



Philippians

Chapter 1&2

Experiencing Joy in Every Situation

My Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Wouldn't you like to experience joy in each and every situation in life? Paul, who was in prison when he wrote the book of Philippians, shares with us in this tremendous book how one can rise above their circumstances to experience joy.

Paul begins by declaring, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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 onto completion until the day of Christ Jesus."(Phil.1:2-6 NIV) Instead of complaining about his imprisonment Paul is praying with joy and being confident that God would bring the good work He had started to completion. Think how much more effective and joyful all of us could be in our work for the Lord if we could have this attitude of gratitude. "So this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately. You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush. Live a lover's life, circumspect, and exemplary, a life Jesus will be proud of: bountiful in fruits from the soul, making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God."(Phil.1:9-11 The Message Bible) These "fruits from the soul" are also referred to as the "fruit of righteous." This fruit is produced by Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers (John 15:5, Eph.2:10) This fruit of righteous is given "to the glory and praise of God."

Paul shows us that the ability to rejoice in every situation is a result of seeing that Christ can be glorified in even the most hopeless of circumstances. What good does he say is coming out of his imprisonment in verses 12-14? "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient

courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”(Phil.1:18-21 NIV) These are the word of a liberated man. One who is free to boldly serve Christ and be all that Christ has called him to be. He is a man so filled with joy even though he is imprisoned he can declare in Phil. 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again; Rejoice!” How do verses 22-24 show that even death itself could not hinder Paul’s joy in Christ?

Paul’s joy is spontaneous and spreads to others. He states, “I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.”(Phil.1: 25, 26 NIV) What about you? Are you spreading joy as a result of your knowledge that God has everything under control and when it is under His control nothing can be out of control? The Christian life is one of joyful growth in the knowledge that God loves us and has a plan for our lives. Christian love and the joy it produces is not merely feeling or emotion but is rooted in knowledge and the understanding of God’s love.

When we are rooted in the knowledge and understanding of God’s love we are able to “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.”(Phil 1:26, 27) Standing firm with such holy boldness keeps us from giving up when things get tough. Paul even saw suffering as a blessing stating, “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him, since you are going through this same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.”(Phil.1:29, 30 NIV)

In Philippians 2:1, Paul speaks of having encouragement from being united with Christ and experiencing joy. This union with Christ is the personal intimate relationship that each believer has resulting in salvation. From this relationship flow all the benefits and fruits of salvation like encouragement, joy and peace. (see Romans 8:1, 2 Cor.5:17, Gal.2:20). Paul goes on stating, “any comfort from His love,” demonstrated through the death and resurrection of Christ resulting in the assurance of His presence both now and for all eternity. (see John 3:16, Romans 5:8, 1John 3:16). In this verse Paul always refers to “fellowship with the Spirit who dwells in believers (see 2 Cor.13:14) “If any tenderness and compassion,” these attributes of the saved life, are referred to here by Paul to point out Christians care deeply about those in need. All these benefits pointed out by Paul in Philippians 2:1 including encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness and compassion are present realities for believers.

In Chapter 2, Paul continues to challenge each of us by declaring, “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.”(Phil.2:2-4 NIV) What a challenge yet what a necessity for those who are serious about the joy that comes from moving into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Philippians is not a book for those who desire a sugar-coated Jesus, who, as a genie in a jar, jumps out to meet every one of their demands. This book does not offer us the pop theology of easy religion and cheap grace. Instead it challenges us by telling us to, “think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of Himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of Himself that He had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave become human! Having become human, He stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.” Paul then goes on and tells us the result of Christ becoming a suffering servant and dying for us. “Because of that obedience, God lifted Him high and honored Him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that He is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.”(Phil 2:5-11 The Message Bible) How can you apply this to your personal life at this time? Paul tells us when he says, “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to 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 universes as you hold out the word of life.”(Phil.2:12-16 NIV)

As you remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ in this crooked and depraved world you shine like the stars of the universe. When you hold out the word of life you are offering hope to a hopeless world. Working out your salvation involves trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior and believing that “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through those He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”(2Peter 1:3,4 NIV)

Paul tells the Philippians what joy he finds in their faithfulness even as his life is under going persecution. As we share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others

we also can rejoice as they grow in Him. Paul declares, “As you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith. I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too shall be glad and rejoice with me.”(Phil.2:16-18) You also can experience this joy which comes from sharing Jesus Christ with others. When people receive the message of salvation, committing their lives to Jesus, there is such joy in helping them grow in the knowledge of Christ’s love and eternal presence. How I praise God for the joy I have experienced from seeing trainees grow in their knowledge of the Lord and then reach out and share God’s love with others. In Philippians 2, Paul shares concerning two of his trainees, the first is Timothy. “I have no one quite like Timothy. He is loyal, and genuinely concerned for you. Most people around here are looking out for themselves, with little concern for the things of Jesus. But you know yourselves that Timothy is the real thing.” Can the same thing be said about you and your devotion to the Lord? The second is Epaphroditus. “He nearly died, as you know, but God had mercy on him. And not only on him—he had mercy on me, too. His death would have been one huge grief piled on top of all the others. So you can see why I’m so delighted to send him to you. When you see him again, hale and hearty, how you’ll rejoice and how relieved I’ll be. Give him a grand welcome, a joyful embrace! People like him deserve the best you can give. Remember the ministry that you started but weren’t able to complete? Well, in the process of finishing up that work, he put his life on the line and nearly died doing it. “Praise be to God for dedicated laborers. What a joy it is to work side by side with one such as you.

Paul is happy and joyful not because of his circumstances. He wrote from a jail cell, his work was under attack and after twenty years or so of traveling and frequently being persecuted for sharing Jesus, Paul was tired. Yet circumstances weren’t important to Paul in comparison to knowing Jesus as His Lord and Savior. It is this resurrection life, hope, and help that Jesus provides that enables one to be joyful in spite of the circumstances. The certainty of this presence both now and for all eternity provides a joy, peace, power and purpose that the world can’t give and can’t take away. Please continue to study Philippians 3 and 4 this week discovering further what Paul means when he says, “rejoice in the Lord always and I say rejoice.”

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice