

Advent 3
December 12, 2021

“Rejoice ...in the Lord ... always!”
(Philippians 4:4)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text for this Third Sunday of Advent is from our Epistle reading,
Philippians 4:4

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!”

Here ends our text.

In 1988, a song reached #1 on the billboard hit chart that was written and sung by Bobby McFerrin. Adding a slight Jamaican accent as he sang, he based the title on an expression that an Indian mystic used in his letters. Often seen on posters and inspirational cards in the 60’s McFerrin made it into his hit song called “Don’t worry, Be Happy”.

At the 1989 Grammy Awards, "Don't Worry, Be Happy" won the awards for Song of the Year, Record of the Year, and Best Male Pop Vocal Performance. It was also named as one of the top 15 whistling songs.

Don’t worry. I’m not going to sing it. I’ll just read the opening lines to remind you of it.

*“Here's a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note
Don't worry, be happy. In every life we have some trouble
But when you worry you make it double
Don't worry, be happy
Don't worry, be happy now”*

When you’ve had some trouble in your life, has anyone ever tried to comfort you by saying, “Don’t worry, everything will be fine, or everything is going to be alright.”

Well, I'm sure the person who said it to you, meant well, and maybe it was even said from a Christian perspective. But, it is precisely the Christian perspective that can only give someone who is going through trouble the antidote for all trouble. And Paul makes sure we know what the antidote for all unhappiness, worry, and unrest of the spirit is ... salvation in Jesus.

Paul says, **“Rejoice in the Lord”**

The phrase “in the Lord” needs to be in bold print, capitalized and underlined. Why? Because only in Jesus is it possible to not worry, but actually, rejoice! Only, “in the Lord”, can Paul be in stocks in prison and be praying and singing hymns to the other inmates!

Yes, that was what Paul and Silas were doing after they were unjustly put in jail because they drove out a demon from a slave girl. This girl was making a man money with her fortune telling for her masters in Philippi we read in Acts 16:16-34. She followed Paul around after he had baptized Lydia and her family and constantly cried out, **“These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”**

When Paul commanded the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her, her money making abilities immediately left her and the masters decided to get even with Paul by putting him in jail on charges of “troubling our city” with their teachings.

After being beaten with rods, Paul and Silas are heard singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them. Then, something remarkable happened, as you know. An earthquake caused the prison foundations to shake so that the doors were opened and all the prisoners' chains were loosed.

The antidote for this unjust imprisonment was prayer and God had heard Paul and Silas' prayers.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;” (Philippians 4:6)

“Don't worry” God's word says. “Be anxious for nothing”. Nothing! But in everything, let your requests be made known to God.

It doesn't matter if you're in prison, extremely sick, near death, going through a tornado, there is nothing that you should be anxious about. But everything should be lifted up to God in prayer. For God knows the tests and temptations that are common to man.

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

God is faithful. Rejoice, in the Lord! He alone is able to provide the way of escape so that you may bear what you are going through.

And at that moment, in that jail, there was one who was needing to escape from total despair. The jailor himself was about to kill himself. There was no amount of positive thinking or repetition, “Don't worry, be happy”, that could stay the sword that was about to take his own life. Try as the world may, it can't produce or manufacture happiness. You can't just repeat over and over, “don't worry, be happy” and be relieved.

No, it took the voice of God's messenger, Paul to stop the sword. “Don't harm yourself. We are all here!”. Why would they not all run for it? What's going on? I want to have the peace that you have was basically what the jailor was asking for when he said, “What must I do to be saved?”

Paul's answer? “Don't worry. Be happy now?” Of course not!

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Rejoice, in the Lord! In this moment of absolute despair, the Lord has not forsaken you and He alone gives you everything you need to rejoice in – your salvation!

So, what happened next?

“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”

The word of God, baptism, the means of grace is what God used to save this jailor and his family! Just like Lydia! And God has done the same for you through His word and in your baptism!

The jailor's life was completely changed immediately. He now washed the wounds that Paul and Silas had endured. God's spirit of gentleness now guided him. **"Let your gentleness be known to all men!"** (v.5) Why? Because the Lord is at hand! God is always near to us to help us in time of need. That is the humbleness and gentleness that God wants you to display always, because the Lord is constantly gentle and kind to you! Even when you are grieved wrongly, don't return evil for evil scripture says in 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

"See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all."

How can God call us to live like this?

Jesus supplied the answer in the beatitudes He gave in Matthew 5.

"11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Yes, this was a new way of living for the jailor. He looked outside himself and looked out for others now. What does Scripture say that happened next?

"Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."

He rejoiced! He believed in God. He rejoiced in the Lord that Jesus was his Savior. This was his new way of life! To rejoice always in every circumstance! And it is also your new way of life and mine. Rejoice, in the Lord, always. Again, I say rejoice!

That song "Don't worry, be happy" repeats that phrase over and over again, but never helps that person get out of the loop of despair. But, Paul's repetition is not in vain. "Again, I say rejoice", because it is always rejoicing, in the Lord.

This new way of life in the Lord, completely our new way of thinking as Paul says to the Philippians and to us.

“whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

We meditate on what the Lord has done for us! It is, as we have heard from Hebrews 12:2 always **“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

For the joy set before Him, to save all mankind, Jesus endured the cross! Jesus is the author and giver of joy. He creates joy in our hearts when we turn away from our vain repetitions of senseless words and things that we hold onto to try and give us joy...and look to Him, the Author and Finisher of our faith!

Yes, God has given us many temporal blessings in this life that He wants us to enjoy. God is not a God of sorrow. He blesses us with good things in this life like family, food, wealth, comfort, vaccines and all our daily bread! But, of course, they are never the source of our joy.

Paul commands us to “Rejoice, in the Lord”, not in all our stuff! Yes, we it’s a command from God to “rejoice”. We have to be told to rejoice also. We could spend all our lives walking around with long faces, if we don’t constantly repent of all the times we seek our joy outside of Christ. Rejoice in the Lord, always! Paul says.

Again, Paul writes this letter during his first imprisonment in Rome. It would have been easy for Paul to have a negative outlook on sinful humanity, instead of thanking God for people who are both sinners and saints.

“¹⁷ Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.” (Philippians 2:17-18)

Paul loves the Philippians and gladly will be imprisoned for them that they may know the truth of the Gospel. Paul describe these fellow partakers of the Gospel of grace in chapter 4 as his joy and crown.

“Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.” My joy, my crown, my beloved! For they stand fast

“in the Lord”. They are part of the fellowship of the Gospel, the communion of saints. As fellow workers in the Gospel, Paul tells them that their names are written in the Book of Life in the verse right before our epistle.

Yes, Paul cannot help but exclaim in the very next verse of our text.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

To absolutely assure us that of what our rejoicing is grounded in, Paul adds this well known verse with which many pastors use to conclude their sermons.

“and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (v.7)

Peace. Peace to the world the angels sang to the shepherds at Christ’s birth. Peace to you, Christ said to His disciples with outstretched nail printed hands, as He appeared in the locked room after His resurrection.

Peace. The debt of sin has been paid. God is at peace with you for your sins are forgiven. Our limited understanding cannot comprehend it. But the **“God of peace will be with you” (v.9)** The Lord is at hand. Rejoice in the Lord, always! For God has made peace with you by sacrificing His only Son for you. So Jesus said to His disciple right before His death these words.

“Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:32-33)

Jesus has overcome the world, your sin, and your death. And that is the reason Paul can tell us to “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice!” Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)