

## 2 Samuel/Romans 5/Phillipians 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn this evening to Philippians chapter 4, page 1181, verse 4, Philippians 4 and verse 4, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice.

I guess some people reading this would say that Paul was being completely unrealistic in this verse.

Not only so, he goes on to be just as unrealistic when he goes on to say, Be anxious, do not be anxious about anything. Verse 6, But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God.

And some might say, well, I don't have a problem with Paul saying rejoice in the Lord sometimes. After all, he's speaking about the way that a Christian finds joy in God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

But surely it's way too far for him to say rejoice in the Lord always. Does that mean that whatever happens to me in this life, I can be happy?

[ 1 : 50 ] There are times when I find it impossible and when I will find it impossible to rejoice. There are all kinds of events and circumstances in which I would find it impossible to be happy.

Sickness, pain, loss, bereavement, many other circumstances in which it's quite the very last thing that I would experience is happiness.

Things go wrong to the extent to which sometimes we lose sight of the reality of God himself, let alone rejoice in him.

It's the same thing when you read on in verse 6. There are times when I would find it impossible not to be anxious. He says, do not be anxious about anything.

Do not be anxious about anything. How can he say that? Well, if my job is on the line, maybe I was threatened redundancy. Maybe there's family illness or someone's at an accident.

[ 2 : 48 ] Would you go to a wife whose child has been badly injured and is critically ill and say, do not be anxious. How could they be anything else but anxious?

So on both counts, it appears that Paul's statements appear to be way too far. Let's take the first one. That's the one which we're going to focus in a few moments.

Paul is not suggesting that we put a brave face in time of sadness and difficulty. He's not speaking about anything contrived. Neither is he saying that a Christian will automatically or immediately rejoice.

But neither is he suggesting that sadness is sinful. What he is saying is that it is mysterious but true that a Christian, even in the face of the darkest and most horrendous difficulty, can rejoice in the Lord.

And it's the same as true with the second statement where Paul says, do not be anxious about anything. Again, a most extraordinary statement in which we need to continue the verse to find some sense in it.

[ 4 : 01 ] Paul doesn't just stop there. He says, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. Then continue, and the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Well, tonight I want us to look at the first of these statements just a little bit more deeply. Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say, rejoice.

You know, I wouldn't make this up. If it came from any other source, I wouldn't mention it to an audience like this. It's easy to mention it as part of a wedding speech or at a happy occasion when the minds of everyone are uplifted and when everybody is in a happy and celebratory mood.

But an audience like this, where I know how much sadness and how much difficulty there has been in the lives of many of you.

It's not the kind of thing that I might invent as something to say to you. But because it's in the Word of God, I can declare it with absolute boldness and confidence.

[ 5 : 24 ] And I can say, rejoice in the Lord always. That's not because I personally would find it easy to always rejoice, even in the Lord.

That's why we're given this statement, that in the face. That's why we're given this command. And remember, it is a command that we are to rejoice in the Lord always.

Because there will be times when we'll be tempted to take our eyes away from the Lord. And to forget that He is on the throne. And to forget that we are in a unique relationship with Him if we have come to faith in Him in Jesus Christ.

The circumstances, the waves, the storms of life can be so overpowering and overwhelming. It's all too easy to take our eyes away from the Jesus who walks on the water and who comes to us in the midst of the storm and says, Do not fear. It is me. It's I.

And it's in these circumstances, only as we keep our eyes and fix our eyes on Jesus, that we're able to rejoice. Just like the disciples did when they saw Him in the middle of the storm.

[ 6 : 40 ] He came to them walking on the water. And if Jesus, this Jesus, has the power and the authority to walk on the surface of the Lake of Galilee, right in the very middle, then He has the power and the authority to do anything and to control everything and to rule over every circumstance.

That's what we need to hear and that's what we need to know tonight. And so, let me just say some things about what this verse might mean for us this evening.

Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say rejoice. This verse does not mean that there isn't a time to cry.

There is a time that even the Bible itself says there is a time to weep and a time to rejoice. There is a genuine time of mourning for good reason.

