

Philippians 3-4 Lecture

The title to today's lesson is "Rejoice in the Lord". This may seem like an odd, or even rebellious, question. "Why?" Why should we rejoice in the Lord? It doesn't take much to look around this world we live in today and see all the effects of evil and sin. There's so much misery, so much suffering, so much pain that the weight of it all just crushes us. Given what's going on around us, we're lucky to just be able to survive, right? Let's look again at this very specific command Paul begins chapter 3 with Rejoice **in the Lord**. Yes, the world is a scary place, but it is not the world that we are to rejoice over – we're to rejoice in the Lord.

I could stand up here for hours with a never-ending supply of reasons to rejoice in the Lord, but for everyone's sake, I'm going to highlight just a few verses: Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Hebrews 13:5b: God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." John 3:16-17: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Now I would say those are some pretty good reasons to rejoice in the Lord, wouldn't you? Jesus Himself tells us why we're to rejoice in Him in John 15:11 "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Yes, Jesus was the slaughtered Lamb of God, and He was a Man of Sorrows, but also He was a Man of Joy. Since He is a co-equal member of the triune Godhead, then God is a God of joy. Too many Christians have this false notion that in order to be a good follower of Jesus Christ you must be this somber, serious, and fun-sucking sad sack. Now I've read the Bible several times, and I don't see any such requirement. As Christians, our redemption is guaranteed and

sealed by God with the giving of the Holy Spirit in each of us. The Holy Spirit is also a co-equal member of the triune Godhead, so if He's living in us, then we should be full of joy, right? If we're not, then we need to be asking ourselves, "Why not?"

Last week, Jim gave us the Greek translation for rejoicing - "chairō", and this means to be full of cheer. Our homework last week posed the question, 'is joy and happy the same thing?' The responses I heard in my group was typically happy is more of a temporary feeling, while joy was linked to the understanding of the consistent loving presence of the Lord. Rejoicing and being joyful are linked to our mindsets – what do we hold in concrete to be true. Our mindsets then dictate our attitudes. Our attitudes then often guide what we focus on. There's a good saying, "Your attitude does, indeed, affect your altitude."

Jesus spoke specifically about the importance of our focus in Matthew 6:22-23 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" Unhealthy eyes are when our focus is in the gutter or wallowing in the misery of this world. When we set our eyes on darkness, then we'll be in darkness. That's as high as we're going to go. However, if we choose to focus on the right things – have healthy eyes, we can rise up on wings like eagles. Let's take a look at a couple of Scriptures that will help us define what our focus in this pilgrimage we're on should be.

2 Corinthians 4:18: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Hebrews 12:1-2: "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand

of the throne of God.” So we’re not to focus on what is seen – the world, the temporary – but on the unseen, the eternal. We’re to focus on Jesus, and there we see that word “joy”. What was Jesus’ source of joy? The Father’s will. God’s will is that all should come to repentance and be saved. The joy of the Lord is in each of us whom have confessed Jesus as our Lord! God’s joy is us! Now do we see why our focus needs to be on Him? We are His joy, and He is ours. That is something we should have no problem rejoicing over – as long as we remain focused on the right things.

Paul talks about a *desire to participate* in Christ’s sufferings in verse 10 of Chapter 3. That is a sign of serious spiritual maturity because it is in our sufferings, if we choose to look and listen hard enough, that we will see and hear a greater level of God’s love for us. Your understandable response to that statement could be, “But I’m no Paul the Apostle?” That’s a true statement – you’re not Paul, but you do have the same Holy Spirit dwelling in you that He did. If we choose to draw on His power – the same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead – we can attain this same level of maturity that Paul achieved, and recognizable fruit of that maturity is joy.

In verse 2, we read of the ‘mutilators of the flesh’ - this is a reference to the non-believing Jews who were still seeking their righteousness according to the flesh – specifically, Paul is referencing in the next verse on circumcision. In the Old Testament, circumcision was a symbolic act of denying the flesh – cutting it off – as an act of consecration to God. It was **symbolic** – and painful. In the New Testament our circumcision-like act is faith – it is our faith – given to us by the grace of God - that consecrates us before God.

