

Rejoice in the Lord
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Philippians 4:4-13

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry 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. ⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹²I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

1. Celebrating the Life of Jean Trench-Ellis

A month ago, while attending an older adult ministry seminar at Osterville UMC in Osterville, MA, I felt God telling me to celebrate the lives of the people in our church. We often celebrate the lives of people when they pass. But we seldom celebrate the people that we have with us. Today, I'm very grateful that we were able to celebrate with Rev. Jean Trench-Ellis. We're thankful for everything she's done in her life and that she is a part of our congregation. We're thankful for her presence, contribution, and dedication to our church.

Today we will sing from her favorite hymns, and I will also preach from her favorite scripture passage, Philippians 4. Before I share with you today's message, Diane Magnuson is going to read Rev. Jean's brief life story for us. (pause) As Diane read, Jean was born in Sagamore Beach in 1928 and went to Hoxie Grammar School and met Ed at Bourne High School. They married and had two children, Bill and Cheryl. Jean and Ed were members of Swift Memorial Church where Jean was the Sunday School

Superintendent and led Bible study. Even though they left this area to serve other churches, she came back after her retirement.

The theme of today's sermon is "Rejoice." This is the theme that Rev. Jean chose. I am happy to celebrate the life of Jean this morning. But I am so saddened since our brother Carl Wilson has returned to his eternal home. I hope today's scripture and my message can comfort his wonderful wife Denise, his precious daughter Maddie, and all of us. I pray that God teaches us how to rejoice in the Lord even when we are in sorrow.

2. Paul & Philippi

In Philippians 4:4, Paul says, "**rejoice in the Lord always. And again I will say rejoice.**" When we hear this verse, we often ask the question why Paul wants us to rejoice. Before we answer the question, let me share with you a little bit about the background of Philippi. The city of Philippi was founded in 368 BC by Philip, the father of Alexander the Great and was named after Philip. Paul came first to the city during his second missionary journey. Acts 16:11-12 says, "**We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.**"

During his mission trip, Paul had planned to go to the province of Bithynia. But one night, Paul saw a vision of a Macedonian man who pleaded with him, "**Come over to Macedonia and help us**" (Acts 16:10). Philippi was one of the cities in Macedonia. And in Philippi, Paul preached the gospel for the first time on European soil. Since then the relationship between Paul and the Philippians became very special. The Philippian Christians diligently supported Paul financially for his mission (Phil 4:16).

3. Rejoice in the Lord

Why then did Paul tell the Philippians to rejoice? The term rejoice means "to be glad" or "be full of joy." "Rejoice" or "joy" is one of the central themes in the Letter to the Philippians. Paul uses the word "rejoice" or "joy" quite often in this letter. In 3:1, Paul says, "**Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.**" Why then does Paul consistently tell the Philippians to rejoice? It is because the Philippians were not joyful. They were saddened by the situation of Paul. Paul was writing letters from

prison, and his future was uncertain. Paul was cut off from his mission and there was nothing the Philippians could do to help Paul.

The Philippians may have also been worried about their own future. And I imagine that we can also understand from our personal experiences what this might feel like. This is why Paul says to them, “I know what might possibly happen to me and to you, but I still want to say “rejoice.” Despite his circumstances, Paul was full of joy and wanted to encourage the Philippians to rejoice. Although his situation looked bleak, Paul found joy and was confident because he knew that the Lord was with him.

4. Paul and Silas in Prison

How did Paul have such confidence? In Acts 16:14-40, we see three people who became believers through Paul’s ministry in Philippi: The first was Lydia, an influential businesswoman. The second person was the demon-possessed slave girl. The third person was the jailer. Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, and placed deep in an inner cell after the demon-possessed girl was delivered and became a believer. We learn that at **“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them”** (16:25).

Paul and Silas were in terrible conditions in a prison, yet they were praying and singing. The prisoners around them were listening. And as this was happening, there was a violent earthquake, all the prison doors flew open, and everybody’s chains came loose. How could something like this happen? This kind of miracle was possible only by the power of the Lord. Not only Paul and Silas, but also all the prisoners were experiencing the presence of the Lord and were filled with joy in the prison. Paul is probably reminding the Philippians of his experience in the prison of Philippi. And so even though Paul is in prison, the Philippians can **“rejoice always”** since the Lord will take care of him. Here we need to pay attention to the expression of **“in the Lord.”** The simple meaning of “in the Lord” is to denote a relation with Christ or “in harmony with the Lord.” So “rejoice in the Lord” means we can be full of joy when we are in relation with the Lord.

Rev. Jean told me that when she was 9 years old she was in a difficult situation at the Hoxie School. One day while at school, she was bullied by the other children. At that moment, Jean felt God’s voice telling her, “Always I love you. Just remember that.” Since then, whenever troubles come, she remembers God’s voice affirming his presence. When she heard

God's voice affirming God's love, she felt the call to be a pastor and eventually became a pastor, even with no female pastors to serve as a role model for her future life.

5. I Can Do All Things

A major life changing moment came for Rev. Jean in the mid-1950s when she was diagnosed with polio. As you heard from Diane, it was a mild case but Jean was bedridden for some time and had to go through physical therapy to recover. During her recovery, Rev. Jean often reflected on the verse in Philippians 4:13 **"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."** Some people use this verse as a message for positive thinking. But when we read this passage, we are reminded that Paul was writing this message under dire circumstances. In these circumstances, Paul wanted to remind the Philippians and us that God gives them and us the strength to endure even the most difficult circumstances. For Rev. Jean while she was recovering from polio she found she had a talent for painting with watercolors. God gave her a special blessing in such a difficult time.

6. Conclusion

The Letter to the Philippians is the most joy-filled letter in the New Testament. Yet we need to remember that this letter was written under circumstances that Paul and the Philippians would hardly count as joyful. Paul was in prison. He didn't know what would happen tomorrow. Still, Paul was full of joy and encouraged the Philippians to be joyful always.

7. Application

Can we be joyful always? Probably not if we think we will be joyful when our circumstances work out the way that we want. However, even though our dreams die, relationships end, and the hope that we have for ourselves do not happen according to our wishes, we can be joyful if we are in relation with the Lord. We know most babies are joyful when they are in their mother's arms. What do we need to do when we are in trouble? Paul says in verse 6, **"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."** Then we will experience that **"the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus"** (4:9). I am sure Jean has had lots of concerns and issues. Many things might have been outside of her control. But she is such a wonderful role model because we can see her smile on her face quite often. So, we are so grateful for her presence among us. As long as we are

in the Lord, we can rejoice always regardless of our circumstances as Rev. Jean does. Amen.