Paul tells us that we are to weep not only for ourselves, but we are to weep with others. That's a command too. We are to come alongside people who we know who are mourning and in sadness, and we are to cry with them.

[ 8 : 00 ] We are to identify as far as it is possible to. And I guess that depends upon to what extent you're able to identify with someone as they go through times of anguish and darkness and difficulty.

But we are to do it. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice, but we are to weep with those who weep. Jesus Himself wept on at least two occasions recorded for us.

You remember how at the grave of Lazarus in John chapter 11, He not only came to where Mary and Martha, the Lazarus sisters were, and when He had come to the grave, even though He knew He was going to raise Lazarus to life once again, it was important for Him to enter into the sorrow of the occasion because He was a man of sorrows and He was acquainted with grief.

And so He genuinely became inconsolable. He sobbed. His weeping was not, they weren't crocodile tears.

They weren't contrived. He genuinely felt the sadness of the occasion and entered into it. He bore our sorrows.

[ 9 : 17 ] Then you remember, of course, when He looked over Jerusalem and He saw the astonishing refusal to believe in Him despite all the evidence that He was the Son of God.

They refused Him. They rejected Him. And they were about to crucify Him. And He saw what was ahead of them as a consequence of their rejection, that they would be destroyed by the Romans.

And He wept over Jerusalem. He said, How often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing.

That was genuine sorrow. He tells us in Matthew chapter 5, Blessed are those who mourn. There is a time for mourning.

Of course, in that context, it was when a person came face to face with the guilt of their sin. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

[ 10 : 22 ] Blessed are those who mourn. When you discover who you really are in relation to God, that you're lost, that you're in darkness, and that you need to be saved. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

The Lord does not expect us to fight against our emotions. Indeed, there is something missing, something somewhat wrong in the person who refuses, in the face of the most compelling circumstances, to become involved and to become deeply.

So it doesn't mean, when it says rejoice in the Lord always, it doesn't mean that there isn't a time to cry and to express genuine, heartfelt sadness in all kinds.

It is biblical to cry. It is right to cry. It is good to cry. And I say that as someone who finds it very difficult myself to become as not exactly the most emotional person in the world.

But yet, that's what the Bible tells us, that we must be. Neither, when we read this verse, does it mean a superficial rejoicing that takes place on the outside.

[ 11 : 45 ] He's not saying that we have to pre-program ourselves to look as if we're happy, to maintain a front so as not to let the gospel down. There are some Christians who seem to think that in every circumstance, they have to smile.

They have to put this front on, no matter what's happening. They have to show the world, well, I have to show the world that I'm happy, to show that I'm strong, and to show that I'm a Christian.

It doesn't matter who has died. It doesn't matter what news, what bad news I've heard. It doesn't matter what's going on in the family or what I've heard. I must maintain a brave face. I've heard of people like that.

That's not what this means at all. That, too, is entirely wrong. It's not genuine. It's not real. Jesus doesn't expect us to be unreal.

Neither does it mean that whatever our circumstance, we have to tell ourselves, oh, well, it could be worse. You know, you get people who, they're describing to you their circumstances, and they might be horrendous, and then they'll say, well, it could be worse.

[ 12 : 47 ] Well, it may be. You might be right in saying that. I'm not saying you're wrong. But you don't have to be a Christian to say that. I suppose there are very few of us that cannot point to someone else and say, well, he's worse than I am.

We're not expected to be stoic and to have this kind of super rationalization of what we're going through, and we're working out everything as if we're in control of everything.

There are times when the world collapses around us, and when we disintegrate and become a heap on the floor. God knows that.

He understands that. And so this verse is not trying to suggest that we have to maintain our control over every event and our emotions and our feelings and our events.

That's not what the verse is saying at all. The verse is not, in fact, telling us just to rejoice. It's telling us to rejoice in the Lord.

[ 14 : 00 ] And I want to say to you before going any further that only a Christian can rejoice in the Lord. Now, that doesn't mean you can't wonder at God's creation.

It doesn't mean that you can't be thankful. But that's not what it means to be a Christian. It's only when a person knows that personal relationship with Jesus Christ that he truly can rejoice in the Lord, as Paul tells us to.

