

Rejoice in the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning again. Oh, that was weak. It is sweet when we have a snowy day and there's still folks here, so thank you for being here.

My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the assistant pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy, as always, to bring God's word to you. A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us.

We're glad you're here. And we're glad you're here, not because you are filling a seat on a snowy day, but because we are following Jesus together as one community. And we're convinced that there is no one so good that they don't need God's grace.

And no one so bad that they can't have it. And so we're glad that you're here because we believe that God has something to say to everyone. And so everyone needs to hear what God has to say in his word.

If you have been with us, you know that we're in the book of Philippians. Philippians is a letter, as I've said before. It's a letter that's written to a church in the first century that was in a city called Philippi, which is in modern-day Macedonia.

[1 : 1 0] And this letter was written to a church that was very much like our church. And this church was in a city that was very much like our city. And so just as Paul had many things to say to the church in Philippi, so this letter still has many things to say to us, as we've seen.

And I've talked a lot about the fact that this letter emphasizes our partnership in the gospel together. But Philippians is more commonly known not as the book of partnership in the gospel, but people actually talk about it as the book of joy.

Now, I'm convinced that it is primarily about partnership in the gospel, but the word joy appears more times in this book than it does in any other book in the New Testament. Joy and then the verb to rejoice.

And it seems to be an emphasis in Paul's thought. And so as we get to the end of the book of Philippians, it's hard to believe we're actually in chapter 4.

I snuck in one verse from chapter 4 last week, and then we're starting full on in chapter 4 this week. We're finally going to look a little bit at Paul and what he believes about joy, what he tells this church about joy.

[2 : 1 6] Now, one of my personal quirks, you might call it, is that I have a little bit of a fascination with survivalists. Now, don't get worried.

I'm not preparing for the end of the world in a physical sense. I'm not preparing for the collapse of society. I just personally find it very interesting. And survivalists, as you may know, are people who are preparing for this.

They're preparing for society to break down unexpectedly. And so they want to be ready at any moment. They want to make sure wherever they're at, whether they're at their grocery store, whether they're at their house, they're prepared.

They don't have to go out and get anything. They have everything they need around them. So I find this fascinating and all the things that they do to prepare. One of the things that's most important if you're a survivalist is you have to make sure that you have a source of fire.

And this is more complicated than it sounds because fire is really tied to the circumstance. You have certain types of burners that might work outside, but they're only going to work when there's low wind. You might have other types of fire that are going to work unless there's moisture in the air, so they're not going to work in the snow.

[3 : 20] And so one of the great tasks of a survivalist is to find a source of fire that will work anywhere. And there's all kinds of ways you can do this. We might think that a strike anywhere match would work, but that just means that the match would start.

It doesn't mean it's going to stay lit if there's a lot of wind. And so there's all kinds of products that you can find that will help you start a fire no matter where you are. Some of them are these little pieces of cloth that are soaked in gasoline, so even when they get wet, they'll light up for you, and you can have your flint and tinder there, and you can start a fire wherever you're at.

But the goal is that no matter where you are, no matter the circumstances, if you're a survivalist, you want to make sure you are able to have fire because that's going to be one of the most important things for your survival.

And so what we're going to see here in chapter 4 is that for Paul, joy is a type of fire that can be lit anywhere.

That joy, as opposed to happiness, is something that is not bound by the circumstance. It's something that the Christian can have no matter where they are. No matter what's going on in their own personal lives, no matter what's going on in the world around them, Paul wants this church in Philippi to have joy.

[4 : 32] We've seen before plenty of reasons they would not have joy. They have people who are teaching things that are wrong about the gospel. They're having divisions within their own church. We found it in chapter 1.

There are people who are opposing them. There's opposition, folks who are making it hard for them to live life as Christians in the Roman Empire. And yet Paul is going to tell us in verse 4 here of chapter 4, rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say rejoice. And it's that word always that lets us know for Paul, joy is the strike-anywhere match of the Christian. It's the thing that the Christian should be able to access at any point in their lives, no matter what's going on around them.

And so our big question today is this, how do we find joy as a Christian? It was challenging for the Philippians in their circumstances, challenging for us as well. We face things that are similar.

We also find difficulties in relationships, just like the Philippians did. We find it at times hard to be Christians in this world. And we also just face the everyday challenges of life, fear about what might happen in the future, the loss of things that are valuable to us, things that are easy to take away our happiness but should not take away our joy.

[5 : 49] And so how do we find joy as a Christian in this life? We're in Philippians chapter four. We're starting in verse one. And remember that this is God's word and God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so we're gonna read now, starting with verse one in chapter four. Please read with me. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

I entreat Aeodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Verse four. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[7 : 09] Verse eight. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that your word is like a fire on a cold day.

It warms us. It sustains us. It keeps us alive. We ask that you would do that now, that you would send your word to do what you did at the beginning of creation, that you would send it to bring things that are not alive, alive.

That you'd take what's dead and you'd raise it up again. We ask that for ourselves, that you would come and you would change us. We ask that you do it by your word. And so we ask all these things in the name of your son.

[8 : 19] Amen. Amen. So how do we find joy in any circumstance? Paul tells us immediately, he cuts to the point here in verse one.

Therefore my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. And so we're going to hear something that we've heard all throughout the book of Philippians.

Paul, first and foremost, here finds joy in the people who are around him. He finds joy in his fellow believers. He finds joy in these people he's labored with side by side for the sake of the gospel.

This is everything we've seen in chapters one and two especially. And some in chapter three as well. Paul's joy, his ability to have joy, even when, remember, Paul is writing this letter from house arrest in Rome.

He's facing the possibility of a death sentence. And so he is not someone who is looking from the sidelines, telling other people to have joy, but Paul has real skin in the game here.

[9 : 23] And as he faces uncertain circumstances, even about his own life, he looks to these people in Philippi who have labored side by side with him as people who bring him joy. That no matter what is happening in his life, he knows that he has these other Christians with him who are striving and seeking for the same goal that we talked about in chapter three.

For the same treasure of what we talked about in chapter one. And so that no matter what is happening, he has them with him to remind him, to bring him joy. But if this sounds a little pie in the sky, if it sounds too repetitious for what we said before, Paul is not unaware of the difficulties of this.

He knows that we find joy in relationships, and yet it's in the very next verse that he talks about the difficulty of relationships. It turns out that there are two people in the congregation at Philippi who are not getting along, and they're not getting along to such an extent that the whole congregation knows about it.

Paul does not have any trouble naming them in this letter, and so our guess is that the congregation is not unaware of this. Paul's not going to take something that's private and make it public, and so this congregation, these people who are meant to find joy from each other, have gotten to a point in conflict where everyone knows about this disagreement.

And so we see here in verse 2, I entreat Aodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

[10 : 56] In other words, we have had partnership together. This reference to the book of life is something that people in the Jewish time would use to refer to someone who had proven their worth by standing in times of persecution.

In other words, you have experienced the joy that I have now with you, you've experienced the partnership, and so do everything that I've told you in chapter 2 and chapter 1. Especially in chapter 2, this agree in the Lord is the exact same language we saw at the beginning of chapter 2 when Paul told them to think the same thing.

And it's the similar language that was used to describe Timothy. Timothy was someone who thought the same way that Paul did. And so this thinking the same way, this agreeing in the Lord is everything that we've talked about before.

That Aodia and Syntyche need to agree that what matters more than anything else is the gospel. That they need to agree that other people's needs are more important than their own so that they can set aside what's driving them apart.

By the way, Paul is very realistic about conflict in the church. He understands the need for a mediator here. He doesn't take sides. He doesn't believe there's a right answer.

[12 : 05] He just tells them they need to figure it out. So the kind of conflict here that's going on is not about something that Paul believes there's a correct conclusion to, except the conclusion of them agreeing with each other, them realizing what's important and what's not important.

And so Paul's not unaware of the struggle of relationship, but he also sees it as a source of joy and this is where the secret comes in. Remember in verse 4 he says rejoice. This is not just generic rejoicing, but rejoice specifically in the Lord.

And that's the same thing he tells these women to do, to agree in the Lord. In other words, this joy is not simply something that comes from relationships in general, but it comes from relationships that are headed in the same direction.

It comes from relationships that are headed towards the gospel and it's actually going in that same direction that allows these women to agree. It's this common partnership, this common mission that's going to allow them to do what they would otherwise be unable to do.

There was a singer and songwriter named Clarence Carter who made music during the time of Jim Crow and he experienced all the horrors of racism during that time.

[13 : 17] He was African American as he was interacting with people who were white. He had to do certain things and bear with certain things. And yet he said this as a musician.

There was one place where he experienced things that were different. He said, when I was a boy, if I met a white boy, I had to say, this is Mr. Robert or Mr. Jimmy. But in the studio, we got away from all that.

It was Jimmy. It was Robert. You just worked together. You never thought about who was white and who was black. You thought about the common thing and it was the music.

In other words, everything outside of the music studio was filled with conflict for him. But there was one place where he was able to overcome that and it was the place where there was a focus that everyone was driven to that was more important than the things that were going outside.

And so what Paul is telling us is that we can find joy in relationships. Not in a pie-in-the-sky way. Not in a Hallmark movie way.

[14 : 24] But we can find joy in relationships because the church should be the one place where people can come and overcome the conflicts they have outside of the church.

That this should be the place where people can see that there's one thing that matters and it's being in the Lord. And so all the things that they have to fight around, the things that don't matter, they can let go of in the church.

They can let go of differences in personality and upbringing and preferences because they're strung together, bound together in the Lord. And so that's why Paul can tell us in verse 4, rejoice in the Lord.

Because this joy, first of all, is in our relationships with each other as and only as we're pursuing the gospel together. And so again, we see the themes we've seen over and over that this joy is not disconnected from our partnership in the gospel and that our partnership cannot be outside of the gospel.

You thought about the common thing and it was the music. And so for the Christian in the church, as we're finding joy, as we have this fire source, this strike anywhere match, we think about the common thing, which is the gospel.

[15 : 40] And so that's how we find joy in our relationships with one another. But it's not just the partnership.

Within we see, we finally come to verse 4, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Now when Paul says reasonableness here, it could be better translated as patience or forbearance.

Let your ability to know what matters and what doesn't matter be known to everyone. And how are you going to do it? Well, the Lord is at hand. And this means two things.

One, that God's presence is with us. And two, that his second coming is near. And the focus here in Philippians is definitely on God's presence, but the primary focus is on God's second coming, on Jesus' return to the earth.

Remember, we've talked before in chapter 3, verses 20 and 21, we saw that Jesus is coming back and he's bringing a heavenly citizenship. And so how we agree in the Lord first is by letting our patience be known to everyone, our forbearance, our reasonableness.

[16 : 50] But second, knowing that Jesus is returning soon. And so that helps us prioritize what matters and what doesn't matter. I had a member of my family who at one point, he was diagnosed and believed that he was heading down the road of cancer.

He was convinced that his end was very near. That it was at hand. And so the first thing he did was begin to figure out what mattered and what didn't.

Suddenly it became very clear which relationships were priorities and which ones were not. It became clear which possessions were priorities and which were not. He began clearing through things that he owned because he didn't want other people after him to have to do that for him.

Now in this particular situation that did not happen. This diagnosis turned out not to be true. That individual is still alive living a full life. But the reality, the realization that the end might be near forced priorities to become clear.

And so Paul is saying look, Jesus is coming back soon. And so let that be the measure stick by which you figure out your priorities. Let that be how you figure out what is worth fighting about and what is not.

[18 : 05] Let that be your attitude towards the people around you. That is how you find joy in relationships. You agree in the Lord as you realize that he is at hand. He's coming back.

And so that helps you know what matters and what doesn't. And so it's not just our relationships with others that bring us joy. It's also our relationship with God. We see that in verses six and seven.

Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And so Paul says here the opposite of anxiety is prayer. Now it's important to know what Paul means when he talks about anxiety. There are all different types of anxiety.

Paul actually says in other letters that he is anxious about people. And so it seems that Paul has a category for types of anxiety that are okay and types of anxiety that are not. When Paul says that he's anxious about someone what he really means is I'm concerned for them.

[19 : 08] I care for them. I want the best for them. And so he talks at various points about his anxiety for the various churches that he has helped and that he pastors. But here when Paul says anxiety what he's talking about is the fear that comes when we refuse to trust other people and when we refuse to trust God.

The anxiety that Paul is talking about here is the fear that comes from refusing to trust other people and refusing to trust God. The fear that pushes us to try to manage the things around us that causes our lives to shrink because we choose rather than living our lives we want to control that we want to make sure there's nothing unexpected that could ever happen.

We think about everything bad that might happen in the future and then adjust our lives in light of that not in light of the fact that the Lord is at hand.

And so Paul's told us that we find our joy in relationships with others but we also find our joy in our relationship with God because God is the one that we can bring our concerns to in prayer. We can tell him about the things that we're anxious about.

We can take the things that we're anxious about and recognize that our control is limited. We are actually powerless in many situations and so trying and working hard to control things that we cannot control is not just a mistake it's actually a form of evil.

[20 : 35] It's a form of denying God of believing that he's not who he says he is. And so there's no special explanation here.

there's times when I have to dare to be boring and dare to be simple as one of my professors loved to say. And so this is very simple.

Paul is saying if you're anxious pray about the things you're anxious about. But don't just do that. Do it with thanksgiving. Because Paul knows something that physiologists now also understand which is that the part of our brain that carries anxiety is the same part that carries joy.

And so it's actually impossible for your brain to be experiencing anxiety and joy at the same time. And so Paul's secret here for experiencing joy in any circumstance is twofold.

One, write down the things you're anxious about and pray about them. And two, write down the things you're grateful for and pray about them.

[21 : 49] And this is not just some modern advice about having a gratitude journal. This is actually what God's people have done throughout all time. It's what we see in the Psalms over and over again.

The psalmist when he's crying out to God when he's experiencing something that causes him anxiety when he feels threatened by forces outside of his control. Often what he'll do in the middle of the psalm is list all the ways that God has taken care of him in the past.

And so part of the Christian life is keeping a list of the things that God has done to guide us and protect us and provide for us in the past. I know some families who will, when something happens that's worthy of thanksgiving, they'll write it down on a card and then they'll put it in a jar or a bucket.

And so when they're facing anxiety, when they're facing uncertainty about the future, they'll take them out and they'll remember all the things they'd forgotten in the past, places where they saw God's hand clearly in their lives intervening and working.

And that reminds them of what anxiety wants them to forget, reminds them that God has not forgotten them, that God is still in control, and that while it seems like things around them have changed, God has not.

[23 : 06] And so that's the peace that Paul talks about in verse 7, the peace which surpasses all understanding that will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Now it's not a coincidence that Paul uses the word guard.

Paul, if you're familiar with his life, was very familiar with what it was like to be in prison. Now in this situation, he's probably under house arrest, so his experience with guards is a little bit less, but Paul knows that a guard's job is to keep anything from getting to the prisoner.

And so Paul is telling us that the secret to joy is to let our remembering of God's provision for us in the past be the guard of our minds as we're tempted to shrink the world around us so that we can control it, as we're tempted to believe the lies of anxiety about worst case scenarios that could potentially happen sometime in the future, instead we're called to remember what God has done in the past.

And that will serve as a guard over our minds. It will keep us from believing the lies of anxiety, believing the lie that we cannot trust God, first of all.

We cannot trust his people, second of all. there's a truth that a man once spoke that big things make push out small things.

[24 : 42] And that's what Paul is telling us here. He's going to tell us again in this final section. Big things push out small things. The big reality of our relationships with other people push out the fears and anxieties that press in on us.

the big reality of God's providence and sovereignty pushes out the small realities that steal our joy. And so that's what Paul is going to end with here in verses 8 and 9.

We've seen first that we find our joy in our relationships with others and not just our relationships in general but specifically in the Lord. Secondly, we find our joy in prayer.

This is not just some mindfulness practice but it's our joy that we find in the Lord because we know that he hears and he listens to us. And then we're going to see that we find our joy in all of the things that are in this world that God has given us that reflect his glory and his beauty.

And so we see in verse 8, finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

[25 : 56] Now Paul is not giving us discrete categories here. There are not things that are on the one hand true but not honorable or pure but not lovely. We're not meant to take these and subtract them, make them into separate lists.

Paul gives us this crescendo of adjectives because he wants to tell us, look, anything that reflects God and his goodness and his justice and his beauty.

Set your mind on that. When you're tempted to be filled with fear and anxiety, when you're tempted to lose your joy, set your minds not on things that are destructive but set your mind on the things that God has made and do it wherever you find it.

He says, whatever is just, whatever is pure. In other words, as you look around the world, you will see things that reflect God and his goodness and you'll see it in the church.

You'll also see it outside the church because everyone, even if they've rebelled against God, is still made in his image. They can't escape the fact that God created them.

[27 : 08] And so we'll see both people who are Christians and non-Christians doing things that reflect God's goodness. It might not be in a specific way, it might not be in a way that's meant or intended to bring glory to God.

But think about it this way. If you have a child, they're going to look like you in some way whether they want to or not. And so there's beauty all around the world and that is part of the great big thing that will push out the small things.

And so when we're tempted to be afraid and we're tempted to give up on joy, it is right, it is good and right for us to drive west along South Academy and see the mountains and be overcome by their beauty because that's one of the ways that God reminds us of his goodness in the midst of this world.

It is right as we're discouraged about the things that are going on in our own family to look at the marriages that God has given us in our church that are healthy and have hope.

It is good and right as we feel the darkness of this world pressing in on us to read a story that reminds us that there's a narrative to this life that God's in control and that he has not given us up.

[28 : 43] And so we have great big things that push out little small things. Finally, Paul reminds us that it's not just an action of remembering and thinking but it's an act of doing.

And so he ends with verse 9. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. And so we see at the end of verse 8 think about these things and the middle of verse 9 practice these things.

That those two are two sides of the same coin. That as we think more and more about what is good and true and lovely we can practice more and more. And as we practice more and more we be able to think more and more.

Paul again is also emphasizing what we've talked about over and over. He presents himself as a model here just as he did in chapter 3 explicitly in verse 17 just as he did in chapter 2 implicitly with Timothy and Epaphroditus.

He's tying back to what we saw at the beginning of this chapter in the first few verses. In the end you've been given the people around you to walk with you.

[30 : 00] And so how do we find joy in any circumstance? How do we find joy in the midst of our lives even when it seems like darkness and evil is pressing in on us? First we find it in the people around us and not just in them generically but specifically as we are in the Lord with them as we pursue the same treasure together.

So we find it in our relationship with others. We find it in our relationship with God as we take the things that cause us to fear and we give them to him. We find it as we take the things that he's done for us and we remind ourselves of them.

And finally we find joy as we look around the world around us even as we look out on a snowy day on the mountains at least as you all look out on the mountains on a snowy day. Oh, sorry.

As I look out on you on a snowy day. Those are the big things the great things that God uses to push out the small things.

that when we see how great and glorious those things are we will realize how small everything else is by comparison.

[31 : 16] And so that's what we're about to sing now in our closing hymn. It starts out this way. Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what thou art. Thy beauty fills my soul.

that God's given us the beautiful things in this world to remind us of his goodness. That his goodness is greater than the darkness. And then we see in the chorus why we bring things to him in prayer because we find out the greatness of his loving heart.

And so we can pray to him asking that he would fill us around with blessings because thine is love indeed. So please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you have given us big, great things to push out little and small things.

We ask that you remind us of it. You put it into our hearts more and more as you make us look more and more like Jesus. We ask all these things in the name of your son.

Amen. Amen. Amen.