

Rejoice in the Lord

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[0 : 00] Ken, welcome. Welcome. Thank you, Nick. We're delighted to have you and you, Rachel. Now, Ken, tell us a little bit about yourself. We know that you're a member of the Middleton Church. Yeah, Rachel and I have been going to the Middleton Church for nearly three years now.

And we must say that we've just found tremendous community and welcome among the Baptist churches of Cork. Shortly after we started going, the Munster Bible College course began. And it was perfect timing for me because I was looking for something like that to kind of get some sort of good understanding of the Word of God. And I have to say we've grown from strength to strength as a couple since joining Middleton Church under Andy, who has been very good to us. Thank you. How did you come to know the Lord? Just very briefly. Very briefly, short version. There is some Christianity in my background. My father is a faithful Christian and he was very faithful to us.

Growing up, he was very faithful to kind of share the gospel with us as we grew up and, you know, just to read the Bible to us every night. But, you know, regardless, and because of some mixed up ideas I had in my own head, I just went off and started doing my own thing in my teens.

[1 : 17] And very quickly, I just kind of found myself in the party scene socializing. And one day, when I was at home, there was a knock on the door and there was two men doing cold calls from the Cork Baptist Church.

And they shared a very simple gospel message with me, a message I was very, very familiar with. But they said to me, you know, perhaps you should read a Bible if you have one, which I did. And, well, there was some bit of a struggle for understanding. Initially, I have to say, my life turned around dramatically at that point. I think I finally really repented wholeheartedly of who I was and who I was trying to be.

And the Lord has been so faithful to us ever since. And shortly after that, six months later, I met Rachel. Six months later, we were engaged. A year after that, we were married.

And here we are, really. You know, it's been that fast, you know. Okay, now we get the chance to ask Rachel how you came to know the Lord.

[2 : 23] Oh, that's a tricky one. That's a tricky one. And we gather how you found Ken, or Ken found you. Well, it's kind of a long story, but I'm not too sure that I was saved when I thought I was.

But I think the Lord was always drawing me to him. But it was kind of after I met Ken and a few other things happened, the Lord really showed us, you know, the real truth of his word.

We had kind of some very funny ideas about things. I don't think I understood sin properly. So I couldn't repent properly. If you don't understand it, you know, you don't know what you're being saved from.

So I think it was a journey along the way. Just even since I met Ken, since we ended up in Middleton, I think the Lord has really, it's probably a process. So I don't know if there's a bang on time.

But he's been very faithful to us. Thank you very much. There's a lot of truth in the line of the hymn, O love that will not let me go.

[3 : 28] That's so true in my life as well. So thank you very much. Ken, will you stay here? Ken's going to bring us God's word. And we look forward to that. I have something to put my water on.

Oh. Don't mind if I take charge of the pulpit. Okay.

It's been a lovely welcome we've received here. As part of my prep for the sermon this morning, I took the time to listen to all the other messages on this series on the church website, which is a fantastic resource.

And I must say I was very blessed by it. And it's great to hear such faithful preaching in Cork. So anyway, I suppose we'll begin by reading our text.

So if you turn to Philippians 3, and we're going verses 1 to 11. That's page 1180 in the Church Bible. Philippians 3, 1 to 11, page 1180 in the Church Bible.

[4 : 54] And we'll read it together. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again.

And it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the Church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God, and is by faith.

[6 : 34] 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, and so, somehow, to attain the resurrection from the dead.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your precious Word. Thank You for Your great kindness to us, that You would choose to reveal Yourself to us through Your Word this morning.

I pray that by Your Spirit, You would open the minds, the hearts, and the ears of all of us here to receive the Word. And I pray that it would do the work that You would have it do in us, even now, here, and today.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Before we begin to examine our portion of God's Word for today, I thought it would be helpful to do a recap of what you've covered in this series up until now.

Where we are in chapter 3, we're just passing the halfway point in Paul's letter, which is as good a time as any to take stock, and also because the first verse in our text assumes that we have read or heard what was written up until now.

[8 : 00] Let's consider the letter as a whole for a moment. Paul's letter to the Philippians is commonly known as the epistle of joy, and rightly so. However, our modern understanding and usage of the word joy has changed somewhat from its original concept, and a brief recap of the messages from recent weeks will help remind us of that.

I'm going to take a little bit of time to set this up, because I want you to understand this concept of joy. A good understanding of the biblical idea of joy is very important for grasping what is at the core of Paul's message.

As we have been hearing through this sermon series, Paul was enduring extremely difficult circumstances as he wrote, or as he more likely dictated this letter. The Philippians themselves were not unfamiliar with suffering, as we will see later.

You see, joy is something that is not without context. Joy is not something that is without a wider setting that gives it meaning. As you may have gathered from the other sermons, or know yourself from direct experience, joy is something that becomes very real in times of difficulty.

In fact, joy is something that is hard won in hard times. But joy is not an end in itself. So let's quickly go to the beginning of the letter.

[9 : 30] The epistle opens in chapter 1 with gratitude. Paul greets them with an expression of heartfelt thankfulness to God for the people of the Philippian church.

Paul is almost always grateful in his letters for people, not circumstances or things. He is grateful for their loyalty to him and for their partnership with him in the work of the gospel.

His gratitude is enhanced by his sure and certain confidence in the God who had saved them. And yet he would bring that divine work he had started in them to completion on the day that Christ returns.

Paul goes on to express to them that in his concern for the church, he had the same type of sacrificial love for them as Christ did. He wanted this love to abound between them as they lived and suffered for Christ together, even as he was absent from them because of his imprisonment. He told the Philippians how even his imprisonment should be a source of joy for them. As Paul found himself chained to Roman guards in his cell, he realized that he had a captive audience. [10:44] Because of this, the gospel message had now been smuggled into the very heart of the imperial household. Paul didn't even mind that there were those who were now dismissive of him in his absence.

In fact, he drew comfort from it and rejoiced. Because of these people's rivalry with Paul, even as they explained the message they were seeking to undermine, Christ was being proclaimed. And Paul rejoiced. Paul rejoiced and drew comfort even as he awaited an uncertain fate in prison because he knew that either by his life or by his death, the kingdom would advance. The Philippians' experience of persecution was a sign to them of their salvation because, as he explains to them, suffering has been appointed to the life of every believer. Even the presence of persecution could be a source of assurance for them. In chapter 2, he orders them to continue to strive together in mutual, humble service for the sake of the gospel by giving the example of Christ himself.

[11:56] Christ set aside every privilege, every right, and every entitlement he had in service to us, just as Paul wished the Philippian church members would do for each other.

They should serve each other without complaint, remembering that they were living their lives in the sight of a holy God and so shine as lights in a crooked and twisted world.

In so doing, they emulated Christ, their Savior. More comfort, more joy. Paul also knew that he might very well not leave prison alive, but rejoiced and drew comfort from this too because if he was martyred, he would then be with Christ.

He reminds the church that even his death in service should be a source of joy to them as it was to him. Chapter 2 concludes with Paul's commendation of Timothy and Epaphroditus as worthy role models for the church.

These two servants had proved themselves to be selfless in their work for the gospel and were precious to Paul. Paul was willing to send them back to the Philippian church because they were uniquely qualified to provide the selfless leadership that they needed.

[13:18] They were exemplars of joy and concern for the welfare of the church. I want you to note this. Paul loved this church.

he really loved them. His affection for them is warm and it's real and it shines up from the page. He anticipates their concern for them in prison and he seeks to reassure him.

He is deeply grateful for their gift that they had sent to him. He knew them well. They were Christ-centered together. They had struggled and suffered for the gospel together.

They had suffered affliction together. They had suffered persecution together. They had experienced profound and deep fellowship together because nothing opens and softens the heart like suffering.

Paul was so fond of them that he boasts about the Philippian church and their near neighbors in his letter to the churches in Corinth. This is 2 Corinthians 8, 1-5 and I'll just read it for you.

[14:26] You don't need to go there. And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.

In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations. They gave, first of all, to the Lord and then, by the will of God, also to us.

This warmth and love that abounded between Paul and the members of the church in Philippi had been forged and shaped in the heat of seething and violent opposition.

They all knew that their suffering was part of the deal. They accepted it as normal. Even more than that, they saw it as a sign of their salvation from God.

[15:40] As they stood together, holding firm to God's word and serving each other loyally, they comforted each other in their grief. They bound up each other's wounds and encouraged each other, remembering that even their very ability to serve was a gift from God.

They rejoiced in the God who one day would finish the work he had started in them. This is the proper context for joy.

Joy is not really a feeling or a mood or an emotion. It is not euphoria or even happiness, although it can lead you there.

It is an attitude. Better still, it is a deliberate approach to every circumstance that is founded on a sure and certain confidence in God's promises.

