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Great Words of the Faith Rejoice in the Lord... Philippians 4:4

There are a lot of words we could use to describe life and work in the West Virginia state capitol. I am not sure JOY would be one of them. There is the ever-constant concern with election or reelection to office. There is the whole framework of competition and conflict found in our system of two-party politics. In recent years in our state capitol there has been heated conflict and debate over a number of issues. Right now, there is much quarreling over several aspects of our state government. In the middle of all this, can someone really find joy in their life and work in the statehouse?

In Paul's letter to the believers in Philippi, he explains how citizens of heaven should live here on earth. In 1:27 he challenges them: "...**Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ**". It means live as citizens or conduct yourself worthily as a citizen of the nation to which you belong. In this letter and throughout the rest of scripture we find one of the most obvious characteristics of one who is a citizen of heaven is JOY. Joy is a theme that flows throughout Paul's letter. It is expressed most forcefully in Paul's command to the Philippian believers found in chapter four:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice!
(Phil. 4:4)

This is the third time in this letter that Paul exhorts the believers to rejoice. In 2:18 Paul urges them to rejoice with him, even in the face of his own possible execution. In 3:1 he encourages them to "rejoice in the Lord". And in 4:4 he adds the pointed qualifier, "rejoice in the Lord **always**..." Apart from these directives to rejoice, joy is a theme that is constantly mentioned throughout the book. "Joy" or "rejoicing" is mentioned 16 times. Remember, Paul is exhorting the Philippian believers (and us) to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel", or literally, "live as citizens" (1:27). He reminds them (and us) that "our citizenship is in heaven" (3:20). Someone who is a citizen of heaven will experience and exhibit joy in their lives. We can learn a great deal about this from Philippians. As we consider the important question of how to find joy in life at the capitol, let us first consider what real and genuine joy actually is.

What is Joy?

Joy is listed as one of the "fruits of the Spirit" found in Galatians chapter four. This simply means joy is a natural outworking or result of the spiritual life we

have within us through our faith in Christ. This is how one commentator aptly described the difference between happiness and joy:

"Joy is a Christian virtue; happiness is the virtue of the world. There is all the difference in the world between them. Happiness is entirely external. It is circumstantial. It depends upon the things we have or can acquire. For some it is money. For others it might be power or good looks. These are all external. When they go, happiness goes with them.

*It is not that way with joy. Joy comes from the nature of God and it is intended to well up within those in whom God's Spirit dwells. It is not external, it is internal. It does not hinge upon circumstances. Things may happen to the Christian that no one, including the Christian, would be happy about. But there can still be joy."*¹

This is how Paul can write, "**Rejoice in the Lord always...**" We can experience the joy that comes from having our sins forgiven through faith in Christ no matter what is going on around us. We can rejoice knowing God is with us and has a purpose and plan for everything that comes our way. Certainly, it can be a great challenge at times to experience and express such joy. That is why Paul challenges the Philippian believers to rejoice. They were facing circumstances and situations that threatened to rob them of their joy. What were the challenges for them to maintain their joyful hearts? What are the challenges for us to experience joy both in our lives and in the capitol?

What are the Challenges to Experiencing Joy?

The Philippian church was already a group of people known for their joy. Paul lifted them up as an example to the church at Corinth: ***Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a***

great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. (2 Cor. 8:1). Though they were known for their joy, Paul still exhorts them repeatedly to rejoice. Perhaps Paul's repeated commands to rejoice are a reminder of how difficult it can be to maintain an attitude of rejoicing in the face of difficulties and challenges.

Remember Paul's own difficult circumstance as he is writing this letter. He is in prison, facing possible execution for proclaiming the gospel. We can look back to Paul's example at the beginning of the Philippian church in Acts 16. Severely beaten and thrown into prison, Paul and his colleague Silas are praying and singing praise to God at midnight. What an example of one who continued to "rejoice in the Lord always"!

From the letter of Philippians, we can ascertain some of the challenges and difficulties they were facing. Their beloved leader, Paul, was in prison and facing possible execution (1:12-13). They were to undergo difficult persecution as well (1:29-30). Constant was their own sinful human tendency to selfishness and self-centeredness, leading to Paul's powerful reference to Christ's example of serving and putting others first (2:1-11). They would be confronted by false teachers who denied or distorted the true gospel (3:2; 18-19). Perhaps most likely to rob their joy was strife and division among their own body of believers (4:2-3). This would lead us to consider the challenges that might rob us of joy in our own lives.

We all face all kinds of trials and challenges in our daily lives. Illness, the loss of loved ones, family difficulties, and more make it difficult to rejoice. Many of you face additional challenges of work in the capitol or in state government. This leads us to one final, all important question; how do we experience and demonstrate joy in the face of difficulties, trials, and challenges?

How Can We find Joy in the Capitol?

Considering the trials and challenges of daily life and life in the capitol, how can we fulfill Paul's exhortation to rejoice always? Paul does not give us "three easy steps", but throughout his letter he describes how we can experience God's joy in our lives.

Center on Jesus Christ – We find that Paul's letter to the Philippians is really all about Jesus. As you read the letter, notice how constantly Paul refers to Jesus – seventeen times in the first chapter alone. It is when we fill our minds with Jesus instead of the things of this world that we can experience real joy.

Focus on the Gospel – We also notice how Paul focuses on the gospel. He talks about the good news of Jesus' suffering and death in our place eight times. There is certainly joy for those who experience the

forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ in our own lives, but Paul writes of the joy of partnership in sharing this wonderful message with others (1:12, 16; 2:22). We can rejoice in seeking to share the good news of Jesus with friends, coworkers, and colleagues in the capitol.

Serve and Give to others – Paul writes of how believers are to follow Jesus' example of serving and putting others first (2:1-5). He speaks of the joy this will bring him, but it is clear it will also bring joy to the ones who practice such an attitude. He also shares of the joy that came from the gifts he received from them. Again, this brought joy to him as the recipient, but the believers also experienced joy in their giving.

Remember Our Citizenship in Heaven – Paul reminded the Philippians of their heavenly citizenship (3:20). We can have real joy when we remember the trials and challenges of this life are but for a short time. The believer, the "citizen of heaven", realizes his real life is in heaven and looks forward to an eternity with Christ.

Wait for Christ's Return – In 3:20 Paul reminds us "our citizenship is in heaven". He goes on to encourage us, "from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (3:20-21). No matter what is going on in our lives or in the capitol, the believer can look forward to the day when all suffering, trials, difficulties, and discouragements are passed and we are with Christ and made to be like Him. When we remember that, we can rejoice no matter what is going on around us.

Conclusion

Have you experienced the joy that comes from knowing your sins are forgiven through faith in the good news of the gospel?

As a believer are you experiencing and expressing joy in your life and in the capitol? Paul, though in difficult circumstances, was not only joyful himself but sought to encourage joy in others. At the beginning of this church in Philippi we find Paul, beaten and imprisoned for preaching the gospel, praying and singing hymns! (Acts 16:25). Do your capitol colleagues see this kind of joy in your life?

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays,

12:00 PM McManus Conference Room (M252 by House Min Ofc)