

Philippians 4:4

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[0 : 00] It's my great pleasure and privilege to be with you here today. New Mills, as you will know, has a very special place in the hearts of my family.

Recently someone asked me, did I miss Cambridge? I said, well, yes, I do miss Cambridge, but it's really New Mills that I miss. Because first loves have an enduring place in people's hearts.

And I know that Eric Alexander would say the exact same thing. Yes, he misses St George's Tron, but like myself, New Mills was his first love.

So I bring you the love and greetings of Joan, our children, our grandchildren. And I trust as we reflect together on God's word that our hearts will be warmed and our minds expanded and our lives brought into closer conformity to that of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

So please turn with me in your Bibles to Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 4, and we will read the first seven verses. Philippians chapter 4, the first verse.

[1 : 26] Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

I entreat you, Odea, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[2 : 40] Reading the Bible can be deeply unsettling. God's word never allows us to read its teaching easily.

If you're able to read the Bible without being humbled, perplexed, puzzled, then I don't know what kind of breed of human being that you are.

And this is an appointed example of how unsettling the word of God can be. When Paul writes in the fourth verse, rejoice in the Lord always, always.

And in case the Philippians thought that Paul's imagination had run away with him, he repeats himself, always, he says, rejoice.

And it's a command. It isn't a suggestion. He isn't saying to us, if your circumstances allow it, then rejoice.

[3 : 42] He's issuing a gospel command. This is as much a command as any other command in the Bible. It's a command we are to obey.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say it. Rejoice. Now, later in verse 6, you'll notice Paul writes, be anxious about nothing.

Don't be anxious about anything. That's the negative side, if you like. But here he's saying, not only have you not to be anxious, you're actually to rejoice always.

Now, Paul understands that life can be difficult. He himself had experienced trial upon trial, trouble upon trouble.

In 2 Corinthians 11, he details in about 20 verses the sufferings that this life had brought to him because of his union with Jesus Christ.

[4 : 48] And even in this letter, you can see in verse 2, I entreat Jodahe, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. There were differences differences and difficulties within the church fellowship.

Back in chapter 2, he says to the Philippians, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, consider others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests. Paul is highlighting the tensions, the quarrels, the difficulties that were disturbing the peace of this congregation. He's not being unrealistic. He knows that life is fraught with troubles and difficulties and tensions. And yet he says, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice. I would guess the first question that naturally arises within us is, how is it possible to do this?

[6 : 06] Is the Apostle Paul not expecting too much? Is he forgetting that we are ordinary men and women who actually sin, and at some time sin very badly?

We grieve God. We grieve one another. Is he forgetting the frailty of our humanity? Well, absolutely not. He understands that Christians sin. In fact, I wonder how embarrassing it was for Euodia and Syntyche to hear their names read out in this letter.

The letter comes to the elders in the church in Philippi, and it's read out on the Lord's Day, and suddenly they hear, I entreat Euodia, Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. These women who were fellow servants with Paul in the work of the gospel, were at loggerheads, were not told why, but there was an estrangement between them.

[7 : 12] Paul knows that we sin, we grieve God, we disappoint ourselves. So how then can we rejoice always?

In good times and in bad times, when life is sweet, when life is hard, when our circumstances are all against us, and when our circumstances are sweetly for us.

Well, the first thing to notice is that Paul doesn't actually say rejoice always, does he? He says, rejoice in the Lord always.

Paul is not stupid. He knows only too well that Christians are only able to rejoice always if their joy is located in the Lord.

And so the question I really want to ask this morning is, what is there in the Lord that enables a Christian believer to rejoice always? Maybe your circumstances are all against you.

[8 : 28] Maybe these past months you have just felt weary and forlorn. Perhaps these past months have left you flat and you wonder where God is in the midst of your circumstances.

Perhaps you've gone through particular sore, deep and dark trials and troubles. Well, Paul is not saying rejoice in your circumstances always.

He's saying rejoice in the Lord always. What is there in the Lord that enables a Christian believer to rejoice always?

Let me mention five things. Number one, we can rejoice always because of the provision that God has made for us in the finished work of his son, Jesus Christ.

No matter how bruised and battered you may be here today, no matter how hard your life is, no matter the hostility you face because you belong to the Lord Jesus, if you are a Christian, you can rejoice because God has provided for you in his son a perfect atonement for your sin.

