

Living in Joy and Peace
Philippians 4:4-7
December 13, 2015

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Some years back, the poet W. H. Auden was sitting in a bar on 52nd Street in New York City. After spending some time studying the faces and demeanor of the people around him, he turned his menu over and wrote this on the back:

Faces along the bar cling to their average day
The lights never go out, the music must always play
Lest we should see where we are, lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night, who have never been happy or good.

That's pretty depressing, isn't it? But do you know what's truly depressing? This little rhyme is so fitting for today's society. I don't mean just the non-Christian part of society. Even many Christians walk around afraid and lost – neither happy or good. As an old proverb says, "Not everyone who dances is happy." Many people go from one day to the next looking like they're just fine, but they're not. Something is missing.

If you've never read the book of Philippians, read it. In his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul lists many ways in which a Christian's life is to be different from the non-believer's life. In today's text, Paul makes clear the idea that a Christian's life is to be one of peace and joy. However, peace and joy are not found in the sinfulness of this world. Peace and joy are sadly lacking in most places and totally nonexistent in others. So, today we are going to take a look at the concepts of peace and joy as they relate to the Christian life.

We must begin with a word of caution. Satan perverts all the good things of God, and peace and joy are no different. There counterfeits of true peace and joy. You can go in most any bookstore and, for \$5.95, buy a paperback that promises you peace and joy if you just follow plan the author lays out. But these plans all fail because they are based on the misconception that the human spirit can generate peace and joy.

There has been a mountain of literature written on the "how to" of bringing peace and joy into your life. We must be careful not to fall into that "how to" mentality. We must always keep in mind that peace and joy are never found in discovering ourselves. Peace and joy are never hiding in some corner of our inner strength. Peace and joy are never released in some undiscovered potential we might have. That kind of thinking is limited and self-centered.

Have you noticed that I've talked about peace and joy like they are in some way related.

That's because they do have something in common. If you look in the 5th chapter of Galatians, you see that Paul lists peace and joy side-by-side as fruits of the Spirit. Their commonality is that they are both planted in a Christian's heart by the Holy Spirit. A Christian has peace and joy because he is a new creation in Christ. The closer a Christian walks with his Savior, the more peace and joy that Christian experiences.

That means, that for the Christian, peace and joy aren't things to be pursued. They are the way the children of God live. If you look closely at our reading, you will see that our joy is "in the Lord," and our peace is "in Christ Jesus." That being true, peace and joy aren't elusive treasures we chase through life. They are gifts that come to us through the grace God. The Christian's life in Christ is one of peace and joy no matter what the circumstances.

Now, let's take a look at these two gifts of God separately. We'll begin with joy. How does one go about living in joy? To live in joy, one must remember that God is the author of joy. One way to live in joy is to get the proper focus for our lives. We don't focus our lives on ourselves. We don't even focus on the pursuit of joy. We focus our lives on God.

Here's how that works. If you know much about Gospel music, you're probably familiar with the name Mahalia Jackson. What you may not know is that for many years she was pressured by some people to stop singing Gospel music and start singing blues. There was more notoriety in singing blues music – and more money. But Ms. Jackson refused. She said that the true song of the Christian was joy. She held that blues songs were songs of despair and Gospel songs were songs of hope. Joy is truly the song of the Christian. That's why Paul says, "rejoice in the Lord always."

Here's a simple question. Where do we find our reason to rejoice? In the Lord. That's important. Since our reason for rejoicing is in the Lord, our rejoicing shouldn't have peaks and valleys. God never changes. His love for us and his care for us are constant.

Throughout the Bible we read of people who enjoyed the joy of the Lord under some very adverse conditions. Why? Because their joy was in the Lord – not in their situation and not in their own power or courage. Situations change, power and courage can rise and fall, but God is constant. That means that our joy in the Lord is constant.

Now, let's look at the peace that we have in Christ Jesus. In verse five of our reading, Paul tells us, "Do not be anxious about anything." Anxious is a good word for our world today. Anxious is where we get our word anxiety. Anxiety is diametrically opposed peace. In our natural sinful selves, we can be anxious – not just about any one thing - but about everything.

Paul gives us the remedy for our anxiety and our anxious times. His suggestion is to replace our anxiety with prayer and thanksgiving. Now there's a thought. What would happen in our lives if we stopped to pray and give thanks during every anxious moment? I'll tell you what would happen – peace would happen. Peace comes from a

constant and close relationship with God through Christ. Peace in our lives expresses itself as contentment and confidence. A heart full of peace has no room for anxiety. Furthermore, the peace we experience comes from an unlimited supply. Thank God we are not responsible for providing our own peace. If that were the case, we'd be in real trouble. We are finite creatures and we can only generate finite things. So, what is the source of all this peace that is ours? Listen to Jesus: *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you* (Jn 14:27).

Jesus is the author and source of our peace. The benefits of his life, death, and resurrection are poured out on us. That means that we are forever at peace with God. And that peace is more than just a warm, fuzzy feeling. Our peace is based on our restored relationship with our heavenly Father. It's the peace of Christ that the Holy Spirit brings to the heart of the believer.

That peace isn't worldly peace. It's supernatural peace. It's transcending peace. Paul tells us that the peace of Christ has the power to lift us above the experiences of this life. This peace is beyond human peace. This is the peace that surpasses all understanding. This peace guards us, keeps us, and protects us. Like our joy in the Lord, our peace in Christ gives us the ability to live above and beyond our circumstances – even beyond our own comprehension.

This supernatural, transcending, all surpassing peace expresses itself as contentment and confidence. It's important that we understand the concepts of contentment and confidence as they apply to the peace we have in Christ. When we see how contentment and confidence spring from our peace in Christ, we can more easily incorporate them into our lives.

We'll deal with contentment first. The dictionary defines contentment as *happy enough with what one has or is; not desiring something more or different; satisfied*. How much would you give to be perfectly happy with what you have and who you are? How nice would it be to be able to look at every facet of your life and say to yourself, "Everything is exactly perfect."

That's what is missing in so many lives – the ability to be content with what you have. People are willing to spend multiple billions of dollars to be content. The majority of the advertising industry is geared to telling you how content your life will be if you just buy this product or that product. People buy, and buy, and buy looking for that one thing that brings contentment. But contentment isn't for sale – it's free, but only to Christians.

Paul tells us that he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Paul was once rich and commanded a good deal of respect from his peers. But Paul didn't find his contentment in his money or his status. In fact, Paul didn't find contentment until his wealth and status were gone. Paul learned that contentment could be found in plenty or poverty, in good times or bad times, in health or sickness, in fellowship or loneliness, in freedom or in prison.

Paul learned the secret of contentment. What is the secret of contentment? Confidence. Confidence in the security that Christ Jesus brings to life. Circumstances change. Situations develop. The only things that never change are God's unending love for us and the hope and salvation that come to us through Jesus Christ. Because of that, we have the confidence it takes to face life – no matter what life brings. Because we have that confidence, we can experience complete contentment in any and all situations. And because we have this confidence and contentment, our lives can't possibly be anything other than joyful.

With his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus purchased the joy and peace that are ours. The price was great but the love of God for us is greater. Paul knew the reality of that love, therefore, Paul knew the reality of the true joy and peace that the Holy Spirit brings to the heart of the believer. Paul was filled with godly contentment and Christ-powered confidence. The joy and peace of God belonged to Paul and it belongs to us, too.

The joy and peace of God, that surpasses all human understand, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus where true joy and peace are found.