**Real Joy**

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! –* Phil 4.4. Paul writes those famous words of the Christian faith in this last section of Philippians. Once again it’s one of those coffee mug, greeting card type of verses!

And at first glance it sounds nice… especially if things in life are going well… family is healthy, finances are great, work is fulfilling… I can totally dig that verse… when times are good… Rejoice in the Lord!

But what about when life isn’t so great… We might wonder… can we really have joy when we are plagued by past sins? When we or those we love are facing unemployment, financial struggles, sickness, pain, marital problems, death, or a whole host of other things that can go wrong in this life… Paul, are you serious? Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS? – What do you know about suffering Paul? What do you know about my problems?

Well actually, he knows quite a bit! Remember, Paul is writing this letter as a prisoner, chained to a guard in Rome! He had been falsely imprisoned for 5 years. And if you go back even further… when Paul first came to Philippi… he demonstrated this Real Joy by example… He literally lived out what it means to Rejoice in the Lord Always! I’m sure the Philippians remembered what he endured for the sake of the Gospel… If you remember, In Acts 16 we see Paul being led to Macedonia in a vision… Philippi was the leading city of that district of Macedonia, a Roman Colony… When Paul arrived there he went to the place of prayer and met Lydia, a notable citizen and businesswoman… Lydia and her family responded to Paul’s message about Jesus. Her whole family was baptized… and she opened up her home to Paul and his partners in ministry… things were starting out Great for Paul in the city of Philippi… Rejoice in the Lord Always!

But then things quickly turned for the worse… so it seemed… on the way to the place of prayer a fortune telling slave kept pestering Paul… by the power of Jesus he commanded the spirit to come out of her and she was healed. But her owner was furious…. because she had made them a ton of money…

The owners grabbed Paul and Silas… brought them before the city officials, the officials ordered them to be stripped naked, beaten with rods, severely flogged, thrown in jail and feet fastened in the stocks… what sort of state of mind would you be in if you were stripped, beaten, whipped and put in jail, because of something you did in the name of Jesus?

One of the most amazing verses of the Bible to me is in Acts 16:25. Paul and Silas, beaten to a pulp, sitting in this jail in Philippi… it says, “*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”*

Paul and Silas knew a deep seated Joy deep within them that allowed them to see the big picture… even after having endured such physical and unjust persecution…

The other prisoners were listening… Eventually Paul brought the message to the jailer and his whole family was baptized and believed…

When Paul says Rejoice in the Lord Always, I will say it again: Rejoice! He means it… He knows it… He lived it… and his dear Philippian friends saw him do it… Why does Paul say these words to his dear friends and to us at the end of Philippians…? *Rejoice in the Lord Always*?

He says it… because he knows how hard it will be and how tempting it will be to be clouded by the here and now instead of seeing God’s bigger work… In the end, Paul’s beating and imprisonment in Philippi lead to the jailer and his whole family being saved… for an eternity… The Joy Paul must have felt to be part of God’s work there… Real Joy. Joy that isn’t rooted in temporary circumstances but a Joy that knows that in the end God will always win… God will always deliver… God will always be with us and God will always use us for his grand purposes… even in what may look like some pretty awful circumstances…

**[TESTIMONY here]**

At the End of Philippians… Paul gives us a host of exhortations, some final words, thanks, and greetings. In the midst of all that I think we can see some threads of truth that help us experience that Real Joy he calls us too.

He gives us real insights on how to live out our faith here and now with a prayerful life, a thinking life, and a generous life… a life that leads to peace and joy… centered in God’s Grace!

**A Prayerful Life**: in verses 5 through 7, Paul gives us some real advice about a life of prayer. In many ways he invites us to pray instead of worry. Two things should be part of our prayer life: Requests to God and Thanks to God. And as Paul says… that brings about the peace of God to our hearts and minds.

Every time I’ve been faced with a difficulty in my life… I found this to be true… When I pray to God… for his help and I do it with a spirit of gratitude for all that he has done for me… The Peace of God comes in to my life in a powerful way…

**A Thinking Life**: Then in verses 8 and 9 Paul gives us some guidance about our thoughts. You might think about it now… where has your thought life been lately? What do you find yourself thinking about…? The things we think about affect the things we do. In verse 9, Paul moves thinking to action… He invites the Philippians to emulate His life.

It made me think of a mentor of mine, you might say my St. Paul. He died recently and I’ve spent a lot of time thinking about him and his way of life in Christ… the more I think about the good things he did and taught and lived… the more I ponder his legacy of faith in Christ… the more I’m drawn to act the same way… the more I’m moved to put that excellent and praiseworthy stuff into practice…

**A Generous Life**: In the next section, Paul thanks his Philippian friends for their generosity. Many scholars have noted the friendly, loving tone of the letter to the Philippians. They had been so generous to him, helping him as much as they could… by doing this they actually shared in his troubles… we might ask ourselves… What did their generosity bring about?

Well… It created a deep bond between them and Paul. It also allowed their hearts to mature and be involved in something far bigger than themselves… far bigger than their everyday material sustenance, homes, food, clothes, stuff…

In fact, I don’t think they could completely understand the lasting effect of their generosity… It allowed St. Paul to do the work God had called him to… their generosity helped fund missionary journey after missionary journey… epistle after epistle… so much so that 2000 years later we are being encouraged, strengthened, and built up by the effects of their generosity! Your generosity reaches far beyond what you can imagine…

A generous life… is a joy-filled life. Real Joy. The kind of Joy that lets you fall asleep… knowing that God has used you to further his Grace in the world!

**All because of God’s Grace**:

The Christian life is not always the easy life… but has anything easy in this life really brought you joy. To tell you the truth… the things I’ve worked the hardest over, struggled through, wrestled with… year after year… those are the things that have brought me the greatest Joy and satisfaction… Paul knew that… he lived through some of hardest of persecutions, imprisonments, hardships… yet had Joy. A Joy that is found in a prayerful life, a thinking life, a generous life! A joy Found in the Grace of Jesus

Paul’s last words to the Philippians are… “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Where the letter ends is where it all begins… for Paul, for the Philippians, for you, for me... “The Grace of Jesus” –

Talk about a prayerful life: on the cross he cried out… Father forgive them for they know not what they do…

Talk about a thinking life… Philippians Ch. 2 talks about the mind of Christ… He didn’t consider equality with God to be used for his own advantage… his thinking led to action… he made himself a servant… born as man…

And talk about a generous life… he gave his life… obedient to death… death on a cross…

That reality – has been, is, and will always be the source and the center of Real Joy.

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your Spirit. Amen. Phil 4.23.