

Philippians 4:4-7 God Brings Joy to Our Hearts! Pentecost 22 (due to Reformation) 11/05/17

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God's grace and peace are yours through Jesus Christ to give you lasting peace and joy in Him. Amen.
We read from Philippians 4:4-7 to find our source of joy.
These are Your words, heavenly Father. Use them to give our hearts lasting joy in Christ. Amen.

Dear Christians who rejoice in the Lord,

I have a glass of water. Some would say that it is half-empty, while others would say that it is half-full. According to Paul's letter to the Philippians, what should he call it? Paul would call it both. It is half-empty and half-full. A half-empty glass reminds us that life in a sinful world has its limits and that this world will come to an end. A half-full glass reminds us that we have the Savior Jesus Christ who is Lord of all. Despite the power of sin and evil, Jesus will keep His promise to bring all Christians to fullness of life.

God brings joy to our hearts!

First, He brings joy despite our problems. I cannot imagine what life is like for non-Christians to deal with problems, especially the power of death. Paul was writing to the Philippians from a Roman prison. He knew there was a possibility that he would be executed. Yet, he did not give up in sadness. He did not allow outward circumstances to determine his thinking. He wrote, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* (v.4) Life was difficult for many Christians at Paul's time. Unbelievers were jealous of them. They hated that people who formerly worshipped idols had turned to Christ. At the same time the Philippians were experienced problems from within. Two prominent women in the church were arguing. They had worked together with Paul to share the news of Christ, but later they couldn't get along. This was hurting the cause of Christ! Paul encouraged the Christians to reunite them in the power and love of Christ.

Ever since sin entered the world, there has been strife between people and inside each person. When we hurt, it's hard to see how God works such things for our good. Yet, Jesus reminds us that even though there are troubles, pains, sadness, and evil in life, they have their limits. Paul wrote, "*The Lord is near.*" (v.5) He meant that Jesus could appear in glory at any time to end the troubles of the world and take us to the perfect world that He will make for all believers. We will receive glorified bodies and live in perfect peace!

Even if Christ doesn't appear in glory during our life-time, He will appear to us personally when we die and He welcomes our souls into heaven. God wants us to keep our temporary troubles in perspective compared to eternal life. Think of our perspective like a camera. The lens can focus on something near or far. So, for us we can focus on what is near – the problems of life or we can focus on what is far – eternal joy! Jesus told His followers, "*Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you..., because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.*" (Luke 6:22-23) We will know the joy of heaven not because we suffered, but because the innocent Jesus suffered and died on the cross to give us eternal life. When we are troubled by past sins, by financial problems, by sickness or pain or problems at home, God reminds us that He hasn't forgotten us or forsaken us. Through faith in Jesus we have His victory that He will share with us forever! Rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances! I say it again: rejoice!

Second, we rejoice in the Lord since we have His peace. Paul wrote, "*The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" (v.7) Is the peace of God that important to us? If we don't know that God is at peace with us, every time we sin we will wonder what God will do to punish us. In life, if are careless in a store and bump into a glass shelf so that it shatters, we quickly look around hoping that we won't have to pay for the consequences. If we accidentally drive

through a red light at an empty intersection, we immediately look around to see if there are flashing red and blue lights following after us. We fear the consequences of a ticket and fine for the wrong we've done.

But, we don't need to fear God's punishment. God's peace doesn't depend on our behavior or thinking. It is a peace that Jesus won by His death. Isaiah wrote, "*The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him.*" (Isaiah 53:5) God is at peace with us because He has forgiven our sin by putting His punishment for sin on Jesus. Jesus has paid for all the damage we have done in life. He has paid our fine to God for the full penalty of all our sins. No matter what happens to us as Christians in life, no matter how bad life seems, God is not punishing us in anger. We need not fear because He is at peace with us in Christ!

Paul said that God's peace will guard believers. Philippi had a garrison of the Roman legion in town. Citizens didn't need to worry about enemy attacks as long as the legion stood guard. So Christians can be at peace in their minds and hearts as they trust that God will keep His promises. Think of how many times the people of Israel were in trouble: Egypt, Red Sea, wilderness, and in the Promised Land and how God saved them again and again. So often with us, rather than be angry with God for what happens in life or become anxious about these things, we should bring our concerns to Jesus, trust in His answers, and be at peace. Paul wrote the Colossian Christians, "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly ... with gratitude in your hearts to God.*" (Colossians 3:15-16)

It's easy to be here on a Sunday and talk about trust in God at all times, but it is not easy when we are in the middle of troubles or temptations. Paul wrote how to apply God's peace: "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*" (v.6) God allows us to face trouble at times so that we learn to call on Him by prayer and to leave our worries with Him. Remember, we are praying to our almighty Lord who loves us as his own dear children. What a privilege it is for us to bring our petitions daily before God's throne. We can be confident that in Christ our prayers are heard and answered. The Bible promises, "*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" (1 Peter 5:7) When we bring our hurting hearts and concerns to God, He will carry our burdens. Then, we can respond as He answers our prayers by giving thanks to Him! Where there is a heart of thanks, there is rejoicing in the Lord no matter what our circumstances!

Another way that God's peace affects us is in our attitude toward others. "*Let your gentleness be evident to all.*" (v.5) The word gentleness means to be self-sacrificing. It means that in freedom we yield our rights out of concern for others. Rather than have self-pity with our problems, we pray and seek to help others who have greater concerns than us. Our purpose as believers is to tell and show the love of Christ that others may know Him as the Savior. We pray to have an attitude like Jesus in the story of the lost sheep who said, "*Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.*" (Luke 15:6) It reminds us of two things: Heaven rejoices when one sinner repents, so let's join them! Second, we were once that lost sheep who was found!

So, whether we look at a glass as half-empty or half-full, we can be thankful for God's true point of view. Life with its troubles will have an end. And in Christ, we can be sure that He will work for good even in bad situations. Through Christ, God is for us! We can know His love here by faith in Christ and in heaven forever. As we focus on God's promises we will have true peace! As we bring our concerns to God, we can be glad He is ready to hear and answer. So, rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Amen.