?

At the end I'll show you some things I am learning to do to practice this reality. But before I do, I want us to see this more clearly in the text. Let's walk through this passage.

In Philippians 4:1-9, Paul is addressing the issue, "How to stand fast in the Lord." "Stand firm in the Lord," he says in verse 1. The Philippian believers held a special place in Paul's heart. He had led them to the Lord. They had served with him as faithful partners in the gospel ministry (1:5). But now they were experiencing turmoil, both from dangerous compromisers of the truth on the outside, and from self-seeking, inflated Christians within. How could they stand firm with these problems?

When a church stands true to the gospel, it will be characterized by three essential marks: UNITY (verses 2-3 "be of the same mind"); JOY (verses 4-7 "rejoice in the Lord"); PURITY (verses 8-9 "think on these things"). These three marks are to be true of the church as a whole. But churches are comprised of people. Individual people. And Paul talks to us as individuals as we come to verses 4-7.

Verse 7 indicates that there was a need for peace at Philippi, peace not only between believers, but peace for distressed individuals. The peace of God. But how do

we obtain the peace of God?

**Main Idea: In Philippians 4:4-7, Paul identifies three prerequisites for experiencing the peace of God. In this message we're focusing on the first, *rejoicing in the Lord*. If we want to experience the peace of God, we must make rejoicing in the Lord a vital part of our lives.**

*Prerequisite #1: Those who experience God's peace are those who rejoice (4).*

Let's look at these words one by one.

First, *rejoice*. Verse 4 says, "Rejoice ... rejoice." Paul mentions "joy" and "rejoicing" some fourteen times in this letter to the Philippians. Here he repeats the command offered in 3:1. What is he asking? Joy is more than a mood or emotion. Joy is perspective on life. It is an understanding which allows one to see beyond any event to the sovereign Lord who controls all events.

I checked several dictionaries and found these definitions of rejoice:

-“to feel or show great joy or delight”

-“to feel or show great happiness about something”<sup>1</sup>

-to feel joy; to experience gladness in a high degree; to have pleasurable satisfaction; to be delighted<sup>2</sup>

Here's the etymology of the word. “The verb '**rejoice**' has its etymological roots in Middle English and Old French. It can be traced back to the Old French word 'rejo(r),' which is a combination of the prefix 're-' meaning 'again' and 'joir' meaning 'to enjoy' or 'to be happy.' Old French, in turn, inherited elements of its vocabulary from Latin, and 'joir' is related to the Latin word 'gaudere,' meaning 'to **rejoice**' or 'to be glad.' The 're-' prefix in this context suggests a renewed or intensified sense of joy.”<sup>3</sup>

The Greek term in Philippians 4:4 is from ... **χαίρω**<sup>a</sup>: to enjoy a state of happiness and well-being—‘to rejoice, to be glad.’ Χαίρω.<sup>4</sup>

Next, the phrase *in the Lord*. Verse 4 says, “Rejoice *in the Lord*.” Not in what you have or do, and not even particularly in what He has done for you. But rejoice *in Him*. Ralph Martin says, “*In the Lord* may signify ‘because you are the Lord’s’, or ‘because of what he has done’, or the entire phrase may be the Christian equivalent of the Old Testament exclamation, *Hallelujah*, ‘Praise the Lord’, which is familiar to us in the Psalter.”<sup>5</sup>

In Philippians 3:1 Paul gives the same command, “Rejoice in the Lord.” Ralph Martin comments, “The Judaizers were rejoicing and boasting in man and his attainments (Gal. 6:12), but Paul said that he would glory only in the Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:14).”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/rejoice>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.definitions.net/definition/REJOICE>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.betterwordsonline.com/dictionary/rejoice>

<sup>4</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In [\*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains\*](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 302). United Bible Societies.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, R. P. (1987). [\*Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#) (Vol. 11, p. 143). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>6</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). [\*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader\*](#) (Vol. 5, p. 86). Eerdmans.

A rejoicing Christian is one who sees life from God's point of view. And takes appropriate action to show this is the case.

How often? How often does God expect us to rejoice in Him? The answer?

*Always.* In fact, since the verb “rejoice” is both present in tense and imperative in mood, this is a command which calls us to “rejoice” continually and habitually. So does rejoicing involve singing? Yes. Smiling? Yes. Clapping your hands? Perhaps. But rejoicing is a bigger than these sub-activities. There are times when we don’t sing and don’t smile. But rejoicing in the Lord doesn’t stop. Or at least it’s not supposed to stop.

Why this emphasis on rejoicing? Humanly speaking, the members of the church at Philippi had reasons *not* to rejoice. Their friend Paul was imprisoned. They were facing mistreatment and oppression (1:30). They had church members who weren’t getting along. They had problems in their lives.

But Paul reminds them that from God's perspective, they had every reason to rejoice! They were valuable contributors to the advancement of the gospel (ch1). They were citizens of heaven (3:20). They could anticipate the day when Christ would return for them, and transform them into his glorious likeness (3:21).

The key to rejoicing is the recognition that we who are Christians are “in the Lord.” The fact that we are *in the Lord* is what enables rejoicing in the midst of difficulty and sorrow.

In the past I tended to gloss over this command. Rejoice in the Lord, sure. Everyone knows what that means. But we don’t. So I turned to some dead men for help. These to these commentators.

**Matthew Henry (a British non-conformist Presbyterian minister 1662-1714):** “He exhorts to holy joy and delight in God: *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice*, v. 4. All our joy must terminate in God; and our thoughts of God must be delightful thoughts. *Delight thyself in the Lord* (Ps. 37:4), *in the multitude of our thoughts within us* (grievous and afflicting thoughts) *his comforts delight our souls* (Ps. 94:19), and our *meditation of him is sweet*, Ps. 104:34. Observe, It is our duty and privilege to rejoice in God, and to rejoice in him always; at all times, in all conditions; even when we suffer for him, or are afflicted by him. We must not think the worse of him or of his ways for the hardships we meet with in his service. There is enough in God to furnish us with matter of joy in the worst circumstance on earth. He had said it before (ch. 3:1): *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord*. Here he says it again, *Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say Rejoice*. Joy in God is a duty of great consequence in the Christian life; and Christians need to be again and again called to it. If good men have not a continual feast, it is their own fault.”<sup>7</sup>

**Alexander MacLaren (a Scottish Baptist minister 1826-1910):** “It has been well said that this whole epistle may be summed up in two short sentences: ‘I rejoice’; ‘Rejoice ye!’ The word and the thing crop up in every chapter, like some hidden brook, ever and anon sparkling out into the sunshine from beneath the shadows. This continual refrain of gladness is all the more remarkable if we remember the Apostle’s circumstances. The letter shows him to us as a prisoner, dependent on Christian charity for a living, having no man like-minded to cheer his solitude; uncertain as to ‘how it shall be with me,’ and obliged to contemplate the possibility of being ‘offered,’ or poured out

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<sup>7</sup> Henry, M. (1994). [\*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume\*](#) (p. 2328). Hendrickson.

as a libation, 'on the sacrifice and service of your faith.' Yet out of all the darkness his clear notes ring jubilant; and this sunny epistle comes from the pen of a prisoner who did not know but that to-morrow he might be a martyr.

The exhortation of my text, with its urgent reiteration, picks up again a dropped thread which the Apostle had first introduced in the commencement of the previous chapter. He had there evidently been intending to close his letter, for he says: 'Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord'; but he is drawn away into that precious personal digression which we could so ill spare, in which he speaks of his continual aspiration and effort towards things not yet attained. And now he comes back again, picks up the thread once more, and addresses himself to his parting counsels. The reiteration in the text becomes the more impressive if we remember that it is a repetition of a former injunction. 'Rejoice in the Lord always'; and then he seems to hear one of his Philippian readers saying: 'Why! you told us that once before!' 'Yes,' he says, 'and you shall hear it once again; so important is my commandment that it shall be repeated a third time. So I again say, "rejoice!"' Christian gladness is an important element in Christian duty; and the difficulty and necessity of it are indicated by the urgent repetition of the injunction."<sup>8</sup>

Maclaren offers three conclusions:

- I. So, then, the first thought that suggests itself to me from these words is this, that close union with Jesus Christ is the foundation of real gladness.
- II. So, secondly, notice that this joy is capable of being continuous.
- III. Lastly, such gladness is an important part of Christian duty.<sup>9</sup>

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* offers this helpful summary: "Christ is the One in whom the sphere of rejoicing was to take place. Surely there are many circumstances in which Christians cannot be happy. But they can always rejoice in the Lord and delight in Him. Paul himself was an excellent example of one who had inner joy when external circumstances—such as persecution, imprisonment, the threat of death—were against him."<sup>10</sup>

This is the first prerequisite for experiencing God's peace. Those who experience God's peace are those who rejoice. But that's not all. Rejoicing in the Lord doesn't stand alone. It leads to other activities. Let's consider them and then we'll return to rejoicing.

*Prerequisite #2: Those who experience God's peace are those who exhibit gentleness (5).*

Christians are to demonstrate a distinctive disposition in their relationships with other people. That disposition is not to be isolated only to relationships with other Christians either. Paul specifies that we are to be known for one particular quality in our relationships before "all men." That quality is what is called "gentleness" in the NIV ("reasonableness" in the ESV; "moderation" in the KJV).

What is gentleness/reasonableness? What does it look like in action?

a) 1 Timothy 3:3 tells us that this quality is to characterize church leaders. "A bishop then must be... not violent, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient..."

b) Titus 3:2 tells us that this quality is to characterize all Christians. "Put them in mind... to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto

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<sup>8</sup> <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/maclaren/philippians/4.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/maclaren/philippians/4.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Lightner, R. P. (1985). [Philippians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 663). Victor Books.

all men."

What does mean to be a moderate or gentle person? This is a person who does not always stand up for his rights. This is the quality which keeps you from insisting on your rights, and standing obstinately for what is due to you. A moderate person is willing to overlook injustices given to him because he cares for others. A moderate person accepts others the way they are, in spite of their faults, just as Christ did with us. Synonyms are words like "forbearance", "graciousness", and "bigheartedness."

Think of the word BIGHEARTEDNESS.

Which raises the question. How can we be gentle when we are mistreated? Verse 5 gives the answer. "The Lord is at hand." In the NIV, "The Lord is near."

This can imply two things.

a) Near in space--Our omnipresent Lord is with us now. He knows our frustrations. He cares for us by interceding in our behalf (Heb 7:25).

b) Near in time--The coming of our Lord is near. It won't be long until he comes for us (3:21). And when He comes, all wrongs will be made right!

We'll never know true peace as long as we insist on getting our own just due in the world. It will never happen. So what happens when someone cuts you off in the lunch line, or when you have worked hard on a successful project at work, but your supervisor takes the credit for it? What happens is that if you respond with gentleness, you are opening yourself wide to the experience of the peace of God. If you don't, you won't experience His peace.

Sure it grinds us when we've been mistreated or overlooked or ridiculed by another person. But those who enjoy God's peace are those who rejoice in Him and those exhibit gentleness towards others. Which of course is fueled only by His grace and thus gives us even more opportunity to rejoice in Him!

Then there's a third vital prerequisite.

*Prerequisite #3: Those who experience God's peace are those who pray (6).*

Verse 6 says, "Be anxious for nothing." Don't be anxious. The word means to be pulled in different directions (Wiersbe). Are you an anxious person? A worrier? Are you a person who is often "stressed out"? Many years ago I heard Martin Clark from Cedarville University identify symptoms of stress including irritability, impatience, critical attitude, uncontrolled anger, and more. I would venture to say that most in this room are affected by stress. But God's Word tell us, "Don't be dominated by stress." But how?

There are over 500 approaches to counseling in the USA. Freud said that a person isn't responsible for himself. Others are. So if you're anxious and can't handle stress, it's not your fault. It's your parents for inadequate training. It's the fault of society. You are not responsible.

Skinner came along with his behavioralism and said that man is basically an animal. He has no freedom or dignity, because he has no soul, nor moral side. Therefore, treat him like an animal. Take care of the physical needs. If you're unable to handle stress, take a substance into your body. A pill. A drink.

