

Philippians 4 Rejoice in the Lord 12th Oct 2025

Rejoice in the Lord, always and again I say rejoice!!

I can't read this passage in Philippians without thinking of this song, hence why we sang it this morning! Lots of Churches sang this chorus in the 70's, singing in a round and going on and on until the leader would finally stop. It repeats itself, but then so does Paul, as he wants to emphasize his point and encourage this rejoicing.

It is Paul's final command in his letter...Rejoice. How hard can that be we might say? I love to rejoice in the Lord...and I often like to do that with song. I find singing brings joy as I sing to praise our Lord. Sometimes I find it hard to keep still and I feel like dancing like David danced before the Lord. But most of you are probably not like me and prefer to rejoice or as one commentator suggests a better word is to 'celebrate' the Lord Jesus in other ways.

In the part of the world where Paul was writing there were festivals and games to celebrate the various gods and even 'Caesar' himself. Paul tells the Philippians to celebrate in the Lord. I guess that is what we come to Church to do - to celebrate our faith in Jesus. When we have Holy Communion we sometimes call it 'Celebrating' the Lord's Supper as we remember what God has done for us in Jesus.

So, are you rejoicing/celebrating this morning? Do you have joy in your heart as you gather with the Church family to sing hymns, read the bible, pray and participate in Communion?

As we rejoice in the Lord, Paul says we can do so freely without anxiety as we put all our concerns to him in prayer. It is hard to celebrate when you are worrying about things so Paul says we should present our requests to God by prayer and petition with thanksgiving. Prayer is the antidote to anxiety. God wants to hear all our concerns and he wants us to trust him with them. Leave them with the all loving, all powerful, all wise, all sovereign God. As it says in 1 Peter; *'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.'* It doesn't say just give him some of your anxiety he says give it *all* to him. I think we are good at holding on to our worries, it seems sometimes we don't want to let them go, but we will be able to rejoice in the Lord much more if we give them all to God! How much time do we waste in worry going round and round in our heads instead of prayer and rejoicing?

In the gospel reading from Luke today Jesus said to his disciples; *'I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear....and can any of*

you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life!’ He points out that as God feeds and clothes the ravens and the lilies, how much more will he provide for us. Our Father knows what we need.

As we cast our cares on the Lord in prayer Paul says that the *‘peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.’* This is part of the blessing often used at the end of a communion service. This peace it says is beyond human understanding...meaning it is supernatural peace that only God can give, because he is the God of peace. He brought us peace when he reconciled us to himself through Jesus. It is the peace that Jesus offers his disciples when he appears to them after the resurrection and he says, *“peace be with you”*, he is their peace. Christ is our peace.

This peace, Christ, will guard our hearts and minds. Think of Christ as a guard surrounding your heart and mind preventing that anxiety from getting in.

Paul then suggests a wonderful way of focusing our hearts and minds away from anxiety and on to the Lord. He gives a list of things that we should ponder on; ‘whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things’. A great list – I wonder what comes to your mind that you would think about. Well God himself in Christ certainly comes to mine – he is all truth and pure and worthy of praise. But we can also praise his excellent creation. We can praise his kindness shown in people we meet, or the generosity of a friend. We can marvel at new birth and the perfectness of a baby. We can think about how the seasons change and bring us rain and sun for food, we can think about the beauty of food that we can create into delicious meals that we can enjoy. We can wonder at our local wildlife - the beautiful birds, our little penguins, dolphins, whales, wallabies, koalas and echidnas. We can also meditate on the word of God so full of truth.

These things are opposite to what the media saturates our minds with daily – we are bombarded with ugly, violent, malicious images, war and destruction and hate and evil abound, and magazines are full of gossip and untruths. It does not mean we shouldn’t watch the news and be informed but we should then offer those concerns for the people of the world in prayer to God and remain in his peace and focus on his goodness. As we think on these things our lives are more likely to reflect God’s love and peace and beauty and have an impact on those around us as they see Christ in us. And we need to trust God to hear our prayers and know that he is Lord over all.

Then in verse 9 Paul tells the Philippians to put in to practice all those things he has taught them, or they have seen in him. In chapter 3 Paul had called them to imitate him and he re-iterates this. There is no point in going to classes to be taught something and then not putting it into practice. If I don't put knowledge into practice, then I tend to forget what I was taught. Iaced at Greek with high distinctions, I was encouraged to keep it up and read my Greek bible. But I didn't and I have forgotten much of what I was taught – not like Richard Prideaux who still gets up early each morning to practice his Greek!