Paul goes on in the next couple of verses to give us a little background on him – he was a devoted Jew, circumcised on the 8th day according to the Law, he was from the tribe of Benjamin, he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee, and

a zealous persecutor of the church. All of these “titles of distinction” were based on his righteousness according to his obedience to the Law. These items were the alleged foundation for his existence. When coming to know Christ, he would realize that his foundation for his old life was built on sand. I can relate to this – when I became a Christian, so much of what I thought was true was a total lie. I’ve spent the last 18 years of my life digging out the lies I lived by and replacing them with the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I’m still doing it.

Here’s a question for each of you – what lies are you still holding onto? What deceptions of the enemy are still gripping you? Are you allowing your circumstances to rob you of the truths of God’s promises of His goodness and love for you? What if your real challenge isn’t your circumstances but your willingness to believe God’s goodness and love for you? What if the greatest realities in your life aren’t your circumstances but God’s promises for you?

This mindset must have been Paul’s for him to make this stunning statement in verses 8-9a, “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.” The foundation of his life – the foundation of his righteousness before God – was proven to be garbage and worth losing all of it for one reason and one reason only – for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as his Lord.

What is so important in our lives that these things could possibly compare to knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord? That is a question each of us needs to ask ourselves. Better yet, ask the Lord to reveal those things in our lives that we’re holding up as idols – things that we count on that we are deceived into thinking they have more value than knowing Jesus. The Lord may ask us to make some radical changes in our lives, but He will only do it in love and in a manner that He

knows we can handle. The thing we need to remember is that if the Lord is leading us to do something, that leading is rooted in His goodness and is targeted to do one thing – to give us an upgrade in our relationship with Him. It may seem scary to do this, but it is only scary if we don't believe God isn't good enough to replace what He asks us to give up with something better.

Righteousness was a big deal to Paul – is it to us? How much righteousness do we see in this world today? Pretty hard to find isn't it? The world doesn't promote righteousness – it mocks it, it ridicules it, and it dilutes it. Paul recognized, and we need to recognize, that we're not going to find any righteousness in the world, or even in ourselves – we're only going to find righteousness that is acceptable to God in God – in His Son. God the **Father** imparts righteousness to those who, by faith, confess God the **Son** as Lord and Savior – by His grace. When we call on the name of the Lord, we are receiving His righteousness, so when God sees us, He sees us through the pure, holy, and righteous blood of His Son. We are righteous because He is righteous.

Verses 10-11 show Paul requesting, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” According to Paul, there are three progressive steps to knowing Christ. The first of which is “to know the power of his resurrection”. Now we all can relate to that, can't we? Who doesn't want to tap into the power that resurrected Jesus from the dead? What does that power do? It gives life to the dead! This is our God – a giver of life and a restorer of life. If with God anything is possible, then what in our lives that we think is dead is beyond the life-giving/restoring/ resurrecting power of God almighty?

The next step, though, is a tough one, “and participation in his sufferings”. Why in the world would Paul want to participate in Jesus’ sufferings? In response to suffering, our sin nature directs our minds to focus on our flesh. Our flesh is the playground of the enemy. Satan can’t touch us spiritually because we are eternally safe in God’s hands. However, the enemy can and will attack our flesh. But, if our flesh is dead in Christ, then what good is it doing us to focus on our fleshly sufferings? Think about this as a potential mindset change – what if our sufferings are really meant to demonstrate the power of God to overwhelm them and reveal His goodness and love?

I’m convinced Paul believed this. He saw that Jesus suffered more than all for His goodness and holiness and righteousness. Yes, He suffered immensely, but what came of these sufferings? - Millions of people’s souls being saved and eternally secure in the Father’s hands. There can be fruit in suffering – if we’re willing to take that mature step of faith and see the possibility that God is trying to reveal a greater truth about Him and His love for us. This is NOT easy!!!! Suffering hurts! It can be extremely painful. We want deliverance!! For those of you who are suffering, my heart goes out to you. But I’m going to challenge you to ask this question to Jesus, “Lord, what are You trying to show me in this suffering?” Keep asking – I’m believing for you that He will answer, and He will answer with a message of the deepest love and the truest hope you’ve ever experienced. It’s a big step, but what have we got to lose?

The final step of Paul’s request sounds even worse “becoming like him in his death”. The truth of the matter is that this is a step of relief. What was Jesus when He died? He was our sin. When we become like Jesus in His death, we are coming into agreement that the penalty of our sin – the end of the eternal cost of our sin – is dead. If our sin is crucified and dead via Jesus, then its hold on us, its

control over us is what? Dead!! Isn't that worth a Hallelujah? The addiction, the guilt, the shame, all the sin that had us trudging through life in shackles and chains is dead! Satan will attempt the lesser resurrection – to remind us of the past life of our sin, but we can boldly proclaim to Him, “That old me died with Jesus on His Cross - I am a new holy and righteous creation in the permanent care of God Almighty. Your accusations have no truth – be gone!” Amen? Let's all proclaim this together as a statement of the authority we have against the enemy by the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus name.

Paul was willing to participate in Jesus' death because He met the resurrected Lord. That's the key to our faith. Are we willing to give up our fleshly desires – to risk what is important to us – to hold onto lies that haven't gotten us anywhere? We can only be asked to do this if we're certain that God can be trusted to keep His promises – to do the same for you as He did for Jesus when He surrendered His life. God is a keeper of His promises – He cannot lie. He also loves those who believe in His Son just as much as He loves His Son. Surrendering our lives to Jesus is a big step, but it's the best step we can ever take. There is great resurrecting power – new life giving power - available to each of us – ***if*** we choose to believe.

Paul will go onto acknowledge that this process is a life-long process, and it requires pressing in – staying relentlessly focused on the promises of God, because he knew the enemy will also be persistent in attacking our flesh to generate doubt and unbelief. He describes the process in verses 13b-14, “But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” What's the first step? “Forgetting what is behind”. This is a tough step – the painful things that have been done to us and the painful things we've done to

others – they can have a vice-grip on our existences. Here’s the thing, though, they can’t be changed, **but** they can be forgiven. That is what Paul is exhorting us to do – we can’t change the past, but we can allow the Lord to forgive the past and offer us a hope for a better future with Him as our ever-present Lord and Savior. It’s the “great exchange” of faith – we handover the sinful and painful past to God, and He hands to us a hope of a liberated and joyful future with Him. Paul even uses the word “straining” to emphasize that what is ahead of him is so glorious, so awesome, and so wonderful. What is this that he is so focused on getting to? “The goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

I am amazed at how many people don’t want the rapture to happen. This is an indictment of the church’s poor teaching on heaven and where our true citizenship is. If we really spent time reviewing Scripture about the wonders of living in the Kingdom of God, I am convinced our appetites for what the world has to offer would diminish and our desire for being with Jesus would become preeminent in our thoughts and actions. Yes, we sorrow over leaving our loved ones, but that sorrow is so incredibly overwhelmed over the joy of the prize of being with the One loved us, gave His life for us, was raised for us, and so He could for evermore walk with us in His Kingdom. Paul goes on in verse 15 to acknowledge this mindset is one of a mature believer, but he lovingly promises that even if we’re not there yet in thinking like this, God will make it clear to us. God is so good, so patient, so merciful, and so loving. He’s that doting Father watching us in pure joy as we spiritual babies struggle to learn to walk but stumble and fall in our efforts. It’s been wisely said that God has no problem with these struggles of stumbling and falling if the direction of these struggles is towards Him.

In verse 16, Paul makes an important exhortation, “Only let us live up to what we have already attained.” What is or are the things we have attained? Let’s review again some of the highlights of Ephesians 1:3-14:

- He has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (v. 3)
- We were chosen to be holy and blameless in the Father (v. 4)
- We are adopted to sonship through Jesus – in accordance with His pleasure and will (v. 5)
- We are redeemed through His blood, our sins are forgiven (v. 7)
- We are sealed with the Holy Spirit – guarantying our inheritance (vs. 13-14)

Let’s look at this list – do our lives resemble these promises of God that each of us received upon our confession of Jesus as our Lord and Savior? In Paul’s words, are we living up to what we have attained? These are the things he is speaking to that we have attained by faith! Folks, I’m not trying to condemn you or make you feel badly if these truths aren’t evident in your lives. The harsh reality is our lives on Earth can be brutal – very painful – seemingly relentlessly unfair. Look again at this list – what’s the common theme among all these things that we have attained? They are **spiritual** blessings. Spiritual blessings may or may not resolve our earthly circumstances, but they will, *if we believe*, **always** allow us to rise above them and give us the faith that there is a greater hope that cannot be altered by even the most painful situations. That is the **truth** – don’t let Satan convince you otherwise with His lies.