[9 : 58] He has covered over your sin. His son has paid in full the price of your sin in your place and for your sake.

no condemnation. You now dread because you are in Christ and in Christ there is righteousness. In Christ there is acceptance. In Christ your sins have been forgiven. God has adopted you into his family. Your great enemy, the devil, is a defeated foe.

He may yet be a troublesome foe, but he is a defeated foe. And you have in Christ an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, that will never fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

1 Peter 1 You can rejoice always because you have in Jesus Christ, in the Lord himself, himself a salvation that nothing and no one can take from you.

[11 : 11] Sometimes we speak more about the finished work of Christ than the continuing work of Christ. But in this regard, think of what your Saviour is even now doing on your behalf.

He is ever living, says the writer to the Hebrews, he is ever living to make intercession for you, to guard and keep you on track, to preserve you in the narrow way that leads to life.

You can rejoice always because you have in Jesus Christ a salvation that is perfect and that nothing and no one can take from you.

Secondly, you can rejoice in the Lord always because of his unchangeable commitment to love you always, to love you in good times and to love you in bad times.

His love doesn't ebb and flow. We may grieve him. Paul speaks in Ephesians 4 of the capacity that Christian believers have of grieving the Holy Spirit.

[12 : 22] We can grieve God but his love doesn't rise or fall. He may discipline you. He may chasten you with his displeasures but only because he loves you whom the Lord loves he chastens.

Hebrews 12 He loves you in good times and in bad times. Let me put it as starkly as I can. He loves you when you are pressing on and when you are going on rejoicing and he loves you no less when you fall and fail flat on your face.

He loves you when your times are sweet. He loves you when your times are hard. There is nothing in all creation that can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus your Lord.

One of the most staggering truths that the Bible from beginning to end confronts us with is the staggering truth of the grace of God and that's a word that we use too easily.

When were you when was I last overwhelmed by the inexplicable wonder of the grace of God. What is the grace of God? It is undeserved kindness to judgment deserving sinners and what that means is that where my sins abound the grace of God in Jesus Christ does much more abound and his love is a love of undying unyielding commitment.

[14 : 09] It's called covenant love chesed love the Old Testament word for steadfast love for covenant committed love just as he just as we in marriage pledge ourselves one to the other for better for worse for richer for poorer so in covenant engagement God says I am yours for better and for worse.

His unchangeable commitment to love you always enables you to rejoice always and then thirdly you can rejoice always in the Lord because of his unabridged sovereignty in all your circumstances I don't think the Bible the word of God expects us or calls us to in a sense rejoice in our circumstances but to rejoice in the Lord who sovereignly overruled wisely and well and perfectly if mysteriously all our circumstances you know these words only too well in Romans 8 God works all things together for the good of those who love God who have been called according to his purpose maybe as you listen to this and watch this you look at your life and you just see weakness and failure and sins that shame you but if your hope and trust rests alone in Jesus

Christ then that's the great issue isn't it if we are truly united to Jesus Christ then sin grieves us and our heart's longing is to live to the praise of the Son of God who loved me and who gave himself for me then we have this wonderful confidence that all things nothing accepted all things work together for the good of those who love God God is at work working all things together for the good of those who love him it's one of the most stunning verses in the whole Bible isn't it we see the reverse side of the tapestry and it's a tangled skein of threads and we often look at life not least our own lives and we just think Lord what a mess I am one one day the tapestry will be reversed and we'll see the finished product and we will just be stunned with amazement

I sometimes wonder if in heaven we'll just be speechless well we won't be but you know what I mean we'll just be so overwhelmed by what God had been about in our lives we just I never thought that I couldn't see that that's why we live by faith and not by sight that's why the Christian life is to be rooted and grounded in God that's why the great need of the church in every age is the recovery of the godness of God having our lives centred in this sovereign magnificent God who is alone able to work together all things together for our good and so we can rejoice in the Lord always because of that but then fourthly we can rejoice in the Lord always because of his promise to be with his people always never will I leave you never will I forsake you and that promise to be with his people always reaches a climax when we pass through the valley of the shadow of death death is the last enemy it's a defeated enemy but it's still an enemy and as you'll know only too well in the 23rd Psalm