As we read what Paul teaches us in his letters and look at his life, and at what we are taught of Jesus as we read the gospels, we have to do more than just read them, we have to act on what we read. Paul tells us to abound more in love and unity - so we have to practice that. Paul has told us we should rejoice in the Lord and take our anxiety to Him in prayer – so we need to practice this until it becomes part of our habit. Again, he finishes with the reminder that in doing these things the '*God of peace will be with you.*' Jesus will be with us, his spirit infilling us, empowering us to live for him. He will *strengthen* us.

We then come to Paul thanking the Philippians for their gifts. Remember this is like a thank you letter Paul is sending in response to some money that they have sent via Epaphroditus, but he is taking the chance to write more than just 'thanks' and 'God bless'. I never understand when I get Christmas cards from people I haven't heard from for a year and all they say is "Dear Ruth and family, Happy Christmas, Love from Aunty Jane." Paul takes the opportunity in his thank you letter to continue to pastor and encourage this Church that he had begun on his first mission journey into Europe.

You can hear the authenticity of this letter as we read verse 10; '*I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.*' But in case they think he was thinking badly of them he hurries on to say, '*Indeed you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it*'... Philippi was a long way from Rome where he was in prison and they had to send someone to travel there.

Pual is very grateful for their gift as he says "*I rejoice greatly in the Lord*" – note the Philippians gave him the money – but Paul rejoices in the **Lord** - for he sees the Lord as the one who would have encouraged them to be generous. And ultimately it is the Lord that is providing for him by whatever means.

And while I'm sure Paul doesn't want to sound ungrateful, he does take the opportunity to say that he would have been okay if they hadn't sent him money... '*For I have learnt to be*

content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do all things through him who gives me strength.’ (4:11-13)

Have you learnt that sort of contentment? It sounds like it was something that Paul learnt over time, maybe each time he suffered a beating or an imprisonment, each time he went a little hungry he was able to place greater trust in Jesus. This is the Paul who desires to know Christ more and *‘more and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.’* (3:10) He learned the secret of contentment – knowing Christ.

I ponder this sometimes, if I were to get cancer or MND or MS or something that would really restrict me, could I really join Paul in saying I am content? I hope and pray that I would be able to offer my prayers and disappointment and anger etc. over to Christ and I would learn to be content in whatever situation I found myself in. Paul, who was an active missionary traveller, now confined to prison, says he knows contentment and his secret is Jesus. It’s not a secret he keeps to himself though– this is a secret to be shared as he wants all to know Christ as he does.

I remember reading a story of someone on a short term mission trip on the Island of Tobago. This person was leading worship in a leper colony on his last day and asked if anyone had a favourite song. A woman raised her fingerless hand, and he noted her disfigured face and she asked, *“Can we sing, ‘Count your blessings’”*. He was so challenged at this woman’s request, to think of how we, who have good health and life often forget to count our blessings. This woman who was a leper had learned contentment – it sounds like she pondered those excellent things of God and could rejoice in her Lord.

After explaining his contentment Paul says; *‘I can do all things through him who strengthens me’*. (v 13) This is an oft quoted verse, but it is often taken out of context; Paul was not suggesting that he could accomplish anything ‘with a little help from the Lord’. No, it is about Paul submitting to God in whatever circumstances, and God giving him the strength to do so, even when in prison and hungry and in need. Paul is reminding us that we can press on whatever our situation with the empowering supernatural peace and strength of Christ.

As we come to the end of Paul's letter to the Philippians, I encourage you to take time to read it, or listen to it from beginning to end and meditate on what we can learn from Paul and put his teachings in to action.

Remember that you are a saint and servant in Christ Jesus, and I pray that your love will abound more and more in knowledge and insight; that you can live in unity with one another, having the same humble attitude of Christ and that you will desire to press forward to know him more fully. I pray we will remember that as the Church we are a colony of heaven and so we should be living as heavenly citizens. I pray that we can always rejoice in the Lord with our eyes fixed on things above, rather than worry, may we pray and rejoice. Again, I say it, rejoice, give Jesus your anxiety and receive his peace. Learn to be content in all circumstances as Christ is sufficient for us and he will give us strength.

Finally, as Paul finishes his letter he says to the Philippians, and I say to you; *"my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever..."*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen'