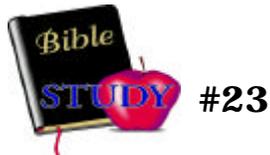


Journey Into God's Word



I Kings 13-16

Jeremiah 21-31

Philippians 1-4

Dear Friends,

Are you happy? You may think the answer to that question depends on what circumstances you are facing. If things aren't going well at this time, you may not be feeling very happy, but you still can be joyful. Joy rises above the circumstances to the extent that Paul declared in **Philippians 4:4**: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Paul knew that while happiness may depend on happenings, joy depends on Jesus. That's why even though Paul was writing from prison, his letter to the Philippians was still a letter of joy. His joy came from knowing Jesus Christ personally and depending on Jesus for strength rather than on Paul's own strength, abilities, or circumstances. "I have learned 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 in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." (**Phil. 4:11-13**) Talk about joy, freedom and power! Paul had discovered this and much more in the Living Christ. To Paul all that really mattered was knowing Jesus Christ, the source of all real joy, peace and contentment. "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him... I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death." (**Phil. 3:8-10**) Paul knew that real joy does not come from outward circumstances but from the inward strength found in Christ, the Hope of Glory. In light of that fact, how could it be said that a depressed Christian is a contradiction of terms?

Those abiding in the love of God and the joy of His presence will walk in obedience to God's Word. "Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien

(homeless), the fatherless or the widow, and to not shed innocent blood in this place.”(**Jer. 22:3**) To those who would try to find joy in power and making lots of money, God would say, “Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know Me?, declares the Lord! But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion.”(**Jer. 22:15-17**) Please read **I Kings 13-16** and compare the results of those kings who walked in the obedience and joy of the Living God to those who did not obey Him? Then please go on and compare the actions of those kings who sinned and served their own desires to the attitude of Jesus Christ described in **Philippians 2:5-11**.

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”(**Phil. 1:3-6**) As you meditate on the verses you have just read, what joy does it bring you to know, “that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion?” What is Paul’s prayer in verses **9-11** in **Phil. 1**? In spite of his chains, what was the result of his attitude of joy according to verses **13** and **14** of this chapter? What does he say is the important thing according to verse **18** that causes him to rejoice? Who have you shared Jesus with today?

Here was a man who was in prison yet totally free in his spirit. Intoxicated by the joy of the Lord, he could declare “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”(**Phil. 1:21**) “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ... stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.”(**Phil. 1:27-28**) Paul says count it all joy, “for it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him?”(**Phil. 1:29**) According to **Philippians 1**, how is it possible to rejoice in our sufferings?

“Make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”(**Phil. 2:2-4**) How do verses **6-11** of chapter 2 explain the humility of Christ? “For it is God who works in you to will and act according to His good purpose. 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 as you hold out the word of life.”(**Phil. 2:13-16**) Did you hear that? You can shine like stars in the universe as you serve God without complaining, arguing and living a godly life what a privilege!

What an opportunity! What a joy! This joy based on the love of God is not just a bunch of words. It is revealed in the historical Jesus who came among us, died for our sins, and rose from the dead. “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”(**John 1:14**) This reality brings about change in those who receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It refines us and breaks up our hard cold hearts, molding us into people of compassion. “ ‘Is not My Word like fire,’ declares the Lord, ‘and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?’ ”(**Jer. 23:29**) When the Word of God takes root in a life, changes take place, “ ‘Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the Lord gave to you and your fathers for ever and ever. Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke Me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you. But you did not listen to Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘and you have provoked Me to anger with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves.’ ”(**Jer. 25:5-8**) What a tragedy it is when people refuse the love and joy of the Lord and instead turn to sin. As a result of such rebelliousness, the children of Israel were taken into captivity for 70 years. When the people sin, the land is also affected. Environmental destruction is the result of sin. How is this described in Jeremiah **25:34-38**?

Jeremiah tried to warn the people prior to their captivity. He declared, “Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster He has pronounced against you.”(**Jer. 26:13**) What kind of response does **Jeremiah 26:14-24** say he received? Even with a negative response, Jeremiah does not give up. He described his source of strength in **Jeremiah 15:16** as he declared, “When Your Words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.” What do you think he meant by the phrase “I ate them”?

“Finally my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!”(**Phil. 3:1**) Paul makes this command to the Philippians, knowing that a joyful attitude is essential for one who desires to “press on to take hold of that for which Jesus took hold of me.” (**Phil. 3:12**) Paul continues by declaring, “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”(**Phil. 3:13,14**) Rejoice! There is

hope! Christ is Risen! Declare along with Isaiah the prophet, "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." (**Isaiah 61:10**) Is your response that you still don't feel this joy of the Lord? Then realize the joy being discussed is not a feeling but a fact. If you are having a hard time accepting this fact, then perhaps there is sin that needs to be repented of as David did in **Psalm 51**. These "garments of salvation" and "robes of righteousness" cannot cover with joy bodies that are filthy with sin. That is why David, after he committed adultery and murder, cries out to God for forgiveness. There is no longer joy in his life, only guilt over these terrible sins, so David cries out, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." (**Ps. 51:3,4**) David knows that God is a just God, but He is also a merciful God Who will forgive the sins of those who sincerely repent. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me." (**Psalm 51:10-12**) Those whose sins make them enemies of the cross of Christ cannot experience the joy of this salvation. What does Paul say will happen to such individuals in **Phil. 3:18,19**? The time to repent and receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior now. "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body." (**Phil. 3:20,21**)

Abiding in Christ enables us to rejoice and experience "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding." What formula does Paul give us in **Phil. 4:4-8** in order to experience such? In order to experience the peace and joy that God has for us we must allow our thinking to change. What things does **Phil 4:8,9** say we need to think about? Remember God's joy and peace involves more than just positive thinking. True joy and peace comes from knowing that no matter what the circumstances are, God is in control. We are people of destiny, for heaven is our home. Through Jesus Christ we have victory over sin, death and the devil. We are a people who can be content and have joy in spite of the circumstances. How does Paul describe this contentment he has found in Christ, in **Phil. 4:11,12**? Such contentment and joy enable us to declare in word and deed, "I can do everything through Him (Jesus) who gives me strength." (**Phil. 4:13**) Next time you feel the pressure, instead of responding with worrying, griping or complaining, why not meditate on **Philippians 4:19**, "And my God will meet all

your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” As you believe and act on this verse, you will respond in a positive way, knowing God is in control.

This week I want to encourage you to join me in reading **I Kings 17-22**, **Jeremiah 32-45** and **Titus 1-3**. Now remember; rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 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 understand, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”(**Phil. 4:4-7**)

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice