

"The Present Power of our Future Hope"

Isaiah 65:17-25; Philippians 4:9-13

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Review: We've come to the final week of our brief time in Philippians! I hope this has been an edifying few weeks and that you can see connections in Philippians to what you've been seeing throughout Romans!

A quick review:

- 1) Risk: Confidence in Jesus deepens not only reliance on Jesus, but risk-taking for Jesus.
- 2) Routine: Habits of our faith for the foundation of our witness.
- 3) Relationship: Relationship is the result of faith – deeper relationship with Jesus that leads to deeper relationships with others!

And so we come to the final theme of Philippians that I've identified for us to look at over these 3 weeks: **Rejoicing!**

Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!" Remember the context – Paul is in prison! If anyone can say something like this, it would be Paul in this particular situation!

Our passage for today is only a few verses later in chapter 4, shortly before Paul wraps up the letter. (Read Philippians 4:9-13)

We will look briefly at 3 principles of joy like we find in Philippians. If you remember, the word "rejoice" appears 7 times in this short letter. This type of rejoicing that Paul experiences is something transcends mere happiness and is rooted deep within the love of God that is revealed to us ultimately and fully in Jesus Christ.

1) Joy is never based on circumstances

Our culture tells us that if we get more stuff, then our lives will be better and happier. How often do we let ourselves believe that if this or that was different, then we'd be ok? A different job, a little more income, a bigger house, a better car...the list can go on and you'll notice that it's a similar list to what we can easily make into an idol.

Our "rejoicing always" if it is done *in* the Lord, then it will never be based on our circumstances. Rejoicing is an act of worship that is grounded in God's goodness and can be done no matter the situations we find ourselves in.

2) Joy is primarily outwardly focused

I believe this to be the most radical and counter-intuitive aspect of our rejoicing – joy points us toward others. Look at verse 10, "I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it." Paul rejoices that the Philippian believers have renewed their concern for him and presumably sent him support to help sustain him while he is in prison. But Paul keeps the focus on them and their concern rather than how their concern has impacted him – he says in the next verse, "I've learned to be content in any circumstance," or in other words, "I didn't really *need* your support, but I rejoice that you gave it!"

3) Joy results from faithfulness to God

Philippians 4:13 is a verse that often gets pulled out of its context. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." When we consider the surrounding discussion when Paul writes these iconic words, we certainly do not find the very individualized and frankly American idea that we can accomplish whatever we set our mind, or that our greatest and wildest dreams for ourselves can come true if we just follow Jesus. No, this verse is a verse about remaining faithful to God, *when* we experience difficulty for our faith.

Deep down, powerful, fulfilling, wonderful rejoicing is enabled and activated when we put our complete trust in Jesus.

Ultimately rejoicing is directly linked to the hope we have in Jesus. Our ability to rejoice in any circumstance is the power that God gives us now, even while we await our ultimate hope: Christ's return that will usher in the completion of God's Kingdom and fully bring heaven to earth.

Illustration: 3 years ago I met someone at a conference in Turkey who sure seemed like a modern day Paul. In fact, I'll just call him Paul. Paul is from a Central Asian country that actively opposes Christian faith. Paul was imprisoned by his government a few times for sharing Jesus and he eventually had to flee his home.

When we met Paul he couldn't stop smiling as he told us his story through a Russian translator. His joy was palpable. He spoke of the last time he was imprisoned before he fled.

"I was in jail for 2 weeks and they beat me every day, but I want you to know how amazing God is!" As he went on I almost couldn't keep up – I was stuck on hearing about the abuse, the persecution.

But that isn't what he wanted us to know about. Still smiling and without much a pause to let the severity of his experience sink in he said, "Right before I was in the jail there was a Islamic Imam in the prison as well who had been yelling at all the other prisoners for days on end, telling them how horrible they were and that they were going to hell! So when God brought me to that jail everyone there was ready to hear about how great Jesus is! Isn't God great!"

Risk, Routine, Relationship, Rejoicing – framework for living our lives in a way that draws us closer to Jesus and invites others to follow Him as well. Amen.