

## Victory of the Lamb – Finding Joy – Joy in the Lord – Philippians 4:4-9

July 25/26 2020 – Pastor Bill Limmer

We made it to the end of July 2020. How are you? A lot of times in life we play the game of glossing over things in life or trying to handle things ourselves. In the middle of the pandemic, how are you doing, really?

Today as continue our series *Finding Joy*, here is God's Word that we want to lean into. Philippians 4:4-9 **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** <sup>5</sup> **Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.** <sup>6</sup> **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** <sup>7</sup> **And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** <sup>8</sup> **Finally, brothers and sisters, 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.** <sup>9</sup> **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.**

What do you think Paul would say, if I were to ask him how are you doing . . . really? The Holmes Rahe Stress Scale lists 43 life changing events and gives each event a weight to determine the stress level in a person's life. According to the Holmes Rahe Stress Scale Paul has these life changing events: **Jail Term – 63; Business Readjustment – 39; Change in Financial State – 38, Change in living conditions – 25, Change in residence – 20, Change in Social Habits – 18.** If a person scores over 200 points, they likely becoming physically sick. Paul's score is **203**. Yet he says, *Rejoice*.

How about you? How are you doing . . . really? Here are some things that are causing stress in our lives because of the pandemic – social/physical distancing – the more of a people person you are the more stress this causes, working from home, did you choose a way of life or did someone require you, did you do what you did to protect someone in your house, boredom, confusion, changing narratives, confusion – what day is it, what month is it, empty shelves at stores, stores closed, division, furloughed, lost job, new working conditions, diagnosed with COVID-19, fear of getting COVID-19, fear of giving COVID -19 to someone else, fear of being quarantined, quarantined, death. I'm sure you can add to the list. Holmes and Rahe doesn't have a pandemic stress modifier but things at best are on a simmer and for some it is a raging boil. It is good, it is ok for us to acknowledge and even lament these circumstances. Arguably more has changed in the last 4 months than any other 4-month period in your life.

And so into our stressful, turbulent, swirling, bottom has dropped out of our lives, Paul is going to answer this question: **How can we find joy no matter what?**

Let's go back to verse 5 it says, **The LORD is near.** God did not create the world and then leave. God is personally involved in each of our lives. We cannot go where he is already not at. Even darkness is not dark to God. He sees us because he is near us. In his sovereignty he is working all of the time and in and through all things. Throughout the Old Testament, we see God being near his people in difficult times. Joseph, ruler over Egypt, said to his brothers who years earlier had sold the 17-year-old Joseph into slavery, Genesis 50:20 **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.** King David with his enemies all around says in likely the most famous Psalm, Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Daniel was in the lion's den but he was not alone.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were in the fiery furnace but they were not alone. In the middle of the furnace of the pandemic, in the middle of the cancel culture, in the middle of political animosity, in the middle of whatever you are going through you are not alone. The Lord is near. **We need to not only acknowledge our struggles but also acknowledge that the LORD is near.**

Not only is God near us, Romans 8:31 teaches us some of the most welcome words of the Bible. **God is for us.** In our ever-changing world God is for us and God never changes. **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.** The unchanging God is for us. He is our healer, He is our rescuer. He smiles over you. He is cheering you on. When the people of the prophet Jeremiah's time were in the middle of their exile he shared this word of God with the people. Jeremiah 29:11 **For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.** His love for us is constant and never changing. He is inviting us to come to him for peace, strength, forgiveness, power and purpose.

And because of all of God's characteristics Paul says, **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (v4)** Paul isn't saying rejoice in your circumstances, rejoice in your payday, rejoice in safer at home being removed, rejoice in a vaccine being found – all those things are can be great, because he says in Rejoice in the Lord always. God is not intimidated by our circumstances. He is not confused as to what to do next. This is important because a lot of stress and anxiety in our life is often the consequence of perceived chaos. If we are victims of unseen and random forces, we get troubled. But when we the sovereign God is near us and for us and loves us that brings us joy. When you love someone, there is joy in their presence. God is near and is rejoicing over you. To the degree that you understand God and his love and his presence we too can rejoice.

And there is more to finding joy. Paul with his sky-high stress score says, **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** When I was in grade school, I went with my parents to the neighborhood high school football game. It was Friday night, and that is what you do in Texas on Friday nights. My dad gave me some money and I left to hang out with my friends. I don't remember how much money he gave me but it was more than he usually did. At half time, I made my way back to my parents. And simply stated to my father, "my financial situation is in need of reinforcement." The lady sitting in front of my parents chuckled at my request. And my dad grabbed his wallet and gave me some more money. I had a need and knew who to go to. I could have lamented about my need, done nothing about it, and still had my need. I could have said, *my dad will not give me any more money* and so never asked. Or I could have asked for money from dad and turned and left before he gave it to me. Or I could simply do what made sense and present my need to the one who could do something about it and trust him and wait for him to respond.

So what are the empty spots, the needs in your life? What do you need to bring to God in prayer? You don't have because you don't ask. (Psalm 50:15) **Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you.** When you go to God in prayer you are going to the one who has all things in his hands and love in his heart. When you go to God in prayer know God will answer in the best way at the best possible time. What burdens are filling your life that you need to be released from. Take these requests to God. (Psalm 68:19) **Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.** His promises aren't canceled by our behavior or by our circumstances.

Paul says if you want to find joy no matter what, praise God, prayer to God and Paul says, **Finally, brothers and sisters, 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.** The word for think about such things is our word for logic. The idea here is when joy is missing from your life, it best faced with a clear mind, with logical thinking. Logical thinking is praising God who is above all things, praying to him knowing that he will answer in the best way and then pondering on good.

Here is what happens we get too busy, too hung up on the bad things and we miss taking time out for the good things and the God things. CS Lewis wrote, **“We are always falling in love or quarreling, looking for jobs or fearing to lose them, getting ill and recovering, following public affairs. If we let ourselves, we shall always be waiting for some distraction or other to end before we get down to our work.”** And I would add we get so busy worrying, fretting, and so little time worshiping and praying and thanking.

When the thoughts, attitudes and potential action come up ask is this from God. Is this true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy. If so jump on that if not get out of there. It doesn't take more than two minutes on Tik Tok to know that there are some things you need not be a part of.

Finding joy is about praising, praying, and pondering God. If joy is missing from your life are praising, praying and pondering.

Finding joy no matter what isn't about feelings. It is about focus. Joy is a focus, a way of looking at things. So understand this Scripture is not telling you to feel joy. Joy isn't the absence of sadness or difficult time. Here is how we know. (Hebrews 12:2) **fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** See joy was not in the event of crucifixion, but joy was in the guaranteed outcome of the event. Joy was not in the whip or the nails, they hurt, but the pain had a purpose. Joy isn't pain-free, joy is knowing there is purpose in the pain. Jesus wasn't surprised by the pain.

Jesus told us in this world we will have trouble, but do not be afraid. I have overcome the world. Cast all your cares on God. There are many things that can cause you and me to fall into anxiety, despair, many trials and tribulations. Choose your focus. Keep in mind if your end game is only the thirty-yard line you are only going to have so much joy. But if your end game is the end zone of heaven, that is where the joy and the celebration is at!

With God in your life, how are you doing . . . really? We need to not only acknowledge our struggles but also acknowledge that the LORD is near. And with that as our focus we will find joy no matter what