

There's a lot that I want to apply from today's passage in Philippians by just asking questions that we all need to **reflect** on, as we think about our relationship with God. One of the most famous verses from this letter is in chapter 4, verse 4, where he writes these words: *'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!'*

Throughout this letter Paul speaks of the Christian's deep joy and cause for great rejoicing. And you'd be forgiven for thinking that Paul was living in the lap of **luxury**, enjoying everything that life has to offer. It's easy to feel joyful when things are going well, isn't it? Family's thriving, job's going well, it's nice and sunny, life's good. But **no**. Paul's **actually** writing while imprisoned, probably in Rome. He talks about his chains, about suffering, about trouble. And from what he writes, it's clear he feels he could be facing death at any moment.

So why the joy? Why the rejoicing?

I want us to find out this morning why Paul is so joyful, and see why and how we can **share** his joy.

Let's read Philippians chapter 1.

-We always have to put what we're reading into context, so let's start with a bit of background before we get into the passage itself.

You'll remember from our studies in Acts, that Paul first came to Philippi after the Holy Spirit had kept him from preaching in Asia and the Spirit of Jesus hadn't allowed him to enter the area. **Instead**, Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia – modern day Greece – inviting him to preach the gospel **there**. So, guided by God, Paul made his way to Philippi, and he founded his first Christian church on European soil. Jesus' gospel came to Europe.

You'll also remember the beginnings of the church as recorded in Acts 16, represented in two people and their families who believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this reminds us, doesn't it, that these are very real and individual encounters of man with God – God speaks to individuals, he draws people to himself one by one, each person different, each conversion important to God, every one precious to him. Each one of us is precious to God, each of us has a story to tell of our encounter with God. Lovely that stories like these are recorded in this way for us.

Lydia, a dealer in cloth, by the river with a group of women, and *'the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message'*.

The miraculous events of that night when Paul is in prison praying and singing hymns to God, when there's an earthquake, the prison doors fly open and the chains fall off, which leads the jailer to ask, *'Men, what must I do to be saved?'* Paul answers, *'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household.'* And that's what happened – *'the whole family was filled with joy, because they had come to believe in God.'*

So this was the beginning of the church at Philippi.

-We all have times of discouragement, difficult situations to go through, sad events, troubles and hardship, and these can sometimes make us bitter. Paul is under arrest and we might expect him to be **bitter**, but we find him **joyful** and we're going to discover what the factors are in **making** Paul joyful as he writes this letter. We'll start by having a look at the effect his fellow **believers** have on him, move on to look at Paul's **desire**, and finally consider his **hope**.

-Firstly, then, **Paul's fellow believers in Philippi bring him joy**. It's clear from the beginning of this letter that Paul has a lot of affection for the Philippian believers. Verse 3 says that he thanks God every time he remembers them, and this remembrance of them causes him to pray with **joy**. Verse 7 goes on to tell us that Paul has them in his **heart**, and he **longs** for them in verse 8 with the affection of Christ Jesus.

The very thought of them fills him with joy. He remembers his time with them, spending time in their homes, sharing meals, walking by the river, walking through the city. He has fond memories of the conversations they had together, how they grew closer to the Lord as they discovered his grace and love. How they'd grown closer to **each other** during the days they spent together. How they'd become partners in the gospel, sharing the bond of their common faith.

-**Throughout** this letter you get the sense of Paul's love for his fellow believers, and of his **joy** through knowing them. And this causes him to pray, verse 9, *'that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.'*

Here is a prayer offered in joy, prompted by deep love for these people, for those who are a constant **source** of his joy. Paul can be **joyful** because of the memories of those who came to know God through his ministry, those who share his faith.

But also because he knows – verse 6 - that God *‘who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.’* Paul knows that the hands of God will **mould** them like a potter, he will **change** them to make them pure sometimes through difficult experiences, so that when God winds up history when Jesus comes again, they will be together **again** in the kingdom of heaven. What a joyful event that will be! This prospect fills Paul with joy.

-Take a look around. Think of your Christian friends, both past and present. Remember those who have shared their faith with you down through the years. Maybe you have known some a long time. Maybe you knew some only for a short time. What effect has knowing your fellow believers had on you? What effect does it continue to have? What feelings are stirred in your heart, as you think about the times you’ve spent with other Christians? Are **you**, like Paul, filled with joy as you remember them?

As you wake up on a Sunday morning, how do you feel about meeting together with your brothers and sisters in Christ? We **primarily** come together to worship **God**, but as we see God at work in our fellow believers, does this give us joy? Looking at Paul’s experience, I suggest it **should**. Our relationships with each other should bring us joy. Do we know anything of this? Do we meet together out of habit, or not as often as we **should**, because we lack this feeling of joy in each other’s presence?

What effect are we having on one another, do we bring each other joy?