It's only when you discover that you can enjoy God. Do you enjoy God tonight?

When a person comes to know Jesus as your Savior, your sins are forgiven. Paul says that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And then and only then can that person begin to rejoice in the Lord because of what he has done for that person within the relationship that has just been established between that person and the Lord himself.

[ 15 : 19 ] Enjoying God is what we were always meant to do. That's why God created humankind in the first place. It tells us why.

The Bible is the only place that tells us why we are here in this world. There is a reason why creation exists, why the universe exists, why the world exists, and specifically why humankind, men, women, boys and girls, and why they are so different from the animals around us and from every other living creature.

What's the difference is that we have been given the capacity to relate to God and to enjoy God by glorifying him and by living for him and by experiencing him and by coming to know him.

We were created with a capacity to know God and this is what our atheist friends cannot answer. Why am I here?

Why do I exist? Why does the world exist? But it's beyond that. Why do I exist? And they say to you, you shouldn't be asking that question. There is no answer so don't ask it.

[ 16 : 32 ] But I say with all due respect, I have to ask it because it's as plain as the nose on your face. The reason I do ask it, I believe, is because there is a God.

It's like you see something missing. You don't say, oh, I mustn't ask where it is because it's not anywhere. You say, where is it?

If you come to it, I remember once we were on holiday and my, I was just remembering this recently, my daughter came to see us in her car a number of years ago and she said, there's something wrong, something desperately wrong with my car.

And so there was smoke coming out of the bonnet and so we thought, right, okay, it looks very serious so we undid the bonnet and lifted the bonnet and this waft of smoke came up and the place was just, the engine was covered in oil.

Now, hence the reason for the smoke. And when it all cleared, you began to think, well, where do I begin? I'm not a very good expert. I'm not an expert on cars. I've had a few cars, old cars and I've worked on them, tinkered around with them but I don't even know where maybe the cylinder head gasket is gone or something else.

[ 17 : 48 ] And anyway, within two minutes, I'd found what the problem was. Thankfully, she had forgotten to put the oil cap back on.

I noticed that right away. I said, you've forgotten to put the oil cap on. I'm not going to make any comment. The important thing here is to get you going again and to fix the problem.

Not to criticize but that's what happened. There was something missing. The place was a mess because there was something missing.

Now, if I was an atheist, I would have said, well, I don't ask the question, where is the oil cap? The fact that it's missing means there is an oil cap. You go down the street, you find a car with three wheels.

You don't say, oh, well, there's a car with three wheels. You say, what's happened to the other one? The very fact that it's missing means there is a wheel that should be there. The very fact that I'm asking the question, why do I exist?

[ 18 : 50 ] It means there is a reason why I exist. There is an answer to the question. I have to ask that question because I've been programmed to ask that question. Of course, you can condition a person, you can persuade that person to say, well, there's no God, there's no God, there's no God, and get out of my head, there's no God, there's no God, I've got to live with this knowledge.

You can do that all you want. That doesn't change the fact. It is as plain as the nose on your face that there is a God. And I would like to say to my atheist friends this evening, have you ever considered that you might be wrong and that in actual fact there is a God?

And that explains why I'm asking the question, why do we exist? And it also explains what the answer to the question is, why do we exist?

The answer the Bible gives us, we were made for God. And that's why in the Garden of Eden we don't know a huge amount about the Garden of Eden. If you and I were transported back to the Garden of Eden, you know, the first thing that would happen is what we would feel.

We would feel what perfection is like and we would feel the immense, perfect joy of having friendship and fellowship with God.

[ 20 : 21 ] it wouldn't be awkward for us. It just didn't get better than the Garden of Eden. What a drastic mistake they made. The most tragic event in all of human history was that Adam and Eve chose to go their own separate way and become estranged from God.

And that brought in the reality of sin and the carnage and the results of sin so that we're no longer able to enjoy God like we were programmed to do, like that's what we were built for.

And there is always something missing. You will always, you will never find what you're looking for until you come back to God once again.

but when you do come back then you discover what it is to rejoice in the Lord. When your life becomes remodeled, that's what God does when he comes into a person's life and when that person comes to faith in Jesus and asks that the Lord will save them.

He begins to see things as he's never seen before. He begins to see himself as he's never seen them before. And he begins to see the world around him in a different light.

[ 21 : 38 ] And he begins to see God in a different light. I don't any longer feel awkward with God. I don't want to change the subject anymore when somebody speaks to me about God. I want to talk about him because I love him because he's a reality.

He's not a God who's far off and wants to judge me and wants me to live a miserable life. He's the God who sent his son into the world to die on the cross. For me. So that my sin and my guilt could be forgiven and so that I know for the certainty of everlasting life.

Do you have that this evening? Do you have it? I know how many questions there must be going in your minds. I know that. But that is the bottom line.

Our first priority tonight. Make that your first priority. To be right with God. There's only one way. I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. It's when a person comes to that personal faith in Jesus Christ that not only are your sins but you start to enjoy God.

Do you know what it's like to enjoy God? To see everything in the light of God. To have everything put in its right place. That's what happens. I'm not saying that a person's life becomes perfect.

[ 22 : 54 ] I'm not saying he never falls, that he never fails. There are so many errors and failings and shortcomings in the life of a Christian and I start with myself and yet you know where to go when you fail and you know how to rejoice in the Lord.

There are so many different examples of how people rejoiced in the Lord in the Bible. That's why I read that chapter in the Old Testament about David when he brought the Ark of the Lord back to Jerusalem.

This wasn't something that he was forced to do. Saul, his predecessor had failed. He had lost sight of the importance of the Ark of God. The Ark of God was the place where the glory of God dwelt.

It's very difficult to understand the Old Testament but that was the place where God's presence came and it was to be kept in the most sacred place called the Most Holy Place and so it not only represented the glory and the presence of God but it actually was the presence of God.

That's why it was such a dangerous object. You had to handle with care and that's why Yuzah, this man who had tried to stabilize the Ark, he died. But when it became obvious that God had blessed the household of Obed-Edom where the Ark was, David wanted it more than anything else.

[ 24 : 11 ] The psalm tells us it was in his heart. He couldn't rest. He couldn't sleep until the Ark of God. What was that? Why was that so important? Because God was everything to him.

God had blessed him. He had called him into his service. He knew he was right with God. He knew his sins were forgiven. He knew how to be right with God.

He understood the Lord and understood that God was not a God who was a Pharaoh, some kind of impersonal force that looked down upon Israel but a God who wanted to be amongst his people in care and in mercy and in concern, loving them with an everlasting covenant love and he just couldn't contain his joy because he understood who God was and who God was to him.

He was all he wanted, all he needed. Everything was focused upon God. Is that true tonight with you and me? That's where the joy of the Lord begins when we understand God and we understand what God means to us.

I know that we'll never understand God. Of course we won't. I haven't even begun and yet I do have an understanding of what God has done for me by sending his son into the world to die for me so that I could be forgiven and set free from the guilt, the guilt that drags me down and has dragged me ever since I was born and you too, you know that if you are on a life, a life that is in the opposite direction for the life that God wants for you, you know that you've never really found lasting joy, you've found momentary thrill.

[ 26 : 05 ] I'm not denying that there isn't thrill and selfish pleasure in the world. That's what you do. You go from one event to another, to another, to another, whether it's living for Friday night or whether it's a holiday or whether it's buying a new car or whatever it is, whether it's drink or whether it's drugs or whether it's sex or whatever it is, that's the way the world tries to fulfill themselves and tries to find, tries to keep on a kind of a level of false excitement but it all comes to an end, doesn't it?

And you have to replace it with something else. That's the way the world lives. That's why it's important for Christians to go out into the world and to explain, you don't need to live like this.

You don't need to live like this. You might be thinking tonight, well, Philippians, there's a letter from Paul, rejoice in the Lord always. and again, I say rejoice.

You might think, well, it's okay for him sitting on some balcony in a Mediterranean country surrounded by olive trees sitting writing letters.

That's what you think. You don't know much about Philippians. Paul wrote the letters of the Philippians in prison and when we talk about prison 2,000 years ago, we're not talking about prison as it is today.