Paul will go on in the next several verses acknowledging the enemy will indeed attack the truths of God’s promises – Satan will do this by using people – people who Paul calls “enemies of Christ”. Interestingly, he describes these people in tears. Why? I would suspect these “enemies” are his former cohorts – the Pharisees

– the religious Jewish leaders – allegedly mature in knowledge of Scripture but with no understanding of Who God is. I was at a funeral for someone once, and the pastor said a beautiful thing, “He didn’t know the Bible all that well, but he sure knew Who wrote it.” Don’t get me wrong - what we’re doing here at People of the World is very important, but even Scripture warns us of getting puffed up in knowledge. Yes knowledge is important, but it should only be important if it leads to an intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus didn’t say, “My people will know My Book”. He said, “They will know My voice.” Speaking involves interaction – a relationship. That’s God’s true desire for each and every one of us.

Paul concludes chapter 3 with a great reminder, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Here we see again where our true citizenship is – where our true home is – in heaven. The phrase “eagerly await” is from the Greek word “apekdechomai”, which is translated “to expect fully”. Are we expecting Jesus to come back? Shouldn’t we want to be expecting Him to come back soon? Look at the promise of what is going to happen when Jesus returns – “He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”. All the aches and pains, all the disabilities, all the deterioration, all the wrinkles, all the unwanted gas – all of that is going to be transformed into a permanent and eternal massive upgrade of a new body. Praise the Lord!

One last point about this statement from Paul that we must not forget, “the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control”. Jesus is in control, loved ones. This verse does not speak of a power that will enable Him to bring everything under control – as if this is only true in the

future. The word, “enables” is a *present tense* action word. Jesus is in control. For those of us that aren’t experiencing major issues in life, this statement of truth is pretty easy to accept. However, for those of us who are facing difficult circumstances, we must hold onto this truth that Jesus is in control and then cling to the promise of Romans 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” The key word in this verse is “all” – this means both the good and the bad are working together for good. This is admittedly tough when our surroundings are painful, but it is true. Remember – faith is the confidence in what we hope for and the assurance about what we do not see.

In chapter 4 we learn of what appears to be some conflict within the Philippian church between two people – Euodia and Syntyche. As long as there are going to be people in churches, there’s going to be problems. I’ve heard it said about business, “Business is easy until you get people involved.” Well, it’s no different in churches. Paul offers the solution to resolve the conflict – to be of the same mind. No two people think exactly alike, so how is this exhortation possible? As I mentioned earlier, each believer has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In the triune Godhead there is perfect unity. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is our role model for unity, so the key for one or more believers to be of the same mind – to be in unity – is to be living lives that are led by and submitted to the Holy Spirit. If you’ve seen the great “Planet Earth” videos, you’ll remember the clips where the predator’s tactics are to separate out its victim from the herd, so it can attack and devour the victim. It does this because the predator knows there is strength in the unity of the herd. The same goes for us – Satan seeks to separate us by preying on our pride and ego, which are solely focused on our selfish interests, which, by definition, will be at odds with someone else’s selfish interests. It is only when we equally

submit to the Holy Spirit that we will achieve the “being of the same mind” Paul is encouraging.

Paul concludes the letter with the exhortation that is the title to this lesson – to rejoice in the Lord. This is such an important exhortation to Paul that he repeats it. He then goes on to offer a checklist, if you will, of what rejoicing in the Lord looks like. Let’s take a look at each of them one at a time.

Verse 5 tells us, “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” I think this is an extraordinary statement. If I’m going to be asked to rejoice in something, I’m going to want to scream it out, dance, sing, and maybe even be a little obnoxious. When I think of rejoicing, I think of sports fans celebrating a championship. Yet, Paul’s first component of what rejoicing in the Lord is anything but that – it’s to be so gentle that it is evident to all. We don’t live in gentle world today, do we? With the advent of social media, people are hiding behind their computers as cyber bullies leaping at chances to judge and criticize others. It is so mean-spirited. Paul is telling us that how to prove that we are His adopted children is to act like Jesus did – to be gentle. He then tells how and why we can do this –that the Lord is near.

The Lord is near. The Lord is here – did you know that? Scripture tells us that where two or three are gathered in His name, the Lord is there. Our Good Shepherd Who watches over us and protects us is always near – Jesus said in the great commission that He is surely with us to the very end of the age. We can rejoice in the Lord because of this, and we can demonstrate the truth of His presence by being gentle.

