

Five Reasons to Rejoice  
Phil. 4:4

Richard Tow 7-12-15

*“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”* At least four different Psalms begin with those words.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the command for thankfulness runs all through the Scripture. Probably the most familiar verse is Phil 4:4 *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”* That is our theme this morning.

I had planned to speak on a different subject; but when I woke up Saturday morning God gave me this word. That produced a struggle in me; I did not feel like rejoicing and I couldn't image preaching this subject with the right emotions to go with it. Saturday morning, I woke up grumpy. I felt discouraged. The crazy part is there was no particular reason for feeling that way. Nothing bad had happened. Have you ever woke up that way? I'm thinking, "God, how can I tell them to rejoice when I'm not rejoicing myself?" Of course, God had a pretty direct answer for that! So here I am this morning reminding you and me of the importance of gratitude.

*“Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”* Neither passage asks how I feel. Like all biblical commands, we don't just do it if we feel like it. We do it and then we let our feelings catch up with our obedience.

In John 15 Jesus was teaching His followers about the importance of abiding in the vine, staying connected with Him. In verse 11 He says, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” The joy Jesus gives is different from the joy the world experiences. Worldly joy is about getting what I want . It's excitement about things and experiences. But the joy Christ gives flows out of our relationship with Him. It is not dependent upon externals. We thank God for His provisions in our lives; but our joy is found in our relationship with Him. That's why Phil. 4 tells us to rejoice *“in the Lord”*—in our relationship with Him. And He is the eternal God who does not change.<sup>2</sup>

The prophet, Habakkuk, live during a difficult time in Israel. Because of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, Babylon was able to attack and plunder Israel. Habakkuk is baffled that God's chosen people would be defeated by such an ungodly, wicked nation (Hab. 1:12-2:1). God teaches Habakkuk to trust Him regardless of the circumstances (Hab. 2:4)<sup>3</sup>. So listen to Habakkuk's declaration of faith in Hab. 3:17-18. *“Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls --  
18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”* Nothing will steal my joy. I will (I choose) joy in the God of my salvation.

I want to share with you five good reasons to rejoice. This list is by no means exhaustive; but it's a good start in cultivating joy in our hearts.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 106, 107, 118, and 136.

<sup>2</sup> Mal. 3:6 and Heb. 13:8.

<sup>3</sup> G. Campbell Morgan summarized a message from Habakkuk 3:17-18 with these words. “Our joy is in proportion to our trust. Our trust is in proportion to our knowledge of God. To know Him is to trust Him. To trust Him is to triumph and excel.” From “Jubilation in Desolation,” *The Preaching of G. Campbell Morgan* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House) p. 153

## I. Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

In Luke 10 Jesus sent 70 of His followers out into ministry. The results were fantastic. They came back to the Lord full of joy, talking about the healings and deliverances that had occurred: all the wonderful manifestations of God's power that had happened. And Jesus affirmed them in all that; but, He brought them back to the most foundational reason of all for rejoicing. Luke 10:19-20 "*Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*"

I don't know what is going on in your life; but, if you're a Christian you have cause for rejoicing. And that may be the best place to begin expressing your gratitude to the Lord. Before Jesus came into our lives we were without God and without hope.<sup>4</sup> We were dead men walking. It was just a matter of time when we would step off into the abyss and be lost forever. We had no power to save ourselves. We were headed in the wrong direction and didn't even know it. Without the cross and without God's divine intervention in our lives, we would be lost forever. But His mercy endures forever! But God did intervene. But God did convict you of your sin. But God did call you out of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son. He did save you and that is the bedrock of your gratitude. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."<sup>5</sup>

What if you received a notification today that your parents were actually very wealthy? They have left you \$ 10 million dollars and all you have to do is go to the attorney's office and receive it. There would probably be some rejoicing. But something so much greater has happened. You have been born into the family of God Himself. You have become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. You are fully accepted in the Beloved.<sup>6</sup> You have before you an eternity of love, joy, and peace. In your Father's house are many mansions. Your Heavenly Father has provided for you all things that pertain unto life and godliness.<sup>7</sup> Meditate on God's mercy. Meditate on God's goodness. Consider the magnitude of what He has done for you by forgiving you of your sins and making you one of His dear children. "...rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

## II. Rejoice because God is providing for all your daily needs.

We pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread*" and He answers that cry on a daily basis. Look with me in Psalm 103. This Psalm begins with a command toward gratitude and toward expressing that gratitude. "*Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*"

Now that touches upon one of our problems. We forget or simply take for granted the good things He is doing for us. Every time I take a breath, I have good cause to be grateful. God provided that oxygen. God gave me the strength to draw that breath. God gave me the lungs to process that oxygen into my blood stream. And He gave me another heartbeat to flow the life in that blood throughout my body. An awesome series of miracles occur every time I inhale and exhale.

