

# Rejoice in the Lord always

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, if we could turn back to the passage we read in Philippians, chapter 4. I want to look particularly at Paul's statement in verses 4 through 7, where he says this, Rejoice in the Lord, always, and again I say, rejoice.

Let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The peace of God that passes understanding. I wonder then, is it sensible for us to focus on this peace of God this morning, and to try and understand something of it, if it is so ununderstandable?

Even Paul describes it as beyond understanding. But like so many things about God, ultimately they all transcend our understanding and transcend into mystery.

If they didn't, then God would be no bigger than my mind or your mind, our understanding. He would be limited to what I can understand. And you see, Paul, as well as telling us that this peace, this marvellous peace of God, as well as telling us that it is beyond our understanding, he also urges us to rejoice in it, and to know certain things about it.

[ 1 : 3 2 ] He wants us to have it, that's his concern. He wants us to have it, and he gives us some instruction about this peace of God. But he also challenges us, perhaps, this morning through the scriptures to examine ourselves, and to ask ourselves, do I really have that peace?

That's the purpose of our verse. That's the purpose of our meditations this morning, the object of our thoughts, the peace of God. Especially in the context, as we have it here, of anxiety and worrying and concerns.

You see, Paul is writing to the Philippians to encourage them, to strengthen them. They already, in a sense, were standing firmer than many of the people Paul had written to. And he writes to congratulate, to confirm their faith and to strengthen them.

He deals with a number of threats to their peace, a number of threats to their standing firm. There are things which might shake their strength.

One of them is anxiety, worries, cares, concerns. You see, they were already expressing concern for Paul, because he's writing in response to a gift they'd sent him.

[ 2 : 4 2 ] They had repeatedly sent him gifts to minister to his physical needs. He says, at one point, you were the only church who remembered me. And he's writing to thank him. And they were expressing this concern.

But he's also writing to show where the boundary between healthy concern and unhealthy worry goes.

So he instructs them a little on this subject of the peace of God. Because this is an important thing for them to know. It's an important thing for you and I this morning.

We want to know a little bit about God's peace. We need to learn the secret that we sang of that King David expressed. Even though ten thousand foes are arrayed against me, I can sleep.

I can lay down and sleep. Because God is my strength. How do I lay myself down and sleep in the middle of the most pressing and the most worrying circumstances?

[ 3 : 42 ] How do I do that? But let's get one thing clear by way of introduction before we look at that. You see, Christ made it abundantly clear as well as the rest of Scripture.

It makes it abundantly clear that there is no peace of God that passes understanding. Like our subject here this morning. There is no peace of God without there first being peace with God.

The peace of God is dependent upon peace with God. And the peace with God is the great imperative of the entire Scriptures. The focus of the entire Scriptures is how we can be at peace with God.

That's the command of the Scriptures. And it's not possible to have that wonderful peace that passes understanding if we're not first reconciled to God and at peace with Him.

We cannot experience real peace in here, in our hearts and our minds as Paul puts it, if we're not in harmony with God. We must get it. That's the first thing.

[ 4 : 47 ] We must be at peace with God. And it's the great command of the Scriptures. The possibility of that peace is the message of the Gospel. The message of the Incarnation. We can be at peace with God through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's the message of the Gospel writers. It's the testimony of the Gospel writers that we can be at peace with God. There's no true inward peace without it.

There are many psychologists and professions and transcendental meditationists and other kinds of gurus and professionals who would tell us various ways to try and find peace.

Whether it's through yoga or transcendental meditation or having a good time. There are many who would try and tell us the secret to peace, the secret to contentment, the secret to happiness.

But you know Jeremiah had something to say about it. He said, They have healed the heart of my people slightly, saying peace, peace, where there is no peace. Until we are reconciled to God, there is no peace.

[ 5 : 58 ] And there are many even from pulpits throughout the wider church of God who would preach a message of easy salvation and peace with God.

But you see, people, you and I want inward peace, perhaps more than anything else. We need that in our lives. And we devise ways of trying to make the message of the Gospel easier to accept.

So that there is no offense of the cross. There's no need for repentance. It's just an easy decision for Jesus Christ. Or if we're outwith the church, before perhaps we came to know the Lord, we devise ways of blotting out reality.