Verse 6 offers the next step in what rejoicing in the Lord looks like, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” This is a progressive set of steps – they’re built one by one with the each one relying on the truths of the former. We

just learned that the Lord is near, so with that truth not only are we to be gentle, but also we're not to be anxious about anything. 1 John 4:18 promises, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment." God is love, Jesus is God, and Jesus is near at all times. That means, if we believe these truths, there is no reason to be fearful or anxious for anything. What's the first thing that disturbs a sense of gentleness? - Fear. Our ability to be gentle is generated by our complete and total trust in God's protection – to fully believe His love for us is far greater than what Satan is going to use to attempt to create fear in us.

We arrive at that trust through prayers and petitions to God. Prayer is not a monologue – us relentlessly telling God what we want and need. Prayer is a dialogue – it's a conversation where not only are we speaking, but also so is He. If we allow Him, God will speak to us the truths of His promises to us to help us build our trust in His infallible ability and willingness to keep those promises. I think it's interesting that Paul throws into this verse regarding our prayers and petitions thanksgiving. I believe that this thanksgiving is not just to give thanks to God for what He has already provided for us, but to thank Him for how He's going to respond to our petitions – even if the answer is "no". We can only do this if we're rooted in the truth of God's goodness towards us. Remember Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Paul offers the fruit of our trust in these truths in verse 7, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Through the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which confirms the truths of Scripture and God's promises, we can tap into the peace of God's love and care that rivals that of the peace of a sleeping baby in a mother's arms. That's hard to imagine when the heat is on, the pain is great, and the

loneliness is real. Folks, a believer in Jesus Christ is never alone, and He offers the peace of His protection – but we have to take it and trust in it.

Verse 8 takes us back to our previous conversation about our mindsets, “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.” You’ve probably heard the saying, “We are what we eat.” What are we feeding on? If we’re feeding on the world – the news, social media, the Internet, etc., we likely have a bad case of indigestion. This is not the “food” that helps us to rejoice in the Lord. These things that Paul lists here in verse 8 should be our “food staples” if we’re going to have the hope of rejoicing in the Lord despite our painful circumstances. These things are tough to find in today’s world, but they’re there – if we look at these things through the eyes of the Lord. Remember, God is a God of love and a giver of life. Don’t let the enemy drag you down into negativity, judgment, and doom. Paul concludes this list with a promise that if we follow this checklist, the God of peace will be with us. I don’t know about you, but I can use all the peace God has to offer.

Paul then speaks to another strength he has in his faith – contentment. He’s been in both dire need and in abundance – yet he didn’t find his contentment in these earthly provisions. Paul’s true provision was Jesus. One of God’s names is Jehovah Jireh, which means the Lord provides. God’s provision isn’t selective or limited; it’s complete and total. When we can build our trust and faith to a point in truly knowing God will take care of us regardless of our circumstances, we can achieve the kind of contentment and peace Paul is advocating. It isn’t easy, but it is true.

Verse 13 is a foundational Scripture for Paul, and it should be a foundational Scripture for every one of us, “I can do all this through him who gives me

strength.” I could do an entire lecture on this verse alone, but I’ll simply ask you to commit this verse to memory and remember a key word “all”. All the gentleness, all the peace, all the contentment can only be obtained through Jesus Christ. These states of mind do not exist on a sustainable level in this world – whatever the world offers as sources of gentleness, peace, and contentment are fleeting. The strength that sustained Jesus through the betrayal and agony of the Cross - and the power of His resurrection is available to each of us – again, ***if*** we choose to believe.

Paul will conclude this letter with a grateful admonition of the gifts the Philippians have sent to him via Epaphroditus – telling them it’s not so much the gifts that he’s received from the people that excite him but how God will remember and no doubt bless the Philippians because of these gifts. His final proclamation of this letter is one we should all commit to mind and soul, “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” Can we say this with total confidence? I said earlier that we may not be the Apostle Paul, but we have the same Holy Spirit living in us as He did. The promises that were given to and confirmed by Paul are the same ones given to us – and we can rejoice in the Lord for them. It just comes down to the same question I challenged you last time I spoke that I’ll challenge you now, do you choose to believe in the One Who cannot lie or the one who is the father of lies? It’s your choice, but it’s only in One you can rejoice. Let’s pray.