Lots of questions – lots of reflection required. Paul thanked God for the Philippians, he **longed** for them, he had affection for them, he always prayed for them with **joy**. How about us? How about me? How about you? Let’s seek this joy through each other, let’s pray that we would be a source of **joy** to each other. Paul’s fellow believers gave him joy.

-At the end of verse 18 we read, *‘And because of **this** I rejoice.’* So in verses 12 – 18 we find the second thing which causes Paul to rejoice, which brings him joy. And these verses speak about his **desire** - what he wants to see happening no matter what. **Paul’s desire.**

I don’t know what **your** greatest desire would be. What would you want to see happening most of all? What would bring you most joy?

Would it be within your family? Your children or grandchildren being happy, perhaps? Would it be that they get on well in life, be happily married, be successful in their careers? Or would it be more far-reaching – that wars should stop and peace come to areas of conflict, that the world becomes a more peaceful place? Or perhaps that the world becomes more and more pleasant, that we take better care of the environment? What would be **your** greatest desire?

-We see what is most important to **Paul** in the middle of verse 18: *'The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is **preached**. And because of this I rejoice.'* Paul rejoices that the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached. The most important thing for **Paul** – his greatest desire – is that people **everywhere** hear that Jesus is the Son of God, that he came to earth from heaven, that he went to the cross and he died there taking upon himself the punishment that we deserve for our sins, that he rose again, defeating the devil and death for ever, that he appeared to people after that before ascending into heaven. The important thing for **Paul** is that this gospel is preached in **every way**. Paul's desire is that Jesus is proclaimed Saviour and Lord of all. And because of **this** he rejoices.

-Verse 12 begins with, *'Now I want you to know,'* signifying something of great importance that he wants people to take note of. What does he want his fellow believers who're miles away, probably fearing the worst for him, probably sad for him, what does he want them to know? *'I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.'* *'what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.'*

He wants them to know that God is in **control**, God is **sovereign**, God's will is being fulfilled, and Paul's desire **too** is being accomplished. Paul's desire is that Christ is preached, this is the important thing, and he's saying that all that has happened and **is** happening is being used to advance the gospel. Christ is being preached, and because of this, Paul rejoices.

But the Philippians may have been thinking, 'Really, Paul? You can't be serious, can you? What about all those near death experiences, what about all those beatings, what about your imprisonments, what about your shipwreck? Can you **really** say that those were to advance the gospel?'

Let's read what Paul himself says about these things by turning to 2 Corinthians 6:4. [Read 2 Corinthians 6:4-10].

Paul is totally **convinced** that God is at work in every situation he finds himself in.

-Back in Philippians, v. 13, *'As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.'* The final verses of Acts tell us that Paul is under house arrest and so could welcome many visitors, and *'boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.'* After many years of travelling, many miles spreading the word of God, Paul now found that people were coming to **him** to hear the gospel of Jesus. This was his greatest desire, that the gospel of Jesus was preached, and this caused him great rejoicing. Not only **that** but other Christians saw his example and they **too** were now preaching the gospel courageously and fearlessly. And **this** caused him to rejoice.

Does it warm **our** hearts when we hear Jesus being preached? Do **we** rejoice when we see that men, women and children all over the world are hearing about Jesus, Son of God, King of kings and Lord of lords? Does it bring us **joy** to know that people are becoming Christians and are coming to know Jesus as Saviour through the faithful preaching of his Word? Is it **our** greatest desire to see the name of Jesus proclaimed wherever, whenever, however? When we come to church on a Sunday, do we come because we want to hear the gospel of **Jesus**, the one who loved us and gave himself for us, being preached? Does the message we hear and proclaim fill us with joy? It did Paul.

-Paul rejoices because of his fellow believers, he rejoices because his desire for the good news to be preached is being accomplished. And **thirdly** he rejoices because of the hope that he has as a believer, **the hope of deliverance**.

We read on from the end of verse 18: *'Yes, and I will **continue** to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my **deliverance**.'*

There is **uncertainty** in the future for Paul - he doesn't know whether he'll live much longer, or whether he'll face execution – he doesn't **know**. But he is **certain**, that whether he lives or dies Jesus will be glorified, and Paul will be delivered. This is his hope – and can we just remind ourselves that hope in the Bible doesn't have the dubious undertones that the word has today: it is a **certain** hope, it **will happen**, but there is uncertainty **when** it will happen.

-Deliverance here means more than being released from prison – it means **salvation**, Paul is certain that he will be **saved**, because it depends on the work of God through Jesus on the cross. He writes in his letter to the Ephesians, *‘For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith ... For we are **God’s** workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.’* Ephesians 2:8. God has given him salvation by **grace**, undeserved love, Paul has faith in God, and is doing the works that God has prepared for him to do. Paul will be delivered to salvation **fully** in the future, when his work is done.