Through drugs, through alcohol perhaps, through tranquilizers, through absorbing ourselves in things that will stop us from thinking too deeply.

Yet without peace with God, there is no peace of God. Are you at peace with God this morning? Are you reconciled to him through the atoning sacrifice of Christ?

[ 7 : 07 ] Is he praying for you on behalf of the Father this morning? Are you at peace with God? But let's turn to our passage, but after that introduction and look at this second peace that it talks about here, the peace that passes understanding, the peace that comes once we are reconciled with God.

And I pray that we would know that reconciliation ourselves this morning. So here we have it. The peace of God that passes understanding. The first thing we see, we see in verse 4, there is an objective, there is a goal, there is an end point to which we are working, to which we aspire.

What is the purpose of this sermon? Well, Paul puts it there very clearly in verse 4. Rejoice. That's the end point. That's what he wants for us. Rejoice in the Lord.

And again I say rejoice. And he stresses it twice. Paul is encouraging the Philippians. To rejoice. That's his desire for them. That's his desire for you and I.

That should be the normal Christian life. To be able to rejoice. Scripture paints a picture of the normal Christian life. The to be expected Christian life.

[ 8 : 20 ] The thing we should be pursuing. We should be aspiring towards this end point that Paul has for us here. Rejoice. That's the goal. The psalmist says the Lord blesses his people with peace.

The reward of those who love God's law is peace. Great peace have they that love thy law. Nothing shall offend them. So scripture tells us that this is a legitimate thing for us.

Peace. Indeed, Paul instructs the Philippians to rejoice. He doesn't say try to rejoice. He doesn't say I hope you feel good enough to rejoice.

No, he tells them to do something. He tells them to do it. To rejoice. Now we may not take kindly to being told to do things and especially we say I don't like being told to rejoice at the moment because things are not going well and things are not easy and it's the last thing I feel like is to rejoice.

When we're in the middle of particularly difficult circumstances rejoicing is sometimes the last thing we feel like and yet here is Paul telling them just to do it. Just do it.

[ 9 : 33 ] As if it's something that we are in control of. As if it's something not primarily an emotion but something we do. And not only is he telling them to do it he's telling them to do it all the time.

It's not a bit unreasonable we say. Firstly to do something like that in obedience to a command and then secondly to be doing it under all circumstances. That's just a bit over the top.

Can we truly rejoice when we are suffering perhaps personal terrible pain or a loved one is suffering terrible pain or we're remembering past failures and sins and disappointments.

What does Paul think he's saying when he says rejoice? And yet look at who's saying it. This is Paul who's saying it. Paul who was acutely aware of his past failures and his past sufferings his past sins rather.

The chief of all sinners persecuting the church slaughtering Christians and yet here's Paul saying rejoice in all circumstances. Here's Paul who's actually languishing in prison.

[ 10 : 47 ] hearing about the church his beloved church being persecuted and driven underground. What pain he must have been going through. And yet he writes to his friends in Philippi and he says to them rejoice.

Just do it. It is possible. There is a secret to it as we shall see. And he goes on further in this end point the goal that he wants us to get to.

He says not just to rejoice and rejoice at all times but he says in verse 5 what initially looks a little bit out of place. He says let your moderation be known unto all men. Let your moderation be known unto all men.

The Lord is at hand. Where did that come from? It sounds a little bit out of place. But you see this phrase let your moderation it might be better translated let your equilibrium let your balance I think it was Calvin who described it as your equilibrium or your gentleness.

You see it's a natural characteristic it's a natural outworking of the person who's learning to rejoice in all circumstances. Hendrickson says there's no single interpretation of that word in the original language which does it justice but it might be translated kindness or mildness or yieldedness.

[12:00] You see that is very closely linked to this rejoicing in the Lord always. That's what we aspire towards. That's the objective. Unshakeableness equilibrium mastery over anxiety now if we are honest this morning we don't always achieve that we don't always experience that but Paul goes on to explain something to them secondly of the problem that threatens that state.

That's the first point we have the state that we aspire towards rejoicing but he says the second thing is you have a problem there is a problem with being there at that end point and we read it in verse 7 the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds he's telling us that our hearts and our minds are a problem they would shake our equilibrium first point was our end point the equilibrium but the second point is the threat to that our hearts and our minds out of which come all sorts of things and that's our personal experience is it not most of us here know the problem of our hearts and our minds and Paul is saying that's true it's the heart and the mind that produce the anxiety it's the heart and the mind that shake your equilibrium and that's a key point to understand to remember and once we grasp that we can understand what the passage is beginning to say to us and start to find the solution it's our hearts and our minds that are the problem the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked it's our hearts which desire things which are outwith the will of God it's our hearts which lead us after things that lead us into all kinds of temptations lead us into all kinds of confusing messes that we make of ourselves in our lives it leads us into all sorts of complicated situations our hearts are a problem and what about our minds well doesn't our minds start to work all kinds of overtime to shake our peace now our minds don't they cause us all kinds of doubts don't they cause us all kinds of fears and worries our mind starts working over time to disturb our equilibrium

Paul says you have a problem with your heart and with your mind and he's describing it as if as if these things are out with our control it's as if we do not have control over them and once again does that not match our experience of our hearts and our minds just think back to the times when you've been lying awake in the middle of the night tossing and turning with your mind working overtime you would have given anything to be able to shut off your mind you would have given anything to be able to get back to sleep if only we could stop thinking only if we could stop that mind working on and on and going round and round and tormenting us it's as if our mind is a tyranny a tyrant tyrannising us revolving around and round and then of course the imagination clicks in just as you're starting to get you think a little control of your thinking the imagination clicks in and we begin to think all sorts of things all sorts of possible problems and outcomes and threats again and then we say well let's just work our way through this let's just reason through this let's get a grip on ourselves our reasoning capacities which don't really reason us out of the tyranny of our hearts and minds at all but our reasoning capacities kick in and we start worrying through all sorts of scenarios and trying to work out what we'll do if this happens and that happens and all the eventualities do we not know that's true from experience our mind is a tyrant we're being held hostage by our hearts and our minds is it not reassuring that

Paul confirms that for us in scripture and says that is true you see Paul has an antidote for that there's one which is better than the solutions of psychology it's better than the solutions of yoga it's better than these things because you see the psychologist comes along as do the well-meaning friends non-worrying friends usually and they say to us don't worry because it might never happen but you see that's exactly the wrong thing to say in the middle of anxiety don't worry it might never happen because you see I immediately reply yes but it might and that's what's worrying me the possibility that it might that's what's making me anxious that's what's causing my mind to hold me hostage the possibility that it might it's pointless to tell me to stop worrying because that's the one thing I can't do my mind's a problem ok so they say to you well stop worrying and this is the Christian friend comes along and says you should stop worrying because you know it's a sin to worry worry is the most practical form of atheism and that might be true but you see instantly not just am I lumbered with a lot of worry now I'm lumbered with a load of guilt as well or they say ok don't worry because it's a waste of energy worrying it's a waste of time to worry you see because you can't change anything by worrying so why waste your time oh yes that's perfectly true perfectly true

I know that worrying is not going to affect my position but the position that's worrying me is still there and the circumstances that are worrying me are still there and they're causing my mind to work overtime no we need a better solution than those trite helps now please don't think I'm denigrating in any way the work of the psychology profession but we need a better solution to our anxiety so Paul has told us the end point it's equilibrium he's told us the threat to that and it's our hearts and our minds and he tells us thirdly the secret or the key he's telling the Philippians that real peace one which will let them rejoice always instead of coming from some inner mental strength you know the Stoics in the New Testament the Stoics believed that they had to develop such a hard exterior to the pains of this world that they wouldn't feel it a passive indifference to everything that might happen or the

[ 18 : 38 ] Indian fake years of eastern religion who developed so much mind control that they're almost oblivious to what's going on outside them they've been so indrawn that if you went and snapped your finger in front of their eyes they wouldn't see it now Paul is telling us that instead of coming from some inner mind control our peace doesn't come from that our peace doesn't come from psychological reasonings rather the secret is that something from outside my mind and something from outside my heart something that's bigger than my heart and bigger than my mind must come in and guard me and he says the peace of God which passes understanding it's bigger than your understanding is bigger than your mind it will come in and protect you and you know he uses a little picture here that will be very familiar to the

