

Intellectually, we know that God is good, that life is his gift to us, that we should cherish it, that we should be thankful for it. However, our hearts often get the better of us, overwhelmed by financial matters, current events, our health, and family matters. St. Paul considered his own life in a similar light, and then he proclaimed, “**Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I will say it, rejoice!**”

This morning we’re going to consider what it means to rejoice just as St. Paul did despite the turmoil in which we live.

OPENING PRAYER

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say it, rejoice! ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Paul’s tone is like that of a man who spends his days sitting on a stump in the forest next to a gentle stream writing poetry. He seems to have nary a care in the world. He’s serene.

But such was not the case. Following Jesus, Paul had lost his reputation, his friends, and his place in Judaism as a teacher of the Law. Indeed, he often lived without shelter and food. Frequently, he was beaten and imprisoned.

It is not a soulful sentiment to give thanks to God when we’re on the mountain top, when our health’s good, our home’s peaceable, and our work’s satisfying. But

when we have been betrayed, when we have lost someone dear to us, or when our work is miserable, giving thanks is truly other-worldly.

When Paul was transformed from a legalistic teacher of the law to a grace-filled follower of Jesus, everything in his world was turned upside-down. Property, reputation, and money – the things the world claimed gave life meaning – meant nothing to him anymore. What sustained him, what gave his life purpose was the resurrected life of his savior, Jesus Christ.

Consider his words: **“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21)**. This makes sense only when we understand that his life was intimately intertwined with Christ’s. Paul also wrote, **“whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.” (Rom 14:8)**. Paul had forsaken everything he had been for everything he had become in Christ.

I think the key to understanding Paul’s devotion to the Lord is in these words. He wrote, **Philippians 4:8**, “**whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you.**”

Paul had reconstituted his brain. He no longer thought about himself according to the things of this world, but his thinking was other-worldly. All of his thoughts revolved around his relationship to Jesus.

Thus when he wrote we should think about things that are “**true**,” I believe he was thinking about the truth of Jesus. When he said we should think about whatever is “**noble**,” he was saying he meditated on the noble things that Jesus did. When he said we should think about things that are “**right**,” he was saying he meditated on what was right about Jesus. When he said we should contemplate whatever is “**pure**,” he was telling us he thought about the purity of Jesus. When he said we should think about whatever is “**lovely**,” he was saying he considered the loveliness of Jesus. And when he said we should ponder whatever is “**admirable**,” he was talking about how he admired the attributes of Christ.

That is why he could write with absolute confidence, **Philippians 4:9, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice.”**

I believe Paul’s meditation on Jesus’ life and ministry made it possible for him to see everything through Jesus’ eyes.

It is the ministry of our Lord Jesus that transforms our hearts. For me it works like this: Even though the world is drowning in lies, I remember that Jesus is “**true**"; he's true to me in his promise to forgive my sins and bless me with eternal life. This is the truth that has set me free.

Even though the world is filled with shame, I remember that Jesus is “**noble**” and that he has called me to be an heir of his Kingdom.

Even though the world is dying in sin, I remember that Jesus is “**right**,” that he is righteous, that he is holy, and I was clothed in his righteousness in the waters of Holy Baptism, and the world can’t take that away from me.

I had a babysitter who used to threaten me, saying, “Richard, before God let’s you into heaven he’s going to make you watch all the bad little things you did with all your friends gathered around, and he’s going to embarrass you!”

She terrified me. But Paul also wrote, **Galatians 3:27, “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** Now I know that if God ever shows anyone my life, they’re going to see Christ’s righteousness. They’re going to see Jesus!

And so, even though the world’s darkness threatens to crush my spirit, I remember that Jesus is “**pure**,” that he was the perfect, unblemished lamb who offered himself as a sacrifice on the altar of God for me. This is the light that breaks through the darkness.

Even though the world has become such an ugly place in so many ways, I remember that Jesus is “**lovely**.” He showed me his love and graciousness through his forgiveness and acceptance.

And even though the world is so vile, I remember that Jesus is “**admirable**,” even giving his life for such a world.

Turning our minds and hearts toward Jesus, this is the only way to remain in his love and grace day-by-day. I’m reminded of a song. Join-in if you know it: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.”

Looking into the face of Jesus: That’s how we may be filled with thankfulness for everything, knowing in our heart of hearts his love and acceptance, forgiveness and truth. In this there is hope. In this there is peace. In the face of Christ there is our joy.

This week let us give thanks for Jesus. He is our light, our life, and our love unto eternity.

This week let us give thanks for our families and our church, our city and our country. The Lord has provided everything we need for this body and life.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of the Lord. Amen.