

Saturday, March 28, 2020

Turn off the outside “noise” for a couple of minutes and consider this message from God’s Word.
I am praying that it calms your spirit and encourages your heart.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9 (TNIV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS.

I will say it AGAIN: Rejoice!

⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all.
The Lord is near.

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything,
but in every situation,
by prayer and petition,
with thanksgiving,
present your requests to God.

⁷ And the peace of God,
which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

— PART 1 —

“REJOICE in the Lord always. I will say it again: REJOICE!” — Paul here tells us that joy is a **choice**. He commands us to rejoice. He says that we can find joy “in the Lord.” (*After all, we might not find joy in our current situation!*) And he says that his command to “rejoice in the Lord” **is to be A WAY OF LIFE for us!** “Rejoice in the Lord **ALWAYS!**” And then he repeats it: “I will say it **AGAIN: Rejoice!**”

Now at this point it might be tempting for us to paint Paul as a **naïvely optimistic** person who has probably enjoyed **an easy life**, never experienced trouble, who looks at life “through rose-colored glasses,” and **lives in constant denial of reality!**

But in fact it comes as a bit of a shock to discover that the author of this little letter currently finds himself in trouble . . . in fact, he is “in chains” . . . “in prison” . . . “almost certainly in Ephesus” (*so suggests New Testament scholar Tom Wright*) . . . under the watchful oversight of Caesar’s elite ***PRAETORIAN GUARD** — *who “were known to engage in espionage, intimidation, arrests and killings to protect the interests of the Roman emperor”* (EVAN ANDREWS, www.history.com).

*...every major centre of Roman influence had an **IMPERIAL GUARD** [the **PRAETORIAN GUARD** were “an elite unit of the Imperial Roman army], and Ephesus was on its way to becoming an important centre of the actual worship of the emperor. **[They] were all now aware that there was a man in their custody who was going around proclaiming a new and very subversive message.**

The soldiers were used, of course, to the ‘gospel’ of Caesar — the supposed ‘good news’ that a new emperor had taken the throne, bringing (so he claimed) peace and justice to the world. Now here was someone out of the blue announcing that there was a different ‘gospel’: that Jesus of Nazareth had taken the throne of the world, and was summoning every man, woman and child to bow the knee to him.

TOM WRIGHT, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*

So is it possible he isn't the naïve, reality-denying optimist that we first imagined?

Tom Wright says of him: **“His own personal circumstances make these especially poignant, and give us a portrait of a man facing huge difficulties and hardships and coming through with his faith and hope unscathed.”**

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I wonder if his difficult circumstances and life of suffering actually gave his words **credibility** to the people around him?

'Have you heard?' they'll be saying to each other. *They've caught that strange fellow who's been going around saying there's a new king — a new emperor!* And you won't believe it — this new king turns out to be a Jew whom they crucified a few years ago, and **this jailbird** is saying he's alive again and he's the real Lord of the world!

Talk like that would be guaranteed to make people feel that Paul was a dangerous lunatic who should be kept locked up. But Paul's reaction is to **celebrate**. That's fine by me, he says. **As long as people are going around saying that Jesus is the world's true Lord, I shall be happy.**

Paul is saying all this, obviously, to encourage the church in Philippi. But it ought also to be a great encouragement to us. How often are we tempted to feel discouraged because the plans we had were badly thwarted, or because malicious people were trying to make life difficult. **[Or in our day, we are tempted to give up hope because a virulent virus is on the loose and is threatening our world in a way that sounds like a Michael Crichton thriller...for example, “The Andromeda Strain”! – Pastor Doug]** We need to learn from Paul (and, long before, from Joseph) the art of seeing God's purposes working out through problems and difficulties. **'God meant it for good.'** *The king is being announced, and I'm going to celebrate!*

TOM WRIGHT, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*

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So we cry out,

“Lord, at the moment we find it hard to ‘rejoice’.

And yet Paul — from prison no less! — **commands** us to **“Rejoice”...**

to **“Rejoice in the Lord”...**

to **“Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS.”**

(And in case we missed it the first time, he repeats it all over again.)

So help us, Lord.

We affirm that **'A time of suffering is a time when rejoicing in the Lord is the only way to survive.'**

G. WALTER HANSEN, *The Letter to the Philippians*.

So “FILL US with joy in your presence” (Psalm 16:11).

“ANOINT US with the oil of gladness” (Psalm 45:7).

“RESTORE TO US the joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51:12).”

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May God's joy and gladness be poured out on you today,

Pastor Doug

P.S. We would love to hear from you! How are you doing right now? And we would love to pray for you! Email us at info@bethanyonline.net

P.P.S. Keep checking this page — we will try to post fresh encouragement **every day** during this crisis!

P.P.P.S. And watch our **LIVE-STREAM Worship Service** this coming Sunday at 10:30 a.m. for more encouragement.