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<sup>4</sup> Eph. 2:11-13.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Ken, "Doxology," *Hymns of Glorious Praise*, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1969) p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 8:16-17; Eph. 1:3-6.

<sup>7</sup> John 14:2-3; 2Peter 1:3.

Psalm 103 gives a nice list of some of God's benefits to help us remember.

Verse 3 "*Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases.*"

I'm glad the blood of Jesus is not just for getting born again. I'm glad, as a Christian, I can go to God and receive forgiveness. "*If we confess our sins,*" the Apostle John wrote, "*He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). Did anyone here have to confess a few sins this week? Did you think about what it cost God for that forgiveness to be available to you?

"...*Who heals all your diseases.*" Some of us have to believe God for physical strength each and every day. Without His healing influence we would not make it. But He is Jehovah-Rapha, The Lord our Healer.<sup>8</sup> He is supplying life to our physical bodies. You are here this morning because God gave you the strength to be here.

Ps 103:4-5 "*Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, 5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*" We had a wonderful time at Wednesday night prayer meeting, talking about times when God intervened in special ways and took care of us. Of course, there are many times when He is doing that and we don't even realize it.

He has provided for us all things that pertain to life and godliness. When Israel needed food in the wilderness, He sent manna from heaven. When the 5,000 were hungry Jesus multiplied the fishes and loaves and there were 12 baskets left over. When Ahab and Jezebel were persecuting Elijah, God had the ravens feed him beside the brook. And when the brook dried up He worked a miracle for a widow and fed him that way. God's got your back covered. He has many ways to meet your needs. He cares for the birds of the air and lilies of the field and He will take care of you.<sup>9</sup>

I like the attitude of the old Puritan minister who prayed over the meal when his family had only a tiny fish and a few potatoes to eat. "Lord," he prayed, "we bless thee that thou hast ransacked sea and land to find food for us this day."<sup>10</sup>

The opposite of thankfulness is illustrated by the murmuring and complaining Israel did in the wilderness. Psalm 106 talks about how God had parted the Red Sea and delivered them from their enemies. How they rejoiced right after that happened; but later forgot about that and started complaining about the manna<sup>11</sup>. Ps 106:13-15 "*They soon forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel, 14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, And tested God in the desert. 15 And He gave them their request, But sent leanness into their soul.*" I've always seen that as a rather alarming verse. They insisted on having a particular thing, and God gave it to them—but with it came "*leanness into their soul.*" They lost something very precious in the process. They lost the abundance of peace and joy in their soul. They lost intimacy and favor with God. They got what they wanted but with it were even less fulfilled.

So let's cultivate gratitude for what God is providing and avoid complaining about what is not there.

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<sup>8</sup> Exodus 15:26

<sup>9</sup> Ex. 16:15; Matt. 14:14-21; 1Kings 17:1-10.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House) p. 167

<sup>11</sup> Numbers 11; 1 Cor. 10:10

### III. Rejoice because you are privileged to be identified with Him in persecution.

Jesus said, "...a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...."

Remember last week when we read from the Sermon on the Mount, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matt 5:10-12). "*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad....*" Why? "...for great is your reward in heaven." Fifty years ago churches sang a lot about heaven. People lived in anticipation of the coming of the Lord and of their heavenly reward. Over the years that has been ridiculed and minimized. The Word of Faith Movement put a lot of emphasis on believing for material things in the now, in contrast to what was called "pie in the sky" religion that only hoped for something in the eternal future. Some teaching was needed about exercising our faith in the now. We went from one imbalance to the other imbalance. We do need to believe for the kingdom of God to be expressed in answer to prayer in the here and now. However, we had better come back to some of that so called "pie in the sky" religion as well. The Early Church did not have much material goods to celebrate the way we have had in America. They had the power of God in their lives and they had a holy appreciation for their "*reward in heaven.*"

Moses had to make a choice between earthly comfort and "pie in the sky" reward. Heb. 11:24-26 "*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.*"