[ 27 : 46 ] We're talking about a cold, smelly, dark, damp environment, a miserable place to be and he spent year after year after year just because he was preaching the gospel.

The truth is that a Christian can rejoice in the Lord even in the most miserable circumstances. That's why this letter, if you've ever read it, it's full of him rejoicing, rejoicing, I rejoice, I rejoice.

Why? Because his rejoicing was not found in his circumstances. He could rejoice even in suffering. In fact, in Romans chapter 5, he tells us that we rejoice in two things.

We rejoice, first of all, in what God is one day going to do when he comes again, when Jesus comes again, when he's going to raise the dead and when our glorified bodies that rise from the dead are going to be reunited with our souls, we're going to go to heaven and forever be with the Lord in ultimate perfection and ultimate sinless bliss.

That's what heaven is. It tells us also in Romans chapter 5 that we can rejoice even in suffering and Paul knew what he was talking about when he said that. This is not some kind of theorist because in Philippians, there were all kinds of problems going on.

[ 29 : 14 ] Things had not gone the way he expected or hoped. He was disappointed in the way that he had planned one thing, things had gone a different direction altogether.

That's very often the case. And yet we know that whatever twist or turn our life takes, that it's God who has done it.

And the reason God brings us through the most horrendously dark and difficult situation is because that's the way he draws close to us.

And that's the way he draws us closer and closer to himself to discover God as we've never discovered him before and how faithful he is in his love towards his people.

And it's when people see the way in which we are still able to rejoice in the Lord in suffering.

[ 30 : 16 ] You see, people are looking at us and say, well, of course that person's happy. Nothing going wrong with him. What else is he going to be but happy? But it was when Paul and his companions were in the prison cell in Philippi.

And when, despite the most awful, dangerous, life-threatening, his life was on the line, they sang hymns to God.

They sang to the Lord of God's goodness and his grace and his mercy because God was everything to them. And that's what it means to rejoice in the Lord.

Do you enjoy God tonight? Do you love him? Have you discovered what he's done for you in Jesus Christ? Have you come to surrender? You have to utterly surrender your heart and your soul and your and yourself to God through Jesus.

only then will God change and transform your life and orient your life towards himself. Meanwhile, you're still living for yourself if you reject, if you turn away from what God has done for us.

[ 31 : 45 ] I remember many years ago hearing a story that Hugh Ferrier, the original Hugh Ferrier, there are several of them, used to tell.

And the story, if I can remember it properly, was about a stork who flew down and stood on a well and as he was standing there, he looked down and there to his astonishment was a poor, bedraggled, dark, dirty bird way down at the bottom of this well.

And he looked clearly and as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he saw to his even more astonishment that this bird was a stork.

And so he called to the bird, he said, hey. And the bird answered him. And he said, why are you down there?

Well, he said, this is my world. I live with my frogs, my friends. I live with my darkness. I can see that there's some light up there.

[ 33 : 12 ] But this is my world. There are enough insects for me to make a living, keep alive. I talk to my friends, the frogs. I'm quite happy the way I am.

And the stork at the top of the well said, do you realize what you are? Do you know that you could be up here with me?

You could fly? You could be discovering the mountains and the trees and the valleys? You could travel, you can spread your wings and you could enjoy the freedom that I enjoy.

And the frog, the stork in the well said, nah, I'm quite happy here with my frogs. that's the way you are.

God is saying to you tonight, you don't need to stay down in the depths of the well. You can enjoy what I have for you, the life that I can give you.

[ 34 : 25 ] What's your answer? Will you take his hand and let him pull you out of the well? Or will you say to him, nah, I'm quite happy down here with my frogs.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks to you afresh this evening for the greatness of the gospel and we pray that you will speak to our hearts.

We know that no amount of emphasis or clarity or enthusiasm. Although these things are right, how can we not be enthusiastic?

How can we not try to make the gospel as clear as we possibly can? And yet, Lord, we need you to speak to people. I pray that you will do that. Lord, show us how to rejoice in you this evening by knowing you and by serving you.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.