But there is uncertainty – he knows where he’s heading, he just doesn’t know how he will get there or when. He can be **confident** of salvation because of what he says in verse 6, that God who began a good work in believers will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

-If we recognise that God shows love and grace and mercy in giving us the faith to believe in him for salvation, **surely** we must believe that he’s done this for a **purpose**. Surely he won’t deny people salvation once they’ve **believed**. Surely Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us on the cross will then give us everything we need to be with him forever. This is **certain**. God doesn’t break his promises. God holds the map, **he** knows the route that each of us has to go, only **he** knows how long it will take each of us to get there, but rest assured he’s got it **all** worked out.

-Paul knows that what has happened to him will work out for his deliverance. He **knows**. And so we have to ask **ourselves**, do **we** know that the things that happen to us will work for our salvation? It’s easy, isn’t it, to think that the **good** days and the good experiences are working for our salvation, but what about when things go **‘wrong’**? Remember, as Paul writes to the Romans, *‘in **all** things God works for the **good** of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.’* Romans 8:28.

What a wonderful promise – how comforting to know, if you’re a believer, that God has a **purpose** in calling you, and **everything** will ultimately work for your good in the aspect of life which is most important – in your relationship with God. How can non-Christians sleep well, not **knowing** how things are going to turn out? At the mercy of situations both good and bad, swept one way today, swept the other tomorrow. The Christian **knows** that **whatever** happens will turn out for his or her salvation. What a great truth to think about.

-Notice two things that give him confidence, still in verse 19: firstly Paul says, *'through your prayers'*. Notice that we all have a responsibility here, to pray for our fellow **believers** as well as for our **non-Christian** friends. We pray for those who don't know the Lord yet, that he will draw them to himself, of course we do. We share God's compassion for those who need to know the **Lord**, and we pray that God will become **real** to them.

But we have a very real responsibility to pray for God's work to continue in our brothers and sisters in **Christ**. Paul recognises this, **we** need to recognise too that we progress in our Christian lives through the prayers of **others**. And we need to take this responsibility very **seriously**. Take a look around – are you praying for everyone here? We need your prayers, we really **do**. Please pray.

- *'through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ'* Of course we need more than **anything** the Spirit of Jesus to help us. God sent his Spirit into our hearts, he lives **in** us, he **sustains** us and supplies all we need to live lives **pleasing** to God, and to **guide** us along the path God has mapped out for us. Because of this Paul is sure of his deliverance.

Paul is **so** certain of his salvation that he can say that **incredible** sentence in v. 21: *'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.'* And this is the **ultimate** expression of Paul's joy: it doesn't matter to Paul whether he lives or dies – his salvation is safe. What a wonderful position to be in, isn't it? What great peace – peace that passes all understanding. Can we say the same?

While he's alive, God has work for him to do, and verses 24 – 26 tell us that continuing to preach the gospel will result in joy for **him** because he's doing God's will, but will also result in joy for the **Philippians** and all his fellow believers because he'll be able to encourage them more in their Christian lives.

But to die is gain for him - it will give the ultimate joyful experience, that of being with Jesus his Saviour in heaven for eternity. Verse 23 tells of his dilemma: *'I am torn between the two: and be with Christ, which is better by far;'* Being with Jesus is better by far.

'I desire to depart' There are two wonderful pictures here behind the word 'depart'; the first one is taken from Paul's own background as a tent-maker – depart here is pictured as someone who lives in a tent leaving to live in a permanent residence forever; the other picture has a sea-faring meaning, raising the anchor and sailing towards safe haven forever. Both depict leaving to go home. Better by far.

Again we have to ask ourselves very searching questions here. Are we with Paul? Do we see that if the Lord preserves us in this life, he does that for a two-fold purpose? Firstly to **experience** joy in spreading his gospel in whatever way he wants? Fruitful labour, verse 22. Secondly to bring joy to **others** as we share our Christian experiences with them? Like it says in verse 25, that if we remain, we will continue with them *'for their **progress** and joy in the Lord'*.

But do **we** have this sense that even if we die, that'll be **gain**, because we'll go to be with our Lord and Saviour, which is better by far. Do we really **believe** that? Or are our feet too firmly entrenched in this life. People in the world see this life as all there is. Paul has an **eternal** perspective. **God's** perspective says that our purpose is to glorify **God** and become more like him, even through troubles in this life, until the day when we see Jesus face to face, when we go to be with him, which is better by far. Do we really believe that? **Paul** did, and he rejoiced in the Lord always, and I'm sure he's rejoicing **now** with Jesus in heaven.

-So we've seen Paul's wonderful hope – he's able to **rejoice** because he knows that his salvation is secure, to live is for Christ and to die is for his gain; he **rejoices** that his desire is being fulfilled, that Jesus is being preached, and lives are being changed; he **rejoices** in what God is doing in and through his fellow believers, people he loves are **growing** in their love for Jesus as they go on in their Christian lives.

-Jesus talks about completeness of love in John's gospel, 15:9-11, where he says, *'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love ... I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.'* Paul knew this completeness of joy, because he remained in Jesus' love. Are we remaining in Jesus' love and do we know anything of this complete joy?