

Why You Can Rejoice

Introduction. Now is traditionally a season of great joy. That joy can come from deeply-held religious beliefs or the sense of family and togetherness the season brings.

The birth of Christ would introduce great joy into the world: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (Luke 2:10).

There’s great power in rejoicing. Our culture is seismically shifting, and that can be very scary. It’s easy to slip into discouragement and despair when you observe culture, especially over the last couple of years. The effects have been profound: (1) Mental health has reached crisis levels; (2) the problem of loneliness is growing; (3) relationships are straining under new pressures; and, (4) addictions have deepened.

Turning back to the dependable scriptures for help in difficult times, there are four reasons from the Philippian letter for Christians to rejoice. In fact, Philippians is a letter about rejoicing (Philippians 1:18; 2:16-18, 28; 3:1, 3; 4:4) and joy (Philippians 1:4, 25; 2:2; 4:1). And it’s not like Paul was in great, upper middle class circumstances and therefore knew no difficulty in his life. Philippians was a prison epistle (1:7, 13, 16) so Paul knew hardship, yet he could rejoice. People need to know how to rejoice now so we’re going to look at one point from each chapter that will give you this power.

I. The Power Of Resolve (1:12-14)

- A. You may feel immobilized, but the gospel will never be incapacitated; preach it.
- B. Paul told the Corinthians that a Christian’s job is to simply do the work of spreading the word and making disciples. God will cause the increase (1 Corinthians 3:5-6). Hopefully, we all do the best work we can, but no one knows the final quality of their work until the end (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).
- C. I’m sure Paul thought plenty of times that he could’ve waited until the crowds calmed down and people were more receptive (Acts 19:23-30; 21:10-13, 26-30), but he kept on preaching, even in bad circumstances. Bad circumstances weren’t “out of season” for him (2 Timothy 4:2-3), and they needn’t be for us.
 - 1. Some prophets had amazing success, like Nathan, but others not so much, like Jeremiah. They were ruthlessly persecuted by their own countrymen (Matthew 23:34-35), but they kept on going.
 - 2. In New Testament times, Stephen (Acts 7:59) and James (Acts 12:1-2) both lost their lives for faithful service.
- D. Paul did what he could in prison. Even though he didn’t have the multitudes of Jesus listening to him, he still proclaimed the truth to his universe of listeners. Sometimes I get discouraged and think that this person or that person won’t listen to what I have to say, and I write them off. But I should let the gospel do its work in people’s hearts.

II. The Power Of Example (2:14-16)

- A. The potential of influence is inestimable and should not be held back.
- B. The indictment of complaining or arguing, which stained the people of God in the Old Testament (cp. Exodus 16:7-8; Numbers 11:1), is still against His will

now. Not only did they complain about Moses; more seriously, they rebelled against God Himself.

- C. The Philippians are called to set their own house in order by amending and improving with purging out the old leaven of party strife and bickering, so that God's purpose for them as a witnessing community may be fulfilled.
- D. We normally use v. 15 in a very general way to discuss and draw lessons about influence. But the context has to do with unity and harmony.
 - 1. "Complaining" describes grumbling discontent in the congregation, and "disputing" depicts evil reasonings and disputes that usually follow.
 - 2. The problem of disunity in the congregation has already been noted in this letter (v. 2), and more is to come (4:2). Division is a tool of the devil that he wields constantly (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-4; cp. Ephesians 4:1-3). And remember, division can also be wielded in marriages and other relationships in life. Avoid the "complaining" and "disputing" in all of them.
 - 3. Unredeemed people complain and find fault, but Christians rejoice. Issues are resolved with maturity before they give rise to division. Promoting peace and unity in your various relationships means that you can become "blameless," "harmless," and "without fault" before God.

III. The Power Of Citizenship (3:18-20)

- A. You are living in this world, but don't ever let this world live in you; you're better than that.
- B. The thought of those whose lives are dominated by the desire for earthly things leads the apostle to say that true Christians know that their life and citizenship is now in heaven with Christ (cp. Ephesians 1:3; 2:6).
 - 1. In the New Testament, "citizenship" is used as a noun meaning "stranger" or "alien" (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11). These uses infer that believers have an alien status as temporary residents of earth; our permanent citizenship is in heaven (cp. Ephesians 2:12, "commonwealth").
 - 2. The Philippians could be proud of their citizenship in a Roman colony, just as we all have an earthly citizenship which has its privileges and obligations. Paul said our life is "hidden with Christ in God" in Colossians 3:1-4. Our lives belong in a real and profound sense to the invisible spiritual realm.
 - 3. This means that we must never become too comfortable with life here on this earth, for it only lasts a short while. We have to appraise the gift and citizenship of a heavenly life above all, and live in hope of our future inheritance. When we can do that, we will eagerly await the reappearing from heaven of our Savior, and therefore rejoice.

IV. The Power Of Peace (4:6-7)

- A. Wherever you live, whomever you're with, whatever you do, Christ alone will give you peace.
- B. Paul attaches to this classic exhortation to pray the beautiful promise that when we turn from anxiety to prayer and thanksgiving, God will give us His own "peace." This peace is for those who are already at peace with God by the

blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20) and through justification by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

- C. This peace of God “transcends all understanding,” for it's not only sufficient for us but far surpasses human comprehension. It acts as a sentry to guard our hearts and thoughts from all anxiety and despair. Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10), Jonah (Jonah 2:2-9), and Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) all turned to prayer in bad times in their lives. Prayer isn't a button to be pushed; it's a relationship with God to be pursued — for the benefit of His saints.

Conclusion. You can shine as a light in the world and help people to see the joy that can be found in turning to and serving God. It's not a “plastic” happiness or a happiness that simply neglects or ignores all the bad in life. It's the deliberate choice to celebrate your journey to heaven, no matter what the day may bring.