

Victory of the Lamb // Pastor Ben Sadler // May 1, 2022
Series: Emotions // Sermon: God & Joy // Text: Philippians 4:4

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)

Is the glass half empty or half full? Now, some of you are optimists and will say this is half-full. And some of you are pessimists. But the pessimists here might say, “We are not pessimists. We are realists. We look at the reality of the situation and see what needs to be changed and improved.” And that is true. Now even if you see yourself as a realist, you probably want to have more optimism in your life. And even if you are an optimist, you probably aren’t always optimistic. When you struggle with your health. Or there is strife in your family, it is a challenge to stay positive.

Yet that is what Paul encourages us, even commands us to be. He wants us to live a life of joy and optimism. In Philippians 4:4 he says “**Rejoice...always. I will say it again, rejoice.**” That sounds like an unattainable command. How could a person *always* be joyful and optimistic? Who could really always be joyful?

We are continuing our sermon series **Emotions: Dealing with Feelings**. There are really four main emotions. Mad, sad, worried, and glad. And out of those four basic emotions, I think we would all like to experience more joy in our lives. So here is the question I want to answer today: **How can we always experience joy?**

To answer that question, we are going to look at Paul’s letter to the Philippians. This letter more than any of his other letters focuses on joy. The word joy or rejoice is mentioned, something like 14 times in this short letter. And that’s pretty surprising because from an outside perspective, there seems to be little reason for Paul to rejoice. Paul is writing this letter from jail to a congregation that has internal fighting and that is also suffering from persecution from the outside. And yet, Paul is filled with joy and he encourages the Philippians to be filled with joy as well.

But how could this be? Well, let’s look at this verse a little more closely. Let’s notice what the verse doesn’t say. It doesn’t say: **Rejoice...in your circumstances.** Paul’s circumstances were really challenging. He was not free to travel and see the churches that he started and check up on in his people. And our

circumstances can be really challenging. Maybe right now you are in a really challenging marriage and you don't know what to do about it. Maybe you are in a really frustrating job and you don't know how you can keep going. Your circumstances are not good right now. That's why if we focus on our circumstances we will not always find joy.

He doesn't say: **Rejoice...in your status in society.** At one time, Paul was recognized as a leader of the religious elite. But then he became a Christian and he lost his status in society. If you are following Jesus you are not going to be accepted and supported in society. So don't try to find your joy in your status.

He doesn't say, **Rejoice...in your success.** Paul had some success in his life. He started a number of churches and wrote many letters that were considered part of the Holy Bible. But he also experienced lots of failure. Many people left his churches. And his churches had in fighting. Many of them, started to spread rumors about Paul. Maybe you have experienced some success. Maybe you have had a successful business. Or a successful marriage. But that can't be your sources of endless joy because you have also experienced failure. Maybe your marriage ended. Maybe your business failed.

He doesn't say, **Rejoice...in your goodness.** Paul tried to live a good life. But he also had huge skeletons in his closet. He had been the one who rounded up Christians to murder them. Even after he became a Christian, he still struggled with sin. He said that the good he wanted to do, he could seem to carry out. But the evil he didn't want to do, that's what he kept on doing.

I pray that you have seen some progress in your walk with Jesus. That you are living a better life today than when you first met Jesus. But here is the surprise. Even after we become Christians, we still are in desperate need of Jesus. We want to do good. But we still struggle to carry it out. That's why our goodness will not be the continual source of our joy.

So what did Paul actually say? How can we be filled with joy at all times? **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4).** He says, "Rejoice in the Lord!"

What does "in the Lord" mean? Paul rejoiced in what God was doing. Paul had a way of forgetting about himself altogether. He said that his life was hidden with

God in Christ. He believed that Jesus lived, died, rose and ascended to God's right hand. That means that God was going to be in control of everything that happened in life.

So if you would ask Paul, "Is this glass half empty or half full?" Paul would say, "I see that it's half empty. I can see all the bad stuff that is happening in my life. But I also see the good things. But more importantly, I know how holds the glass." Whether there is good or bad that is happening in my life. Jesus holds the glass.

Yes, the realist can see that the glass is half empty and the optimist can often see some good in a situation. But Paul shows us how to always rejoice because we believe Jesus holds the glass.

What did that look like for Paul? Well, in Philippians 1 we read:

Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear that throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. (Philippians 1:1-13)

When Paul was in prison, he saw the glass half full, he was filled with joy, because he believed Jesus held the glass. He believed that God was using his imprisonment to reach the palace guard. And it seems like because of Paul's imprisonment, even Caesar's household were becoming Christians.

Paul's joy was not based on his circumstances and his comfort. His joy was that he believed that the risen and ascended Lord was at work.

Then later he says, **"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. (Philippians 1:15-18)**

It seems like there was a group of preachers that were still Paul's church members while he was in prison. They thought that Christianity was a competition. They were taking Paul's members and growing bigger churches,

making Paul look like failure. That can happen even today. Churches can fight over members and swap people from other churches. But Paul didn't get his joy from whether he appeared successful or had a big church. He was rejoicing because Christ was preached and people were coming to faith.

Then later in that same chapter, Paul takes about the likelihood that he might be executed for his faith. **For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Philippians 1:21-24)**

Paul believes that there could be a chance that he could be execute for his faith. But even in this circumstance, he sees the glass half full because he knows that Jesus holds the glass. He believes that because of the work of Jesus, if he was to die he would be with Christ, which is the best case scenario. But if he would go on living, he believed that God would give him fruitful labor. You see Paul's joy was not based on his freedom or his personal happiness. But on being with Christ and working with Christ.

Here is what you need to know:

How can we always experience joy?

Christians can always rejoice in the work of the Lord.

We can always rejoice because of what the Lord is doing. We can always see the glass half full because we know Jesus holds the glass.

Now, it's time for us to be honest. Emotions happen. **Martin Luther** once said, **"You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair."** Now, Luther was talking about temptation. But the same illustration can apply to emotions. You can't help some emotions from popping in your head and making your body react. Some cuts you off when you are driving, maybe anger flies into your heart. You lose a loved one, and sadness flies into your heart. You lose your job and worry and fear about the future flies into your heart. Just like you can't help birds flying over your head, you can't help feeling some emotions.

But if you live in a constant state of anger, fear, and sadness, if you have let those emotions make a nest in your heart, then you are most likely putting all your focus on yourself. Your circumstances, your status, your success, your failure. And you were not designed to be the source of your joy.

Jesus is Lord. He lived, died, rose, and ascended. He is in control of all things. Your happiness no longer depends on your success or your failure. It is not about your circumstances. It is not about you at all. Your joy depends on what the Lord is doing.

Look again at your circumstance. Yes, there are some good things and some bad things. The glass is both half empty and half full. There are things that need to change and things that need to be celebrated. But ultimately, Jesus is at work. He is at work in your finances. With your health. With your relationships.

Here is the main take away: **Rejoice IN THE LORD always.** Rejoice in his success and his work and his reign. Rejoice at what he is doing in your life.

I want to encourage all your optimists and pessimists to unite. Yes, let's talk about what's going wrong in our lives. Let's see that the glass is half empty and let's repent and change. Let's also celebrate what's going right in our lives. But more than anything, let's keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the one who holds the glass. Amen.

