

WD November 25, 2024

“A Lifestyle of Gratitude and Joy”

Last week we talked about filtering all things through Jesus recognizing that rejoicing by itself is not true joy but rejoicing in the Lord is essential. Today we continue our thoughts on Thanksgiving asking ourselves “How do we learn to rejoice in the Lord, to not be anxious about anything?”

First, look at what you have...a warm home, being healthy, running hot water, someone who loves you, friends, a job, a good church home, having a Bible, a dependable vehicle, electricity, warm clothes, food to eat, and much more. Much of what we have is often taken for granted, but the moment we lose it we are quick to miss it. All ten of the Lepers in Luke 17 missed their good health.

Leprosy not only had physical ramifications, but also social and emotional ones too. For one to have leprosy meant that he would have to live apart from his friends, apart from his job, apart from his family, no longer allowed to touch his wife or hold his children or even be within ten feet of them. These Lepers pleaded with Jesus to get back what was lost—their health, their homes, their jobs, and their families—the very same things that are so often taken for granted. Look at what you have and give thanks and you find yourself much more content. Psalm 92:1-2 says, "It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your loving kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night."

Secondly, rejoicing in the Lord means we stop complaining. We don't always complain because we have a lot of problems. Much of the time we have problems because we complain. Complaining doesn't change anything or make situations better. It amplifies frustration, spreads discontent and discord, and can invoke an invitation for the devil to cause havoc with our lives. Complaining makes us miserable. Psalm 77:3 says, “I complained and my spirit was overwhelmed.” Philippians 2:13 “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.” Instead of looking at the negatives in our lives and complaining, we must look at and for the positives and give thanks.

Thirdly, no one rejoices out of envy. Envy is never satisfied; nothing is good enough nor fulfilling enough. Envy builds in us a sense of entitlement, entitled to anything I want. Envy only frustrates people, leaving them in a constant state of need. Life is always unfair, always the victim. James 3:16-- “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” Envy is based in pride. In Deuteronomy 8 we hear, “Be careful you do not forget the Lord...otherwise, when eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your prosperity grows then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord who gave it to you.” The opposite of pride and envy is daily gratitude that recognizes that what I have is a blessing from the Lord. Gratitude is envy repellent.

Next learn to laugh a little, or a lot. “Rejoice” means “be glad”. Proverbs 17:22 says that a cheerful heart is good medicine. I heard Joyce Meyer read the following paragraph which describes the benefits of laughter. She did not name the source but I thought it was a wonderful description of the benefits of laughing. "Laughter is good medicine because causes the release of body chemicals called endorphins. These substances help to relieve pain and create a sense of well-being within us. Laughter is able to raise your energy level and pull you out of the pit of depression. It actually releases tension, anxiety, anger, fear, shame and guilt and can completely change a person's attitude. Like a massage, a good belly laugh is able to stimulate all your major organs. It's like internal jogging. Laughter strengthens your immune system. It increases antibodies. It is believed to have a protective capacity against viruses, bacteria, and other microorganisms. It's like an internal aerobic exercise because you inhale more oxygen when you laugh. Laughter stimulates your heart and blood circulation and is equivalent to any other standard aerobic exercise."

Learn to laugh. As we said last week genuine joy is found v.4 “in the Lord”. He didn't say to rejoice in yourself but in the Lord. All spiritual blessings are in Christ and since you are in Christ you always have a reason to be joyful. Learn to laugh because in Christ you will share in the greatest last laugh of them all, overcoming the world in Christ. Grumpy Christians don't make a lot of sense. You and me have reason to laugh. All the dirt and yucky stuff that invades our peace is eventually going to be filter out permanently through Jesus.

Finally, let us turn to Jesus. V. 6-7 “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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Two words stand out don’t they, “with thanksgiving”. At first it might seem like an odd insertion, but “with thanksgiving” implies that something is already given. And there is something given, namely the giver in this case has given Himself.

Years back my cousin’s husband Harry planned on going to Afghanistan for a year to work. They still live in Michigan, and with jobs hard to get back then it was a place that become a state of anxiety to say the least. Opportunity knocked so Harry set himself up to work on Hum-V’s for the military as a mechanic. We may remember from the news that Afghanistan was a dangerous place. Family members harbored concerns, naturally. Yet Harry wasn’t all that worried. In his mind he would be working on base, surrounded by American soldiers, 24/7. His anxiety is lessened because of who will be with him, making it safe to work. The tax free income that he earned definitely motivated him to sign on but he but it was the safety of being with the American soldiers that made it work most. It is their presence that made the other blessings possible for Harry.

It is easy to forget sometimes that we daily live in enemy territory. Anxiety is one of the enemy’s favorite tools. But remember Jesus promises, “I am with you always,” and “I will never leave you or forsake you.” Jesus is with us. Jesus willingly became the filter for our sin purifying us on the cross; That’s the hard stuff. How much more then should our confidence be that we can make our requests to God to ask for the smaller things. James 1:16, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, come down from the Father...” We don’t live or work in Afghanistan but we still have our anxieties don’t we. Jesus is, however, right here with you. It is His peace alone that transcends...And it is already yours.

Jesus is our filter. Jesus purifies us from all unrighteousness. He makes us ready for eternal life. Let us rejoice in the Lord. Let us make our requests. Let us give Him our anxieties. Let us learn most of all to give thanks for what we have because what we have promises more to come. This thanksgiving let us rejoice in the Lord and give thanks for all that Jesus has given us.

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John 3:30