"...for he looked to the reward." I need to get my eyes more on that reward. To be honest with you, I'm so busy just trying to make it, that I seldom meditate on my heavenly destiny. But that is one way to stir our hearts toward praise. "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus. Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ. One look at His dear face, all sorrow will erase. So bravely run the race, 'till we see Christ."<sup>12</sup>

Paul wrote in Rom 8:18 "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" We need to do some of that kind of considering. We need to gaze into heaven and believe God's promises. Yes, we enjoy an earnest of that inheritance now.<sup>13</sup> But the fullness of our inheritance is reserved in heaven waiting for us.<sup>14</sup>

### IV. Rejoice because your suffering is not in vain.

James says, "...count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

<sup>12</sup> Esther Rusthoi, "When We See Christ, *Hymns of Glorious Praise*, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1969) p. 313.

<sup>13</sup> Eph. 1:14

<sup>14</sup> 1Peter 1:3-7.

This is linked with the previous point, but here I want to focus on what God is working in our character through the experiences we go through. The Potter is making it count. He is molding and shaping you through your experiences.<sup>15</sup> *“And we know that all things work together for the good of those who love God and are the called according to his purpose”* (Rom. 8:28 KJV). Do you realize, that is not true for the ungodly? For those who do not know God, life is not working toward their good. Life is moving toward eternal destruction. In some ways, that’s hard to comprehend. On the other hand, aren’t you thankful that the hard things you go through are not in vain? Your life has purpose and it’s moving toward a glorious destiny.

In 2Cor. 4 Paul talks about the challenges he was facing in life. *“8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”* Can you identify with any of that? Then he puts it all in perspective in verse 16 *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

If all you look at is current trials—if all you focus on are the hardships of today, you will lose heart. If you will turn your eyes from the temporal and see the eternal—you will be able to rejoice the way Paul rejoiced.<sup>16</sup> If hard times come to America, we will need a more eternal perspective than we have had in the past.

## **V. Rejoice because Jesus is coming back.**

In the end we win. We win because we are with the Winner.

God rules over the earth no matter how crazy and chaotic things get around us. *“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof...”*<sup>17</sup> He sits on the circle of the earth—all its inhabitants are as grasshoppers. The nations are as a drop in the bucket and are counted as small dust in the scales (Isa. 40:22, 15).

In last week’s text we saw how the Early Church reminded themselves of the sovereignty of God as they prayed together. They quoted Psalm 2 *“Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.” 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision.”*<sup>18</sup>

God is not nervous about anything that is happening in the world. He sees the end from the beginning.<sup>19</sup> I watch our leaders make Pacific Trade Agreement that may wipe out the middle class in America. I watch them negotiate a nuclear agreement with Iran that may be the prelude for WWII. In the natural, I could freak out. But God! God will have the final say in it all. God

<sup>15</sup> Isa. 64:8; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 5:3-5.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 16:24-25.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 24:1 KJV

<sup>18</sup> Acts 4:23-31.

<sup>19</sup> Warren W. Wiersby in his book, *Be Joyful*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986) p. reminds us the word “providence” comes from two Latin words: *pro*, meaning “before,” and *video*, meaning “to see.” He defines providence as “the working of God in advance to arrange circumstances and situations for the fulfilling of His purposes.”

just might send a worldwide revival that turns everything around.<sup>20</sup> Oh for another Great Awakening in America! That's probably the only hope. But it is a hope and it is a possibility. Either way, we win.

We live with our eye toward heaven, "*...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*"<sup>21</sup> I don't have all the details of prophesy worked out. But this much I can see in the book of Revelation. The heathen may rage, the Devil may do his worst, the Antichrist may arise and work all kinds of havoc. But in the end King Jesus rules. In the end He puts down all wickedness and rebellion. In the end every knee bows to Him.<sup>22</sup>

I don't know for sure the timing of it all but this I know. 1 Thess 4:16 "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*"

Therefore rejoice, and again I say rejoice!

Pray

#### POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you nurture gratefulness in your life? How do you avoid complaining?
2. How does rejoicing "*because your names are written in heaven*" put life's events in perspective?
3. Do you make it a practice to "count your blessings"? What does that look like in your life?
4. How much do you think about heaven and your reward in heaven? How does that help put life's events in perspective?
5. Why do we "*count it all joy*" when we go through various trials?
6. Does the thought of Jesus' return stir your heart? Does it seem real or just religious?
7. What other reasons for rejoicing come to your mind?

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<sup>20</sup> Rev. 7:9-14.

<sup>21</sup> Titus 2:13

<sup>22</sup> Rev. 19