



Sermon, Sunday, October 29, 2023

“The Meaning of Life: Always Rejoicing in the Lord”

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 4:4-7 ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Introduction: Apostle Paul and the Philippian Church

Today is the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost. The text we are talking about is a key passage from Philippians. The theme of Philippians is ‘Joy,’ and verse 4 of today’s text says; **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice”**. In fact, for Christians who have experienced the grace of salvation through the Lord's sacrifice on the cross and resurrection, joy and gratitude are natural fruits of faith. However, even as a Christian, it is difficult to always rejoice in everyday life. So, are Apostle Paul's words to always rejoice impossible to put into practice?

In fact, a Christian who has experienced the grace of salvation cannot be called a Christian if they do not know joy and gratitude. However, the world where we must live, with weak bodies, is a place where it is difficult to always live with joy. In these situations, even Christians cannot always be joyful.

The lives of Christians in the Philippian church were also difficult. At that time, the Philippian church was experiencing economic difficulties, persecution from outside, and conflict within the church.

The Philippian church Christians in today's text lived in a difficult world like us. Apostle Paul was aware of the situation of the Philippian church amid these difficulties.

However, when Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian church, he was in prison in Rome on a wrongful charge. Paul's health was poor, and he had been cut off for a long time from the Philippian church that had provided him with financial help. This is because the Philippian church at that time was also in a difficult situation. Meanwhile, the Philippian church relayed news of the mission fund and the Philippian church to Paul through Epaphroditus. At that time, Apostle Paul was also going through difficulties, and the situation in the Philippian church was not good. Nevertheless, Apostle Paul told the Christians in the Philippian church to **“Rejoice in the Lord always.”** So what does Apostle Paul mean when he says to rejoice in the Lord always?

Body: The meaning of a life that always rejoices in the Lord

We live in the real world and cannot always be rejoicing just because we are Christians. So, the question arises in our hearts: **“How do we resolve the gap between living a life of joy as Christians who have been saved by the grace of the Lord and living a life in reality where we cannot always rejoice?”** We may be able to briefly enjoy the joys of everyday life through religious (prayer, praise) or non-religious (self-suggestions such as “I will rejoice”) ways to solve this problem, but it does not fundamentally solve the problem.

In fact, it does not work well to always pray, always rejoice, and always be with the Lord in our religious life. As a pastor, I cannot always pray, always rejoice, and be with the Lord all the time. Of course, there may be a very small number of people who live beyond reality, or who live pretending to be filled with joy. I am not sure because I have not met Apostle Paul in person, but even Paul, who lived a life of noble faith, would not have lived a life of joy all the time.



However, despite this, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to “**rejoice in the Lord always.**” So what is Apostle Paul trying to tell us? It means that even if we don't always have the Lord and rejoice in the Lord right now, we must follow the path toward that kind of life. In other words, although Christians in the Philippian church are experiencing many difficulties amidst the challenges of reality and cannot always live happily, they should not be discouraged by such reality and move forward toward a life of joy.

This means that even though we may not always rejoice in our present life, we will always rejoice with the Lord when He comes back to earth. In addition, we must hope for a life of eternal joy with the Lord, and we must always live joyfully with the Lord, even if it is only partially, even though it is not perfect now.

Therefore, Christians must steadily walk the path of life that rejoices with the Lord. As we walk this path, we will experience moments filled with joy, but we also will experience the opposite. However, we must follow this path. The moment we stop following this path, we will no longer be able to reach the world of true joy. Apostle Paul recommends two things to help us walk this path well. First, treat others with gentleness (v.5) because a person who knows joy can be tolerant of others. Conversely, people who do not know joy are stingy with others. Second, prayer. (v.6). Those who know the joy of being with the Lord can express their desires to God with a sincere heart. Prayer is not forcing my thoughts on the Lord, but completely entrusting my future to the Lord. If we trust that the Lord is responsible for our future, we will ask the Lord for anything. People who have this kind of faith do not become discouraged even if the Lord does not grant their wishes, because we know that the Lord gives good things in the end. Those who walk the path of joy with the Lord must pray to the Lord with this heart.

In today's text, Apostle Paul promises that God will guard the hearts and minds of those who do not become complacent with reality and follow the path of joy through gentleness and prayer, with His peace. Verse 7 of today's text say, “**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**”

In fact, the reason we cannot live happily in this world is because our hearts and minds become confused. However, if God's peace guards our hearts and minds, all problems will be solved. This is something that no human being can even dare to think about, and it is a peace that only God can achieve.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, God's peace surpasses all our thoughts and guards our hearts and minds. I am a sensitive and thoughtful person. Also, I am a very weak person. However, as difficulties grow and great despair sets in, I experience God's peace guarding my heart and mind. So, I am not very frustrated or disturbed by such situations. It is a grace given to me by the Lord.

I pray that we will experience God's peace guarding our hearts and minds, not only in difficult times, but also in our ordinary daily lives.

Conclusion: God's peace guards our hearts and minds.

Now let's summarize today's message. The circumstances of the Philippian church and Apostle Paul in today's text were very difficult. In such a situation, Apostle Paul cried out to always rejoice in the Lord. Apostle Paul's advice does not force us to do something impossible but is a word of truth presented based on an accurate understanding of the reality of our lives.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! I hope that you and I will not give up and follow the path of always rejoicing with the Lord, as recommended by Apostle Paul in today's text, until we die. And along the way, I hope that you will be gentle to others and pray with a pure heart. Then, the peace of God that we cannot imagine will protect our hearts and minds. Amen!