Philippians Philippi was a garrison town and it was surrounded by a wall and protected by a Roman garrison and he's writing to the Philippians and he's saying the peace of God is a little like that it comes in and it guards it fortifies now to be at peace with God as we saw earlier on the forerunner to this wonderful peace that passes understanding to be at peace with God to be reconciled to God and to know that that alone is a fortification that knowledge alone should cause us to rejoice because it's far more significant in the eternal spheres than any of the current or future circumstances that perplex and cause us anxiety but it's interesting also is it not that Paul makes no mention anywhere of God's peace coming as a result of God's intervention in our circumstances he makes no mention that we can be at peace because God the benign daddy in the sky will come and smooth out all our circumstances that is not the picture here at all there's no mention of

God overruling or stepping in to save us from going through these circumstances that misses the point completely there's no peace in that yet there are those who think that our peace and security comes from having a God who when we are worried and we inform him of our troubles he will come along and intervene and just smooth everything out there's a danger of always expecting the miraculous from God to step down and just create smooth playing field for us and if he doesn't come along then our conclusion is that our faith is too small but you see what's Paul telling us Paul's telling us something totally different he says rejoice in the middle of those circumstances let's remember that Paul is writing from prison to tell the Philippians to rejoice and to rejoice again and he's telling us that this peace that passes understanding after all if it didn't pass understanding it wouldn't be bigger than our minds but he says that peace that comes bigger than our minds comes and it guards and it's bigger than psychological reasonings and it's bigger than counseling and it's bigger than all our attempts to work our way through our problems he's saying the peace of

God doesn't overcome your circumstances the peace of God comes to you and it takes you through those circumstances by guarding your mind by protecting your heart King David can lie down and sleep in peace even when pursued by his enemies and hiding in a cave under probably more pressing circumstances than you and I will ever have to go through because God's peace takes him through it and is it not marvellous to see what is being said to us here what's being said to us here is that God is concerned with us with you and with me first and foremost we are the focus of his attention in his workings not the circumstances that we're in but us we're the apple of his eye the focus of his love the father so loved the son my beloved son in whom I am well pleased the apple of my eye the delight of my life and he tells us that he loves us with that same love is it not marvellous to recognise that where

God intervenes is not in the circumstances that are causing us trouble God intervenes in here and in here that's where he's working in my heart and my mind and that's more important than the ultimately fairly trivial circumstances that are causing me to be unsettled the peace of God will guard your hearts and will guard your minds and even by reminding us of this through this passage we can take great comfort from that of his providence for us you might say yes I need some of that guarding I need to be able to say and to know along with King David I'm ready for whatever may happen not that whatever may happen and is happening may go away no I need to be able to say I can overcome that because God is guarding we've seen the end point the equilibrium the rejoicing we've seen the threat to that which is our hearts and our minds and we've seen the key to understanding the solution which is

[ 24 : 33 ] God's peace must come in to guard and take us through but finally and fourthly we see the responsibility in this passage for our responsibility our part in it we find it in verse 6 be careful for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God there's our part in all things pray pray pray there it is the key the command the appropriation of the blessing and even getting to the stage of praying requires an approach to God and an attitude of mind that is the road to peace in every matter Paul says cast all your cares he mirrors the in all things rejoice within all things pray it's two sides of the bargain in all things rejoice in all things pray and our consolation as believers our relief is to be able to deposit and unload into the bosom of the father everything that harasses us and that confidence itself brings tranquility and peace that we often forfeit oh what peace we often forfeit because we don't take everything to

God in prayer he says take your requests to God take your desires to God take your wishes to God even better to take them to God than to take them anywhere else or to go and look for those desires to be satisfied in the world or elsewhere to go heather and thither if we do we may find some degree of solace and some degree of relief but only temporary there's only one safe haven even just take your requests to God yes you say but that's a bit of an anticlimax after all that build up to the wonderful peace of God this is a bit disappointing we say because we were wanting some more tangible solution some more ABC type solution a formula that will equip us with the peace of God and now we're being told just pray and we say but I've tried that and it hasn't really worked well Paul says two things to encourage us on that he says there's an attitude to prayer and there's a practice of prayer for the solution to be effective there's an attitude to prayer he says pray with thanksgiving and we say even in the troubles even in the difficulties are we being told to give thanks for these difficulties is he suggesting that that's possible yes he is count it all joy my brothers when ye face various trials pray with thanksgiving for the trials we often pray with murmurings and complaints and grumblings as though we had just cause to complain or even to accuse God so Paul joins prayer with thanksgiving he links them inextricably those things which are necessary for us ought to be desired from the Lord those things which are necessary for our discipline those things which are necessary for our growth ought to be desired of the Lord pray with thanksgiving it was

Calvin who said unquestionably gratitude will have the effect upon us that the will of God will be the chief of our desires if we're praying with thanksgiving then God's will becomes our greatest desire prayer but there's a practice of prayer mentioned here as well not just an attitude pray with thanksgiving but he says in verse 6 pray in everything that should be our practice pray in everything can we really complain that this is an anti-climax can we really complain that the solution of Paul's pray in all things with thanksgiving can we really complain that that's a disappointment and an anti-climax if truth be told we haven't really kept up our half of the deal have we prayed in all things with thanksgiving you see there's no quick fix mentioned here there's no formula ABC to the peace of God there's a labouring lifelong work of praying with thanksgiving in all things there's no instant solutions you know we live in a world that demands instant solutions recently I had to renew my motor insurance and you do it by phone now you just phone up give your details takes two minutes maybe less and yet they put you on hold and you're frustrated and you think this is taking too long and I was getting quite angry of being put on hold and being transferred to other places and then I remembered back a few years when I lived in Albania it took me a week to insure the vehicle a week of sitting in queues and being ignored and basically being shunted around from pillar to post from office to office and we get angry when we don't get things instantly

I want my insurance now there is no quick fix in the Christian life it needs patience things don't come instantly but there is a truth here for us to be working on to be constantly working at there is an attitude to prayer of thanksgiving and a practice of prayer of in all things that we need what have we seen this morning from this passage the peace of God that passes understanding is a reality it's an objective reality it's a reality only for those who are at peace with God and if you haven't been reconciled to God the Father this morning please realise that without that harmony you will not have the peace that passes understanding you know if you went to a war zone say Chechnya and you said to them actually there has been a ceasefire or into Macedonia and you said actually there has been a ceasefire and they're still hiding out with their guns they won't feel at peace although peace has been announced they won't feel at peace they won't dance for joy until they know it until they know that peace has been made until they can see in their hands that peace has been made we have in our hands the truth that peace has been made with

God be reconciled to God and you say oh let's talk of a peace that passes understanding I don't feel it very often in fact I feel it very rarely I'm too anxious but doesn't the fact the fact that Jesus Christ ultimately is our peace that he bought that peace he is our peacemaker he's done it he's made the peace he's done the ceasefire has been made he's made a peace between God and me and God and you shed his blood for that peace he died for that peace he rose for that peace he intercedes for that peace and he intercedes circumstances are nothing in perspective to that peace does that not make your heart sing with joy this morning when Christ met the disciples after the resurrection he showed them his hands and the first words he spoke to them were peace be unto you now he wasn't just saying a nice thing he wasn't just saying be at peace everyone he showed them his hands and he said peace with you peace be with you you can be at peace now because of what

[ 32 : 58 ] I did on the cross what key thing can we take away from this morning what key thing should we remember there's a problem we have and it's my heart and my mind and it would hinder us from the rightful peace that is available as a Christian experience of rejoicing and equilibrium and balance what key thing do we take away we are very special those of us who have peace with God because now circumstances are impotent to take away the peace that passes understanding there is no power to take away my peace because God's care protects me even our hearts and minds are guarded against the onslaught to the devil you know we go away from here perhaps faced by the most daunting of circumstances this week and yet we're reminded of the fact that we go away guarded if we're at peace with God we go away guarded and protected and Paul tells us we can go away rejoicing because the reality of the situation is that there's a peace beyond our heart and our minds if you need that that's your need then it's your right it's your

Christian heritage this morning but there's an attitude of prayer and there's a practice of prayer advocated by Paul and he'd learnt these things through greater adversity than we're ever likely to know and I pray that that would be the experience and the knowledge of us all here this morning Amen May God bless that peace to us