David writes even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me God's pledged commitment to his people takes them safely through the valley of the shadow of death my brothers and sisters you're never alone you may feel alone aloneness is one of the most crushing experiences I think that life can bring you may lose someone you prize and treasure a husband a wife mother a father son daughter you may feel the ache of that separation and as it should be it should be an ache it should be an ache that you never lose but in the midst of it underneath are the everlasting arms

[19 : 19] I am with you always Jesus said to his disciples to the very end of the age I personally am with you always you are never ever alone so we can rejoice always through our tears through our sadness we can rejoice that may be counterintuitive you think well how can I be sad and rejoice

well that's the reality of the Christian life and then fifthly one could go on and on we can rejoice in the Lord always because of his promise to bring his people at the last into his nearer presence Lord I've been reading through John's gospel these mornings and in John 6 Jesus tells the crowds who have been following him

I will not lose one that the father has given to me not one there will not be one missing for whom he shed his precious blood not one who has put their trust and hope alone in him will be missing on that last great day and his promise is that he will bring you into his nearer presence and he will let nothing stand in the way of bringing all who have been united to him through faith by the Holy Spirit he will let nothing stand in the way of him bringing you into his nearer presence and so we can rejoice always because our joy is located not in our frail hold of him but in his mighty grasp of us at your lowest at your most vulnerable if you are in

Jesus Christ you're the most precious blessed being in the cosmos when life is hard and you can get barely through a day I sometimes think we underestimate the wonder of just getting through another day when all hell is organised diets to divert you bring you down turn you aside simply to get through another day is a triumph but when life is hard and when you can get barely through the day all heaven is looking at you with admiration and when dangers threaten to overwhelm you underneath you are the everlasting arms now let me say this as we draw this very brief reflection to a close when Paul says rejoice in the Lord always he does not mean you're always to grin and be saying praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord it doesn't mean you will not break your heart it doesn't mean you will not be filled with sorrow look at our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect man of faith look at the pathology of his life look at the landscape of his life it was not even and untroubled there were disappointments, there were sorrows there was an occasion, John 11, at the tomb of Lazarus where he blazed with anger his soul was troubled the Christian life is not a life of stoical indifference to the trials and the troubles of life

I sometimes think we have an unrealistic view of what it means to be a faithful Christian we think we should be even and untroubled well our Lord's life was not even and untroubled he knew highs and lows now is my soul troubled and the word is often used for a turbulent sea when Paul says rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice he's not expecting you to be walking about with a broad grin in your face but nor are we to think well as I once said to someone once said to me or as a student I was a little difficult to bear with he said why are you always so solemn?

I remember saying the Lord Jesus had the sin of the world upon him he was solemn well actually that was a nonsense response it was a very unbiblical response it was a very self-righteous response but our joy is not to be so deep within us that people can't see that in the midst of life's sorrows and trials with the tears and the heartaches that it brings that notwithstanding all of that we are men and women, boys and girls who have a joy that this world cannot take from us no matter how hard it tries what do you think the last word in your life will be if you're a Christian believer and you breathe your last breath what do you think are the first words you're going to hear?

[25 : 29] it may surprise you that these will be the words you will hear well done good and faithful servant enter into the joy of your Lord now I can guess that some of you maybe all of you are thinking well Ian if only you knew what I was really like I spent 20 years here and if only you knew what I was really like but you see when we breathe our last breath and we find ourselves in the presence of the Lord God Almighty our Father in Heaven we will be perfectly clothed with the righteousness of His Son God will have remembered your sins no more and you will be astonished when He says well done good and faithful servant here you are you've fought the good fight you've finished the race you have kept the faith you see to use the old adage at the end of the day we can rejoice always because our joy is in the Lord our deepest joys are in Him that's why our greatest sorrows are that we love Him so poorly serve Him so meanly rejoice in the Lord always my brothers and sisters in Christ you are the most blessed of beings all heaven looks at you with wonder because the Father has elected you the Son shed His precious blood for you and the Holy Spirit of God indwells you if that's not cause for rejoicing well nothing is so as we look out into another year filled with uncertainty from one perspective we can say my help is in the name of the Lord who made the heavens and the earth may the Lord richly bless your life as a church may He prosper you may He bring you closer to Himself may you seek in all your ways to live to the praise of Him who loved you and who gave Himself for you

Amen I love you I am I love you I am I loves you I am I love you I am I love you