

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (5-1-1992 Cleland Baptist Church)

Philippians 3:1

Additional Bible reading: Philippians 3:1-3; 4:1-7

Introduction

The theme which dominates this epistle is joy and rejoicing. Paul wrote this letter to teach his readers to rejoice in the Lord. It is worth mentioning that rejoicing and joy dominate not only Philippians but also the whole of the New Testament.

At the birth of Jesus, **Good news of great joy** (Luke 2:10); **When they saw the star they were overjoyed** (Matthew 2:10); When the 70 disciples returned from their mission, it was with joy because of the subjection of devils (Luke 10:17); Jesus taught **that my joy may be in you** (John 15:11); Even in His death, **who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross** (Hebrews 12:2); When the women at the tomb heard that Jesus was alive, they departed **afraid yet filled with joy** (Matthew 28:8); After the Ascension, the disciples **returned to Jerusalem with great joy** (Luke 24:52).

And then the theme is carried on through the Acts of the Apostles, and in the New Testament epistles. **The Apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering and disgrace for His name** (Acts 5:41); When Paul and Silas were in the stocks at midnight, their back bleeding from the beatings, they sang praises to God (Acts 16:25); **You joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property** (Hebrews 10:34); **Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing** (2 Corinthians 6:10); **For the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit** (Romans 14:17); One of the fruits of the Spirit is joy (Galatians 5:22); **You are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy** (1 Peter 1:8).

Thus joy is a dominant note in the Christian life. It echoes through the life of Christ, even through His death. It was the daily mark of His disciples, even in times of trials and persecutions. There are many evidences that all is not well with many Christians and the Christian church. One of these evidences is the lack of joy and rejoicing in the Lord. What it would do in the life of the Church and in the effectiveness of our witness if we had this mark of the New Testament church. They made people sit up and take notice. They were different people, and attractive. Can people say of your church that the members “enjoy” their salvation?

What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord?

We are not talking about being happy, trying to be cheerful, slapping people on the back and telling them to snap out of it. That is skin-deep jollity, forcing self to be jolly, and the life and soul of the party. We are not supposed to pretend things are better than they really are. Nor should we try to work ourselves up into an emotional state by singing. Getting carried away with emotions is like a drug. We are not to sit waiting for a nice warm feeling to come over us. No, it is a definite command – we are to rejoice.

It involves taking a definite state. We are capable of doing it, and we are ordered to do it. And we must do it “in the Lord”. In the Lord is the very last place the man of the

world expects to be able to rejoice. He looks to riches, friends, position, material blessings, pleasure, and escapism. And they can lead to elation of spirits for a while. But this does not last, the novelty wears off. Such shallow things pass away and let us down, or disappoint. They do not touch our deepest needs, and they are no use to us in times of sickness, pain, death and eternity. The world, for all its pleasures and diversions, merriment and amusement, is profoundly unhappy.

True rejoicing comes from knowing a person, Jesus Christ.

*“Solid joys and lasting pleasure
None but Zion’s children know.”*

What bad specimens we often are of this great truth. Hudson Taylor put off the claims on Christ for a long time. In his day, conversion meant “to be serious” – and judging by the faces of Christians, he reckoned it must be a very serious matter indeed. If only our faces suggested the blessings of salvation, the unbeliever would have to call Christian conversion “becoming joyful”.

We rejoice in a person – in the Lord. **You will fill me with joy in your presence** (Psalm 16:11). We are talking of something that is very real, positive and lasting, that is stimulating and stirring.

When can we rejoice in the Lord?

Paul is able to say **Rejoice in the Lord** despite his past life. What a record he had – the chief of all sinners, who persecuted the church of God, threw men and women into prison, and encouraged the death of others. He is able to say **Rejoice in the Lord** despite his present circumstances or future prospects. He was in prison, could be executed at any time, people were giving him cause for trouble and grief (Philippians 1:15), seeking their own ends (Philippians 2:21), opposing the Cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18), arguing amongst themselves (Philippians 4:2).

