

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“Rejoice in the Lord Always”**

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Thanksgiving, 2020

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

I admit, I have a little trouble with this verse. Maybe you do too. “Rejoice in the Lord always?” Really? How? How now? Rejoice as the spirit moves you. That’s plausible – on the wedding day, at the birth of a child, or when you finally pay off the house. But rejoice always? Rejoice when divorce shatters a family, or when a teenager runs away from home, or when your workplace locks its doors for good? Does Paul really think we can rejoice in the midst of all that?

He does seem adamant: “Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again: Rejoice!” And he does have the authority to tell us to rejoice. After all, he is an apostle called by the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, these words are not just his words. They are words of Scripture. They are God’s words. Paul also has what we would call “street cred.” Quite literally, he’s earned his stripes. In 2 Corinthians, he writes, “I have been flogged . . . Five times I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles . . .” The litany goes on and on. And yet he says, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” He’s not a politician doing the requisite fly-over the disaster zone. And he’s not sheltered in some ivory tower. No, while writing this, Paul is sitting in a Roman prison, and he has a pretty good idea his life is going to end soon and not peacefully in his sleep. Still he tells us, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Notice it’s not aimless rejoicing. It’s not empty, pollyannish cheerleading. No, it’s rejoice in the Lord, the God of our salvation. He’s the source of our joy, regardless the circumstances.

In fact, the whole letter to the Philippians overflows with rejoicing even though Paul knows his time is short. He knows the days are evil. He knows there is feuding in the Philippian church. Still he writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always.” His faith in the Lord is at the root of his joy.

Similarly, our faith in the Lord can inform and inspire joy and thanksgiving in us, also today. Today, there is joy found in the Lord. It’s not the loud, shallow sort of joy associated with heavy drinking, party hats, and horn squawkers. Today it’s more likely to be a quiet joy, but steady, durable, available. It’s Christian joy.

Even a quick look reveals the Bible is full of joy. Job 38 speaks of the joy at creation when “the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.”

There is joy in repentance. Psalm 51, “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin . . . wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness.”

There is more joy in the Lord than found in booze. Psalm 4: "You have filled my heart with greater joy than when . . . new wine abound. I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."

The miraculous conception of Jesus elicits joy. In Luke 1, Mary says, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

The near presence of the unborn Jesus elicits joy. In Luke 1 Elizabeth says to Mary, "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."

At his birth there's reason for all people to be joyful. Luke 2, "The angels said to the shepherds, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'"

There is joy in his teachings, that is, in Christian doctrine. John 15, "I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

There's joy even on the cross. Hebrews 12, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame." There's no joy in being crucified unless it's in the heart of the one who came to free us from our captivity to sin and death.

There's joy at the resurrection of Jesus, so much that the disciples could hardly believe it. Luke 24, "He showed them his hands and feet, and they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement."

There is joy in the promise of our own resurrection. Psalm 16, "You are my Lord . . . Surely I have a delightful inheritance. Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my **body** also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave. . . You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

There's joy in remembering we are God's redeemed people, even when down and depressed. Psalm 51, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation."

There's joy in the promise of the Lord's return. In John 16 Jesus said, "You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. . . Now is your time of grief, but I will see you, and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. . . Your joy will be complete."

There's joy in God-given assurance. In Luke 10 he says, "Rejoice that *your* names are written in heaven."

There's joy as we enter into heaven. Isaiah 35, "They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away" (Is. 35).

There's joy written all over Scripture. Most surprising of all, there's the Lord's joy over you, and me. Psalm 149: "Praise the Lord! . . . For the Lord takes pleasure in his people."

Christian joy and thanksgiving. It's not tied to the circumstances of this life. It's not necessarily brought on by peace and prosperity nor snuffed out by discord and poverty. Thankfully, it's not contingent on having lots of people around the table today. Christian joy is tied to the salvation God has won for us, and that's a done deal. Nothing can undo it. Therefore, Paul was right all along. "Rejoice in the Lord always; I will say it again rejoice." Amen.