This is what Paul means when he says rejoice. Joy does not well up within us when our circumstances change for the better, but happiness might.

[16:51] No, joy or confidence in God gives the grounds for contentment even in dire circumstances. It does not necessarily overflow into happiness, but it can.

If it leads to a feeling at all, then it leads far more often to a peace or a feeling of security, even when all your circumstances suggest otherwise. This is a better sense of the biblical concept of joy. And no, this is where we turn to our assigned text because this is where it begins. It begins with joy. So let's go to chapter 3 and verse 1 and read it together.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again and it is a safeguard for you. Rejoice in the Lord.

Why? Because the Lord is the source and grounding of our joy, our confidence. There is no other place to find joy joy.

[18:03] And Paul makes no apologies for repeating himself, for writing these same things about joy over and over again throughout his letter. Why? Because, as Paul says, joy in the Lord or confidence in the Lord is a safeguard for us.

It protects us. Now that seems like an odd statement, doesn't it? why would Paul say that joy is safe? Does that mean a lack of joy is dangerous?

Well, joy is safe. Here's another way of putting it, by asking another question. What is it exactly that protects us when we're vulnerable?

and I'm referring specifically now to moments of temptation. The temptations that beset all of us, particularly in moments of acute suffering or opposition, will try and separate us from our source of joy and confidence by offering a false alternative.

When the bait of temptation is presented, what is it that reminds us of our right priorities? Isn't it God's word? The word that tells us about God's love for us.

[19:26] His love that is so deep, mysterious and profound that it shows us in him even before the foundation of the world. That love which caused him to set aside the glories of heaven.

That love which compelled him to become a man, living a short, sorrowful and painful life in perfect obedience on our behalf so that we could be credited with his perfect work.

That love which compelled him to die an agonizing, wretched death in our place. Taking the punishment we deserved, knowing he would rise again to glory and reign over us as one of us.

That love which takes delight in interceding for us even now before the Father as our great and merciful high priest and our loving elder brother. Joy or confidence in God makes temptation to sin seem bland by comparison.

It makes any temptation offered repulsive. Joy is a deliberate act. Joy in the Lord prayerfully reminds itself of God's promises and lets the bait of temptation rot on the hook.

[20:52] Now that Paul has assured his beloved Philippian church of the benefit of joy, of confidence and trust in God as a safeguard, he now points out the danger that awaits them because obviously there is something he needs to warn them about.

Joy is not a Pollyanna mentality where we're all in a journey together being wafted along in a gentle breeze under the loving gaze of a mutant benign God. There is real danger for this Philippian church but they can't beware of the danger unless they're first being made aware of it.

To verse 2. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. Now that Paul is absent from his beloved congregation and confined to a prison cell, he is concerned for his brothers and sisters in Philippi.

He anticipates that even as he communicates to them, there are wolves closing in on his beloved flock. These were the Judaizers. Judaizers were false Christians who would press gang naive believers into thinking that they had to conform to defunct old covenant laws.

Paul knew that he would not be around to give a point-by-point rebuttal to their teaching. So, clever teacher that he is, he applies some memorable labels to these false preachers to draw attention to

the lies that are in their message.

[22 : 31] He first calls them dogs. Unlike our modern world, where kittens and puppies receive worship on the internet, dogs in Paul's era were an unwelcome sight.

They were feral and riddled with diseases, and they would eat anything, no matter how repulsive. Dogs was an insulting nickname for Gentiles, used by self-righteous Jews who were proud of their dietary laws and hygienic eating practices.

These laws, along with others, were now being added to the gospel of God's grace by these Judaizers. They were preaching a gospel of law-bound righteousness, a profoundly evil act which subverts the gospel of God's grace.

And hence, Paul's ironic name of evildoers for these deceitful preachers. These men were preaching their own self-righteousness. They sought to draw the Philippians trust away from the past faithfulness and future promises of God and focus on their own accomplishments and religious compliance.

This is a recipe for both self-condemnation and for sinful pride. However, his most cutting insult is reserved for their preaching of circumcision.

[23 : 58] Mutilators, he calls them, revealing how their practice of circumcision is nothing more than an empty religious ritual, no better than the self-cutting Baal worshippers who battled with Elijah on Mount Carmel.

To verse three. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

for all their legal bluster and bloviating, these false preachers who are adding all these extra requirements to the gospel of Christ were in fact merely heaping condemnation on themselves. Not merely because they were preaching another gospel as awful as that was, but also for thinking that they could be righteous apart from God. Remember, Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised.

The great irony is, as Paul is showing, that these Judaizers were in fact the new Gentiles. Christians were now the true circumcision who worshipped by the Spirit and put no confidence in our own ability to keep a set of laws or to please God by our own works or the fulfillment of rituals.

[25 : 22] The Old Covenant had run its course and had served its purpose and had demonstrated our inability to keep these requirements. The gospel of grace teaches us that Christ has done all these things on our behalf, and more than that, he is the very fulfillment of those things.

Now, as we turn to verse four, we see that if anyone had grown to base their joy or their confidence in their own works, it was Paul.

Verse four to six. Though I myself have reasons for such confidence, if someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Paul didn't just dismiss these Judaizers out of hand. On their own terms, he excelled them all. Again, he is anticipating that these false teachers would sweep into the sanctuary with their heads high, regaling these wide-eyed and innocent believers with their impressive knowledge of old covenant laws and requirements.

[26 : 56] They would have them bound up with their laws and their loopholes in minutes flat, and Paul knows it. And he sets out to pop their bubbles with a list of achievements that none of these wolves could touch.

This is not ego. This is argument, because it is crucial that he pulls the rug out from under these deceivers. Paul had every one of the qualities required by the Judaizers, and more.

He was circumcised on the eighth day according to the letter of the law, not later as an adult convert. He was of the people of Israel, or a true Jew racially and able to verify his lineage, speaking of which, the tribe of Benjamin, who along with Judah were of Jewish royalty and very prominent.

And the very fact that he knew his tribe at all showed that he also knew there had been no mixed marriages in his ancestry, because all the tribal records had been destroyed during the Babylonian invasion.

He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He had inherited and had been maintaining the tradition, the language, and the culture of his people wholeheartedly.

[28 : 12] He was a Pharisee, a member of a sect that had the aim of drawing the Jewish people back to a proper observance of the law of God. Now, initially, this movement was sincere, but by Jesus' time, had become mostly legalistic and crushing.

However, even still, Paul was not merely a Pharisee. He was not merely just making up the numbers. Prior to his conversion, he had been a zealot to the point of persecuting the church. He saw it as his duty to crush this cult, these followers of the Nazarene blasphemer, Jesus. Lastly, he was blameless before the law.

Now, Paul is not claiming to be sinless, but he is saying that his obedience to the law was wholehearted and it was sincere. Insofar as anybody could obey the law, he did.

And not only that, he did it better than anyone. This is where Paul left these teachers in the dust. He had outworked and outstriven them all.

[29 : 27] But he is not finished. This is where he turns their false gospel upside down and pulls it inside out. Verses 7 to 9. But whatever was to my prophet, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

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, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

The righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. All these gains he had.

All these achievements. All those years of striving. Years of dogged obedience. years of theological accomplishments.

[30 : 37] Years of memorizing scripture. Years of his cultural reverence and deference. All of it was worth nothing. Paul says that he considers it all garbage.

And he's not merely saying that these things are disposable. But much worse than that, they are repulsive. repulsive as excrement. The word Paul uses, skubalon in the Greek, is a startling image. It does mean excrement and there is no getting around that. Paul is saying, and I'm not going any further than he is here, that if you Philippians strive to please God in your own strength, according to these Judaizers teaching, if you try and please God with your own accomplishments, if you grasp onto your own morality, your own achievements, and your own status to try and haul yourself up that sheer cliff, you will find to your horror that you'll have grasped hold of something rather unpleasant.

That disgust, that revulsion, that is what Paul is alluding to. And that disgust, that dismay, and even horror, is the proper response to religious attempts to please God.

Not because God is in heaven, lying on a futon somewhere, kind of like mulling over what a great legalist he isn't, but because God actually is perfectly holy.

[32 : 14] He is perfectly good, and perfectly righteous, and pure. He detests sin. He is totally unlike us.

Let's take a look at Isaiah, who was another religious athlete, by the way. When he was confronted with the divine vision in chapter six of his book, what was his response?

Let's turn there, actually, to Isaiah chapter six, and we'll go through it together, Isaiah six. And that is page 690 in the church Bible, Isaiah six.

Sorry, my lectern is coming down here. All right. Isaiah chapter six, 690 in the Bible. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and a train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him were seraphs, each with six wings, which with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying, and they were calling to one another, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty.

[33 : 48] The whole earth is full of his glory, and at the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. Woe to me, I cried, I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips, and live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it, he touched my mouth, and said, See, this has touched your lips, your guilt is

taken away, and your sin atoned for.