But God's Word reveals a much different approach. Dr. Clark pointed out that the context of the command "Be anxious for nothing" is one dealing with our concept of God. The alternative to worry is prayer. The means to achieve the first negative command, "Don't be anxious" is to practice the second command, "Pray." We are not to avoid problems. We are not to deny that problems exist. But we are to "let our requests

be known unto God.” Paul had learned from experience that the way to be anxious about nothing was to be prayerful about everything!

Did Paul practice what he preached? Remember his first contact with Philippi? He was whipped, and thrown into prison, with his feet fastened in stocks. What did he and Silas do? Acts 16:25 tells us, “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them.” They prayed and sang songs to God! Did they have reasons to be anxious? They did, but they focused their minds on the Lord. They rejoiced in the Lord by praying.

Anxiety betrays our lack of confidence in God. And it robs us of God's peace. The person who enjoys God's peace is the person who prays.

We've seen three prerequisites thus far. Those who experience God's peace are those who rejoice in the Lord, demonstrate gentleness, and pray. What happens to people who exhibit these actions, enabled by grace of course?

*The Benefit of those who rejoice, exhibit gentleness, and pray: The Peace of God (7).*

Verse 7 mentions the “peace of God.” This is not “peace with God, which is a legal standing, a position for a person in Christ. This is the “peace of God” (only appearance in NT). This is practical, daily peace. This is the same peace which God Himself has, which He offers to us and we can enjoy.

According to verse 7, it “passes all understanding.” This means that we can't comprehend God's peace because of its greatness. It can also mean that God's peace is able to produce better results than human planning and scheming for security. God's peace is far better than security man can offer. Why?

Paul says it's because God's peace “keeps our hearts and minds.” The word “keep” is a military term which pictures a garrison of soldiers guarding a city at its gates. Their job was to protect the city from the attack of the enemy. God's peace then protects us from the enemies which can destroy us from the inside out--anxiety, stress, pressure.

But there is one important qualification for obtaining God's peace. We may attempt to manufacture the three prerequisites we've studied this evening—rejoicing, being considerate of people, and praying—on our own strength. But if we do, we'll not experience God's peace. Why? Because the key to God's peace is available only “in Christ Jesus,” as Paul concludes verse 7.

We must be united to Christ to experience. This means both we're saved but also we're abiding in Christ as John 15 explains. Our joy depends upon living in light of our union with Christ. As Jesus said in John 15:11, “These things I have spoken to you [what things? Abide in Me, etc], that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

Now let's go back to where we started. People who experience the peace of God are people who make rejoicing in the Lord a vital pursuit and practice in their lives. This is one of my top take-aways personally from the sabbatical. The Lord has been teaching me how vital this is for me on a daily basis.

The Bible has much more to say about rejoicing in the Lord, and I have much to learn. Many passages talk about it, demonstrate it, call for it, give examples of it, show the significance of it, and more. Perhaps in the future we'll do a more exhaustive series.

But to conclude this message, I'd like to demonstrate one of the ways I seek to implement this exhortation. I'd like to use my guitar and sing several passages that use the word “rejoice” or “joy”. Again, there are many, including the following.

**Philippians 4:4 (ESV)** “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”

**Isaiah 61:10 (NIV84)** “I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

**Psalms 85:6–7 (NIV84)** “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? <sup>7</sup> Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.”

**Psalms 70:4 (NIV84)** “But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation always say, ‘Let God be exalted!’”

**Psalms 16:8–11 (NIV84)** “I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. <sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, <sup>10</sup> because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. <sup>11</sup> You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

**Psalms 33:20–22 (NIV84)** “We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. <sup>21</sup> In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. <sup>22</sup> May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you.”

**Habakkuk 3:17–19 (NIV84)** “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. <sup>19</sup> The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”

**Isaiah 12 (NIV84)** “In that day you will say: ‘I will praise you, O LORD. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me. <sup>2</sup> Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.’ <sup>3</sup> With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. <sup>4</sup> In that day you will say: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. <sup>5</sup> Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. <sup>6</sup> Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.’”

**Zephaniah 3:17 (KJV 1900)** “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee *is* mighty; He will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.”