

“Rejoice in the Lord!”

[The “Philippians 4 Bible Sermon Video” was shown after the Scripture Reading and before the Sermon.]

The pew Bible’s Scripture Text, the Bulletin Cover, and that video – using a portion of the Reading from a different translation help us to approach what Paul was writing about his great intensity and focus. Specifically, let’s examine closely what the Apostle meant by his words in **verse 4**, *“rejoice in the Lord!”* or *“May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!”*

Within the context of this Scripture, those words may seem a bit strange or confusing. Having joy and Paul’s instructions about bringing reconciliation among some of the leaders in Philippi don’t seem to be closely related. What are we to be rejoicing about? Perhaps, we are to have joy or rejoicing as we live the New Life in Christ – the New Faith Relationship with God, one another, and with all people. Being forgiven – being welcomed into the Agape Love of God – being received into the New Faith Relationship with God comes with joy and rejoicing because our lives are part of that New Life and we follow our Lord’s example of radical and extravagant welcome of every person – seeking to manifest agape love in the way we treat everyone – protecting the welfare of those in need and seeking justice for all people!

Christian A. Eberhart jumped into this subject of being joyful in the Lord, when he asked, “Is it not somewhat odd to urge people to be joyful? This is probably true; however, if we could measure the ‘degree’ of joyfulness in our Christian congregations, then we would probably have to admit that advice for more joy rather than less might be quite expedient.” He stated, **“We are too often focused on sin instead of celebrating that we are forgiven.”** “We complain too often about the lack of holiness instead of remembering what we are as children of God. We are too often frustrated by feelings of weakness instead of being delighted about the strength of the Holy Spirit working in us. Yes, we too probably need a periodic reminder to ‘rejoice in the Lord.’ ...”

Eberhart pointed out, “There is a difference between something funny and deep joy, which has a lasting effect and the power to change us.” “Specifically, this joy is not the same as ‘fun,’ and following Jesus is certainly not always ‘fun.’ Just as Jesus, so Paul was countercultural. This was manifest in the fact that he was persecuted, beaten, and imprisoned. In the end, his faith cost him his life, as it did for many who believed in Jesus. This was not fun. Those who know Jesus have made this experience for the past 2000 years.”

Eberhart inquired further, **“So what is there to rejoice?”** He began answering his question, “Real and lasting joy comes from the confidence that, no matter what happens, we are inseparably connected to God and saved. It has to do with where the focus of one’s life is”. ... Eberhart concluded, “The Apostle Paul could rejoice because he did not fear death. A

few years before penning his Letter to the Philippians, he wrote to the congregations in Rome: ‘Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?’” (Romans 8:35).” (“Commentary on Philippians 4:1-9” by Christian A. Eberhart posted on www.workingpreacher.org)

The theological aspects of the Apostle Paul’s message about rejoicing in the Lord include putting our trust – faith – confidence in Jesus’ and our Divine Parent’s Agape Love for us. An important part of depending on the Lord – being a child of God is that having such a relationship and living it out includes a childlike joy. Viewing the following video helps us remember that joy we have as children of God – the joy we are called to have in the Lord. [The “JoyRide” video was shown.]

So, we are to live life to the fullest – live joyfully as a child of God! However, the joy we live has some very serious and important aspects. For example, “rejoicing in the Lord” is not self-centered but God focused and centered on the wellbeing of others. It comes with a behavior – a way of life, which was revealed in Jesus’ public ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection. The Apostle Paul revealed an aspect of the New Life in Christ in **verse 5**, ***“Show a gentle attitude toward everyone.”***

Frankly, given that our culture and society are so self-centered and encourage everyone to chase after wealth, personal pleasure, prestige, and violence, rejoicing in the Lord – joyously living the New Life in Christ will not win us a lot of admirers – will not lead to large crowds in our Worship, Education, Fellowship, and Service activities. Since apparent success is the world’s mantra, it is understandable when Christians, who practice rejoicing in the Lord in their daily lives, become discouraged, dishearten, depressed, and even filled with despair. However, all is not lost!

The Apostle Paul encouraged the Philippi Church and us when he wrote in **verses 6 - 8**, ***“Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart. ... And God’s Peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. ... And the God Who gives us peace will be with you.”*** Putting our faith – trust in Jesus and our Divine Parent – in that Joyful New Faith Relationship – we intentionally emphasize the relationship by frequently focusing on prayer. Yes, the Lord is Trustworthy and God’s Peace – Forgiveness and Love assure us of our ultimate happiness and safety in our union with Jesus Christ!

Rejoicing in the Lord is that loving and freeing Relationship with the Lord! It is getting on board the heavenly train with joy and trust. It is also the grateful and full expression of God’s Agape Love through the way we treat one another, the way we seek the welfare of others, and the way we work for persons in need of justice. There is no reason to give up rejoicing in the Lord as we live the New Life in Christ and the New Faith Relationship with God. Rejoice! Amen.