

## Rejoice for The Lord is near- Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2015

***Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*<sup>5</sup> *Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.*<sup>6</sup> *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*<sup>7</sup> *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)***

Beloved in The Lord,

The Apostle Paul gives us a very strong reason for rejoicing – “The Lord is near.” This time of year is a happy time. It is a time to rejoice, because Christmas is just around the corner. Christmas reminds us that of that beautiful truth, that we do not have a God who is far away, but a God who is near.

One of the names given to Jesus is Immanuel, which means God is with us. This immediately brings to mind Paul’s words: ***“If God is for us, who is against us?” (Romans 8:31b)*** The simple answer is nobody and nothing. If God is with us and for us then we are in a good place, because God is bigger and more powerful than anything or anybody.

We have a reason to be joyful always. During this Advent Season we have been reflecting upon the fact that we are to be like the Advent Candle that shines forth in the darkness. Our lives are to be living witnesses to the living Lord.

Rejoicing always is another powerful testimony that shines forth. Paul writes: ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil.4:4)***. Paul commands us to rejoice in the Lord always. We need to understand that joy is much more than a happy feeling. You can be feeling very bad and yet still rejoice in the Lord. You can have deep abiding joy in the midst of sadness.

As I mentioned last Sunday, the key is to have our focus squarely and fairly on The Lord Jesus Christ. It is vital that we remain in Him at all times and in all places. When that is the case, then we can, and will have joy abiding in our heart, even in the midst of trial and pain. Jesus is greater than any burden we bear,

We need to understand that in the Greek language – which is the language of the New Testament – the word translated joy (*Chairo*) is very closely associated with the word Grace (*Charis*) and also the word gift (*Charisma*). These all stem from the same root word and are closely interlinked. Out of His Grace God has given us His Son, in whom we rejoice always.

God has gifted Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. This is a gift that far transcends our limited human understanding. Eternal, almighty, all – powerful God, the Creator of all things, has in His Grace, given Himself to us and for us. How can we not rejoice?

God is near to us. I saw a great quote a while ago “If God seems distant – guess who moved.” If you do not have deep abiding joy in your heart, then that is not God’s fault, it’s yours. You have drifted away from Him.

Worry and concern, fretting over, stressing over things we shouldn't, rob us of our joy, and that in turn ruins our witness. This is why Paul writes:

***Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)***

For how many things should we be anxious? How much worry should we harbour? A little, a percentage? No – none at all. Be anxious for nothing. Nothing means nothing. The moment you begin to worry, and to stress about things beyond your control you begin to lose your joy and peace, and your candle begins to flicker and it no longer shines as brightly as it should.

Worry, anxiety are a sign of unbelief. If we are anxious about something and worrying ourselves sick, then put simply we are not trusting God. In this very same letter to the Philippians Paul writes:

***“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Phil.4:19)***

How many of your needs will God supply? All of them. That means that if we are anxious, then we do not really believe this promise. As I said last Sunday – we need to live our faith. It isn't enough to say I believe. We need to put those words into practice in everyday life in all circumstances. God promises to supply all of our needs in Christ Jesus. Period. There are no buts. We should say Amen.

God loves you so very much. He is a loving Father who provides for His children, who protects and upkeeps and guides. All is under His control and He is love.

How can we not rejoice in such a wonderful God and Father? How can we be ungrateful? We should be thanking Him and praising Him day and night.

As I mentioned last Sunday, and do so again now: The problem is that we are focused upon ourselves way too much. We are too focused on the world and not enough on God and His Word. We read in Psalm 1:1-2:

***‘How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.***

What do you meditate upon? How often do you meditate on God's Word? What do you fill your mind with day in and day out?

Solomon wrote:

***“My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; <sup>2</sup> For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.***

**<sup>3</sup> Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck,  
Write them on the tablet of your heart.**

**<sup>4</sup> So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.**

**<sup>5</sup> Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.**

**<sup>6</sup> In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.(Proverbs 3:1-6)**

In all your ways acknowledge Him. This means exactly what it says. It means to be aware that God is near all the time. He is in all you do. Keep Him in the centre of your heart and the centre of your thinking. Be thankful to Him for all things and in all things. Thank Him that you are never ever alone. That He loves you, that He never leaves you nor forsakes you. Thank Him that His mercies are new every morning and that great is His faithfulness. Thank Him that all your times are in His hand and that not even a single hair falls from your head without His knowledge. Thank Him that He provides for and supplies all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus the Lord. Thank Him that He is the Good Shepherd and that you lack no good supply. Thank Him that this world is not your home, but that through Jesus you have a place in the Father's House. Your citizenship is in Heaven. Thank Jesus, that He took your punishment and that by His precious blood you are made an heir of God's Kingdom. Thank Him that even though you deserve eternal punishment for your sins, He grants you eternal life.

Thank Him that He has given us the Bible, His Word, which is a light to our path and a lamp to our feet. Food for the soul. Thank Him for the congregation, your spiritual family, your brothers and sisters that are journeying with you on the road of faith.

Thank Him that His Word is Truth and never changes.

If you stop and think for a moment, then you will find the list of things to be thankful for is inexhaustible. As we give thanks, as we bless God for the good things He does for us, our hearts are filled with joy.

That is why Paul writes:

***Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. <sup>9</sup> The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” (Phil.4:8-10)***

So my friends rejoice in the Lord, for He is near.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.