Isaiah, who was a devout Jew, and a true believer, believer, when confronted with the sight of God, was horrified, terrified.

What did he say? Woe to me. He thought he was lost for all eternity. Suddenly, and instantly, he was excruciatingly aware of his sin, in a way he had never been before.

His sin was now naked and exposed. It was writhing and shrieking in the unbearable light of God's throne room. But then, a curious thing happens.

[35 : 26] One of the seraphim picked up a live coal with a pair of tongues, pressed it to Isaiah's tainted lips, and said, see, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.

Like Paul, Isaiah had his gospel moment. He realized that he did not have a righteousness of his own that comes from the law, but that which comes from God on the basis of faith.

Faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice as sufficient to cover his sin and objective guilt before God. That's how he could count everything else, everything else, as loss.

let's go back to our text in Philippians 3, and we'll go to verses 10 and 11. 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, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection of the dead.

Still, as we come to the end of the passage for today, what does that mean for us? How do we apply this? It's all very well saying that we should consider our status and achievements rubbish, but how does that lead to knowing the power of his resurrection?

[37 : 28] It means this, Philippi was an obedient church, and Philippi was a suffering church. Paul was an obedient servant, and Paul was a suffering servant.

And obedience to Christ, following Christ, means that we too will suffer for him. Paul had only just said earlier in chapter 1, verse 29, for it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.

Paul wants his beloved brothers and sisters in Philippi to prepare for the inevitable continuation of their suffering by turning worldly values upside down.

what does he say to them and to us in our text today? Rejoice. Draw your comfort from the promises of God.

This will keep you from the temptations of a worldly mindset. Speaking of which, set aside worldly religious attempts to please God with works or rituals or supposed spiritual feats.

[38 : 45] It is futile and will only foster a competitive spirit. Suffering and loss is the price of obedience in God's upside down economy.

We draw our strength and our confidence from the certain promises of our all-powerful God. This is the heart of Christian joy.

And this is the heart of Paul's letter. Where Christ led the way by setting aside his divine privileges, Paul reveals to us the same process as it works out in the regenerated mind of the believer who, upon finding treasure hidden in a field, sells all that he has and buys that field.

I'll close with this fundamental truth of the New Testament. Here it is. The more faithful you are to Christ, the more you will suffer for him.

And the deeper the fellowship you will have with him. That's knowing Christ, not merely knowing about him. What deeper fellowship could we have with Christ than to lay our lives down for the same cause that he did?

[40 : 10] to reach a lost world, to minister to his beloved and suffering church. Back in verse 8, when Paul says that he counts everything as lost, that he might gain Christ, he is using accounting terminology.

We could say that those of these losses are nothing by comparison to the kingdom of heaven. We shouldn't over spiritualize this. They are still tangible. These losses will cost you something.

They will hurt here and now. The good news is we don't do this alone. That is the purpose of the church.

And we won't have to do it forever. We will strive for the gospel together. We will suffer affliction together. We will suffer persecution together.

If we do those things together, then we will experience profound and deep fellowship with Christ and with each other. Because nothing opens and softens the heart like mutual suffering.

[41 : 26] Lastly, Paul ties knowing Christ to participation in his sufferings. participation in his sufferings means that we will become like him in his death.

That could potentially mean martyrdom. It will certainly mean honoring Christ in the myriad moral decisions we make every day. I don't need to explain to you how this could cost you dearly in our present world.

God. But this is the context for true joy, a confidence and trust in the holy and righteous God who has been so faithful to us.

This is the God who parted the Red Sea and delivered his people. This is the God who comforted and rescued a sobbing Hagar.

prayer. The God who heard Hannah's prayer. The God who afflicted a bewildered Job. The God who burned in the heart of David who would write the sound book of Jesus.

[42 : 40] The God who terrified Isaiah. The God who became a man. Living a perfect life on our behalf.

taking on himself the shame and the punishment for our sin. The God who died in our place and now reigns over us as one of us and whoever lives to intercede for us.

The God who spoke the heavens and the earth and us into existence is with you. Your church, his church is with you.

And by his grace, as we become like him in dying to ourselves, we can be certain that we will attain that same resurrection from the dead our saviour did.

That glorious day when we are called to meet him in the air, when we will be like him because we will see him as he is. Amen.

[43 : 45] Amen. Let's introduce our song. And our closing hymn, I think, is knowing