This is an amazing thing, a paradox in the Christian life. We do not live in a world of make-believe; we feel the effect of these things that would pull us down, adversities, sickness and sorrow. And yet in the Lord we rejoice. We face trouble realistically, not pretending things are better than they are, or ignoring the truth of what is going on. In all these circumstances, there is also rejoicing in the Lord.

This has been the authentic Christian experience in every age, not just of “super saints” in the New Testament. A letter sent to John Wesley in 1756 from a father whose son was in a York jail, condemned to death, read, “His peace increased daily. On Saturday, he came out of the condemned cell clothed in a shroud, and got into the cart. The cheerfulness and composure on his countenance was amazing to all the spectators. He had joy in the face of the scaffold.”

Hudson Taylor’s experience in China in 1870 – in February his son Samuel died. In March his three eldest children went to England. In July his wife died in childbirth, and 14 days later the newborn baby died. Then he went on to endure a massacre, dysentery, sleeplessness etc. In a letter to his mother, broken with grief, he spoke of God – “Yet never does He leave me – His own rest, peace and joy He gives me. Often

I wonder whether it is possible for her to have more joy in His presence than He has given me.”

Despite all that life brings – sorrows, upsets, disappointments, and griefs – the New Testament experience is of rejoicing greatly, rejoicing evermore, rejoicing always, and enjoying the fullness of joy.

How can we rejoice in the Lord?

Clearly everything depends on our relationship with the Lord. Meditate on, realize, and grasp clearly your relationship with the Lord. Salvation is God’s plan to relate us by faith to His Son. Fix your eyes on Christ, the Son of God, your Saviour. All the fullness of life is in Him. Think of His work of atonement, the complete answer to sin and guilt. Whatever is in your past, His blood cleanses you from all sin.

He indwells your life – changing, moulding, strengthening, empowering, and giving assurance. His will for your life is good, acceptable and perfect. He is able to cause everything to work together for spiritual good. He is in sovereign control over the universe, and all authority is given to Him. Everything is under His control and leading to His great goal, His glorious and personal return in power.

He will set up His kingdom. Every tongue will confess Him and every knee bow to Him. There will be a new heaven and new earth in which will dwell righteousness. The muddle, confusion, chaos will end; wickedness and evil will be put down. He is going to be all in all, the conqueror of sin, hell, death and the devil.

Meditate on Him. Think on Him. Realize your position in Him. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ. You are in a position of safety, security and certainty. Possess your possessions in Christ. This will put poise in your step, a smile on your face, and peace in your heart when the world is collapsing around you. Think of what there is to enjoy now in Christ and also in the future. The world cannot touch that. It is beyond the reach of man.

Need also to maintain right relationship to the Lord. Work at it. Cannot serve God and Mammon. Walk, be led, filled by the Spirit. Remember there are many dangers in relying on self, pride, and sufficiency in selves. The more we realize our emptiness and weaknesses apart from Him, the more we can be filled with Him. The process – become empty of self, then hunger and thirst, and be filled.

*“Vile and full of sin I am.
Thou art full of truth and grace.”*

Beware of unconfessed and unforsaken sins. Maintain contact by prayer, Bible reading and Christian teaching. Talk to Him, commune with Him. Lean on Him. Yesterday’s grace is no use for today. He is the fountain of joy. The closer we are to Him, the more we drink at the fountain.

Beware of anything coming between us and the Lord. Avoid compromise. If we fail, go back to Him. Learn the lesson, and taste again His grace and mercy. Even failures

can be overruled for good. The more clear-cut, more decided, more committed, more hard working we are in our Christian life, the more joyful we will be.

Conclusion

Rejoice in the Lord. This is the only joy that will never fail or disappoint us. It should be a literal, actual, everyday experience of Christian life. It makes us an effective witness to the world, which is searching, disappointed, frustrated, and defeated. It puts strength in our own lives. **The joy of the Lord is your strength** (Nehemiah 8:10). This is glorifying to God. Proclaim the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.