

WD November 18, 2024

“Rejoice in the Lord”

We use filters for everything it seems these days. On our cars we have fuel filters, oil filters, air filters, and the ones most never change—the cabin filter which filters the air inside the car. In our homes we use water filters, furnace filters, and HEPA filters in our vacuums. We even use filters on our computers to keep out viruses. We all know how they work: When water passes through a filter dirt is trapped in the filter while the water passes through. When air passes through a filter dirt is trapped in the filter while the clean air passes through. The whole idea is to remove the dirt and the harmful stuff that spoils our fuel, our air, our oil or our water. The filter ends up with the dirt and then is sacrificed to purify whatever passes through it.

Jesus is our filter. In order to enter into heaven Jesus invites us to come to the Father through Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Upon the cross our sins were laid upon Jesus. Our dirt stuck to Him so that we can receive the pure righteousness of God. 1 Peter 2:24: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." Jesus is our filter for salvation, and our filter for living in joy.

Philippians 4:4 calls us to “Rejoice.... I will say it again rejoice.” In verse 6 he goes on to say, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all human understanding, will guard your hearts in minds.” As I read this, did you notice what I left out? Wait for it...Philippians doesn't just say rejoice, but “Rejoice *in the Lord...*” The Peace of God doesn't just happen, it happens through the filter that is Jesus. The Peace of God which transcends all understanding, guards our hearts and minds...in Christ Jesus.” “In Christ Jesus...” is the key to thanksgiving and the center of our attention this Thanksgiving season. Genuine joy is an outgrowth of thanksgiving and gratitude is found in the Lord.

The Apostle Paul made it his practice to be in the Lord even though he wrote to the Philippians while in prison in Rome. This was during Paul's Roman imprisonment in about 62AD. Acts 28:16 tells us that Paul was “allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him” (house arrest). Ironically, Paul was once thrown in prison in Philippi, along with Silas (Acts 16:19ff.). As a result, we know that the Philippian jailor and his entire family were saved. But now, from his house arrest in Rome, Paul is giving thanks and expressing joy. Philippians is often called Paul's joy letter. He is thankful and joyful because of the Gospel. Philippians 1:12-15 we learn that Paul's imprisonment has advanced the Gospel, and it is well known to the whole Palace Guard that he is imprisoned for Christ. Paul is thankful and joyful for his fellowship in Christ with the Philippians and for their support.

Perhaps you have something similar happening in your life right now. Perhaps you are in a place you didn't expect to be. Perhaps you are mourning a loved one and this is the first Thanksgiving without them. Perhaps your job has been cut and Christmas looks like very intimidating rather than like a blessing. Perhaps you are caring for a loved one where every day presents new challenges. Or perhaps your children are simply far from home and you are just feeling a little lonely for them. Like Paul you may be in circumstances that were not planned and developed completely outside of your control. Giving thanks and rejoicing would naturally under difficult circumstances be a lot harder. It was hard for Paul.

And yet somehow, we see Paul choosing to look for the good of his circumstances. He didn't miss an opportunity to talk about the Gospel. He didn't let his thinking dwell too far on things he couldn't change but instead chose to focus on what he could do within each moment of each day. He made it a priority in fact to find reasons to rejoice and give thanks for what he does have rather than what he didn't. Paul was as human as any of us. He had thorns in the flesh and asked to have them removed. Paul endured a lot of things that left him hungry, hurt, or miserable. I am sure being stoned by his enemies and left for dead was not a pleasant experience. And yet, Paul was defiantly focused on giving thanks and rejoicing in the Lord.

Being in the Lord doesn't necessarily make things pleasant. It doesn't make things fair. For Paul being in the Lord gave Him purpose. Whatever his circumstances, in plenty or in want, Paul made it about Jesus and

about others around him. Notice how Paul starts the whole book of Philippians. In 1:2-3 He says, "Grace and peace be to You from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank God every time I remember you."

If we are facing our first thanksgiving mourning a loved one, we can still rejoice and give thanks for them and the good they blessed us with. We can celebrate them in grace and in peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ even in sadness. We can do the same thing while caring for one with long term illness, or when missing a child far away, or when struggling with troubles. Something good has been given to us that is worthy of our thanksgiving. Missing them is evidence of that. Troubles also move us to take stock of what we have. It's just as important to filter the hard stuff through Jesus as much as our sin. That's what Paul did over and over and rather than dwelling on his troubles he focused on the good of the people. The people in the churches that he visited were his greatest blessing. When he wasn't with them Paul missed them like any of us would miss loved ones. Through those people God blessed Paul in prison. They visited him for long visits and cared for Paul. Paul depended on them as much as they depended on Paul. And in the midst of it all Paul rejoiced in the Lord and gave thanks in all circumstances.

Faith gives us the same advantage that Paul had. Filtering our lives through Christ makes some things tolerable and other things a great joy but it always brings us salvation. Our great joy in the Lord is knowing that when all is said and done our Lord will keep His promise to us. Because of this Philippians 4:13 is a place many are fond of quoting in this regard. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." A life filtered through Christ is a life strengthened in Jesus and a life that still finds a way to rejoice in the Lord. May the Lord strengthen you. (Part 2 is next week.)

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30